The period in the history of western thought and culture that stretches roughly from the mid-seventeenth to the eighteenth century is known as the Enlightenment. This period is characterised by revolutions in science, philosophy, society and politics; these revolutions replaced the medieval world-view based on religion and superstition with modern systems based on 'reason'.

**Research the Enlightenment**

In what ways are ‘Enlightenment’ ways of thinking relevant to the texts you are studying?

1. Find out about Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756). You should be able to find a summary of the ideas that Burke presents in this essay on the internet.
   
   In what ways is the idea of the sublime, and the responses it generates, related to the Gothic?

2. The 20th century psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud developed the concept of the unconscious mind. Freud’s research and writing revolutionised the ways in which we have come to regard human nature, dreams, anxiety and sexuality. **Research Freud** and make notes.
   
   How might Freud’s ideas about hysteria and repression relate to the interpretation of Gothic texts?

3. The Gothic has been adopted by feminists as a means of generating discussion about gender and the ways in which women are often represented in literature as creatures who are confined, imprisoned and trapped. Dramatisations of imprisonment pervade Gothic narratives. Research the Feminist Gothic. **What insights does this school of criticism provide into the texts you are studying?**

4. The Gothic at its inception might have been thought of as a conservative genre in that, even though its narratives involved the demonisation of particular aristocratic villains, it did not criticise the social systems that legitimised the existence of an aristocracy. Think about the texts set for this topic. **Would you say that the Gothic, as it develops through time, retains its early political conservatism?**