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Exploring Dracula Criticism

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Exploring *Dracula* Criticism

Amy Barlow, Rhode Island College

NELIG Winter Program - December 6, 2019

Background:

First year students in Honors 100 - *Dracula: The Monster (Always!) Returns* are expected to gain some sense of the critical conversation that surrounds Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Their professor, Dr. Maureen Reddy, organizes the students into small groups and asks each to find a single critical article for close reading. Later in the semester each group will present ideas from their chosen article during an oral report.

As the Librarian for English, I meet with Professor Reddy's class so that I can teach students how to search for literary criticism. This semester I developed a lesson for Honors 100 that integrated active learning and the concept of "Searching as Strategic Exploration" from the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy. I was interested specifically in helping students to "recognize the value of browsing and other serendipitous methods of information gathering." The lesson anticipated that students in the class would know more about *Dracula* as a culture text than the instructor (me) because it is the entire focus of their course. After a brief introductory lecture on the production of literary criticism, we started the activity.

Lesson URL: tinyurl.com/nelig-dracula

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will know where to look for literary criticism.
2. Students will construct an effective search for *Dracula* criticism.
3. Students will explore and evaluate a large number of relevant publications to find the most suitable articles for their assignment.

Reception:

This activity received a strong response from the class. The students delighted in exhibiting their budding knowledge of *Dracula* as a culture text by calling out the "expected" topics, such as *Gothic*, *science*, and *sexuality*. They highlighted the ingeniousness of literary interpretation when they noticed such "surprising" subjects as *clocks*, *circumcision*, *veganism*, and *transgenderism*. They revealed gaps in their knowledge through their choice of "unfamiliar" topics, such as *deconstructionism*, *Bergsonism*, and *narrative authority*. After some discussion, each group selected three critical articles from JSTOR for close reading, which was a requirement of their assignment and their reason for visiting the library.

Assessment:

1. Professor Reddy reviewed and approved the articles selected for close reading before the students left class.
2. As part of the activity, I asked students: "How might you use these topics to further your search for *Dracula* criticism?"
3. An assessment committee evaluates course artifacts for evidence of research fluency.

Exploring *Dracula* Criticism - HONR 100 - Fall 2019
Library Workshop

Researchers use library databases, such as JSTOR and MLA International Bibliography, to search for literary criticism. One strategy for finding *Dracula* criticism is to spend time exploring a large number of search results, paying close attention to article titles and topics. Through this process, you will discover patterns in *Dracula* criticism, and will be surprised by inventive interpretations of the text.

Please list one or two subjects and/or topic examples in each category.

1 - Expected Topics

2 - Surprising Topics

3 - Unfamiliar Topics

Question: How might you use these topics to further your search for *Dracula* criticism?