

The Body Snatcher- Gothic Themes

Post-Show Activity

This activity is very similar to the pre-show themes activity with “The Tell-Tale Heart.” You can choose to do one or both assignments or to do them in tandem with each other as a comparison activity.

Drawing Key Moments

Goals:

- Students will examine common themes in Gothic literature.
- Students will explore the structure of Gothic literature.
- Students will analyze excerpts from *The Body Snatcher* for Gothic themes.

NOTE: This activity has been aligned with TEKS and [Universal Design for Learning](#). TEKS can be found at the end of this document.

Materials Needed

- Excerpts from *The Body Snatcher* (attached at the end of this document)
- Highlighter or pen/pencil

Introduction

- Review typical elements of Gothic literature (Use the slideshow on the ReSourced website, or use this [website](#) for more information and detail)
- Ask students for examples of Gothic literature that they may be familiar with (*Frankenstein*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, *Dracula*, etc)

Identify Gothic Themes

- Highlight or underline phrases in your excerpts that show these Gothic themes:
 - Death and decay
 - Obsession with science and control over life/death
 - Fear of the unknown and unnatural resurrection
 - Isolation and alienation (physical or emotional)
 - Ethical ambiguity and moral conflict(You can also choose to do this activity as a review-type activity of the entire play)

Notes for UDL alignment: To provide multiple ways of expressing understanding, consider letting students express their understanding not just through highlighting but also through creative means like drawing or group discussions.

Analysis

- As a class or individually, have students answer the following questions
 1. How does the setting (e.g., midnight cemetery, dark laboratory) contribute to the Gothic atmosphere? Cite specific descriptions or actions.
 2. What does Fettes' grave-robbing reveal about attitudes toward death and the body? How does this create unease?
 3. How is Dr. Noakes' obsession with medical advancement portrayed? What Gothic qualities emerge from his character and actions?
 4. Describe how the resurrection scene blends science and the supernatural. What feelings does it evoke?
 5. What moral or ethical conflicts do the characters face? How do these tensions enhance the story's Gothic nature?
 6. How does Elizabeth's illness and family history add to the themes of mortality and fragility?
- Write 3-4 sentences about how *The Body Snatcher* fits into Gothic literature. Which themes or scenes impacted you most, and why?

Class Discussion

Invite students to share findings and discuss how these themes shape the overall Gothic tone.

Notes for UDL alignment: Encourage students to share in pairs, small groups, or through written reflection to offer varied ways of participating.

TEKS

Fine Arts- Theatre, Middle School

1(F)- identify, analyze, evaluate, and explore the structure and form in examples of dramatic literature.

Fine Arts- Theatre, High School Level I-IV

Level I- 4(B)- relate historical and cultural influences on theatre;

Level II-III 1(D)- analyze dramatic structure and genre

Level IV- 2(C)- analyze and interpret characters from various genres and styles, describing physical, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions

English Language Arts and Reading, Middle School, Grades 6-8

4- Developing and sustaining foundational language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking--self-sustained reading. The student reads grade-appropriate texts independently. The student is expected to self-select text and read independently for a sustained period of time.

6(C)- use text evidence to support an appropriate response

7(A)- use text evidence to support an appropriate response; (Grade 8- analyze how themes are developed through the interaction of characters and events)

English Language Arts and Reading, High School- English I-IV

7- The student recognizes and analyzes genre-specific characteristics, structures, and purposes within and across increasingly complex traditional, contemporary, classical, and diverse texts

English I- 6(A)- analyze how themes are developed through characterization and plot in a variety of literary texts

English II- 6(A)- analyze how themes are developed through characterization and plot, including comparing similar themes in a variety of literary texts representing different cultures;

English III/IV- 6(A)- analyze relationships among thematic development, characterization, point of view, significance of setting, and plot in a variety of literary texts;

Excerpt 1

Dr. Noakes slams his journal down on his desk.

DR. NOAKES. Damn!

DR. BROOK. No good?

