**The Features of Gothic Literature**

No single features defines what *is* or what *isn’t* gothic literature. Think of gothic literature as a collection of texts that have overlapping characteristics.

**These characteristics are seen in the choice of setting**

* Crowded cities
* Hidden rooms
* Dilapidated castles
* Isolated mansions
* Ancient ruins
* Wild landscapes

**They are also seen in recurring motifs**

* Nightmares
* Shadows
* Storms
* Silence
* Fog
* Mirrors
* Prophecies
* Ghosts

**There are also a number of common themes**

* Obsession
* Guilt
* Redemption
* Power
* Duality
* Isolation

**Characters in Gothic Literature**

Characters in gothic fiction typically find themselves in strange and threatening situations. They are often very intense and possess motivations that are complex and sometimes contradictory. It is not unusual for heroes and villains to share similarities and to act in ways that we might consider morally ambiguous.

**Some characters are ultimately good**

* The Byronic Hero Brooding and mysterious; possess a mixture of virtues and vices
* The Innocent Hero Embodies moral integrity; pure in a dark and sinister world
* The Mad Genius Talented, but conflicted; seeks forbidden knowledge

**Other characters only *appear* to be good**

* The Femme Fatal Alluring, but dangerous; outwardly charming and beautiful
* The Inner Beast Struggles to repress destructive desires; impulsive and reckless
* The Tyrant Powerful and domineering; demands obedience from others
* The Supernatural Being Defies the laws of nature; uses otherworldly powers

**Some characters need support from others**

* The Damsel in Distress: Vulnerable and in distress; requires help from the hero to survive
* The Outcast: Isolated and lonely; misunderstood and persecuted by society



**Extracts from Gothic Literature**

Look at the passages below and think about what makes them unmistakably ‘gothic’ in style.

**Example 1**

* *Frankenstein*

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open.

**Example 2**

* *The Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both.

**Example 3**

* *The Yellow Wallpaper*

The front pattern does move and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it! Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over. Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard. And she is all the time trying to climb through.



**Vocabulary for Gothic Literature**

Use the words below to help you express your ideas with precision.

**Words to describe emotions**

* Claustrophobic A feeling of being trapped in a small or confined space
* Curiosity A strong desire to know or learn something
* Despair A feeling of complete hopelessness
* Foreboding A feeling that something bad will happen
* Horror Intense shock and fear often elicited by gruesome elements
* Melancholy A deep and pervasive sadness
* Paranoia An irrational and persistent feeling of being persecuted or threatened
* Terror Intense fear

**Literary terms**

* Allegory A story containing another symbolic story or hidden meaning
* Allusion An indirect reference
* Ambiguity The quality of being open to multiple interpretations
* Foreshadowing Hints or clues about what will happen
* Imagery Language used to engage and immerse the senses
* Juxtaposition The placement of two elements side-by-side to create a contrast
* Motif A recurring element
* Symbolism Use of an object or entity to represent ideas or qualities
* Theme A big idea that is explored throughout the narrative
* Tone Elements of the text that shape the mood



**Writing About Gothic Literature**

Writing about gothic fiction helps to clarify your thinking. Crafting is key: go slowly and edit where necessary.

**Because / but / so**

* The protagonist feels a sense of apprehension *because*….
* The protagonist feels a sense of apprehension, *but*….
* The protagonist feels a sense of apprehension *so*….

**Before / after**

* *Before* the plot twist is revealed…
* *After* the plot twist is revealed…

**Despite / although**

* *Despite* knowing that the house has been derelict for a long time, the group continue to…
* *Although* the group know the house is derelict, and has been for a long time, they continue to…

**Not only… but also**

* The sense of threat is *not only* conveyed by the protagonist’s subtle movements, *but also* by the…

**This implies / This highlights**

* The door of the house is painted in a deep, vivid shade of red. *This implies*…
* The door opens slowly and reveals a dark, silent corridor. *This highlights*…

**In contrast / Similar to**

* *In contrast* to the mood of the group, the weather is…
* **The mood of the groups is *similar to*…