



The Canterville Ghost

Author: Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

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Information about assessment and curriculum links can be found at the end of these Teaching Notes.

Synopsis

The Otis family move from America to live in an old haunted house in England – Canterville Chase. The resident ghost, Sir Simon de Canterville, killed his wife in 1575 and his guilt causes him to haunt the house where it happened. Sir Simon haunts with different coloured bloodstains that appear on the floor every day. It is all to no avail as nothing frightens the Otis family, especially the naughty twins! Virginia Otis, the only girl, feels sorry for Sir Simon and when he tells her that his wife's death was an accident and how unhappy and lonely he is, she tries to help him.

Social and historical context

The book is set in the late nineteenth century, a period marked by the rise of a growing middle class in Great Britain. This middle class had gained wealth through the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution, and as a result of Britain's expanding empire. The values of this class stood in marked contrast to the values of an older aristocracy – which the ghost comes from. The middle class idealised the importance of the family, thrift and hard work, and this book shows a clash not just between the aristocracy and the middle classes, but also between British and American cultures.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book

- *(Predicting)* Look at the title and the cover. What genre do the children think the story will be based on? Activate children's prior understanding by asking whether they know of any other ghost stories. Ask: *What usually happens in ghost stories?*

During reading

- *(Clarifying, Predicting)* Read Chapter 1 together. Ask: *Why do you think the family might have moved to England from America? What do you notice about the names of the two older children in the book? How do these names give us a clue about the nature of the family?*
- *(Deducing)* Ask: *What can you deduce about the Otis family having read Chapter 1? What evidence can you find in the text to support your view?*

Objective: Explore how writers use language for comic and dramatic effects.

- Ask: *How has the author used the dialogue for Mrs Umney to suggest her characteristics?* Challenge the children to be word detectives and collect examples of words that can suggest someone has an accent.

Assessment:

- Can the children begin to explain the literary devices that the author has used to suggest characteristics?



Classics

- *(Imagining)* Ask the children to draw a picture or use a small world model to re-create the scene as the family first arrive at the house.
- *(Clarifying)* As they read, ask the children to notice how the author switches from one scene (the Otis family) to another (watching Simon de Canterville). Ask: *What effect does this have on the reader in terms of how you feel about the ghost?*
- *(Questioning)* Ask the children to work in pairs to develop questions to ask Sir Simon.
- When the children have finished reading, go into role as Sir Simon and answer the children's questions.

Assessment: Check that children:

- are able to make connections between different moments in the text
- can identify structure and understand how the scenes switch and focus on different characters.
- Ask the children to finish reading to the end of the story independently.

Returning and responding to the text

- *(Summarising, Clarifying)* When the children have read the whole book, ask them to retell the story. Then ask them to consider how the author has chosen to vary the presentation of the story.
- *(Questioning)* Are the children surprised by how the story turns out, because this ghost story is more a humorous tale than a spooky ghost story?

Assessment:

- Can the children identify the different devices that the author has used?

Speaking, listening and drama activities

Objective: Tell a story using notes designed to cue techniques, such as repetition, recap and humour.

- Ask the children to recall any ghost stories that they know. Invite them to retell their ghost story to the class. Encourage them to prepare by using notes and cue techniques such as repetition, rather than reading directly from a written text.

Writing activities

Objective: Experiment with different narrative form and styles to write their own stories.

- Discuss familiar ghost stories with the children.
- Define the common features of a ghost story.
- Revisit the pages in the text where Mrs Umney gives warnings in rhyme, e.g. 'A flock of crows, a bleak storm blows'.
- Highlight vocabulary that is adventurous.
- Challenge the children to write their own ghost stories that must include a warning rhyme modelled on how Mrs Umney speaks in the text.

Assessment:

- Can the children demonstrate the sustained use of varied, precise and often adventurous vocabulary?

Whole class reads

Books on a similar theme:

- *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* by Penelope Lively



Classics

- *The Orchard Book of Goblins, Ghouls and Ghosts and Other Magical Stories* by Martin Waddell and Tony Ross
- *The Great Ghost Rescue* by Eva Ibotson

Cross-curricular links

History

- Research Britain and the wider world in Tudor times, which is the period in which Sir Simon and his wife were alive, and then research Victorian times, when the Otises inhabited Canterville Chase.

Design & Technology

- Create one of the rooms that is central to the story, either in a doll's house or in a shoe box. For example, the room with the fireplace where the bloodstains appear, or the room that Sir Simon hides in.

Art

- Research William Morris, the Victorian artist and designer, and his work.

I.C.T.

- Use a computer package to design a repeating pattern to make Victorian-style wallpaper (similar to William Morris designs).

Science

- Create circuits to make a light for the recreated room.

