

Wallenpaupack Area School District Planned Course Curriculum Guide

Department: English

Name of Course: American Horror from Poe to King

Course Description:

This course explores the growth and popularity of the horror genre in American literature. Throughout a sequence of thematic units, students will examine the development of horror stories and novels from the 1800s to the present. There will be an emphasis on the use of literary devices to analyze and interpret literature, and on both critical and creative writing. During this course, students will identify and discuss the broad cultural impact of the horror genre, gain a deeper understanding of the genre, and engage critically with texts while participating in thoughtful discussions with peers. Students will also work toward a semester-long project/assessment called “Original Horror Story/Movie.” For this project, students will create a plot outline, script/story, advertisement, trailer, and pitch presentation of their original horror story/movie ideas that would potentially appear in a printed story collection, in theaters, or on streaming services.

Revision Date:

August/September 2025

Wallenpaupack Area School District Curriculum

COURSE: American Horror from Poe to King

GRADE/S: 11/12

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students will...

- independently read and respond to literary works of horror/suspense/psychological thriller/mystery.
- use reading strategies to improve comprehension and to communicate effectively.
- analyze the effectiveness of various literary elements in both fiction and nonfiction.
- construct meaning from text by making connections from previous knowledge to new information.
- increase understanding and appreciation for the horror genre through a variety of authors and texts.
- identify universal themes, particularly those specific to the horror genre.
- compare and apply nonfiction texts to the fictional works studied throughout the course.
- evaluate how an author's diction, syntax, tone, and voice shape the intended meaning of the text, achieve specific effects, and support the author's purpose.
- expand upon vocabulary usage and applications through the course reading and writing.
- apply effective expository and narrative techniques in their own writing.
- create and sustain arguments based on texts, research, and/or personal experience.
- write for a variety of purposes and advance through the stages of writing and storytelling.

INSTRUCTIONAL UNITS/STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES:

EQ = Essential Question(s) for Unit

Pre-Unit Introduction to Course:

EQ: What scares us and why? Why do people love horror? How has this genre changed over the years in both literature and film?

- The Science of Fear/What Scares Us – article/activity and follow-up discussion
- Phobias and Fears – video, notes, and discussion of “What is the Scariest Thing?”
- The Origins of Horror – background information on the history of the horror genre and how its popularity has grown in America and around the world
- From Poe to King – biographical information and/or nonfiction essays about/written by the father and godfather of American Horror (more detailed information within units)
- Reading Strategies List/Literary Elements Review – What do readers look for in the horror/thriller/mystery genre? What makes a story suspenseful and purposeful? What questions or confusions arise while reading this genre?

Structure of Thematic Units from Spring of 2024-Present:

Note: The Focus Standards for all units can be found on the final pages of this document.

Unit 1 – Revenge and Sacrifice

EQ: Are these behaviors or practices ever justified? What are the motivations behind acts of violence?

Poe Focus: “Hop Frog” and “The Cask of Amontillado”

Other Story Selections:

- “Man with a Problem” by Donald Honig
- “The Ledge” by Stephen King

- “Dolan’s Cadillac” by Stephen King (excerpts/summary)
- “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson
- “Friends for Life” (*Isolation* Horror Anthology)
- “In the Tall Grass” by Stephen King and Joe Hill (summary only – possible movie clip)

Activity Breaks/Assessments: true crime headlines/research on real-life revenge, plot infographic for stories, connect article(s) about revenge to 1-2 of the selected stories, read and view former students’ movie projects about revenge or sacrifice

Unit 2 – Obsession, Loneliness, and Loss

EQ: *What other emotions does fear induce or impact? How are one’s emotions or emotional responses emphasized, exploited, or exaggerated in the horror genre?*

Poe Focus: “The Oval Portrait” (+ article on obsession) and “The Fall of the House of Usher” (video summary and brief look at “Usher” – original story and clips from the Netflix series)

- “The Raven” and “Alone” (other poetry selections if time)
- *The Haunting of Hill House* (summary and excerpts)
- “The Last Rung on the Ladder” by Stephen King

Activity Breaks/Assessments: stanzas in the style of “The Raven”, review of former students’ movie projects on obsession and loss

Unit 3 – Isolation, Illness, and Inevitability of Death

EQ: *How do feelings and situations of isolation affect our mental, physical, and emotional state? How do we cope with ailments, physical discomfort, and the inevitability (or suddenness) of death?*

Poe Focus: “The Masque of the Red Death” and “The Pit and the Pendulum”

from *Isolation – The Horror Anthology*:

- “Under Care”
- “The Peculiar Seclusion of Molly McMarshall”
- “Full Blood”
- “The Long Dead Day”

Possible Stephen King selections:

- “Survivor Type”
- “Gray Matter”
- “Night Surf”
- *The Stand* (summary/excerpts and other adaptations)

Activity Breaks/Assessments: student reactions to Mind Field video on Isolation, bringing “...Molly McMarshall” to life with interactive story experience, mythical monster poster using generative A.I.

