



This curriculum has been adapted from our Education Outreach program, “Can’t Look Away: Exploring Societal Fear Through Horror.” You can bring this workshop to your school! To find out more, visit MoPOP.org/Outreach

Overview

The Big Idea	The horror genre reflects our societal fears.
Summary	Students will think creatively and critically about horror storytelling, and then create their own mini horror stories.
Grades	9-12
Time	90 minutes
Supplies & Setup	-Prep your computer to play the provided video clip -Pen or pencil -Printed activities
Vocabulary	Horror, fear, genre, artifacts, emotions, dialogue, storytelling, lighting design, sound design

Learning Standards

Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts	CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3
WA Media Arts Standards	MA:Cr2.1.I, MA:Pr4.1.I, MA:Re7.1.I, MA:Re8.1.I, MA:Re9.1.I, MA:Re7.1.II, MA:Re8.1.II
Social & Emotional Learning	Self-Awareness (1A, 1B, 1C), Self-Management (2B), Self-Efficacy (3A, 3B, 3C), Social Awareness (4A, 4B, 4C)
21st Century Skills	Communication & Collaboration: Communicate Clearly; Creativity & Innovation: Think Creatively; Critical Thinking & Problem Solving: Use Systems Thinking, Make Judgements & Decisions, Solve Problems; Information, Media, & Technology: Use & Manage Information, Media Literacy
Artist Habits of Mind	Develop Craft, Engage & Persist, Envision, Express, Observe, Reflect, Stretch & Explore, Understand Community

PART 1: What is Horror? (3 minutes)

There is much debate in the film community about what makes a horror film, and how horror is different from a thriller or slasher. For the purposes of this curriculum, we’re going to define horror as content designed to cause fear, panic, terror, dread, and alarm in its audience. They sometimes bring to the surface hidden fears and can release or provide relief from strong or repressed emotions.

Why does horror have such huge appeal? Why do we like to be scared, surprised, and shocked? Throughout these activities, we'll unpack some of these ideas and then look at the elements and techniques used, ultimately creating our own mini piece of horror.

Horror can include some intense content and topics, so we've designed our activities to avoid potential **triggers**. Triggering refers to when someone sees, hears, or experiences something that reminds them of a previous trauma. We ask that as you create, avoid content that depicts violence, weapons, or gore. Focus on all of the other ways that horror can be conveyed—through sound, lighting, storytelling, etc.

PART 2: Analyzing Horror Film (20 minutes)



For this activity, you'll watch a clip from the film *Get Out*, written and directed by Jordan Peele.

Here's a short synopsis of the film: "Now that Chris and his girlfriend, Rose have reached the meet-the-parents milestone of dating, she invites him for a weekend getaway upstate with her parents. At first, Chris reads the family's overly accommodating behavior as nervous attempts to deal with their daughter's interracial relationship, but as the weekend progresses, a series of increasingly disturbing discoveries lead him to a truth that he never could have imagined." – IMDB.com

You'll watch this clip a total of 3 times, looking for different elements each time.

Here's the clip: <https://bit.ly/2YbUKJc>

- A. **Watch the clip. How do you react?** Take a look at the word bank on the next page. This includes some possible emotional, physical, and verbal responses you might have. Circle any that you experience, or add your own.

How did you react? Circle all that apply.

Emotional Reactions:

Anxious

Terrified

Curious

Grossed out

Panicked

Frightened

Confused

Petrified

Interested

Apprehensive

Creeped out

Startled

Nervous

Wondering

Surprised

Suspicious

Stressed out

Alarmed

Amazed

Physical Reactions:

Uncomfortable

Heart racing

Sweat

Chills

Goosebumps

Cover eyes

Louder voice

Look away

Cover eyes

Don't want to look

Shaking head

Folding arms

Hugging self

Recoil

Shaking

Grimace

Jumpy

Verbal Reactions:

"Ew!"

"Nooooo!"

"Oh no"

"Ah!"

