



## Introduction

Schools have differing views about running Halloween activities in their school. Where schools have chosen to join in with Halloween, there is an opportunity to explore deeper ideas about what makes us human. This idea for collective worship uses a famous horror story to explain how Christians see Jesus as the light of the world, and why the cross is a powerful Christian symbol.

## Preparation

You might want to search out images of Dracula as an illustration, but please take great care to only use images that are suitable for a young audience. Searches that include the phrase 'for children' tend to be more helpful. If in doubt, check your choice of images with a senior member of staff.

## Props

- A copy of the book *Dracula* by Bram Stoker
- Heart symbol
- Marionette or puppet
- Christian cross
- Communion wafer (if available)

## Development

What is love? The word 'love' can mean very different things. On Valentine's Day, couples might send each other cards or flowers to say, 'I love you.' But there are other kinds of love too. Families have love. I can say I love chocolate.

Somebody once wrote a very famous story about the opposite of love, and it wasn't hate.

One hundred years ago, the Irish author Bram Stoker decided to create a story made up of folk tales he'd heard and books he'd read. But this one would be different. Bram was going to write his own tale about an evil man who just wanted to control other people like puppets, to make them do what he wanted. This man would be a kind of living disease that spreads and makes itself bigger and stronger by being passed on by more and more people.

The name of the man was... Count Dracula. Who's heard of him? Yes, nearly everybody.

The Count was a made up character who lived by feeding on blood, and anyone he bit would become like him and be controlled by him, like a marionette (or another puppet). In Bram Stoker's original story, the Count first controlled the people living near his castle, but then came to England to catch more victims, by turning them into vampires too. But in the end, he was defeated by a small group of brave people who chased him back across the ocean to his castle, where he was finally destroyed.



The book was turned into a stage play, then a film, and then more films. There have been hundreds of versions of the Dracula story. Why? Perhaps because people like being a little bit scared. But it's also a powerful story about something nasty trying to come in and take control of people. Stories about intruders breaking in are as old as time, and people like to see adventure stories, because everyone's a little bit scared of something nasty coming in the dark.

Bram Stoker added a very important detail to his story: Dracula was terrified of Jesus Christ. Count Dracula could be turned away by the cross of Jesus, whether it was worn around someone's neck or held in the hand. Dracula could even be held back by piece of communion wafer, which Christians use to remember Jesus sharing bread at the last supper. Dracula's enemy, Professor Van Helsing, knows this, and says, 'We are pledged to set the world free... For the good of mankind, and for the honour and glory of God.' In the story, Christian symbols are powerful weapons that drive Dracula back.

But why does Dracula fear Jesus? Because Jesus is the opposite of Dracula. Jesus never tried to control people, he was kind and loved them. He spoke up for children, defended people who weren't thought to be important, and set many free of the things that messed up their lives. Dracula wasn't about love. He was all about control. Dracula is a picture of all the nasty things that Jesus came to fight. And in Bram Stoker's book, whenever Dracula faces a symbol of Jesus he flees, terrified, because he knows he's beaten.

In the Bible, St Paul says:

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

*1 Corinthians 1:18 (NIV)*

I wonder what the 'message of the cross' is to you? Remember, *Dracula* is just a made up story. But in the story, when Dracula comes up against Jesus, who Christians believe is the light of the world, he flees like the coward he is. I wonder, how could you shed a little light into someone's life today, simply by being kind? Could you speak up for someone who needs help? Now that is something good to pass on!

## **Thinking about it**

Shut your eyes. Can you think of a situation today where someone you know could do with some friendly help? It might be in the classroom, at breacktime or at home, but it's a place where you could make a difference. Imagine yourself offering that help now, in your mind. Now open your eyes, and remember - you just might make that happen today. Now, there's a challenge!



## Prayer

*Jesus, light of the world, shine your love in our hearts to drive out our fears, so that we can be lights for the world too. Deliver us from everything that scares us and help us to be a light for others when they are afraid. Amen*

## Information for teachers

When Halloween celebrations are a talking point for children in school, teachers can choose either to ignore them or to go with the flow, revelling in the fantasy elements of the season and using them as a basis for cross-curricular work. This idea for collective worship offers another alternative: to explore some of the underlying ideas in the mythology and point out positive elements in the original story that relate to Christian values. *Dracula* is an adult novel, and we would not suggest it as suitable reading for children, nor that they should be watching this material. However, Bram Stoker's use of Christian symbols in his tale is often passed over today, and it is well worth rescuing for new audiences fascinated by things that go bump in the night, who need to remember there is light, too.