

Exploring Gothic Horror in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*: a student work ebook



Lessons and exercises based on developing knowledge of and skills in writing the horror genre and studying *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman

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Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*:
a student work ebook

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3. Features of gothic horror stories

When we speak of gothic we refer to the gothic 'mode'. 'Mode' is simply a fashion or style, and 'gothic' means a style of architecture common in Western Europe in the 12th-16th centuries. The architecture is defined by pointed arches and rich stone carvings. The gothic story or novel was therefore placed into this setting, as well as the ghosts and supernatural beings we are familiar with today in stories such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*.

The word gothic was not intentionally associated with 'bad' or 'scary', although it has come to be associated with these terms due to the mystery and fear the architecture evokes. Gothic literature can also include elements of romance (medieval tales of heroes, chivalry and love affairs) as well as melodrama (sensational dramatic genre of drama). For example the *Twilight* series revolves around the love affair between Bella and Edward (and to some extent Jacob) and battles amongst vampires and werewolves in modern America.



Brainstorm features of gothic horror stories. You might like to use the following gothic horror images as a starting point.



From left to right: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rohitchhiber/5545441111/>;
<https://pixabay.com/en/woman-gothic-dark-horror-fantasy-578820/>;
<https://pixabay.com/en/terror-tree-stairs-door-fear-973169/>; <https://pixabay.com/en/woman-gothic-dark-horror-fantasy-578820/>

You may have come up with some of the following features of gothic stories:

- A villain
- A ruin in the grounds
- A mystery
- Strange noises
- A sliding panel
- Secret passages
- A servant, preferably with a secret
- A staircase, preferably winding
- The moon
- An innocent heroine
- A hero whose identity or integrity (honesty) is doubted
- A ghost and or monk-like figure
- A storm
- A gloomy cellar
- A moving stone slab
- A dark or foreboding atmosphere
- The threat of danger
- A missing document.

Complete the exercise below.

Exercise 3: Features of gothic horror stories

1. Read an extract from a gothic horror short story, taking note of the features of horror and gothic horror stories used to tell the story. Below are links to websites with gothic horror short stories.

<https://americanliterature.com/gothic-ghost-horror-and-weird>

<http://www.gothichorrorstories.com/category/classic-gothic-ghost-stories/>

2. Fill in the table by identifying examples of horror and gothic horror features and explain the meaning and effect.

Extend yourself

1. Read one gothic horror short story. Write an analytical paragraph explaining the effectiveness of the features of horror and gothic horror stories.
2. Read another gothic horror short story. Compare and contrast the effectiveness of the gothic horror features.

Features of gothic horror stories

1. Create and fill in the table by identifying examples of horror features in a story.

Horror and gothic features	Examples of horror & gothic horror features in a story
A villain	
A ruin in the grounds	
A mystery	
Strange noises	
A sliding panel	
Secret passages	
A servant, preferably with a secret	
A staircase, preferably winding	
An innocent heroine	
A hero whose identity or integrity is doubted	

Horror and gothic features	Examples of horror & gothic horror features in a story
A ghost and or monk-like figure	
A storm	
A gloomy cellar	
A moving stone slab	
A dark or foreboding atmosphere	
The threat of danger	
A missing document	
Other:	

Writing space
