

Dracula – Bram Stoker

Literary Response Journal Prompts

Each response should be thoughtful and well-developed. 2-3 pages in your LRJ per response is the proper range.

1. A Definitive Primer on the Recognition and Subsequent Eradication of Vampires

As *Dracula* opens, we are following Englishman Jonathan Harker as he makes his way deeper and deeper into the “imaginative whirlpool” of Dracula’s home country, Transylvania. The closer he gets to Dracula’s castle, the greater his misgivings become – the place has a mysteriously oppressive quality that Harker feels but can’t quite put into words. As Harker rides towards the castle, for example, he feels “a little strangely, and not a little frightened.” However, instead of taking these signs as a warning, Harker continues his ill-fated journey to the castle, where he ultimately becomes, in effect, Dracula’s prisoner. Suffice it to say that Mr. Harker could have used a primer on recognizing and dealing with vampires! In this LRJ assignment, you will use the text of *Dracula* to put together a “vampire primer” so that future Jonathan Harkers don’t enter the world of vampires naive and unprepared.

Your job is to draw information from the text of *Dracula* to create what we might call “A Definitive Primer on the Recognition and Subsequent Eradication of Vampires: The Only Guide You’ll Ever Need.” There will be four sections, each of which will open with a key question.

Section One: How do you know you are near, or worse, in the lair of a vampire? (Look for examples in the text where setting details establish the presence of vampires.)

Here’s an example: *A Pack of Wolves Seems Always to Be Near: “There seemed a strange stillness over everything; but as I listened I heard as if from down below in the valley the howling of many wolves. The Count’s eyes gleamed, and he said:– “Listen to them – the children of the night. What music they make!”*

Section Two: How do you know you are in the actual presence of a vampire? (Look for examples in the text where character description establishes that the strange and ominous creature in their presence is in fact a vampire.)

Section Three: How do you keep vampires away from your friends, out of your house, and away from your stuff? (Here look for ways that the characters “vampire-proof” their loved ones and their homes.)

Section Four: How do you get rid of a vampire once you’ve found one? (Look for ways that the characters both reverse the “vampirification” process and kill, once and for all, a pesky vampire.)

Note: Some of Stoker’s ideas have been modified over the years by subsequent authors, and you may be familiar with these modifications. However, stick with the text of Stoker’s *Dracula* as you put together your “vampire primer.”

2. Research: Patterns of Language in *Dracula*

Stoker’s *Dracula* has been published many times, in many forms, and by many publishers since London’s Constable Press introduced it in 1897. There are deluxe, edited versions (Broadview Press, 1998; Norton Critical Editions, 1996), “no frills” economy versions (Penguin Classics, 1993; Dover, 2000), and even graphic novels (Puffin Classics, 2006; Marvel, 2010). The good news is that the full text of the original novel exists online at the Project Gutenberg website, [www.gutenberg.org: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/345](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/345)

In this prompt, you will conduct original research on the text of the novel, looking for patterns of language and ideas that may yield insight into this particular story and/or the nature of the vampire story genre in general. Based on your findings, you will create a **thesis** about Stoker's use of language and/or imagery in the novel.

Step One: The first thing you need to do is to get a copy of Stoker's novel onto your laptop workspace. The easiest way to do this is to click on the "Plain Text UTF-8" download format option – the complete text of the story (along with a short header and some general Project Gutenberg information at the end) will appear shortly. "Select All" and "Copy" to get the text onto your clipboard; open a new document in your preferred text editor (e.g., Microsoft Word), and "Paste" the text into that document. At this point you can format the novel any way you'd like (you can then delete the Project Gutenberg introductory and closing material). Don't forget to "Save" the document as well. *Note: The document will be long – in 11 point Times New Roman it comes to 587 pages – but don't fret, your computer's search capabilities will make short work of your queries!*

Step Two: Formulate a search query for a list of **five** "words of interest": words that seem to stand out, words that are associated with one or more of the characters, or words that appear over and over, perhaps as part of a pattern. ("Blood" might top the list, for example, which could also include body parts such as "eyes," "teeth," and "neck"; animals such as "dogs," "wolves," and "bats"; and emotions such as "fear," "desire," and "excitement." But you are not limited to these.)

