WHAT IS HORROR FICTION?

* Horror fiction is fiction in any medium intended to scare, unsettle, or horrify the audience.
* Historically, the cause of the “horror” experience has often been the intrusion of an evil or misunderstood supernatural entity into everyday human experience.
* Since the 1960’s, any work of fiction with a morbid, gruesome, suspenseful or frightening theme has come to be called “horror.”
* Horror often overlaps with science fiction and fantasy and falls into the classification of supernatural fiction.

Origin and History of Horror

* Many of today’s horror archetypes can be found in tales and folklore of ancient cultures.
* Modern horror fiction found its roots in gothic novels such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).
* The first published American horror story was Washington Irving’s short story, “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.”
* Other early American horror writers include Edgar Allen Poe and H.P. Lovecraft, both best known for their short stories.

Contemporary Horror

* Early horror works used mood and subtlety to deliver an eerie and otherworldly flavor, but usually avoided the explicit violence.
* Some modern horror writers use vivid depictions of extreme violence or shock to entertain, but many contemporary writers such as Clive Barker and Stephen King can usually pull off the horror effect without such extreme violence.
* Despite the often graphic or adult subject matter of horror stories and films, authors such as King have noted that horror as a genre is actually concerned with re-establishing normalcy and morality. Some ways that this can be seen include: STUDENT EXAMPLES
* Horror fiction is now not just confined to paper though. Countless horror films have been released in the 20th century, such as *Psycho, Halloween, A Nightmare on Elm Street, Night of the Living Dead, Jaws,* etc.

HORROR ARCHETYPES

* An archetype is a model or pattern of a character that recurs throughout literature.
* In Stephen King’s guide to horror fiction, *The Danse Macabre,* he cites that there are four major horror archetypes: the vampire, the werewolf, the ghost, and the thing that should not be.
* However, there are many more archetypes such as: zombies, witches, monsters, mad scientists, demons, maniacs, etc.

ELEMENTS OF HORROR

* Psychological fear—Fear that imposes itself on and causes unnatural effects on the mind. (The thing that makes you shudder)
* Physical fear—Fear that one’s body or life is actually in danger.
* The Grotesque--Anything characterized by ludicrous or freakish distortion of appearance or manner
* Urban Legend—a secondhand story told as truth about some horrific series of events that “supposedly” happened to a real person.
* Comic Relief -- A funny character or scene in a serious work, designed to relieve tension in the audience momentarily

OTHER KEY ELEMENTS:

* Situational Irony—Where the opposite of what you expect happens
* Dramatic Irony—Occurs when the audience knows something that the characters do not.
* Verbal Irony—When someone says something but means the opposite.
* Foreshadowing—Presenting an indication or suggestion beforehand of things to come.