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The Canterville Ghost (Oxford Level 15) curriculum coverage chart

Links to Oxford Reading Criterion Scale:

- Can refer to the text to support opinions and predictions. (R/D) [ORCS Standard 5, 7]
- Can use clues from action, description and dialogue to help establish meaning. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 8]
- Can identify the effects of different words and phrases to create different images and atmosphere, e.g. powerful verbs, descriptive adjectives and adverbs. (E) [ORCS Standard 5, 17]
- Is beginning to identify differences between some different fiction genres. (A) [ORCS Standard 5, 21]
- Can sometimes explain different characters' points of view. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 23]

Comprehension strategies

- Comprehension strategies are taught throughout the Teaching Notes to enable pupils to understand what they are reading in books that they can read independently. In these Teaching Notes the following strategies are taught:

Predicting, Questioning, Clarifying, Summarising, Imagining, Deducing

ENGLAND The National Curriculum in England: Years 3–4

Spoken language	Pupils should be taught to participate in discussions, presentations, performances and debates (SpokLang.9)
Reading: Word reading	Pupils should be taught to apply their growing knowledge of root words, prefixes and suffixes (morphology and etymology), as listed in Appendix 1, both to read aloud and to understand the meaning of new words that they meet (Y3/4 ReadWord.1)
Reading: Comprehension	<p>Pupils should be taught to develop positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by identifying themes and conventions in a wide range of books (Y3/4 ReadComp.1v)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by asking questions to improve their understanding of a text (Y3/4 ReadComp.2ii)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence (Y3/4 ReadComp.2iii)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by predicting what might happen from details stated and implied (Y3/4 ReadComp.2iv)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by identifying main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph and summarising these (Y3/4 ReadComp.2v)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning (Y3/4 ReadComp.2vi)</p>
Writing: Composition	<p>Pupils should be taught to plan their writing by discussing writing similar to that which they are planning to write in order to understand and learn from its structure, vocabulary and grammar (Y3/4 WritComp.1i)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to draft and write by composing and rehearsing sentences orally (including dialogue), progressively building a varied and rich vocabulary and an increasing range of sentence structures (Y3/4 WritComp.2i)</p>

SCOTLAND Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English experiences and outcomes – Second level

Listening and talking	<p>When listening and talking with others for different purposes, I can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share information, experiences and opinions • identify issues raised and summarise main points or findings • clarify points by asking questions or by asking others to say more (LIT 2-09a)
Reading	<p>I can select and use a range of strategies and resources before I read, and as I read, to make meaning clear and give reasons for my selection (LIT 2-13a)</p> <p>To show my understanding across different areas of learning, I can identify and consider the purpose and main ideas of a text and use supporting detail (LIT 2-16a)</p> <p>To show my understanding, I can respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other close reading tasks and can create different kinds of questions of my own (ENG 2-17a)</p> <p>I can: recognise the relevance of the writer's theme and how this relates to my own and others' experiences; discuss structure, characterisation and/or setting; discuss the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre (ENG 2-19a)</p>
Writing	<p>By considering the type of text I am creating, I can select ideas and relevant information, organise these in an appropriate way for my purpose and use suitable vocabulary for my audience (LIT 2-26a)</p> <p>I am learning to use language and style in a way which engages and/or influences my reader (ENG 2-27a)</p>

WALES Programme of Study for English: Year 4

Oracy	Learners are able to explain information and ideas using supportive resources, e.g. on-screen and web-based materials (Y4_OracSpea.1)
Reading	<p>Learners are able to accurately identify the main points and supporting information in texts (Y4_ReadComp.1)</p> <p>Learners are able to deduce connections between information, e.g. sequence, importance (Y4_ReadComp.2)</p> <p>Learners are able to explore information and ideas beyond their personal experience (Y4_ReadComp.3)</p> <p>Learners are able to use a range of strategies to make meaning from words and sentences, including knowledge of phonics, word roots, word families, syntax, text organisation and prior knowledge of context (Y4_ReadStrat.1)</p> <p>Learners are able to identify how texts differ in purpose, structure, layout (Y4_ReadStrat.7)</p>
Writing	<p>Learners are able to use subject-specific vocabulary independently (Y4_WritLang.2)</p> <p>Learners are able to adapt what they write to the purpose and reader, choosing words appropriately, e.g. descriptive, persuasive language (Y4_WritMean.1)</p>

NORTHERN IRELAND Levels of Progression in Communication across the curriculum: Primary Level 3

Talking and listening	Pupils can maintain a role (L3_com_talk.1ii)
Reading	<p>Pupils can recognise, understand and sequence main points (L3_com_read.1i)</p> <p>Pupils can choose and use reading strategies independently (L3_com_read.2)</p> <p>Pupils can make deductions using information from the text (L3_com_read.4ii)</p>
Writing	<p>Pupils can provide supporting detail using an expanding vocabulary (L3_com_writ.2iii)</p> <p>Pupils can use the form appropriately (L3_com_writ.3)</p>