BTN explainers - Why do people like scary movies?

**ABC ME screening details: Friday** 8th May 2020 at 12.50

This episode can also be viewed on [ABC iView](https://www.abc.net.au/tveducation/programs/btn-explainers/12138358) after the scheduled screening time.

**Key learning areas:** English

**Level:** secondary

**About:** This episode examines the science behind why people like scary movies. The information provides an excellent stepping stone into the scary story genre.

## Before the episode

1. There are many types (genres) of movies which all have their own distinct style, for example comedy. Write a list of as many genres as you can think of.
2. Write down the names of as many horror movies as you can.
3. Think about a horror story or movie you have seen or ask someone to tell you about one. What are the elements of a good horror movie or story?
4. The purpose of a horror movie or story is to create a feeling of fear. What techniques might a movie use to create this feeling?

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## During the episode

1. Sociologist, Dr Margee Kerr claims there are three main reasons why people like watching scary movies. Explain each of these reasons in the space provided.

* Fight or flight
* Sense of accomplishment
* Positive social experience that brings people together.

1. Is watching a scary movie good for you? Write down the arguments for and against.
2. What reasons does Dr Kerr give for some people not liking scary movies?

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## After the episode

1. Preparing to write your own scary story -imagery will be important to both build up suspense and to create a feeling of fear. Make sure you include more than visual imagery. Write a list of words you could use for each of the 5 senses in the space below.

* Visual (sight)
* Auditory (hearing)
* Olfactory (smell)
* Gustatory (taste)
* Tactile (touch)

1. Extend your vocabulary so it fits the scary story genre -instead of 'said' you could use 'shrieked' or 'screamed'. Write down alternatives for the words, **walked, trembled, ate, jumped** and **cried**.
2. Your aim is to create a feeling of fear - This could include for example a fear of alienation, nightmares, death, vulnerability, pain, being unable to escape, loss of identity. Circle one or two fears you will focus on in your story.
3. Creating a villain - Scary stories usually have a hero and a villain. The villain will usually have distinctive physical features or powers. Read the extract from Dracula where the protagonist describes Count Dracula. Write a paragraph where your villain’s features are described from the viewpoint of the protagonist.

Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in the firelight, and they had seemed rather white and fine: but seeing them now close to me, I could not but notice they were rather coarse – broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of his palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. As the Count learned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have ben that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me.

Dracula by Bram Stoker ([gutenberg.org](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/345/345-h/345-h.htm))

Notice that the Count at first appears normal but on closer inspection has something sinister about him**.**

**Your task:** Write a paragraph where your villain's features are described from the viewpoint of the protagonist.

1. Creating your hero - Now you need to create your protagonist – what does he look like, how does he act and speak? Is he brave, likeable? In 5-6 lines describe your hero. Think about whether he will defeat the villain or ultimately be destroyed himself.
2. Setting the scene - It is important that there are hints right from the start that something is sinister or 'not quite right' as the scene is described for the story. This could be the weather, suddenly changing, an isolated spot, darkness, a sense that someone is watching. Write your own introduction to your story, setting the scene and slowly introducing a feeling of suspense.
   1. **Follow up activity:** Writing your own scary story - you have set the scene, created a villain and worked out which fears you will focus on in your story. You also understand the importance of language in creating suspense and a feeling of fear. Now write your own scary story aiming for a length of 2 to 3 pages.

## NSW teacher notes

This is an optional standalone resource that could supplement student learning. The activities align with syllabus outcomes across stages and can be modified to meet the needs of your students. Students can complete the activities while learning at home and in the classroom. All activities can be completed without access to the internet or a device. Teachers could collect student work to offer feedback and as evidence of learning.

### Learning intentions

* Students will develop understanding of why people like scary movies.
* Students will experiment creatively with their composition of a scary story.

### Resources

Additional extracts from scary stories or movies of your choice.

### NSW English K-10 Syllabus outcomes

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| Outcome | Stage 4 | Stage 5 |
| think in ways that are imaginative, creative, interpretive and critical | EN4-5C A student thinks imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically about information, ideas and arguments to respond to and compose texts | EN5-5C A student thinks imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically about information and increasingly complex ideas and arguments to respond to and compose texts in a range of contexts |
| express themselves and their relationships with others and their world | EN4-7D A student demonstrates understanding of how texts can express aspects of their broadening world and their relationships within it | EN5 –7D A student understands and evaluates the diverse ways texts can represent personal and public worlds |

[NSW English K-10 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10/english-k-10) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales 2012.