DR. NOAKES. The cadaver is so diseased that it is impossible to suture. What I wouldn't give to have been looking over the shoulder of Ludwig Rehn when he mended the hole in that soldier's heart. *(looking in his book)* Idiopathic Coronary Decline...! What a feeble diagnosis.

DR. BROOK. Sir, at the time of your wife's death, was there any thought given to an autopsy?

DR. NOAKES. None. I was devastated, as were her parents. Even now, the autopsies I've read that bear any similarity to Elizabeth's condition—well, you've read them John, what do they indicate?

DR. BROOK. Dilatation of the heart chambers in one, hypertrophy of the septum in another, enlargement of—

DR. NOAKES. They tell you that a young persons' heart has failed them! But why!? Why?! Even if we knew—there is no cure for a heart that has abrogated its duty! *(back on track, looking at his journal)* That first dry run was endless...!

DR. BROOK. Yes, and it didn't include—.

DR. NOAKES. The second was shorter, yes...?

DR. BROOK. Two minutes.

DR. NOAKES. *(pounding his fist)* It's taking too long!

DR. BROOK. Sir, there's still the matter of re-starting the new heart. We have no way of knowing—

DR. NOAKES. *(his notes)* You're absolutely clear what must be done?

DR. BROOK. I could perform the surgery in my sleep.

DR. NOAKES. The back wall of the left atrium is to be left in place—

DR. BROOK. I won't forget. Dr. Noakes, perhaps if you were to sleep for an hour, it might—

DR. NOAKES. There's no time! Look at her! Her heart is shutting down.

DR. BROOK. I know.

Dr. Noakes opens his medical journal.

DR. NOAKES. The pattern of her decline mimics exactly that of her mother's. Look. Each day's entry for Elizabeth is a duplicate of the one that I wrote for my wife. Skin tone, breath, swelling—exactly the same description. *(He slams down the book.)* Read it! At this rate we may have only days before she dies—hours!—and with no warning! Mary looked and acted exactly as Elizabeth does today—she even seemed to be improving just moments before and then, in mid-sentence, reaching for her tea, she simply...slumped forward. We have got to find a heart!

DR. BROOK. But a cadaver heart, Sir, even from someone who was young and healthy at the time of their death, if we could fine one—

DR. NOAKES. IT'S ALL I HAVE! *(Pause.)* You love my daughter, don't you John?

DR. BROOK. Yes, Sir, I do. I love her very much.

DR. NOAKES. Then help me, man. Help me save her.

DR. BROOK. Sir, I would like nothing better, but you must realize that what we are attempting is nigh impossible.

DR. NOAKES. The heart is not inviolable! Rehn's surgery was only 3 years ago. In 50 years, a 100, replacing internal organs will be just another operation. The future knows something we don't, John. That secret knowledge exists right now, in this room—it's in the air, all around us—we've only to discover it before it's too late!

Excerpt 2

Dr. Noakes' home laboratory. Night. A long table. Tools, a large sink, etc. We hear voices and scuffling sounds.

Thunder and lightning.

DR. NOAKES. *(off)* One, two, three...!

Grunting noises and a loud sound. Noakes and Fettes wheel the casket on top of the gurney into the room. There is a blanket that was used to cover the casket. They remove the lid. We can see that there is a figure surrounded by chipped ice. The face sits above the ice with the thin muslin hood covering it.

DR. NOAKES. Latch the door!

FETTES. *(running off)* Right!

DR. NOAKES. And lower the outside light! *(Noakes reads a large thermometer that is sticking out of the armpit of the body, then takes a step out into the hall and yells off)* Mrs. Keene!! Quickly!

Thunder, lightning. Sound of horses in distress.

He goes back to the body. Starts scooping ice out of the casket. Fettes returns.

FETTES. The horse is kicking up a fuss!

DR. NOAKES. How much water did you use?!

FETTES. It was all I could do to get the lid on! The minister showed up to bless her again// just as I was—

DR. NOAKES. //Post yourself outside the door—ring the bell if you see anyone approach.