"Nope"

Speechless


Laughing


Ask questions

Gasp

Any reactions not listed here:



 B. **Watch the clip a second time. What is the story?** Write down what you think might be happening in this scene:

 C. **Watch the clip a third time. What elements are being used?** Just write down what you observe- we'll analyze it in the next section.

- What do you hear? What do you notice with the sound and music?

- What do you see? How close or far is the camera from the actors faces?

- What are they saying? What's the language of the scene like, do they use any words or ways of talking that stand out to you?

- What objects are present? Why are the cell phone and charger important in this scene?

D. **Connecting it all together.** Now look at all of the information you have collected. The filmmakers for *Get Out* wanted to tell a specific story, using the tools of filmmaking to elicit specific emotions from their audience. How are these connected?

Brainstorm how some of the filmmaking decisions could create specific audience reactions.

Example:

The camera being really close to one character's face	=	Feeling trapped Feeling claustrophobic
This camera angle choice	=	This audience reaction
This music choice	=	This audience reaction
This sound design choice	=	This audience reaction
This choice of words	=	This audience reaction
The objects in the scene	=	This audience reaction

PART 3: Analyze a Horror Text (30 mins)

For this activity, you'll read an excerpt from Stephen King's horror novel, *IT*.

Here's a short synopsis of the book:
 "IT follows the story of seven preteen children from the fictional town of Derry, Maine who are stalked and terrorized by an evil eldritch entity they only know as "IT." The mysterious creature has the ability to easily shapeshift and disguise itself to its prey, and uses their greatest and deepest psychological fears against them. One of IT's favorite disguises is the appearance of a circus clown called Pennywise." – Fandom.com



Like you did with the film clip, you'll read the excerpt a total of 3 times, looking for different elements each time.

"Want your boat, Georgie?" Pennywise asked. He held it up, smiling. He was wearing a baggy silk suit with great big orange buttons. A bright tie, electric-blue, flopped down his front, and on his hands were big white gloves.

"Yes, sure," George said, looking into the storm drain.

"And a balloon? I've got red and green and yellow and blue..."

"Do they float?"

"Float?" The clown's grin widened. "Oh yes, indeed they do. They float! And there's cotton candy..."

George reached. The clown seized his arm. And George saw the clown's face change... What he saw destroyed his sanity in one clawing stroke.

"They float," the thing in the drain crooned in a clotted, chuckling voice. It held George's arm in its thick and wormy grip, it pulled George toward that terrible darkness where the water rushed and roared and bellowed George craned his neck away from that final blackness and began to scream into the rain.





A. **Read the excerpt. How do you react?** Take a look at the word bank below. This includes some possible emotional, physical, and verbal responses you might have. Circle any that you experience, or add your own.

Emotional Reactions:

Anxious
Terrified
Curious
Grossed out
Panicked
Frightened
Confused
Petrified
Interested
Apprehensive
Creeped out
Startled
Nervous
Wondering
Surprised
Suspicious
Stressed out
Alarmed
Amazed

Physical Reactions:

Uncomfortable
Heart racing
Sweat
Chills
Goosebumps
Cover eyes
Louder voice
Look away
Cover eyes
Don't want to look
Shaking head
Folding arms
Hugging self
Recoil
Shaking
Grimace
Jumpy

Verbal Reactions:

"Ew!"
"Noooo!"
"Oh no"
"Ah!"
"Nope"
Speechless
Laughing
Ask questions
Gasp

Any reactions not listed here:



B. **Read the excerpt a second time. What is the story?** Write down what you think might be happening in this scene:



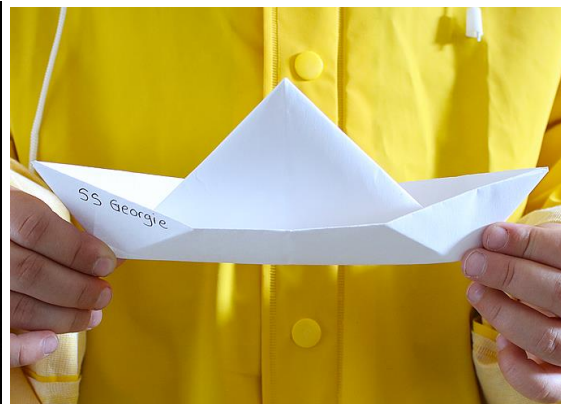
C. **Read the excerpt a third time. What elements are being used?** Answer the following questions:

- a. What does Georgie hear? Are there any sounds or music?

