

THIS GUIDE CONTAINS:

- Three lesson plans
- Each lesson will take one to two class sessions
- Strategies and considerations for teaching Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

TARGET AGE:

- 9 - 12 grade

DISCIPLINE:

- ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS

A Study Guide from Chicago Humanities Festival 2010 CLASSICS IN CONTEXT by BILL YARROW

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

The program on *Frankenstein* took place at the Franke Center for the Humanities at the University of Chicago. Professors Heather Keenleyside and Timothy Campbell led the conversation.

Professor Bill Yarrow from Joliet Junior College moderated the curriculum session and produced the following study guide and lesson plans.



Chicago Humanities Festival
500 North Dearborn Street, suite 825
Chicago, IL, 60654
phone 312.661.1028
fax 312.661.1018
www.chicagohumanities.org
education@chfestival.org

“My days were spent in close attention.”

— Victor Frankenstein, in *Frankenstein*, 1818 text, page 95

LESSON PLAN: Maybe *Frankenstein* Really IS the Monster

Age and Discipline: This lesson is most suitable for high school English/Language Arts classes.

Goals:

- To teach students close reading of a literary text
- To teach students to collect evidence and form that into a thesis
- To teach students literary analysis
- To expose students to a 19th century work of fiction

Objectives:

Students will utilize research, analysis, and oral and written communication skills.

Materials: Text of *Frankenstein* (E-Text preferred)

Timeframe: This lesson will take 1-2 days to complete.

PROCESS AND PROCEDURE:

1. The creature in *Frankenstein* the novel by Mary Shelley is unnamed. Victor Frankenstein is the actual creator of the monster. The name Frankenstein, however, now popularly refers to the Creature, not his creator. Students should consider the possibility that this common perception (that Frankenstein is the name of

the monster) represents or points to the deeper truth of the novel.

2. Students should collect evidence of the “monstrousness” of the character of Victor Frankenstein. Among the qualities of Victor to consider

- a. his obsession with physical ugliness
- b. his irrationality
- c. his selfishness
- d. his asocial tendencies
- e. his asexual nature
- f. his overly-passionate quality
- g. his lack of empathy
- h. his dereliction of filial duties

3. In looking at Victor Frankenstein in the novel, students should consider the three elements that define any character in a literary work:

- a. Words [what a character thinks, says, or writes]
- b. Deeds [what a character does or does not do]
- c. Reputation [what others think of the character]

4. Students (looking at Victor’s words, deeds, and reputation) should gather evidence which supports the idea that Victor is a monster and also gather evidence which opposes that idea.

5. Students should then weigh the evidence they have collected and form a thesis in response to the question “Is Victor Frankenstein the real monster in *Frankenstein*?”

6. The assignment which follows from this can take the form of a class discussion or a written essay (formal or informal, depending on the wishes of the teacher) or a debate in class in which both sides of the issue can be argued and judged (the teacher can assign some of the class to teams and assign other students as judges—clear criteria, however, need to be established and agreed to for judging, and the

student judges should work from a checklist derived from the criteria above and judge the debating teams based on their presentation.) An adventurous teacher could even stage this argument as a trial with Victor Frankenstein brought before a judge and jury for being a monstrous human being. [He would NOT be on trial, however, for creating a living being...]

DIGGING DEEPER

Have students collect evidence in the novel of the humanity rather than the monstrousness of the Creature. Expand the paper about Victor to include evidence (both positive and negative) about the Creature himself. This comparison/contrast will lead to a deeper understanding of the relation of Victor and the Creature and a clearer understanding of the complexity of the novel.

Assessment: Evaluation of participation in class discussion, class debate, and/or written analysis paper.

LESSON PLAN: Empowering the

Student Scholar

Age and Discipline: This lesson is most suitable for high school English/Language Arts classes.

Goals:

- To teach students how to work with an electronic text.
- To teach students to collect data using the Search, Replace, Copy, and Paste functions in Microsoft WORD.
- To teach students to organize and interpret data.
- To teach students to form a thesis from data.
- To teach students how to support a thesis using data.

- To empower students to think of themselves as scholars capable of original insights.
- To expose students to a 19th century work of fiction

Objectives:

Students will utilize research, analysis, and written communication skills.

Materials: Text of *Frankenstein* (E-Text preferred)

Timeframe: This lesson will take 1-2 days to complete.

PROCESS AND PROCEDURE:

1. As scholars, we sometimes proceed impressionistically with our readings of texts. That is to say, we work from overall impressions we get from our reading. An example of this is the statement from the Classics in Context presentation on February 27, 2010, that the term “monster” in *Frankenstein* was the term “used most often” in referring to the Creature.

