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## Course Syllabus for English 1120 - Speculative Fiction

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## **Monsters, Murder, Madness: Horror Fiction in American Culture**



**English 1120 – Fall 2020**  
**University Hall 106**  
**M & W 9:00 AM – 10:15 AM**  
**Off. Hours: M & W 3:30 – 4:30 & by appt.**

**Professor Chad Luck**  
**Email: [cluck@csusb.edu](mailto:cluck@csusb.edu)**  
**Office: UH 301.43**  
**Office Phone: 537-3855**

### **Course Description:**

Like some kind of creeping infection, the cultural influence of horror fiction and horror film seems to grow larger and spread wider with every passing year. From the massive box office success of movies like *It* and *Get Out*, to the bestseller status of Stephen King and the *Twilight* series, scary stories occupy an increasingly prominent position in contemporary American culture. But why should this be, we might ask? Why are so many people so strongly drawn to unpleasant stories that frighten them? And what can this tell us about our own culture, about our own values and fears and desires? This class is designed to chew on precisely these questions. In it, we will explore the powerful experience of reading and watching frightening stories. We will ask *how* such stories work and *why* they work. But we will also try to figure out what they *mean*. That is, we will consider what these stories might reveal to us about American culture in 2020, but also what they might show us about other cultures in other times.

To do this, the class will read (and watch) a wide variety of horror fictions, some created hundreds of years ago and some created almost yesterday. We will enjoy the spine-tingling pleasures of these stories, but we will also cultivate a different kind of pleasure: the

pleasure of analysis. We'll learn to see these stories as crucial windows onto all kinds of social and cultural issues. So we'll consider what *The Exorcist* might tell us about religion in America; we'll ask what Hitchcock's *Psycho* might reveal about human psychology; we'll watch Jordan Peele's film, *Get Out*, through the lens of race relations; and we'll try to fathom the gender politics of Octavia Butler's blood-soaked vampire novel, *Fledgling*. Through it all, we'll be honing our skills of analysis and critical thinking. As we'll see, horror stories provide an ideal opportunity to think in complicated ways about our own history, our own culture, and our own sometimes frightening society.

**Required Books (make sure you get the same editions listed at the bookstore):**

- ♦ *The Exorcist* – by William Peter Blatty
- ♦ *Fledgling* – by Octavia Butler
- ♦ *The Graveyard Book* – by Neil Gaiman
- ♦ *The Ballad of Black Tom* – by Victor LaValle
- ♦ *What You See in the Dark* – by Manuel Muñoz

**Required Film Viewings**

- ♦ *Get Out* (2017) – directed by Jordan Peele
- ♦ *Psycho* (1960) – directed by Alfred Hitchcock
- ♦ *The Curse of La Llorona* (2019) – directed by Michael Chaves

**Writing Assignments:**

There are several different kinds of writing that you will be asked to do for the course.

- **Blackboard Reading Responses** – These are one-paragraph responses to an upcoming reading assignment. I may ask you to respond to a specific question or I may simply ask you to choose an issue or passage in the reading that interests or bothers you. These exercises must be posted to your particular Blackboard Discussion Group **on Monday or Wednesday before class**. You will need to post one response per week.
- **In-Class Quizzes** – There will be daily quizzes in class, sometimes at the start of the session, sometimes at the end. They will cover either the readings assigned for the day, or the day's lecture.
- **“30-Second Horror Film”** – Working in small groups, you will produce a short, 30-second horror film using your phone, tablet, camera, or computer. Each group's film will be screened as part of our end-of-the-semester Horror Film Festival. I will provide detailed instructions on this process in week three of the semester.
- **Midterm & Final Exams** – There will be a midterm and a final exam in this class. The midterm will cover all of the concepts, theories, texts, and conversations that we have covered during the first half of the semester. The final will be comprehensive, covering the entire semester. I will provide more information on exam specifics in the weeks leading up to the exam.

## Grading:

<b>Blackboard Reading Responses</b>	=	150 points
<b>In-Class Quizzes</b>	=	75 points
<b>30-Second Horror Film</b>	=	50 points
<b>Midterm Exam</b>	=	75 points
<b>Final Exam</b>	=	150 points
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<b>Total</b>	=	500 points

**A Word About Participation:** This is a large lecture course but my lectures will be interactive so your participation is absolutely crucial. You are expected to have done the reading before coming to class and to have formulated some thoughtful responses to and questions about the text.

## Attendance:

Because active participation is so important, attendance is also essential. I expect you to come to every class **ON TIME** with your reading and writing assignments completed, prepared to participate in discussion and group work. **Your final grade for the course will be dropped by a third for each absence after two (for instance, a grade of C+ would drop to a C). Every two tardies are equal to one absence.** Excessive absences can result in failing the class. Let me know, **in advance**, of special circumstances such as religious holidays for which there will be no penalties. Again, in the case of emergency or serious illness, please remain in contact with me by e-mail.