Unit 4 – Murderous Madness

EQ: *What causes madness/psychotic behavior and what are the signs? What does insanity mean – what does it look like?*

Poe Focus: “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”

- “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor (video/excerpt)

Possible Stephen King selections:

- “The Boogeyman”
- “Strawberry Spring”
- “The Man Who Loved Flowers”
- *Misery* – Film and novel excerpts (discover the many parallels to previous unit)

Activity Breaks/Assessments: clips from Mind Hunter (Netflix series), read and view former students’ movie projects about murderous madness, Kahoot review games for *Misery*

Unit 5 – Miscellaneous Mix and Final Project Presentations

EQ: Are you ready to scare an audience? What horror themes have you included in your project?

This final unit is dedicated to any extra readings or activities not covered in previous units and finalizing/presenting the original movie/story projects. Supplemental materials may include “Horror Lite” with selections from R.L. Stine and Edward Gorey.

Course Focus Standards

- CC.1.2.11-12.A: Determine and analyze the relationship between two or more central ideas of a text, including the development and interaction of the central ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CC.1.2.11-12.B: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author's implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.
- CC.1.2.11-12.D: Evaluate how an author's point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- CC.1.2.11-12.F: Evaluate how words and phrases shape meaning and tone in texts.
- CC.1.2.11-12.L: Read and comprehend literary non-fiction and informational text on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.
- CC.1.3.11-12.E: Evaluate the structure of texts including how specific sentences, paragraphs and larger portions of the texts relate to each other and the whole.
- CC.1.3.11-12.H: Demonstrate knowledge of foundational works of literature that reflect a variety of genres in the respective major periods of literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.
- CC.1.3.11-12.I: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade-level reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies and tools.
- CC.1.3.11-12.K: Read and comprehend literary fiction on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.
- CC.1.4.11-12.G: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics.
- CC.1.4.11-12.S: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and literary nonfiction.
- CC.1.4.11-12.X: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes and audiences.
- CC.1.5.11-12.A: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

ASSESSMENTS (Diagnostic/Benchmark/Formative/Summative):

Focus Standards:

- CC.1.4.11-12.C: Develop and analyze the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic; include graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
 - CC.1.4.11-12.M: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.
 - CC.1.4.11-12.O: Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, reflection, multiple plot lines, and pacing, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.
 - CC.1.4.11-12.U: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments and information.
 - CC.1.4.11-12.T: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
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- Daily journal writing exercises with follow-up discussions
 - Single and multi-paragraph critical analysis/written assessments
 - Objective assessments to accompany units/literary works accordingly (very minimal)
 - Self- and peer-evaluations, particularly during project work
 - Projects and presentations that align with various course objectives

Project-Based Assessment: Original Horror Movie/Story Presentation

The final product will include:

- a formally developed outline of plot/characters/setting
- a portion of the screenplay (three well-developed and cohesively written scenes) OR a fully written short story with all six elements of plot
- a visual/advertisement that would appear on a streaming service's browsing pages OR bookstore website with an accompanying tagline, synopsis, main cast/characters, etc.
- a trailer/preview created using iMovie or similar software ("book" trailer to accompany story)
- a pitch-style presentation to the in-house producers/publishers (teachers, peers, tech coaches, and members of administration if available)

EVIDENCE OF MASTERY/Cut Score:

- Students will achieve, on average, 80% or above on all assessments

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (Remediation/Extension):

Remediation

- Read/re-read text selections to and with students/allow audio versions of text. Use adapted versions of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories.
- Provide graphic organizers, rubrics/checklists, and clear expectations/deadlines well in advance of assessments, particularly large projects.
- Allow students to work in partners and small groups with consideration of their various strengths and struggles.
- Prepare guiding/essential questions prior to each day's lesson or main text.
- Encourage students to ask questions of their teacher and peers, and to voice their concerns/confusions whether verbally or in writing (journals).

- Allow students to listen to, view, or review texts and respond to them with personal perspectives prior to analyzing themes. Provide a list of potential themes and subsequently allow students to find the text evidence in which those themes are illustrated.
- Provide a teacher-approved list of fiction and nonfiction texts if students are struggling with an independent choice of novel, article, etc.
- Provide one-on-one instruction/conferencing throughout the semester-long project process.

Extension

- Select strong readers when doing class or group read-aloud sessions.
- Encourage students to complete additional research on authors and allusions that appear within texts.
- Allow students to select their own analysis articles, novels, etc.
- Encourage students to compare/contrast works read in class to other works by same or similar authors.
- Provide opportunities for all students to expand their creative writing skills/use of narrative techniques, as well as improve their presentation skills with the semester-long project.

RESOURCES (Websites, Blogs, Videos, Whiteboard Resources, etc.):

- Schoology/PowerSchool
- Office 365 Applications (Word, PowerPoint/Sway, Forms)
- NoodleTools
- YouTube/other video resources
- iPad applications/iMovie
- Books/researched information from the HS library/librarian
- Approved films on DVD or streaming
- Poestories.com (and other free full-text web resources for literary works)