FETTES. No one followed,// I made sure—

DR. NOAKES. //Do as I say!

Fettes starts to exit, runs into Mrs. Keene.

FETTES. Coming through! Watch out!

MRS. KEENE. *(standing in the doorway)* Yes, Doctor?

DR. NOAKES. How is she?

MRS. KEENE. The same.

DR. NOAKES. Was the ice delivered?

MRS. KEENE. Yes, Sir. It's just outside.

DR. NOAKES. What is the time?

MRS. KEENE. *(looking at her watch)* Exactly midnight, Sir.

A bell tolls midnight, gradually fading.

DR. NOAKES. I'll meet you in the library.

MRS. KEENE. Yes. Doctor.

Mrs. Keene exits.

Noakes checks the temperature again, seems satisfied, exits.

Loud sound of horse rearing back and whinnying as Fettes rushes back in.

FETTES. Doctor—!? *(seeing he's gone)* Bloody hell! I'll take care of it myself!!

Crack of thunder, a spear of lightning illuminates the room as:

The body shoots up from the casket gasping for air and spraying ice everywhere.

Fettes leaps back, screaming.

BLACKOUT.

Excerpt 3

DR. NOAKES. John. Listen to me. I've been thinking—considering—for some time actually—a different course of action. Now, listen. In order to secure the most effective outcome, Elizabeth must still have some strength, some...*life* in her at the time of the operation. (*Pause.*)

DR. BROOK. I don't understand.

DR. NOAKES. We've been assuming that the surgery would take place moments after Elizabeth expires. What if, what if...it is essential that the failing patient be alive before transplantation.

DR. BROOK. Dr. Noakes. I am willing to jump off any cliff with you in the name of medical science, but I cannot, will not, take another living soul with us.

DR. NOAKES. John—!

DR. BROOK. You're talking about Elizabeth, Lizzie! Do you hear yourself?

DR. NOAKES. Good god, man, why do you think I'm even considering it?! It is because she is my most cherished possession that I even allow myself to contemplate such an extraordinary procedure. Were it another patient, I would take the safe, conventional route—but Elizabeth's certain, unthinkable fate calls for an unthinkable course of action—one that may drastically improve her chance of survival.

DR. BROOK. First do no harm!

DR. NOAKES. Would you let a gangrenous leg fester and kill the patient because cutting it off would emotionally and physically traumatize the man beyond all description?

DR. BROOK. Sir, with all due respect, I don't think that comparison is—

DR. NOAKES. SHE IS DYING!! We exchange the last few days of her life, if, in fact, she has that long, for the possibility that she may live weeks or months or even longer.

DR. BROOK. This is a gamble we are not entitled to take.

DR. NOAKES. Elizabeth is entitled to take it. I shall ask her and let her decide. If she says no, then we wait. We preserve Alice Parker's body as best we can and we wait. If she says yes, will you assist me?

DR. BROOK. I don't know where to begin...! You'll—you'll have to confess to her that you've lied for years about her condition and prognosis and about her mother's death.

DR. NOAKES. Will you assist me?!

DR. BROOK. You know what will happen. Lizzie will say yes to please you! She is incapable of doing anything which might bring you sorrow! (*Lightning and thunder as Fettes staggers into the room, shaking and panting.*)

DR. NOAKES. Fettes! What is it?!

FETTES. God have mercy on me...!

DR. BROOK. What is it, man...!?

FETTES. The girl...

DR. NOAKES. Yes...

FETTES. She's...alive...

DR. NOAKES. She's... What are you talking about?

FETTES. Oh, my god...

DR. NOAKES. Speak!

FETTES. Alice Parker. She's not dead...! She's alive...!

DR. NOAKES. You're confused, Fettes. You thought you saw her move or flinch. It's not unusual.

FETTES. She did more than flinch, Sir. She popped right up like a jack-in-the-box!

DR. NOAKES. That's impossible!

DR. BROOK. You saw her sit up?

FETTES. I did indeed. Nearly stopped my heart right then and there.