

**Grade level:** 11<sup>th</sup>-12th Grade & University Study

**Subject:** Language Arts / Literature

**Rationale:**

Students will examine the use of theme in the Manga Classics adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Students will be asked to focus on specific illustrations in the book and consider how the artist brings to light some of the major motifs of the novel including (but not limited to) the epistolary form, darkness, religious iconography, vampire lore, and good vs. evil.

**Instructional Duration:** 6-8 hours

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- ✓ Read the Manga Classics graphic novel *Dracula* and consider it as a visual adaptation of a classic piece of literature.
- ✓ Use images from the novel to answer specific essential questions.
- ✓ Understand the motifs of darkness, good vs. evil, and vampires as they pertain to a graphic novel adaptation of a classic novel

**Front-loaded information / understanding:**

Theme - Students should be able to define and identify one or more themes from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Imagery - Students should be able to define and identify imagery in the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Symbolism – Students should be able to define and identify one or more symbol from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium with a particular focus on animal imagery.

The epistolary novel – Students should be able to define and identify moments in the text where the artwork, actions of the characters, or dialogue point to how an epistolary novel can be adapted to a visual medium in this way. Consider this as a sort of “found footage” account of the legend of Dracula.

Darkness – Students should understand the concept of darkness as it pertains to classic literature and, in particular, gothic novels. Consider the nature of this concept and the individual components specifically focusing on how vampires are creatures of the darkness and how it plays out in the text.

Manga – Many students have not been exposed to this type of reading. Prior to assigning any reading in the Manga Classic Text, instructors should cover the “How to read manga” section at the beginning of the book with their students to ensure understanding.

### **Instructional Strategies:**

*NOTE: The lessons contained below assume that students are reading the Manga Classic adaptation after having already been exposed to some or all of the original text. If you are using the graphic novel adaptation as an alternative to reading the original novel, the lessons can still be utilized with modifications.*

Students should have read the original novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. Have them share with the class what they know about the text itself. Specific attention should be paid to how students visualize some of the more crucial moments of the book including, but not limited to, character appearance and actions, conflict, thematic elements, and the epistolary form.

### **Activity #1 – Answering Essential Questions (Pre-Reading)**

Students should be asked to recall their experiences reading Stoker's *Dracula*. Instruct them to think about what parts of the novel stood out to them and why. Students should then be broken into groups of 3-4 and asked to consider how they themselves would adapt the text to a visual medium. In doing so, they will answer the following essential questions:

- ✓ *What is one major motif of the novel? How does it manifest in the text?*
- ✓ *Which moments of the text are the most memorable and impactful based on how the plot moves forward as a result? Choose three to consider and explain why you chose them.*
- ✓ *If you were making a movie of this book, how would you adapt the epistolary elements (letters, recordings, news clippings, ship manifestos) that you chose from above if you were a director? How would you draw them if you were an artist tasked with adapting the book?*
- ✓ *One character that never gets a voice of his own is Dracula himself. He is only ever seen through the eyes and accounts of others. How do you think he would have represented himself if we had his journal as part of this story?*
- ✓ *How would this story have been different if it had been written as a straight narrative rather than an epistolary novel? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this format?*

For the second essential question in the list above, ask students to provide three sketches (one for each scene selected). These sketches do not need to be elaborate but should stage the scene in some way (position of characters, background, and objects). Sketches should include some sort of caption that contains specific guiding information that explains how the images shape understanding of the text (2-3 sentences).

### Activity #2 – The Epistolary Form

*Dracula* is an epistolary novel. That is, it is a story told through individual personal accounts pieced together to create a coherent narrative. In the case of this book, we have journal entries, letters between characters, audio recordings (transcribed), ship manifestos, and newspaper accounts.

Have students look at the section of the Extra Materials entitled “The Different Voices of the Characters” on pages 376-377. Note how each individual source has its own distinct font and/or narrative box style that reflects the character or origin of the information. Have students discuss the effectiveness of the Manga Classics Adaptation in making each of these voices distinct visually.

Have each student create their own minicomic using this method. The complexity (number of voices, length of story) can be adjusted depending on the expectations of the instructor.