- b. What does Georgie see? How close or far are the characters from one another?

- c. What are they saying? What's the language of the scene like, do they use any words or ways of talking that stand out to you?

- d. What objects are present? Stephen King's villain is a clown, and this encounter involves childhood toys and treats. How are these typically innocent objects used to make this scene scary?



D. **Connecting it all together.** Now look at all of the information you have collected. Stephen King wanted to tell a specific story, using the elements of storytelling to elicit specific emotions from his audience. How are these connected?

Brainstorm how some of the storytelling decisions could create specific audience reactions.

Example:

The water making “roaring and bellowing” sounds = Makes the audience feel a sense of dread. Sounds like a dangerous animal.

_____ = _____

_____ = _____
 The distance between characters results in This audience reaction

_____ = _____
 This music and sounds result in This audience reaction

_____ = _____
 The object choice results in This audience reaction

_____ = _____
 This choice of words results in This audience reaction

_____ = _____
 results in

PART 3: Creating Your Own Horror Story (30 Minutes)

Now it’s your turn to create your own horror story! You can create a story starter of your own, or choose one from the next page to inspire a chilling short story.

A. Pick a story starter that intrigues you:

1. "Imagine you are home alone at night, and you're in your bedroom getting ready for bed when you hear something rustling in the living room. A shiver runs down your spine and you know you won't be able to sleep unless you check to make sure you're alone. You walk out into the dark and you see *this item* has been placed in the living room, you look around, but nobody is there..."



2. "You're walking through the woods completely alone, and realize you're lost. You try to retrace your steps, but the winding trails all seem to take you deeper into the woods. You begin to panic as darkness engulfs the forest. You break into a cold sweat and run down the path, and suddenly you trip on something poking out of the ground. Curious, you turn and begin to dig up the item with your hands. With some of the dirt cleared you reveal *this item*."



3. "You're 7 years old and at a friend's house playing hide-and-seek. You scurry up to the attic to hide behind an old dusty rocking chair. As you crouch in the dark attic, you hear something move behind you. When you look back, there is an *object* that you didn't notice before. It's under a black cloth. Lift the cloth to see what lies underneath."



B. Choose an element to enhance your story: You can choose:

1. Sound and music
2. Distance between characters
3. Language
4. Significant objects
 - a. If you'd like to use an object, you can use one from our *Scared to Death* horror exhibit at MoPOP (featured below and on the next page.)
 - b. Have something creepy in your house? Grandma's old doll collection? Dad's weird photograph with a floating orb? Feel free to use your own spooky object for inspiration!



Stick figure prop from *The Blair Witch Project*, 1999
Courtesy of Haxan Films and Eduardo Sánchez and Ben Rock.



Necronomicon Ex-Mortis, the Book of the Dead, featured in *Ash vs. Evil Dead*, Season 2, 2016-2017.



Lament Configuration Box from *Hellraiser: Inferno*, 2000. Courtesy of Kurt Root.



Concept art for Leatherface's mask from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 2003. Drawing by Scott Stoddard. Courtesy of Kurt Root.



Facehugger from *Aliens*, 1986. Allen Family Collection

C. Start drafting a short horror story.

Imagine you are the person in the story starter. Think of how you would feel in the given situation. What could this item mean? Is it a piece of a bigger thing? Is it alive? Possessed? Use your imagination along with the elements you thought about earlier to write a horror story. Choose one element that you would like to experiment with in your story. Sound and music, distance between characters, significant objects, or language.

