Gothic fiction has its own distinctive style of narration, characters, settings and events. You are going to look at some examples. The following are extracts from Gothic novels or short stories. Read each one carefully and answer the questions on each:

1 In mortal terror of people forcing an entrance at such an hour, and in such

2 a manner as to leave no doubt of their purpose, I would have turned to fly

3 when I first heard the noise, only that I feared by any quick motion to catch

4 their attention, as I also ran the danger of doing by opening the door, which

5 was all but closed, and to whose handlings I was unaccustomed. Again,

6 quick as lightning, I bethought me of the hiding-place between the locked

7 door to my husband’s dressing-room and the portiere which covered it; but

8 I gave that up, I felt as if I could not reach it without screaming or fainting.

9 So I sank down softly, and crept under the table, hidden, as I hoped, by the

10 great, deep, table-cover, with its heavy fringe. I had not recovered my

11 swooning senses fully, was trying to reassure myself as to my being in a

12 place of comparative safety, for, above all things, I dreaded the betrayal of

13 fainting, and struggled hard for such courage as I might attain by deadening

14 myself to the danger I was in by inflicting intense pain on myself. You have

15 often asked me for the reason of that mark on my hand; it was where, in

16 my agony, I bit out a piece of flesh with my relentless teeth, thankful for

17 the pain, which helped to numb my terror. I say, I was but just concealed

18 when I heard the window lifted, and one after another stepped over the sill,

19 and stood by me so close that I could have touched their feet. Then they

20 laughed and whispered; my brain swam so that I could not tell the meaning

21 of their words, but I heard my husband’s laughter among the rest – low,

22 hissing, scornful – as he kicked something heavy that they had dragged in

23 over the floor, and which lay near me; so near, that my husband’s kick, in

24 touching it, touched me too. I don’t know why – I can’t tell how – but

25 some feeling, and not curiosity, prompted me to put out my hand, ever so

26 softly, ever so little, and feel in the darkness for what lay spurned beside

27 me. I stole my groping palm upon the clenched and chilly hand of a corpse!

*(The Grey Woman, Elizabeth Gaskell: 1861)*

1. Look at the first long sentence, lines 1-5. What does this long sentence tell us about the narrator’s state of mind?

2. What is unusual about the narration in line 14? What does this tell us about the story?

3. In your own words, explain the narrator’s actions in line 13-17.

4. The narrator’s husband is among the intruders! How would she feel about this?

5. What do the intruders seem to be up to?

1 It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of

2 my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the

3 instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the

4 lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain

5 pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out,

6 when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow

7 eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion

8 agitated its limbs.

9 How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how

10 delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had

11 endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his

12 features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely

13 covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a

14 lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these

15 luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that

16 seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they

17 were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.

*(Frankenstein, Mary Shelley: 1817)*

1. How does the writer create a gloomy and eerie setting in lines 1-8?

2. Look carefully at the words used to describe Frankenstein’s creation. What words does Shelley use to show that it is far from being human?

3. Why does Frankenstein refer to this event as a “catastrophe”?

4. In your own words, explain what is frightening or unnatural about the creature’s appearance.

The intense horror of nightmare came over me; I tried to draw back my arm, but, the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed,

“Let me in – let me in!”

“Who are you?” I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself.

“Catherine Linton,” it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton). “I’m come home, I’d lost my way on the moor!”

As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child’s face looking through the window – Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes: still it wailed, “Let me in!” and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear.

*(Wuthering Heights, Emily Bronte:1847)*

1.What is particularly shocking about the narrator’s actions in this passage?

2. We discover that this ‘child’ is in fact a dream or a ghost. Why do you suppose it appeared to the narrator?

Questions on all three passages:

1. What style of narration do all three extracts have in common?

2. A feeling of fear is present in all three extracts. Explain what has caused the fear in each case. What do these things have in common?

3. What other feelings or themes are present in these extracts?

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**What is Gothic Fiction?**

* A great deal of Gothic fiction was written in the **late 18th and 19th centuries.**
* Gothic fiction is sometimes said to be a combination of both romance and horror.
* Many writers of Gothic fiction are, surprisingly, women. This was shocking to people at the time due to the rather ‘unladylike’ content of these stories, which could be both gruesome and frightening.

There are many Gothic short stories, but many famous novels also include Gothic elements:

*Frankenstein* – Mary Shelly *Wuthering Heights –* Emily Bronte

*Dracula* - Bram Stoker *Jane Eyre* – Charlotte Bronte

**Gothic** (goth-IK): a literary style popular during the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. This style usually portrayed fantastic tales dealing with horror, despair, the grotesque and other “dark” subjects. Gothic literature was named for the apparent influence of the dark gothic architecture of the period on the genre. Also, many of these Gothic tales took places in such “gothic” surroundings. Other times, this story of darkness may occur in a more everyday setting, such as the quaint house where the man goes mad from the "beating" of his guilt in Edgar Allan Poe's “The Tell-Tale Heart.”In essence, these stories were romances, largely due to their love of the imaginary over the logical, and were told from many different points of view. This literature gave birth to many other forms, such as suspense, ghost stories, horror, mystery, and also Poe's detective stories. Gothic literature wasn't so different from other genres in form as it was in content and its focus on the "weird" aspects of life. This movement began to slowly open may people's eyes to the possible uses of the supernatural in literature.

