

English Knowledge Organiser. Gothic Writing

English:		
Definition of 'Gothic' writing: <i>"Tales of the macabre, fantastic, and supernatural, usually set amid haunted castles, graveyards, ruins, and wild picturesque landscapes."</i>		
Social and Historical Context		Values and ideas held by gothic writers
<p>The term 'gothic' comes from the Germanic tribe 'the Goths', who played a part in the fall of the Roman Empire. The Goths are sometimes called barbarians. They destroyed a lot of Roman architecture in around C3 and replaced it with buildings in the gothic style.</p> <p>Medieval Europe (C3-14) is sometimes referred to as the 'Dark Ages' (although this can be contested for a number of reasons.) Some believe that people lived in fear due to superstition and ignorance and that not much learning took place in this time. Castles with gargoyles were built to ward off evil spirits, this architecture is known as 'gothic' e.g. Notre Dame.</p> <p>Gothic writing transformed into the format of the extremely popular Victorian ghost story.</p> <p>Today, we use the term 'gothic' widely to describe art, style, clothing (e.g. Alexander McQueen couture) music and film (e.g. Tim Burton films). The style and genre is very much still alive.</p>	<p>Figures from The Age of Enlightenment (C18-19) believed that scientific progress was the only way to advance society, and great discoveries were made in this time. They tried to rid Europe of superstition and ignorance through promoting reason and logic.</p> <p>A group of poets, artists and thinkers called the Romantics challenged this because they believed that not everything can be explained by science, and too much reason rids the world of beauty and mystery.</p> <p>The gothic genre first emerged from the Romantic movement. It used art and ideas from the Dark Ages, wild emotion and nature to contrast modern ideas about science and logic.</p>	<p>Gothic writers are preoccupied with the supernatural because they believe that not everything has a scientific explanation.</p> <p>They believed that nature is 'sublime': it has the power to simultaneously inspire awe and terror in people.</p> <p>They challenged society's expectations about propriety and emotion. To show wild emotion was seen as crass and uncouth, but not to the gothic writers, who often depicted passion and rage.</p> <p>They explored the role of the female characters: often in gothic texts, there are powerful female roles, which contrasted the contemporary society.</p> <p>They were very interested in the psychological exploration of characters, particularly in relation to themes of madness.</p> <p>Big question: why is a genre that is so frightening so popular?</p>

Typical genre features:

- Death and darkness
- Supernatural (magic, ghosts, vampires, curses)
- Curses or prophecies
- Madness and intense emotions/paranoia
- Mystery, terror and suspense

Typical characters:

- Mysterious characters with high social status e.g. Princes, counts
- Female or feminine characters that are threatened by powerful men
- Threatening women who are monsters or vampires
- Powerful, tyrannical male figures
- Villains, vampires, ghosts, werewolves, giants

Typical settings:

- Wild landscapes
- Medieval style castles, churches or abbeys
- Gloomy, decayed and ruined environments
- Remote, uninhabited places (older gothic) or monsters intermingling in every day life (newer gothic)

Key techniques

Narrative voice	Semantic field
Sibilance	Assonance
Pathetic fallacy	alliteration
Contrast	Figurative
Imagery	Juxtaposition
Verb	Personification
Adjective	Symbolism

Key vocabulary

Notable Gothic texts (in chronological order)

- The Castle of Otranto – Horace Walpole, 1765
- Vathek – William Beckford, 1786
- Frankenstein – Mary Shelley, 1818
- The Hunchback of Notre Dame – Victor Hugo, 1831
- The Raven – Edgar Allen Poe, 1845
- Wuthering Heights – Emily Bronte, 1847
- The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde – R.L. Stevenson, 1887
- The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde, 1890
- Dracula – Bram Stoker, 1897
- Rebecca – Du Maurier, 1931
- The Woman in Black – Susan Hill, 1983
- The Graveyard Book, Neil Gaiman 2008

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volatile and threatening weather (symbolism)	Abstruse Afflicted Alienate Anguish Annihilate Apprehensions Beguile Claustrophobia Decomposing Despair Dilapidated Discomforted Disfigured Enigma	Entrapment Forbidding Grotesque Hopeless Lamentable Lifeless Mournfully Obscured Sinister Torturous Unleashed Vengeful Withered Wretched	
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