

Summer work for students starting A level English Literature September 2022

What is Gothic?

Aim: *The first topic you will study for A level English Literature is Gothic Literature. To be successful at this unit, you will need to be familiar with a range of Gothic texts and to know a lot about the history and key characteristics of the genre. The following tasks are designed to develop your wider knowledge of this topic ahead of beginning the course in September.*

Task One: Reviewing Gothic literature

 Have a look at the wider reading list at the end of this document. Choose one text to read and review (you can read as many as you like but we only want feedback on one!)

 Type a short review of your text to be shared with your class when you start your course in September. You should aim to discuss:

- A brief introduction to the plot but with no spoilers!
- Whether you would recommend this book to others.
- What sort of reader would this book appeal to? E.g. is it very dark, very gory, a bit like a crime novel, romantic?

It should be no more than 200 words long.

Task Two: Creative task

 Create your own title for a Gothic story.

Stuck? Pick some words from the list of Gothic words on this website - select one adjective and one noun, turn these into a title. <https://en.islcollective.com/english-esl-worksheets/skill/speaking/gothic-elements/74643> . Now draw the front cover for the book of your Gothic story!

Extension task: What is Gothic literature?

Please go to this website where you will find helpful information on the origins of Gothic literature. <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/themes/the-gothic> (British Library website)

1.  Read the following article by John Mullen: 'Origins of the Gothic'.
 - a. <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-the-gothic>
2.  Read the following article by John Bowen: 'Gothic motifs'
 - a. <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gothic-motifs>
3.  Watch the video titled 'The Gothic'.
 - a. <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos/the-gothic>

 As you watch and read, make your own notes on what the key features of Gothic literature are.

Gothic Reading List

The list of texts below has been split into categories. Try to read novels from different categories over the course of the summer and next academic year to give yourself a more rounded understanding of the genre.

Many of the older novels and short stories can be found for free online at Project Gutenberg: [Free eBooks | Project Gutenberg](#)

Classic Gothic texts:

Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto, 1764 (this is where Gothic literature starts: bonkers, short and a great read)

Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho, 1794 (the second great Gothic text: more subtle than The Castle of Otranto, and the progenitor of the Gothic idea of 'terror' rather than 'horror')

William Beckford, Vathek, 1786 (evil in the ancient Middle East; fuelled by a late eighteenth century obsession with the Orient. Archaic stuff!)

Matthew Lewis, The Monk, 1796 (another crazy Gothic tale, full of sex, violence and murder)

19th Century Gothic:

Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey, 1817 (not strictly speaking a Gothic text, but it parodies traditional Gothic stories, particularly The Mysteries of Udolpho. Fun, especially if you're a Jane Austen fan)

Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, 1818 (a key Gothic text, with a morally complex monster and hero!)

Edgar Allan Poe, Tales of Mystery and Imagination (especially 'The Tell-Tale Heart' and 'The Pit and the Pendulum'), written in 1830s and 1840s, though published posthumously 1908. (Short stories, so easy to dip in and out of. Poe is the master at exploring extremes of terror and psychological instability – his narrators are wonderful creations!)

Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, 1847 and **Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre, 1847** (two classic romances – and the progenitors of the Byronic hero - as well as darn good stories. Definitely two to read if you're thinking of studying English at university.)

Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, 1861 (technically a Bildungsroman but elements of the Gothic)

Robert Louis Stevenson, The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, 1886 (good for literally embodying the idea of good vs evil/the figure of the other – and pretty short too)

Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, 1890 (this is also great for the split self: good and evil, wrapped up in a picture doppelganger...)

Henry James, The Turn of the Screw, 1898 (a wonderfully ambiguous ghost (or is it?) story)

Modern Gothic:

Daphne Du Maurier, Rebecca, 1938 (a classic thriller and page-turner; there's also a film starring Laurence Olivier for those of you who love black and white cinema, or a TV version with Charles Dance)

Angela Carter, The Magic Toyshop, 1967 (an early novel of Carter's, it explores a number of Gothic taboos that she returns to in *The Bloody Chamber*)

Cormac McCarthy, Outer Dark, 1968 (from the author of *The Road*, a disturbingly bleak tale set in a nihilistic world. Stuffed full of Gothic taboos)

Iain Banks, The Wasp Factory, 1984 (a very dark yet humorous look at a young serial killer, who is also the narrator)

Toni Morrison, Beloved, 1987 (a brilliant novel on so many levels, this one blends the idea of slavery and the revenant, trauma and its relentless return)

Sarah Waters, The Little Stranger, 2009 (another ambiguous ghost story; terrifying but a complete page turner)

Sarah Perry, Melmoth, 2018 (a modern day Gothic novel with an interesting female 'monster' who may or may not exist...)

Vampire Fiction:

This is particularly useful to track the development of the literary depiction of the vampire. Compare these with the vampires in *Dracula* and 'The Lady of the House of Love'.

John Polidori, The Vampyre, 1819 (The first vampire in literature!)

Anne Rice, Interview with the Vampire, 1976 (A more modern look at the vampire; interesting in terms of shift in narrative focaliser)

LGBTQ Gothic:

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Carmilla, 1872 (A female lesbian vampire - interesting to consider in terms of the femme fatale and her relationship with the protagonist)

Sarah Waters, Affinity (1999), Fingersmith (2002), (More excellent novels from the writer of *The Little Stranger*, mentioned earlier in the list, and *Tipping the Velvet*)

Sara Collins, The Confessions of Frannie Langton, 2019 (Set across a Jamaican sugar plantation and Georgian London, this historical gothic novel explores themes of science and empire.)