### Activity 3: Vampire Lore

While *Dracula* isn't the first appearance of vampires in literature (that honor is believed to go to *The Vampyre* by John William Polidori), it certainly is the most well-known! How we envision the look of Dracula is informed by 100 years of popular culture. Have students consider how Dracula is described in the novel by those who see him and how he appears in the Manga Classics adaptation.

Have students draw their own pictures of Dracula based on what they think he should look like and then consider the following questions:

- ✓ Does the book's description match up with your picture? What is different? What is similar?
- ✓ Does the Manga Classics adaptation's version of the character match up (look at the cover, page 21, and page 302) with your picture?
- ✓ What modern pop culture images inform your understanding of what Dracula looks like?

Show students clips from various incarnations of Dracula including, but not limited to, *Dracula* (1931 film), The Count from Sesame Street, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992 film), *Hotel Transylvania* (2012 animated film), and *The Monster Squad* (1987 film). Have them piece together their own memories and influences. Discuss how amalgamations via popular culture can be powerful icons.

**Activity #4 – Religious Iconography**

*Dracula* is the ultimate story of good versus evil. Mina's purity and goodness protect her from fully giving herself over to Dracula as Lucy does. Goodness is inextricably linked to faithfulness in this novel. Dracula is godless and those that battle him use religious symbols to drive him back.

Have students identify moments in the book when religious symbols appear. They should point to specific panels and pages. Have them consider how the artist chooses to depict them, how the characters react to them, and how Dracula and the other vampires are impacted by their presence.

**Activity #5– Theme Identification**

There are a lot of moments where the text explores darkness and the supernatural. Select specific points in the novel where the artwork illustrates one of these themes in a particularly compelling manner. For example:

- Page 28 – Dracula appears from the darkness
- Pages 43 – Dracula silhouetted behind his brides
- Pages 50 – The wolves from the darkness
- Page 82 – The shadow of Dracula
- Pages 86 – Dracula as a wolf, attacking from the shadows
- Page 94 – Mina seeking out Lucy at night, her shape silhouetted
- Page 96 – A shadowy figure behind Lucy
- Page 110 – Dracula's shape in darkness but for his eyes
- Page 137 – Lucy is shadowed except for the wounds on her neck
- Page 157 – An evil face in the shadows frightens Mrs. Westenra to death
- Page 173 – Silhouette of the bat
- Page 195 – Dracula's face partially shadowed
- Page 215 – The face of Dracula blackened and surrounded by misery
- Page 238 – The history of the Dracula family – shadows around them
- Page 281 – Dracula in the mist
- Pages 361 – Dracula arises – note the lack of eyes in the first panel

Or any others where you feel the artwork creates a visual representation of the idea of darkness and the supernatural within the novel that you find particularly compelling. Have students answer the following question about the image with a short essay:

What elements of the artwork bring a strong understanding of the concept of evil and how the use of darkness and shadow within the Manga Classics adaptation that the novel's text alone could not?

**Final Assessment:**

There are many questions around the secondary characters of the book. Consider how three (Renfield, Lucy, and Jonathan) are depicted in the Manga Classics adaptation. Have students do a character study of one of these three characters and answer the appropriate question below. The answer can be in any form you choose (essay, presentation, Socratic Seminar, etc...)

- ✓ *Renfield is Dracula's familiar and has descended into madness, believing that he will be granted immortality by his master. How does the Manga Classics artist effectively represent this madness in the comic?*
- ✓ *Lucy's slow suffering transformation into a vampire (the Bloofer Lady) is chronicled in the comic. What visual clues are there to build tension behind her ultimate fate and how well does the comic represent this macabre journey?*
- ✓ *The character of Jonathan undergoes significant development throughout the book. Consider how he is visually represented at the start of the book and how he behaves during the final showdown with Dracula. What is different and how well does the manga represent this?*

**Lesson Developed By:**

Michael Gianfrancesco, MA

English Department Faculty  
North Providence High School  
North Providence, RI 02904

Adjunct Professor of English  
Johnson and Wales University  
Providence, RI Downcity Campus

[michaelgteach@gmail.com](mailto:michaelgteach@gmail.com)

Twitter @tryingteacher