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WESTERN
CANADA
THEATRE

PLAY GUIDE



DRACULA THE BLOODY TRUTH

By **LE NAVET BETE AND JOHN NICHOLSON**

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FEATURING

CHRISTY BRUCE	Actor
NATASCHA GIRGIS	Actor
CHRISTOPHER HUNT	Professor Van Helsing
KIRK SMITH	Actor

CREATIVE TEAM

CRAIG HALL	Director
SCOTT REID	Set Designer
DEITRA KALYN	Costume Designer
ANTON DE GROOT	Lighting Designer
ANDREW BLIZZARD	Sound Designer
KARL SINE	Original Fight Director
MARK BELLAMY	Original Musical Staging
LANI MARTEL	Stage Manager
CASSIDY GALLAND	Assistant Stage Manager

BACKSTORY: THE BLOODY DETAILS

Like many great stories that have become a part of popular culture, it's difficult to trace an exact beginning to Dracula. Myths become novels, novels become films, films become television shows, and so the genre grows. Many of the classic tropes of the genre were made popular—though not necessarily originated—by the Stoker novel. A missing reflection in the mirror, an aversion to garlic and sunlight, transformation into bats, and the stake through the heart are a few of the conventions that have captured our imaginations and fed a hunger for more vampire stories. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is known as the quintessential vampire story, though it wasn't the first of that genre. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem "The Bride of Corinth" (1797) was an early take on vampire literature, and later Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871); however, the story that introduced the "gentleman vampire" was John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1817).

Stoker would have been aware of this literature, as he undertook research over a period of seven years, surveying a variety of materials, including Emily Gerard's essay "Transylvania Superstitions" (1885), which touched on vampire mythology.

From the moment of its publication, *Dracula* was already being adapted for the stage. Stoker wrote it himself, and it opened the same month as the novel's publication. He was able to accomplish this so quickly because of his day job as the Lyceum Theatre's business manager.

The version that Western Canada Theatre is producing is a parody by UK company, Le Navet Bete in collaboration with John Nicholson. The creators had a shared interest in comedy theatre and created the show through a combination of writing and improvisation. Though it takes the original novel as inspiration, this version eagerly diverges from the source material to send up the story, the genre, and theatre in general.

Dracula is one of the most adapted characters in the world, second only to Sherlock Holmes, with over 200 films featuring the character.



SYNOPSIS

Professor Abraham Van Helsing leaps off the pages of *Dracula* and onto the stage to tell you, dear theatre goer: Bram Stoker's novel had it all wrong! At last Van Helsing hopes to set the record straight and bring the truth of the legendary vampire to light...even if he only has three amateur actors to help him do it! Van Helsing and his troupe dive into 40 different characters on a breakneck journey from the Transylvanian mountains to the seaside town of Whitby.

CHARACTERS

Four actors play 4 actors who play 40 characters in the play!!



HEY! THAT'S BLOODY COOL!

Interesting tid bits to chew on!

Vampire Facts: The Bloody Truth?

Below is a list compiled of the most well-known “facts” about vampires.

- A group of vampires has variously been called a clutch, brood, coven, pack, or a clan.
- One of the most famous “true vampires” was Countess Elizabeth Bathory (1560-1614) who was accused of biting the flesh of girls while torturing them and bathing in their blood to retain her youthful beauty. She was by all accounts a very attractive woman.
- Many scholars argue the word “vampire” is either from the Hungarian vampir or from the Turkish upior, upper, upyr meaning “witch.” Other scholars argue the term derived from the Greek word “to drink” or from the Greek nosophoros meaning “plague carrier.” It may also derive from the Serbian Baniup or the Serbo-Croatian pirati “in human consciousness”.
- The first full work of fiction about a vampire in English was John Polidori’s influential *The Vampyre*, which was published incorrectly under Lord Byron’s name. Polidori (1795-1821) was Byron’s doctor and based his vampire on Byron.
- A vampire supposedly has control over the animal world and can turn into a bat, rat, owl, moth, fox, or wolf.
- Vampires can be killed by the use of a wooden stake through the heart.
- Vampires do not have a reflection.
- Garlic, a traditional vampire repellent, has been used as a form of protection for over 2,000 years. The ancient Egyptians believed garlic was a gift from the gods, Roman soldiers thought it gave them courage, sailors believed it protected them from shipwreck, and German miners believed it protected them from evil spirits when they went underground. In several cultures, brides carried garlic under their clothes for protection, and cloves of garlic were used to protect people from a wide range of illnesses.
- Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) remains an enduring influence on vampire mythology and has never gone out of print. Some scholars say it is clearly a Christian allegory; others suggest it contains covert psycho-sexual anxieties reflective of the Victorian era.
- While blood drinking isn’t enough to define a vampire, it is an overwhelming feature. In some cultures, drinking the blood of a victim allowed the drinker to absorb their victim’s strength, take on an animal’s quality, or even make a woman more fecund. The color red is also involved in many vampire rituals.

BREAKING DOWN THE FOURTH WALL

“Breaking the fourth wall” in theatre refers to the notion that actors must pretend that the audience simply is not there in order to complete their immersion in the story and maintain suspension of disbelief. The idea is that the three walls of the stage have a “fourth wall” that comes between the actors and the audience, and doing anything to acknowledge the audience or that reminds them they are watching a play “destroys” this barrier.

When someone breaks the fourth wall, the result is often that the audience become detached from the story and characters and begins to regard the production as people on a stage rather than a transportation to another possible reality. For this reason, most actors are taught to avoid breaking the fourth wall at all costs.

On the other hand, some clever playwrights, directors and actors occasionally break the fourth wall on purpose as a device to engage the audience in unexpected ways, often reinforcing themes or character traits. *Dracula: The Bloody Truth* is one of these such plays. The very notion of the play is for Van Helsing to convince the audience that Bram Stoker’s version of events of Dracula is incorrect. Van Helsing spends the entire play talking to his “actors” and the audience. Audience members become a part of the show, creating a wonderful dynamic amongst everyone involved.

THE VAMPIRE GENRE

What other vampire stories do you know? These could be from books, films, television shows, or video games.

Why do you think the vampire genre has been so popular? What are the elements that we love about it?

The vampire genre has also been ripe for parody (*What We Do in the Shadows*), contemporary commentary (*True Blood*), high school comedy/drama (*Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*), and angsty teen romance (the *Twilight* series). What makes the genre so flexible? Why do we want to see so many stories about vampires? What is it about vampire stories that we find relatable?

POST SHOW QUESTIONS

What is Van Helsing's purpose in telling the story from his perspective? Does he succeed?

In the play, Van Helsing rails against theatre. What exactly is it that he dislikes about it? What strengths does theatre have that make it different from film or books?

How did you feel about the characters breaking the "fourth wall" (i.e., speaking directly to the audience or interacting with them)? How is this different than a story where the characters stay in their own world?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Drama and Communication

- Reason and reflect
- Connect and expand
- Roles of performer, audience and venue
- Dramatic genre

RESOURCES

Bartlett, Wayne and Flavia Idriceanu. *Legends of Blood: The Vampire in History and Myth*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006.

Factretriever.com/vampirefacts

Lionhearttheatre.org

Melton, J. Gordon. *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Dead*. Farmington Hills, MI: Visible Ink Press, 1999.

Russo, Arlene. *Vampire Nation*. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2008.