

Learning objective: to revise and understand the elements of a horror story and gain some introductory knowledge of Victorian Penny Dreadfuls

Starter:

Display a copy of the front cover of one of the Penny Dreadfuls such as *Varney the Vampire* or *the Feast of Blood* which is widely available on the internet (try:

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/d/d7/VarneyVampire.gif/200px-VarneyVampire.gif>)

Ask students to write down their initial impressions of the front cover. You might want to point out that it is a book cover – what do they think the book will be about? What sort of story will it be? What do they think the genre of the book is?

Gather ideas together on the board and see what similarities there are.

Introduction:

There should have been some similarities from the starter task so now ask students if they can devise a list of elements that are needed to create a horror story. You might want them to work in pairs and then share ideas with another group to create an 'expert' list. Take feedback and write the list of ideas on the board.

Development:

How might a story like *Varney the Vampire* begin? Give students only a minute to think of its possible opening line and again take feedback (if appropriate) to see how similar the openings of the stories are.

Display the attached sheet which is the opening to *Varney the Vampire*. For a weaker group you might want to hand out the sheet so that students can write their ideas on it.

With students collect the words and phrases (perhaps by highlighting or underlining) that are typical of horror or gothic genre.

You might want to hand out the *Varney the Vampire* – opening lines analysis sheet which invites students to categorise the words and phrases.

Discuss the idea that this story comes from a genre – gothic or horror (or even gothic horror) and that it is what is termed a Penny Dreadful: a type of 'book' much maligned when they were first released in Victorian times because they were intended for the working class masses. They were thought to be immoral and to have a corrupting influence on young minds. (It might be worth spending time doing the activities from the other lesson on www.morelearning.net on Penny Dreadfuls). However, as we start to read our class text we will see that the influence of the Penny Dreadful is apparent in our gothic or horror text.

Plenary:

Either revise the elements of the gothic horror or ask students why they think Victorians might have enjoyed this type of story and why some elements of society thought they were immoral.

Varney the Vampire

-- "How graves give up their dead,
And how the night air hideous grows
With shrieks!"

MIDNIGHT. -- THE HAIL-STORM. -- THE DREADFUL VISITOR. --
THE VAMPYRE.

The solemn tones of an old cathedral clock have announced midnight - the air is thick and heavy -- a strange, death like stillness pervades all nature. Like the ominous calm which precedes some more than usually terrific outbreak of the elements, they seem to have paused even in their ordinary fluctuations, to gather a terrific strength for the great effort. A faint peal of thunder now comes from far off. Like a signal gun for the battle of the winds to begin, it appeared to awaken them from their lethargy, and one awful, warring hurricane swept over a whole city, producing more devastation in the four or five minutes it lasted, than would a half century of ordinary phenomena.

It was as if some giant had blown upon some toy town, and scattered many of the buildings before the hot blast of his terrific breath; for as suddenly as that blast of wind had come did it cease, and all was as still and calm as before.

Sleepers awakened, and thought that what they had heard must be the confused chimera of a dream. They trembled and turned to sleep again.

All is still -- still as the very grave. Not a sound breaks the magic of repose. What is that -- a strange pattering noise, as of a million fairy feet? It is hail -- yes, a hail-storm has burst over the city. Leaves are dashed from the trees, mingled with small boughs; windows that lie most opposed to the direct fury of the pelting particles of ice are broken, and the rapt repose that before was so remarkable in its intensity, is

exchanged for a noise which, in its accumulation, drowns every cry of surprise or consternation which here and there arose from persons who found their houses invaded by the storm.

Now and then, too, there would come a sudden gust of wind that in its strength, as it blew laterally, would, for a moment, hold millions of the hailstones suspended in mid air, but it was only to dash them with redoubled force in some new direction, where more mischief was to be done.

Oh, how the storm raged! Hail -- rain -- wind. It was, in very truth, an awful night.

Varney the Vampire – opening lines analysis sheet

Write down words and phrases which fit the following categories:

Setting
People's reactions
Time of day
Weather
Mystery
Fear
Interruption of a tranquil or happy scene