Syllabus - Literary Genre: HORROR

2015-2016
Ms. Casperson
Room 103
E-mail: acaspers@HoustonISD.org

Course Description: The literary genre known as “horror” has evolved since it first began. At the very core, the genre was designed to instill fear into people, by whatever means were thought necessary. Horror masters of the past were generally inspired in their work as they use subtlety and psychology to maximum effect, though more modern horror works rely on more overt attempts to scare. Older horror classics relied on an understanding of human nature and psychology to instill fear.

Bram Stoker’s Dracula wasn’t terrifying because of the vampires bite and the effects it had. Dracula instilled fear by the threat of the bite, the possibility of being turned into the monster he has become. In fact, classic horror literature relied heavily on the use of fear and anxiety about the darker sides of humanity to scare their audiences. However, as people became more and more desensitized to violence, fear and anxiety became harder to instill through the written word.

In addition, some real-life horrors were more shocking than the literature of the day. This was the case when the murders perpetrated by Jack the Ripper came into the knowledge of the general British public. The unknown killer had done things that were more horrific than the literature of the day, even by the standards of Shelley’s or Stoker’s classics.

Two later masters of horror, Edgar Allan Poe and H.P. Lovecraft, relied more on the fear of the unknown and what lay beyond that threshold. Of the two, Poe was the more widely known master. He is prominently remembered as the master of American horror, tapping into psychological facets only touched upon by his Victorian predecessors. He relied heavily on the consequences of falling victim to things outside one’s control, which he expertly combined with the very real threat of death. Whereas Poe scared by reminding people that they knew too little, Lovecraft achieved the same effect by showing people the consequences of meddling with things man was not meant to know. In contrast, Lovecraft made use of the consequences of humanity seeking knowledge that he should not rightfully delve into. Lovecraftian-horror, a smaller but equally powerful sub-genre, attempts to show the futility of human endeavor and uses the concept of excessive knowledge as a device for terror.

As the visual medium of movies and television started to grow in popularity, and more people realized the depths and the horrors their fellow human beings were capable of, the monsters that were Dracula, Frankenstein’s monster, and Mister Hyde suddenly seemed less horrifying. In the modern era, “Hollywood horror” has taken on two distinct directions; one for the literary scene and the other for the motion picture industry. For literature, modern horror novels tend to focus more on personal horror, attempting to call upon the reader’s fears of becoming the monster within the human being. By whatever means were thought necessary, they are an intricate webbing of character development & detailed settings – which culminates to get the reader invested in the fate of the characters. As the modern era of the horror genre began to take shape, fear and anxiety quickly lost the focus of horror makers. This is particularly true with the advent of movies, which relied more on gore and blood to elicit cheap thrills out of people. Horror films today take a more brutish route, using as much blood, gore, and blatant violence as possible. And, some of the most recent “horror” movies have been primarily focused on gruesome torture – rather than suspense. As movies move away from the exquisite art of the horror genre, literature is returning to its roots.

With contemporary writers – such as Neil Gaiman – the horror genre is again crafting stories of suspense through human intrigue. And, like Frankenstein, they are often even revealing a moral throughout the events of the novel. The genre of horror has long since been misjudged by its label and should be properly enjoyed as the intense reflection of the “humanity” it exposes.

In this course, students will track the origins of the genre and employ the techniques used so artistically by the writers of this genre. Students will develop an appreciation for the elements within this genre and understand why it holds a timeless and hypnotic power over generations of fans everywhere.

Grading Policies:
- Major Grades (Projects, Films, Creative Writing) = 50%
- Activities, Mini-Projects & Presentations (Class work) = 20%
- Creative Writing Portfolio = 15%
- Homework = 15%
Much of the reading for this course is expected to occur outside of class. The majority of the homework that will be assigned is comprised of the outside readings. Students must balance this with the demands of their other courses.

Personal responsibility and accountability are paramount in my class. All students are expected to turn in all writing assignments & projects on time.

All homework assignments will be turned in at the beginning of class. Any assignment that does not make it into the tray by the beginning of classroom instruction will be considered late & not accepted.

NO LATE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

* * * In the event that you have an EXCUSED absence on the day that an assignment is due – you must turn the assignment in to me as soon as you walk into my class, the same day that you return to school. This is your responsibility. I will not ask you for the assignment. If I do not receive the assignment – the day you return – you will receive a ZERO. Any MAJOR assignments that are turned in 1 day late will be given a maximum grade of 80%. Any major assignment that is turned in 2 days (or more) late will be given a ZERO. (* * * The only exception to this policy will be in the event that prior arrangements –due to unforeseen family circumstances or medical emergencies— have been made and approved by me. In the event of an approved arrangement, the assignment must be submitted to me no later than 2 days after the original due date.) You must always turn in a hard-copy of your written assignment the day that it is due!

Course Content:  (subject to change)

FALL SEMESTER focus:  Gothic Literature

Unit 1 (1st Nine Weeks)
- Understanding the psychology & physiology behind Fear
- Fears versus Phobias
- Most common fears
- Writer’s motivation for creating fear
- Intro to Classic Films (& classic filming techniques)
- Intro to Classic Monsters
- Group Movie Project
- Creative Writing: Poetry & Short Stories
- Early genre literature: Dracula, Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde, Manfred, etc.

Unit 2 (2nd Nine Weeks)
- Edgar Allan Poe & H.P. Lovecraft
- Elements of Gothic Literature
- Horror & the Supernatural
- Iconic Horror Films
- War of the Worlds
- Intro to Elements of Contemporary Horror Literature
- Creative Writing: Short Story Portfolio
- Semester Exam

SPRING SEMESTER: Contemporary Literature

Unit 3 (3rd Nine Weeks)
- Intro to Contemporary Monsters
- Intro to Contemporary Horror Films
- Review Elements of Contemporary Horror Literature
- Zombie Lore
- Group Movie Project
- Creative Writing: Poetry & Short Stories
- Contemporary genre literature: King, Gaiman, etc.

Unit 4 (4th Nine Weeks)
- Synthesis of genre elements
- Creative Writing: Short Story Portfolio
- Graphic Novels
- Monster Mayhem!
- Semester Exam