

Mexican Gothic Lesson Plan
The Female Gothic
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Overview: This lesson serves as a means to investigate the novel's participation in a long-standing "Female Gothic" tradition. It encourages students to consider how various women characters in the novel experience and respond to patriarchal oppression within High Place. Because this activity largely covers minor characters—Ruth, Florence, and Catalina, it is best suited for a lesson in the middle of a unit, so that students can build their character portraits based upon the first eighteen chapters of the novel.

This lesson has been adapted from the "Novel Portraits" exercise included in Diana Fuss and William A. Gleason's *The Pocket Instructor, Literature: 101 exercises for the college classroom* (Fuss and Gleason 296-99). For a useful resource on the Female Gothic genre as it might pertain to *Mexican Gothic*, see Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith's "Defining the Female Gothic."

Objectives:

By the end of the class, students will:

- Define Female Gothic
- Analyze the Female Gothic in the novel through key genre conventions and characterization

Class Structure:

15 minutes: Introduce Female Gothic

- Provide definition of "Female Gothic": "a politically subversive genre articulating women's dissatisfactions with patriarchal structures and offering a coded expression of their fears of entrapment within the domestic and the female body" (Wallace and Smith 2)
 - As needed, define patriarchy for students: "The predominance of men in positions of power and influence in society, with cultural values and norms favouring men" (*OED*)
 - Put differently, the Female Gothic uses Gothic genre conventions to express women's anxieties about social institutions that privilege men over women and consequently devalue women's traditional domestic roles and oppress women's bodies
- Use a brief discussion of High Place as a way to illuminate the definition of the Female Gothic. Position High Place as an example of a Gothic genre convention that also expresses the precarious role Noemí and Catalina have within the family due, in part, to their gender:
 - The house's distance from the town and the bad weather traps Noemí, and she can only go into town when she has a chaperone to drive her.
 - The house bears reminders of a previous haunted woman, Ruth.
 - Noemí is quite literally not allowed to speak, per the rules of the house.
 - Other structures within the family, such as their close relationship with Dr. Cummins, strip both Noemí and Catalina of their voices concerning Catalina's health and body.

30 minutes: Small group activity

- Break students into groups of 3-4 and assign each group one of the following characters: Catalina, Ruth, or Florence.
- Each group should construct a written portrait of the character by answering the following questions:
 - Characterize your character. What is she like? What traits does she possess? What role does/did she play within High Place? What passages serve to characterize her most explicitly?
 - Is/was the woman entrapped? What forces—cultural, familial, medical, etc.—entrap her? Are such forces related to the Gothic genre?
 - How do Noemí and readers learn information about the woman? What forces control the information that Noemí and readers learn? How does a “coded expression” of resistance to patriarchal forces also play into these women’s portraits? What makes these women potentially subversive to the forces working on them?
- You might offer the following passages to help guide each group:
 - Catalina: Pgs. 7-9, 48-50, 170-71
 - Ruth: Pgs. 66-67, 129-31, 172
 - Florence: Pgs. 21-22, 113-15, 168-69

25 minutes: Class discussion

- Have each group share their findings and record them on a whiteboard or PowerPoint.
- Discuss the following questions as a class:
 - What similarities exist between the three women’s lives and stories? How do High Place, the Doyle family, and/or patriarchal gender structures oppress or entrap the women? What do the connections between these women’s lives tell us about the environment within High Place?
 - How does Noemí’s story compare or contrast to the other women’s lives? How does Noemí’s role as primary focalizer connect to the novel’s use of the Female Gothic genre?

Additional passages for group discussion (as needed):

- Catalina: Pgs. 24-26, 34-35, 43, 83-85, 138-41
- Ruth: Pgs. 107-08, 116-18
- Florence: Pgs. 68, 71-73, 188-89, 193

Works Cited

Fuss, Diana, and William A. Gleason, editors. *The Pocket Instructor, Literature: 101 Exercises for the College Classroom*. Princeton UP, 2016.

Moreno-Garcia, Silvia. *Mexican Gothic*. Del Ray, 2020.

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www.oed.com/view/Entry/138873.

Wallace, Diana, and Andrew Smith. "Introduction: Defining the Female Gothic." *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, edited by Wallace and Smith, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 1-12.