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from http://www.uncp.edu/home/canada/work/allam/general/glossary.htm

**The Gothic Novel**

The gothic novel was invented almost single-handedly by Horace Walpole, whose *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) contains essentially all the elements that constitute the genre. Walpole's novel was imitated not only in the eighteenth century and not only in the novel form, but it has influenced the novel, the short story, poetry, and even film making up to the present day.

**Gothic elements include the following:**

**1. Setting in a castle.** The action takes place in and around an old castle, sometimes seemingly abandoned, sometimes occupied. The castle often contains secret passages, trap doors, secret rooms, dark or hidden staircases, and possibly ruined sections. The castle may be near or connected to caves, which lend their own haunting flavor with their branchings, claustrophobia, and mystery. (Translated into modern filmmaking, the setting might be in an old house or mansion--or even a new house--where unusual camera angles, sustained close ups during movement, and darkness or shadows create the same sense of claustrophobia and entrapment.)

**2. An atmosphere of mystery and suspense.** The work is pervaded by a threatening feeling, a fear enhanced by the unknown. Often the plot itself is built around a mystery, such as unknown parentage, a disappearance, or some other inexplicable event. Elements 3, 4, and 5 below contribute to this atmosphere. (Again, in modern filmmaking, the inexplicable events are often murders.)

**3. An ancient prophecy** is connected with the castle or its inhabitants (either former or present). The prophecy is usually obscure, partial, or confusing. "What could it mean?" In more watered down modern examples, this may amount to merely a legend: "It's said that the ghost of old man Krebs still wanders these halls."

**4. Omens, portents, visions.** A character may have a disturbing dream vision, or some phenomenon may be seen as a portent of coming events. For example, if the statue of the lord of the manor falls over, it may portend his death. In modern fiction, a character might see something (a shadowy figure stabbing another shadowy figure) and think that it was a dream. This might be thought of as an "imitation vision."

**5. Supernatural or otherwise inexplicable events.** Dramatic, amazing events occur, such as ghosts or giants walking, or inanimate objects (such as a suit of armor or painting) coming to life. In some works, the events are ultimately given a natural explanation, while in others the events are truly supernatural.

**6. High, even overwrought emotion.** The narration may be highly sentimental, and the characters are often overcome by anger, sorrow, surprise, and especially, terror. Characters suffer from raw nerves and a feeling of impending doom. Crying and emotional speeches are frequent. Breathlessness and panic are common. In the filmed gothic, screaming is common.

**7. Women in distress.** As an appeal to the pathos and sympathy of the reader, the female characters often face events that leave them fainting, terrified, screaming, and/or sobbing. A lonely, pensive, and oppressed heroine is often the central figure of the novel, so her sufferings are even more pronounced and the focus of attention. The women suffer all the more because they are often abandoned, left alone (either on purpose or by accident), and have no protector at times.

**8. Women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male.** One or more male characters has the power, as king, lord of the manor, father, or guardian, to demand that one or more of the female characters do something intolerable. The woman may be commanded to marry someone she does not love (it may even be the powerful male himself), or commit a crime.

9. **The metonymy of gloom and horror.** Metonymy is a subtype of metaphor, in which something (like rain) is used to stand for something else (like sorrow). For example, the film industry likes to use metonymy as a quick shorthand, so we often notice that it is raining in funeral scenes. Note that the following metonymies for “doom and gloom” all suggest element of mystery, danger, or the supernatural.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| wind, especially howling | rain, especially blowing |
| doors grating on rusty hinges | sighs, moans, howls, eerie sounds |
| footsteps approaching | clanking chains |
| lights in abandoned rooms | gusts of wind blowing out lights |
| characters trapped in a room | doors suddenly slamming shut |
| ruins of buildings | baying of distant dogs (or wolves?) |
| thunder and lightning | crazed laughter |