Choose one of these words and search the full text for it with the goal of finding out how many times it appears. The "Find" command in the "Edit" menu will serve you well here. (When you select "Find," enter your "word of interest" into the search box; for a slightly more advanced search, select the "Find All Word Forms" check box. It also makes sense to select the "Highlight All Items" check box so that you can more easily find each instance of the word. For accurate search results, either position your cursor at the beginning of the document or "Select All" prior to your search. You can move through the highlighted selections by selecting "Replace" and then "Find Next" – you won't actually be replacing the selected word(s), but this will allow you to easily work through the text, finding all incidences of the word(s).)

Here is an example (that you may not use): A search for "teeth," for example, reveals that the word appears 82 times in the novel. That's interesting, as it's obviously a repeating word/image in the novel, but so what?

One way to dig further would be to explore the context(s) in which the word appears, opening the way to the following questions:

- What other word(s) are typically found in close proximity to the word of interest?
- With what character(s) is the word associated?
- In what settings or situations does the word often appear?

In order to answer questions like these, you will need to read the sentence, and possibly a few sentences before and after, in which the "word of interest" appears. You should make note of the page each reference appears on, though you don't necessarily need to look at each and every reference.

So what about those "teeth" references? Early in the novel, Harker describes the Count's teeth many times, and each description is quite similar: on page 9 he has "sharp-looking teeth, as white as ivory"; on page 15, he has "peculiarly sharp white teeth" and then "protuberant teeth"; on page 18, he has "long, sharp canine teeth" and then on page 25, "sharp, canine teeth." This is already interesting, if only that Harker is so consistent in his description.

But it gets more interesting. For example, as Harker is being driven to Count Dracula's castle (by, it seems, the Count himself!), the carriage suddenly stops and is quickly surrounded by "a ring of wolves with white teeth" (11). The astute reader will make the connection between the white teeth of these fearsome canines and the Count's own "canine teeth." It seems likely that Stoker is drawing a parallel between the man/monster and the animal/monster, and it would be useful to formulate a thesis about this mirroring.

Moving through the highlighted words, we come to another scene in which Harker makes special note of teeth, the scene in which, while still a guest in Dracula's castle, "three young women" appear in his bedroom (with what seems to be lusty intent). Like Dracula and the wolves, they have "brilliant white teeth" (28). As superficially attractive as they are, the link between these women and the more threatening characters in the novel should be clear. Their white teeth signal danger! As you progress, form working theses like this – your theses may seem rudimentary at this point, but you will continue to refine your ideas as you work through the results of your word search.

In Dr. Seward's journal of September 20, he writes of Lucy Westenra that "her teeth, in the uncertain light, seemed longer and sharper than they had been in the morning." And then, tellingly, "the canine teeth looked longer and sharper than the rest" (123). Long, sharp teeth, and the canine teeth at that? The observant reader should be picking up on clues to what has happened to Lucy, perhaps known at this point only to Dr. Van Helsing – simply put, Lucy is becoming (or has become) a vampire, due most likely to a visit from the Count himself. These fears are confirmed when later, laying in her coffin, Lucy displays "white teeth" (155).

Step Three: At this point, you might propose a thesis such as this one:

Bram Stoker uses imagery of unnaturally white, peculiarly sharp canine teeth to identify vampires and their animal conspirators; furthermore, he carefully applies this imagery to characters such as Lucy who have been bitten by vampires, as a way of signaling a human-to-vampire change even before the majority of characters are aware of what has happened.

So, can we test this thesis? Going back to our search, and continuing to scroll through instances of "teeth" in the text, we come to Van Helsing's description of Mina's teeth, which have, like Lucy's, grown "sharper" (248). The conclusion, based on your thesis? Like Lucy, Mina is undergoing a human-to-vampire change. The only question now is, will the heroes be able to save her in time?

Bottom line: So, for each "word of interest" you should copy down at least ten sentences that use the "word of interest" followed by your formulated thesis. (Remember, you may not use "teeth.")

3. An Epistolary Conversation

One interesting aspect of Stoker's *Dracula* is the form in which the story is told, which is through journal and diary entries, letters, memoranda, telegrams, and so on. This means that there is no central narrator with a single point of view, but rather a group of narrators whose personal observations combine to form an overall impression of what's happening. This type of literary genre is known as the **epistolary novel**. "Epistolary" means to be contained in or carried on by letters.

For this prompt you will create a short "epistolary conversation" of your own. Although it's up to you to create your own plot scenario, here are a few basic criteria for your stories:

1. They should have at least three characters;
2. Each character should speak (or communicate) at least twice;
3. The characters should use at least three different forms of communication, which may include more modern forms such as texting, Facebook posting, tweets and so on).