

DRACULA

Terror in Transylvania



They come in the night, flying from their graves in the form of bats. If they are not stopped, they will kill the members of their own families, and then go on to take the lives of others. They are vampires—corpses that rise from their coffins in the middle of the night, seeking out living victims whose blood they drink to sustain their unnatural existence.

² The most famous of all vampires is Count Dracula, a fictional character made famous in books and movies. Dracula is portrayed as a tall, dark figure with two long fangs. He wears a black cape lined with red silk. As is true of all vampires, he can abandon his coffin only after the sun has set, and he must return to it before sunrise, for he cannot survive in the light of day. He attacks his victims by piercing their necks with his fangs and sucking out their blood. A vampire's victims also become vampires (although according to some stories, it takes three bites to bring that about).

³ Like Count Dracula, a newly created vampire will live forever, roaming the

Dracula, also known as Vlad the Impaler, dines amid bodies he has had impaled in this 15th-century German woodcut.

lands in the dark of night to find its own victims. There is only one way the monster can be stopped: someone must drive a wooden stake through its heart.

⁴ Although the legend of Dracula the vampire is not true, there was once a real Count Dracula. Like the vampire of fiction and film, he lived in the mountainous part of eastern Europe known as Transylvania. He was born to nobility in 1431, and while his real name was Vlad, he was called by his nickname, Dracula, which means “son of the dragon.” He was also known as Vlad the Impaler, a nickname he earned for the barbaric acts he committed.

⁵ In the 15th century, Turkish warriors were conquering much of southeastern Europe. When Dracula was 13, the Turks captured his father. In order to secure his own freedom, the father gave Dracula to the Turks as a hostage. For the next four years, Dracula was imprisoned in a Turkish jail.

⁶ Perhaps it was his father’s betrayal that warped Dracula’s mind, but whatever the reason, from 1448 on, Dracula was renowned as a fierce and evil madman. After his imprisonment, he returned to rule his native Transylvania. His main job was to defend it against the Turks, and he himself led many battles against the

invaders. But he also murdered thousands of his own countrymen. There was usually no reason for the killings except that they gave Dracula pleasure.

⁷ His favorite method of killing was impalement. Many times he ordered his servants to prepare hundreds of long wooden stakes. He wanted the tips of the stakes to be rounded a bit—not so sharp that his victims would die quickly. Then the torture would begin. Dracula would order the stakes to be driven through the entire lengths of his victims’ bodies. The stakes would later be erected on the hills around the town, and the maimed people would be left there to suffer a slow and agonizing death.

⁸ For several years, Dracula terrorized the people of Transylvania with such monstrous deeds. Perhaps his single greatest crime occurred on the morning of August 24, 1460. On that day, Dracula ordered thirty thousand Transylvanians impaled on stakes around the city of Brasov.

⁹ Dracula’s crazed acts also had a powerful effect on the invading Turks. As an army of Turks approached one Transylvanian town in 1460, they were horrified by what they saw. There outside the city were the remains of twenty thousand men rotting on wooden stakes.

The men, most of whom were members of the upper class, had been Dracula’s prisoners. All had offended Dracula in some way. Repulsed by the sight, the Turks turned away.



Gary Oldman and Winona Ryder star in the 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.

¹⁰ At last the Turks did succeed in invading Transylvania and capturing Dracula. Although his rule was ended, word of his gruesome deeds lived on and soon became legend.

¹¹ One other historical figure whose habits became part of the vampire legend was Countess Elizabeth Bathory. Also from Transylvania, she lived during the 17th century. One day a maid who was combing Elizabeth's hair pulled one strand a little too hard. Angered, the countess slapped the girl so forcefully that blood appeared on the girl's cheek. A few drops of the blood splattered onto the countess's hand, and to Elizabeth's twisted mind, the blood seemed to have the effect of making her skin as firm and fresh as that of the young maid. The countess quickly summoned her servants and ordered the girl killed so that her blood could be drained into a tub. Elizabeth bathed in the blood and believed that it made her look younger.

¹² Over the next 10 years, the countess had many young maidens killed in order to bathe in their blood. Finally one day a girl escaped and ran to notify the king. It was only then that the countess was arrested and her grisly ritual halted.

¹³ Stories about such characters as Elizabeth Bathory and Vlad the Impaler

were passed down through the years, eventually becoming part of the general folklore of eastern Europe. The legend of Dracula was brought to the West by Bram Stoker, who in the late 1800s wrote the first novel about the vampire.

¹⁴ Since then, interest in Dracula has grown in both western Europe and America. Over a hundred vampire films have been made. Bela Lugosi was the first American movie Dracula, and he remains the most famous. Lugosi so loved the role that in his will he requested that he be buried in his Dracula costume, cape and all. ■

If you have been timed while reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words-per-Minute Table on page 195 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 196.

Reading Time: Lesson 17

_____ : _____
Minutes Seconds

A Finding the Main Idea

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea

B—Too Broad

N—Too Narrow

- _____ 1. The fictional character Count Dracula was created by combining the insane traits of some real people.
- _____ 2. The fictional vampire Count Dracula is based on a real Transylvanian Dracula and a mad Transylvanian countess.
- _____ 3. In Transylvania in the 15th century, there was a real Count Dracula, whose nickname was Vlad the Impaler.

B Recalling Facts

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

1. Vlad the Impaler was
 - a. the ruler of Transylvania.
 - b. a barbaric Turk.
 - c. the father of Countess Elizabeth Bathory.
2. Vlad got rid of Turkish invaders by
 - a. offering them hostages.
 - b. impaling them.
 - c. erecting impaled victims for them to see.
3. The most famous Dracula of the movies was
 - a. Lon Chaney.
 - b. Bela Lugosi.
 - c. Vincent Price.
4. Countess Elizabeth Bathory
 - a. bathed in blood.
 - b. drank blood.
 - c. pierced the necks of her young maids.
5. Countess Elizabeth Bathory lived in
 - a. England.
 - b. Transylvania.
 - c. France.

Author's Approach

Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

1. What is the author's purpose in writing "Dracula: Terror in Transylvania"?
 - a. To inform the reader about some of the true stories that helped create the Dracula legend
 - b. To inform the reader about the monster in vampire movies
 - c. To compare the fictional Dracula to Vlad the Impaler

2. Which of the following statements from the article best describes the real Count Dracula?
 - a. "He [Dracula] wears a black cape lined with red silk."
 - b. "He attacks his victims by piercing their necks with his fangs and sucking out their blood."
 - c. "Perhaps it was his father's betrayal that warped Dracula's mind, but whatever the reason, from 1448 on, Dracula was renowned as a fierce and evil madman."

3. From the statements below, choose those that you believe the author would agree with.
 - a. The fictional Dracula's fondness for drinking blood springs, in part, from the bloody deeds of Vlad the Impaler and Elizabeth Bathory.
 - b. The role of Dracula was Bela Lugosi's favorite.
 - c. Vlad and Elizabeth felt very guilty for what they did.

4. The author tells this story mainly by
 - a. telling the story of Vlad the Impaler.
 - b. comparing Vlad the Impaler to Elizabeth Bathory.
 - c. retelling some of the stories that have created the Dracula legend.