For example, if my story starter was:

“You’re at a sleepover, some friends dare you to go into the cellar with the lights off and stay in there for 1 minute with only a flashlight to guide you. You accept the dare and descend the stairs into the damp and cold cellar. You shine your light around to see what’s down there and come across this artifact.”

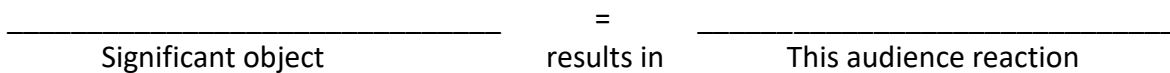
And my artifact was:



Stick figure prop from *The Blair Witch Project*, 1999
Courtesy of Haxan Films and Eduardo Sánchez and Ben Rock.

Stick figure prop

Gives an eerie feeling/
possible connection with the occult



I could continue the story by saying . . .

I squinted in the dark and could faintly make out some sort of symbol made of sticks. As I drew closer to the eerie relic, I worried that it may be cursed. It might have been used for some sort of dark ritual. I lifted a trembling finger and reached out to touch the sticks crudely bound together by wire. I heard a strange chanting in my head drawing me in. Like a chorus of ghoulish voices droning and moaning and commanding me to come closer. Suddenly, my friends burst through the cellar door letting in a flood of light. I jumped and turned towards them. ‘Minute’s up!’ they shouted. I quickly ran back up the stairs. I didn’t mention a word of it to my friends. I started to think I had imagined the whole thing until later that night when I woke to the sound of voices chanting. It sounded like it was coming from the cellar...

Now you try!

Which story starter did you choose?

Which element would you like to focus on? (sound and music, distance between characters, language, or significant objects)

What impact does the chosen element have on your audience?

_____ = _____
Your element results in This audience reaction

How would you continue the story? What happens next?

PART 4: Closing: (5 minutes)

Congratulations! You've created your own horror story. You learned how to combine many different elements to elicit a specific feeling in your audience. Now it's time to share your story with others! Find someone in your home to tell your story to, and see how they react.

There are many ways to continue the creativity you've started today. You could:

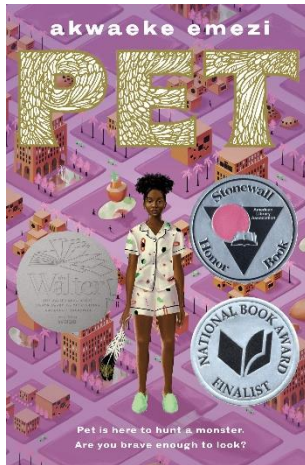
- Turn your story into a graphic novel.
- Film your story as a short video or TikTok.
- Take a series of photos that shows each step of your story.
- Continue adding to your written story.

What will you create next?

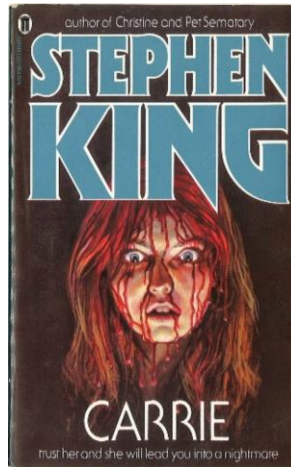
Extra Inspiration

On the following pages, we've listed some horror novels and films that might spark your imagination: (Please use your own discretion when selecting these - many contain mature content.)