## Blackboard:

A number of the course readings will be posted on Blackboard. You should print them out, read them, and bring them to class with you the days they are due. The syllabus and assignment sheets for major assignments will also be posted there. Smaller assignments will be sent to you via Blackboard as well, so make sure you check the email address associated with your Blackboard account very regularly. If you have any questions about how to use Blackboard, please see me.

## Academic Dishonesty/Plagiarism:

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and the ideas are yours—with exceptions indicated by quotation marks and citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of others' materials (words and ideas). Any evidence of plagiarism (on any written work, including exams) will result in an F in the course, and a report filed with the dean.

## Cell Phones, Laptops, Tablets, etc.:

If you carry a cell phone, it needs to be **turned off before you enter our classroom**. This is common courtesy. If you find it hard to remember to do so, then **do not bring it to class**. If your cell phone goes off in class I will count you absent for the day. This also means **no text messaging**. The same holds true for **laptops and tablets**.

**Special Needs:**

If you are in need of an accommodation for a disability in order to participate in this class, please contact Services to Students with Disabilities in UH-183 at (909) 537-5238.

**Grading Criteria**

**A (90-100%) Exemplary** Work that exceeds ‘meritorious’ to such a degree that it may serve as an example or model of excellence to others.

**B (80-89%) Meritorious** Work that fully meets all requirements and exceeds basic competence, giving the work distinction.

**C (70-79%) Satisfactory** Work that fully meets all requirements of the assignment or course with a basic level of competence for students entering college.

**D (60-69%) Marginal** Work that fails to meet all requirements, but what has been completed may be considered at least competent, OR, work that meets all requirements but does so below a basic level of competence.

**F (1-59%) Failing** Work that falls significantly short of requirements, or basic competence.

**Reading Schedule**

Any changes to the schedule will be announced both in class and on Blackboard.  
(Readings posted on Blackboard are marked with the letters “BB.”)

**Introducing Horror...**

**M (Aug. 24)** Introductions, Course Policies, Horror vs. Terror

**W (Aug. 26)** BB: Stephen King, “Horror Fiction”

**The Experience of Fear**

**M (Aug. 31)** BB: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart”

**W (Sep. 2)** BB: Alma Luz Villanueva, “La Llorona”  
BB: Edith Wharton, “Afterward”

**The Psychology of Horror**

**M (Sep. 7)** BB: Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”

**W (Sep. 9)** BB: Shirley Jackson, “The Summer People”

**M (Sep. 14)** Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho* (view film before coming to class)

**W (Sep. 16)** Manuel Muñoz, *What You See In the Dark*, pp. 1-143

**M (Sep. 21)** Manuel Muñoz, *What You See In the Dark*, pp. 144-251

### **Horror and Religion**

**W (Sep. 23)** BB: Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

**M (Sep. 28)** William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*, pp. 1-104

**W (Sep. 30)** William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*, pp. 105-216

**M (Oct. 5)** William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*, pp. 216-385

**W (Oct. 7)** Robert Eggers, *The Witch* (view film before coming to class)

**M (Oct. 12)** **Midterm Exam!**

### **Gender and Horror**

**W (Oct. 14)** BB: Carmen Maria Machado, "The Husband Stitch"

**M (Oct. 19)** BB: Edith Wharton, "Her Story"

**W (Oct. 21)** Octavia Butler, *Fledgling*, pp. 1-110

**M (Oct. 26)** Octavia Butler, *Fledgling*, pp. 111-222

**W (Oct. 28)** Octavia Butler, *Fledgling*, pp. 223-315

**M (Nov. 2)** Michael Chaves, *The Curse of La Llorona*

### **Race and Horror**

**W (Nov. 4)** H. P. Lovecraft, "The Horror at Red Hook"

**M (Nov. 9)** Victor LaValle, *The Ballad of Black Tom*, pp. 1-74

**W (Nov. 11)** Victor LaValle, *The Ballad of Black Tom*, 75-148

**M (Nov. 16)** Jordan Peele, *Get Out* (view film before coming to class)

### **Horror and Science**

**W (Nov. 18)** Neil Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, pp. 1-98

- M (Nov. 23)** Neil Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, pp. 99-210
- W (Nov. 25)** Neil Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, pp. 211-310
- M (Nov. 30)** Thomas Ligotti, "Notes on the Writing of Horror: A Story"
- W (Dec. 2)** **In-Class Horror Film Festival!**
- M (Dec. 7)** **Final Exam!**