

## Great Books Discussion: Dracula

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1. Dracula has become a famous (or should I say infamous) character over the years. Before you read the book, what expectations did you have for *Dracula*? What have you seen in movies, TV shows, etc. that caused you to think the book would be this way?
2. What are the elements of vampire folklore? For example, what, according to the novel, attracts or repels a vampire? How do you kill a vampire for good? Although Stoker did not invent the mythology of the vampire, his novel firmly established the conventions of vampire fiction. Choose another novel that deals with vampires and compare it with *Dracula*. (Consider, for example, one of Anne Rice's vampire books or Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series.) In what ways are the novels similar? Different?
3. Like so many novels of this time period, *Dracula* plays into stereotypical gender roles. Were you at all bothered by the heroine-in-distress part of the plot? Did any of the characters complicate or challenge these "normal" gender roles?
  - a) Discuss the significance that many of the male protagonists are doctors (Dr. Seward) or men of science (Dr. Van Helsing). Why is this important to the story?
  - b) Discuss the roles of Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker in the novel. How are the two women similar? Different? What accounts for their differences? To what extent does the novel depend on both of these women to propel the narrative forward?
4. The vampires in *Dracula* seek beauty and youth as principal objects of conquest. Why do they fixate on these two ideals? Are these twin obsessions specific to the time and place of the novel, or do we still grapple with their hold over us today? Does the author provide any positive examples of aging? In the novel, how do youth and naiveté take a back seat to knowledge and experience?
5. Discuss the role of sexuality in *Dracula*. What does the novel suggest about sexual behavior in Victorian England?
  - a) Count Dracula's thirst for blood is closely tied to sexual desire. How does Mina Harker thwart his physical --- and psychological --- advances? How does Lucy Westenra's vulnerability affect his bodily appetites? How does Jonathan Harker fend off the female vampires who nearly prove his undoing? What conclusions does the book draw about the link between seduction and evil? Sexual purity and innocence? What are the contrasts between love and lust in *Dracula*? How does passion complicate efforts to hasten Count Dracula's demise?
6. *Dracula* pits science and reason against superstition and the occult. Are these opposing philosophies ever reconciled? Does the truth of one argue against the existence of the other? How do the two doctors, John Seward and Abraham Van Helsing, approach the matter differently? Is Seward's skepticism ever completely overcome? How does R.M. Renfield contribute to Seward's education? What is the significance of Seward's diagnosis that Renfield tries "to absorb as many lives as he can"?

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7. Do you think *Dracula* is a religious novel? What is the significance of the role played by holy objects in warding off the vampire's damnation? Does the author mean to satirize the piety and superstition of Transylvania town folk, or to strengthen the power of their beliefs?

8. *Dracula* relies on journal fragments, letters, and newspaper clippings to tell its story. Why might Stoker have chosen to narrate the story in this way? Do letters and journal entries make the story seem more authentic or believable to you?

9. Stoker includes an interesting note at the very end of the book that asks his reader about truth. Although the characters have repeatedly written of the validity of this tale through facts and accurate accounts of events, the reader is now asked to take everything on good faith. Why do you think Stoker chose to end this way? How does this choice affect your trust of the characters and your experience with the book?