**10. The vocabulary of the gothic.** The constant use of the appropriate vocabulary set creates the atmosphere of the gothic. Using the right words maintains the dark and stimulated feel that defines the gothic. Here as an example are some of the words (in several categories) that help make up the vocabulary of the gothic in *The Castle of Otranto:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Mystery** | diabolical, enchantment, ghost, goblins, haunted, infernal, magic, magician, miracle, necromancer, omens, ominous, portent, preternatural, prodigy, prophecy, secret, sorcerer, spectre, spirits, strangeness, talisman, vision |
| **Fear, Terror, or Sorrow** | afflicted, affliction, agony, anguish, apprehensions, apprehensive, commiseration, concern, despair, dismal, dismay, dread, dreaded, dreading, fearing, frantic, fright, frightened, grief, hopeless, horrid, horror, lamentable, melancholy, miserable, mournfully, panic, sadly, scared, shrieks, sorrow, sympathy, tears, terrible, terrified, terror, unhappy, wretched |
| **Surprise** | alarm, amazement, astonished, astonishment, shocking, staring, surprise, surprised, thunderstruck, wonder |
| **Haste** | anxious, breathless, flight, frantic, hastened, hastily, impatience, impatient, impatiently, impetuosity, precipitately, running, sudden, suddenly |
| **Anger** | anger, angrily, choler, enraged, furious, fury, incense, incensed, provoked, rage, raving, resentment, temper, wrath, wrathful, wrathfully |
| **Largeness** | enormous, gigantic, giant, large, tremendous, vast |
| **Darkness** | dark, darkness, dismal, shaded, black, night |

from http://www.virtualsalt.com/gothic.htm

**Common Themes of Gothic Literature**

Edgar Allan Poe: The Definitive Webquest

DIRECTIONS:

1. Open Internet Explorer and go to **trackstar.4teachers.org/** (If you have trouble with this, just Google search trackstar; the link should be first).
2. Next, in the section labelled “Find a Track” type **439002** into the View Track # box.
3. You should be taken to a page that reads: “Track #439002 requires a password to view.”
4. The password for this track is **lamb** (with no capitalization).
5. On the next page, click on “View in Frames.”
6. Use the links on the left side of the page to navigate the webquest. The questions and directions for each site appears across the top of the page as well.
7. Stay on this page and navigate through the links on the side.
8. Answer the questions for each site on your own piece of paper.
9. Enjoy! ☺

<http://knowingpoe.thinkport.org/default_flash.asp>

Visit this page, exploring the links to “Poe the Person” and “Poe the Writer.” Be sure to put your headphones in to listen to the available audio! Explore the Interactive Timeline, It’ll Be the Death of Me, and School Days sections on “Poe the Person.” On “The Poe Library” page, look at some of the Primary Source Documents as well as Poe in Your Life (If you are interested in football, the links about the Baltimore Ravens may be of interest to you as well. Use the knowledge you have gained from exploring this site to answer the following questions.

1. What were some of the tragic events Poe faced during his life? How do you think these may have influenced Poe's writing?
2. Poe was sometimes described as opinionated, romantic, impractical, arrogant, ingenious, creative, intelligent and restless. Did you find examples in your research that would support these descriptions?
3. Do you think many of the themes of Poe's work can be explained by the events in his life?
4. Do you think Poe's frequent moves impacted his work? Explain.
5. Are you surprised that Poe didn't get along with his father? Explain.
6. Poe was recognized as a skilled writer during his lifetime and yet he was often very poor. Do you think this would happen if Poe had lived today? Explain.
7. Do you think that the time period in which Poe lived is reflected in his writing? Explain.

<http://www.poemuseum.org/index.php>

Visit this page and click on the “Students” tab along the top of the page. Scroll through the links along the right side and answer the questions associated with each page.

A Brief Overview of Edgar Allan Poe

1. Summarize the information under the headings “Who is Edgar Allan Poe?” and “What did he write?” Remember that a summary is a shortened version in your own words.

Fact or Fiction

1. Answer the 13 fact or fiction questions about Poe. What did you already know? What did you learn?

Now visit the “Poe’s Life” tab at the top of the page. Answer the questions that follow.

1. What types of writings did Poe create?
2. What is the “Poe of legend” and where did this idea come from? What was he really like and how do we know?
3. What events in Poe’s life may have had the greatest influence on his writing styles?
4. What is the significance of Rufus Griswold to Poe’s life and death?

On the right side of the page, visit the link “Death Theories” and answer the following question:

1. Why is Poe’s death so mysterious?
2. How many theories are there about his death?
3. What are the first two theories?
4. What are the three most recent theories?

<http://www.poestories.com/>

In order to prepare for our reading of several of Poe’s short stories and poems, visit the following short stories on this page and follow the directions for each of the following:

“The Fall of the House of Usher”

1. What does the epigraph at the beginning of the story mean in English?
2. What is an epigraph?
3. What predictions could you make about the story based on this quote?

“The Tell-Tale Heart”

1. What do the following vocabulary words from the story mean?
   1. acute
   2. dissimulation
   3. sagacity
   4. death watches
   5. suavity
   6. gesticulations
   7. derision
   8. hypocritical
   9. dissemble
2. Now, using these definitions, create three predictions about this story. What is it going to be about? What will the characters be like? What will be some major elements or themes?