

Ghost Stories

Why do people tell ghost stories?

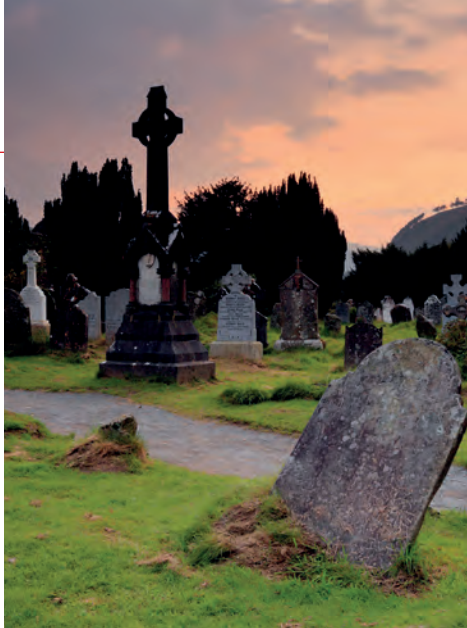
Many countries around the world have tales of spirits and ghosts. Here are some of the reasons people tell ghost stories.

- A warning to others: some ghost stories are tales about what will happen if someone doesn't do things correctly. For example, not burying a dead body correctly.
- Grief: death is a difficult subject. It can be difficult to accept¹ a person's death. In many ghost stories it is not only the humans that help the ghost find peace. The ghost can also help a human to accept and feel hope for the future.
- To entertain: it is exciting to listen to a good ghost story, in the dark, next to a fire. We enjoy being frightened.

A History of Ghost Stories

Before the 1800s, people often told ghost stories in villages or religious believers talked of spirits. Many people believed ghosts were the spirits of the dead and they prayed for the spirits so they could go to heaven. These stories were not scary.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, a new type of story became popular. These were called 'Gothic Horror'. These stories were not real. The events happened in castles, old ruins, and dark, cold places. *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole is one of the first books of this type, but



1. **accept**: understand something is true.



there are many other famous books like *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker.

The ghost stories we know today began later in the 19th century. In

these stories, the ghosts are often bad spirits. Sometimes the ghosts teach people how to live better lives. In *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, three ghosts show a man what will happen if he doesn't change. The next day he changes the way he behaves.

Ghost stories and horror stories became popular with American writers. Some well-known writers are Edgar Allan Poe and Edith Wharton. These writers also wrote short stories. Some ghost stories are funny and entertaining. In the *Canterville Ghost* by Oscar Wilde, for example, the family tell the ghost to go away and stop making trouble. In the end, a child is able to help the ghost to find peace.

Another famous ghost story of this time is *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. In *The Turn of the Screw*, the reader doesn't know if there is really a ghost. It could be the imagination of the main character. Or maybe it is the imagination of the reader!

M.R. James had many good examples of ghost stories to use, but his stories are special. His stories are not horror stories. The reader must imagine the ghost or feel it is near. Modern ghost stories often follow this example. We should feel scared but not terrified. M.R. James called this feeling a 'pleasing terror.'

Comprehension check

4 Which of these words best describe a ghost story?

entertaining frightening exciting scary
horrible terrifying funny

The Tractate Middoth



Before you read

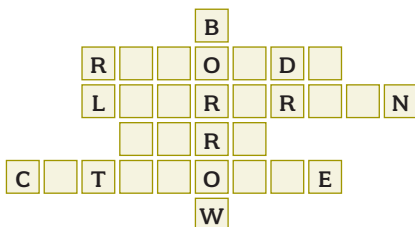
1 KEY Vocabulary – In the library

Read the descriptions of people, objects and things you do in a library. What is the word for each one? The first letter is already there.

- 1 Information on paper or in a computer r e c o r d s
- 2 I work in a library. I _____
- 3 A piece of hard paper or plastic. C ____
- 4 Something flat to put books on. S ____
- 5 Take for a short time and return it. B _____
- 6 A list of all the books you can find in the library. C _____

2 Puzzle

Complete the boxes with the words from exercise 1. You can use the puzzle to help you.



3 The title

Read about the title of the story. Why do you think the Tractate Middoth is important in this story?

The Tractate Middoth is a Jewish sacred text. This means the text has religious importance. It is written in the language of Hebrew.

- A It is an important sacred text.
- B The librarian only knows Hebrew.
- C There is some hidden information in the text.