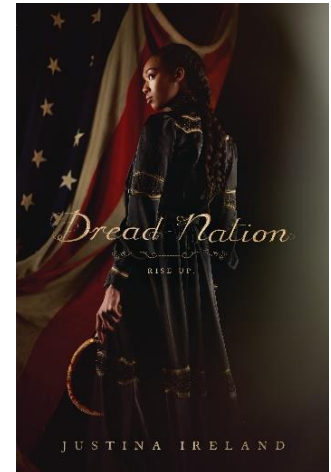
Novels:



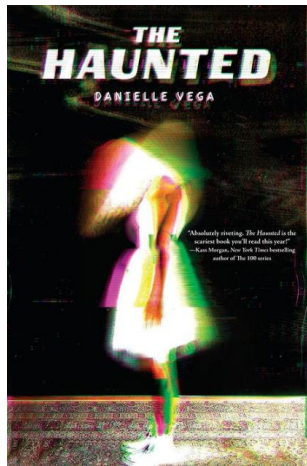
[Pet by Akwaeke Emezi](#)



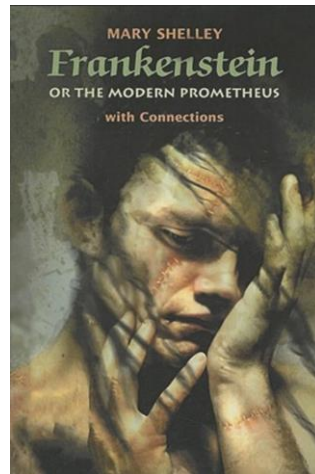
[Carrie by Stephen King](#)



[Dread Nation by Justina Ireland](#)



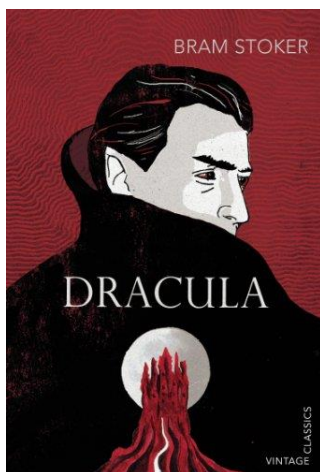
[The Haunted by Danielle Vega](#)



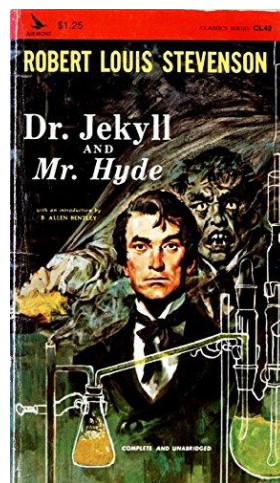
[Frankenstein: Or, the Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley](#)



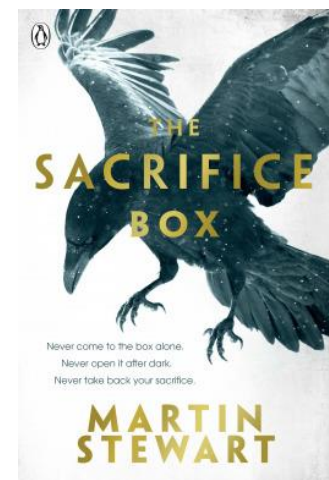
[There's Someone Inside Your House by Stephanie Perkins](#)



[Dracula by Bram Stoker](#)

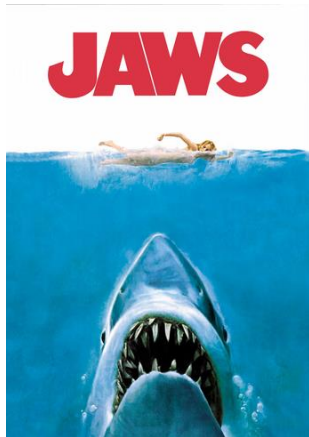


[Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson](#)



[The Sacrifice Box by Martin Stewart](#)

Films:



[Jaws \(1975\) rated PG](#)



[Poltergeist \(1982\) rated PG](#)



[The Sixth Sense \(1999\) rated PG-13](#)



[Babadook \(2014\) not rated](#)



[Us \(2019\) rated R](#)



[The Others \(2001\) rated PG-13](#)



[The Ring \(2002\) rated PG-13](#)



[Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark \(2019\) rated PG-13](#)



[Cloverfield \(2008\) rated PG-13](#)