



DISCUSSION ARTIFACTS

LA PORTE HIGH SCHOOL SPEECH AND DEBATE INVITATIONAL TOURNAMENT

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2025

CONTENTS:

1. Visual Media:

“Study After Velázquez’s Portrait of Pope Innocent X” (1953)

Francis Bacon, after Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez

2. Literature:

“Haunted Houses” from The Courtship of Miles Standish and Other Poems (1858)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

3. Current Event:

“Ghost stories: Why tales of the undead still mean so much (even if you don’t believe in ghosts)”

Cody Mello-Klein, Northeastern University Global News (2023)

**La PORTE HIGH SCHOOL
602 “F” STREET
La PORTE, IN 46350**

Discussion Artifact: Visual Media

“STUDY AFTER VELÁZQUEZ’S PORTRAIT OF POPE INNOCENT X”

Francis Bacon (1953), after Velázquez (1650)



Discussion Artifact: Literature

HAUNTED HOUSES

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

**All houses wherein men have lived and died
Are haunted houses. Through the open doors
The harmless phantoms on their errands glide,
With feet that make no sound upon the floors.**

**We meet them at the door-way, on the stair,
Along the passages they come and go,
Impalpable impressions on the air,
A sense of something moving to and fro.**

**There are more guests at table than the hosts
Invited; the illuminated hall
Is thronged with quiet, inoffensive ghosts,
As silent as the pictures on the wall.**

**The stranger at my fireside cannot see
The forms I see, nor hear the sounds I hear;
He but perceives what is; while unto me
All that has been is visible and clear.**

**We have no title-deeds to house or lands;
Owners and occupants of earlier dates
From graves forgotten stretch their dusty hands,
And hold in mortmain still their old estates.**

**The spirit-world around this world of sense
Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere
Wafts through these earthly mists and vapours dense
A vital breath of more ethereal air.**

**Our little lives are kept in equipoise
By opposite attractions and desires;
The struggle of the instinct that enjoys,
And the more noble instinct that aspires.**

POEM CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Discussion Artifact: Literature (Cont.)

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

**These perturbations, this perpetual jar
Of earthly wants and aspirations high,
Come from the influence of an unseen star
An undiscovered planet in our sky.**

**And as the moon from some dark gate of cloud
Throws o'er the sea a floating bridge of light,
Across whose trembling planks our fancies crowd
Into the realm of mystery and night,—**

**So from the world of spirits there descends
A bridge of light, connecting it with this,
O'er whose unsteady floor, that sways and bends,
Wander our thoughts above the dark abyss.**

FROM THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH AND OTHER POEMS (1858)

Discussion Artifact: Current Event

Cody Mello-Klein, Northeastern University Global News - October 23, 2023

Ghost stories: Why tales of the undead still mean so much (even if you don't believe in ghosts)

We all know the stories: A dark shape lurks in the background, just out of view. A house seems to have a life of its own, doors opening and objects moving untouched by human hands.

Whether they're told around a campfire or on the big screen, ghost stories still haunt and intrigue people today, particularly Americans. But why? What do ghosts mean to us, and why do they still matter, even in 2023?

The answer is, it depends. Ghost stories have a long history in American culture and media, but almost every culture has its version of a “ghost” — and they aren't all here to haunt us.

“What a society calls a ghost is really reflective more of the society than it is necessarily the entity itself, depending upon your belief system,” says N. Fadeke Castor, an ethnographer and assistant professor of religion and Africana studies at Northeastern University.

It might sound simple, but to understand why and what ghost stories mean to us, it's important to first understand what a ghost is — and what it's not.

Other cultures have their own interpretations of spirits — like the duppy in the Caribbean — but the idea of a ghost seen in American pop culture, a spirit that haunts a house or people, is specific to the West. Carie Hersh, a teaching professor of anthropology at Northeastern, says ghost stories are usually about the transition between life and death. But in the West these stories are often about what happens when something goes wrong in that process.

“Whenever we talk about funeral rituals and things like that, there's always a fear or an anxiety that something's going to go wrong, that people aren't going to move on to the next phase of existence or that part of them will remain,” Hersh says. “We tend to have a lot of rituals around death, and some of that is to enact a sense of control over this ultimately unknowable transition.”

ARTICLE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Discussion Artifact: Current Event (Cont.)

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

If spirits are just another relationship and ghost stories are our way of depicting that relationship, then Western ghost stories are all about fractured or unresolved relationships. But Hersh says modern ghost stories like horror movies are connected to very contemporary concerns. Tales of the undead end up saying more about the living than about the spirits that haunt us.

“It probably tells you more about our society’s trauma/depression around natural life cycle stuff — we tend to hide death away,” Hersh says. “We make it a very sterile, distanced thing, and as a result, like with anything that’s out of sight, out of mind, it becomes something we either don’t think about or we’re scared of. I see contemporary ghost stories more as a reflection of our society and our engagement with death than something universal.”

However, not every ghost story is even about a ghost. Ghosts, spirits, ancestors — different cultures call them different things. They also mean something very different: Not every ghost story is about cheap thrills, fear or unresolved relationships.

For many people of African descent in the Americas who are part of the African diaspora, the ancestors, those who have died, are not feared but embraced.

“People who have passed on, especially your relations, are still in relationship with you,” Castor says. “They still have a vested interest in your life and are still in active communication with you in a relationship of exchange.”

Unlike the ghostly tales that come from a Euro-centered tradition, these stories provide comfort, kinship and a connection to the past. Hersh observed something similar in her work with a New Age community in Virginia.

“I made friends with a lot of mediums who would be like, ‘Hey, there’s someone at your elbow who wants to talk to you,’ and it was just accepted,” Hersh says.

ARTICLE CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Discussion Artifact: Current Event (Cont.)

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Even within one culture or community ghost stories can mean different things. Not all ghosts are the same, not all spirits are the same and not all ancestors are the same. Castor points out that the duppy, a more malevolent kind of spirit, can exist alongside the positive power brought by the ancestors in some Caribbean cultures.

However, the biggest reason ghost stories are still so powerful might be that we are always talking with the dead, Castor says.

We read books, watch movies and recite plays and poems by people who are no longer living. Academics cite the work of other academics who have long since passed away, using the voices of the dead to support their own work. We maintain relationships with ghosts, even if we don't believe in them.

"People are in relationships with non-embodied spirits, and they may conceptualize that relationship in many different ways and ghosts are one of those ways," Castor says. "When do those who have passed become recognized by a society as spirits, as ghosts, as the ancestors, as the dead and when do they not? We are invoking people's names all the time. ... That is another way that society normalizes being in relation to those who have passed."

END OF ARTICLE

DIGITAL LINK TO ARTICLE:

<https://news.northeastern.edu/2023/10/23/ghost-stories-american-culture/>