

# Year 8 - Knowledge Organiser – Gothic Writing

**Definition of ‘Gothic’ writing:** *“Tales of the macabre, fantastic, and supernatural, usually set amid haunted castles, graveyards, ruins, and wild picturesque landscapes.”*

Typical genre features:	Archetypal characters:	Typical settings:
1. Death and darkness	1. Characters with high social status e.g. Princes, counts	1. Wild landscapes
2. Supernatural (magic, ghosts, monsters, curses)	2. Female victims threatened by a powerful male	2. Medieval style castles, churches or abbeys
3. Focus on body parts	3. Threatening women who are monsters or vampires	3. Gloomy, decayed and ruined environments
4. Depiction of madness and hyperbolic emotion, including psychological episodes	4. Powerful, tyrannical male figures	4. Remote, uninhabited places (older gothic) or monsters intermingling in every day life (newer gothic)
5. Mystery, terror and suspense	5. Villains, vampires, ghosts, werewolves	5. Volatile and threatening weather (symbolism)

Social and Historical Context	Values and ideas held by gothic writers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The term ‘gothic’ comes from the Germanic tribe ‘the Goths’, who played a part in the fall of the Roman Empire. The Goths are sometimes called barbarians. They destroyed a lot of Roman architecture in around C3 and replaced it with buildings in the gothic style.</li> <li><b>Medieval Europe (C3-14)</b> is sometimes referred to as the ‘<b>Dark Ages</b>’ (although this can be contested for a number of reasons.) Some believe that people lived in fear due to superstition and ignorance and that not much learning took place in this time. Castles with gargoyles were built to ward off evil spirits, this architecture is known as ‘gothic’ e.g. Notre Dame.</li> <li>Figures from <b>The Age of Enlightenment (C18-19)</b> believed that scientific progress was the only way to advance society, and great discoveries were made in this time. They tried to rid Europe of superstition and ignorance through promoting reason and logic.</li> <li>A group of poets, artists and thinkers called the Romantics challenged this because they believed that not everything can be explained by science, and too much reason rids the world of beauty and mystery.</li> <li>The gothic genre first emerged from the <b>Romantic movement</b>. It used art and ideas from the Dark Ages, wild emotion and nature to contrast modern ideas about science and logic.</li> <li>Gothic writing transformed into the format of the extremely popular <b>Victorian ghost story</b>.</li> <li>Today, we use the term ‘gothic’ widely to describe art, style, clothing (e.g. Alexander McQueen couture) music and film (e.g. Tim Burton films). The style and genre is very much still alive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gothic writers are preoccupied with the supernatural because they believe that not everything has a scientific explanation.</li> <li>They believed that nature is ‘sublime’: it has the power to simultaneously inspire awe and terror in people.</li> <li>They challenged society’s expectations about propriety and emotion. To show wild emotion was seen as crass and uncouth, but not to the gothic writers, who often depicted passion and rage.</li> <li>They explored the role of the female characters: often in gothic texts, there are powerful female roles, which contrasted the contemporary society.</li> <li>They were very interested in the psychological exploration of characters, particularly in relation to themes of madness.</li> <li>Big question: are humans always attracted to darkness? Is this why the gothic style has been almost constant?</li> </ul>

## Notable Gothic texts (in chronological order)

<b>The Castle of Otranto</b> – Horace Walpole, <b>1765</b>	<b>Vathek</b> – William Beckford, <b>1786</b>	<b>Frankenstein</b> – Mary Shelley, <b>1818</b>	<b>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</b> – Victor Hugo, <b>1831</b>	<b>The Raven</b> – Edgar Allen Poe, <b>1845</b>	<b>Wuthering Heights</b> – Emily Bronte, <b>1847</b>	<b>The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</b> – R.L. Stevenson, <b>1887</b>	<b>The Picture of Dorian Gray</b> , Oscar Wilde, <b>1890</b>	<b>Dracula</b> – Bram Stoker, <b>1897</b>	<b>Rebecca</b> – Du Maurier, <b>1931</b>	<b>The Woman in Black</b> – Susan Hill, <b>1983</b>	<b>The Twilight Series</b> – Stephanie Meyer, <b>2006</b>
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