2. The advent of public domain e-books allows scholars now to search texts much more accurately. See Project Gutenberg (www.gutenberg.org) for a rich resource of such texts, including Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1831 version), Mary Shelley’s *Mathilda*, and Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* and also Plutarch’s *Lives*, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and Volney’s *The Ruins, or, Meditation on The Revolutions of Empires* (three of the Creature’s readings in *Frankenstein*).

3. By downloading *Frankenstein* and reformatting it as a readable electronic text in Microsoft WORD and then using the Search function in Microsoft WORD (CTRL+F), readers can now discover that the word used most often to refer to Victor Frankenstein’s creation is “fiend” (used forty-one times) whereas the term “monster” is used thirty-three times. [The Replace function in WORD (CTRL+H) can be used to count the number of instances a word appears. Just place the same

term exactly in both boxes and then choose Replace All—the program will tell you the number of times the word was “replaced.”]

4. Teachers and students are now able to have a lot of data easily available to them. For example, just a few minutes working with the electronic text of *Frankenstein* reveals sixty-nine instances of “creature,” (referring both to humans and the “monster”), sixteen instances of “daemon,” fourteen instances of “devil,” four instances of “beast,” one instance of “brute,” and sixty-four instances of “wretch.”

5. This collection of raw data can sometimes be misleading, however. In looking for instances of “fiend” or “monster,” for example, it is important to differentiate which terms the Creature applies to himself and how often he does so compared to the usage of the terms and the referents of those terms by others. The best collection of evidence would indicate who used each term and to whom or to what each term was applied. Students or teachers after finding relevant passages would use the Copy (CTRL+C) and Paste (CTRL+V) functions to collect their data and save it in a blank WORD document.

6. Using the Search function also allows teachers and students to easily find a term or phrase they might have noticed and want to return to. For example, the term “insect” is used interestingly in the novel, once to refer to the Creature and once to refer to Emily Lavenza! Unusual terms like “mummy” and “vampire” also appear in the novel.

7. Students, thus empowered with this tool, can become scholars capable of original discovery even working with familiar works like *Frankenstein*, mined already by competent scholars for more than a century.

8. Teachers must help guide students to be good collectors of and good interpreters of data. Finding the number of times the word “the” appears in *Frankenstein* is possible but not valuable.

9. The teacher should provide an electronic version of *Frankenstein* to the students (via a Course Management System) or show students how to download and reformat for readability an electronic copy of the novel from Project Gutenberg.

10. Have students search the electronic version of *Frankenstein* for each appearance of the word “creature.” [NOTE: this assignment would be extremely difficult and almost impossible without multiple re-readings of the novel if one was working with a physical text alone.] Students should record each instance the word appears, note who says it, and note to whom the word applies. As they collect, paste, and save their data, they should begin to see that the word sometimes applies to human beings, sometimes to animals, and sometimes to the “monster.” They should organize and evaluate their data and then begin to form a thesis about the novel based on the data they have collected.

The better students may go beyond just collecting instances of the word “creature” and may amass data from a cluster of words, phrases, or images. The phrases “fellow creatures,” “amiable creature,” “human creature,” “interesting creature,” “noble creature” and others may also come to light.

11. Students should write a formal paper with a clear thesis related to the use of the word “creature” in *Frankenstein*. The data they have collected will be the evidence in support of their thesis.

12. The teacher should discuss the findings of the class after all the papers have been collected, graded, and returned. The teacher might also include his or her own findings based on his or her investigation of the electronic version of the text. This discussion should lead to some radical insights about the similarities of monsters and mankind at the center of this novel.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Have students collect, evaluate, and interpret all references to religion in the novel (“God,” “creator,” “daemon,” “devil,” “angel” “salvation,” etc.) and construct a thesis and write a paper about the role of religion or religious references in *Frankenstein*.
2. Have students collect, evaluate, and interpret evidence in the novel of what they think is significant. Let the students spread their scholarly wings! [This could be a group assignment as well as an individual assignment.]
3. Have students read, reference, and work with more than one electronic text. Mary Shelley’s *Mathilda*, and Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* and also Plutarch’s *Lives*, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and Volney’s *The Ruins*, or, *Meditation on The Revolutions of Empires* (three of the Creature’s readings in *Frankenstein*) are all available in electronic forms as are many other Romantic texts. Let students be inventive and make comparisons and connections wherever they can. Treat them seriously as potential scholars and they will become the next generation of scholars.
4. Students who do original, insightful research on a text like *Frankenstein* should be encouraged and shown how to submit their polished work to scholarly journals for publication.

Assessment: Evaluation of written analysis paper.

LESSON PLAN: Reading the Texts

We Don’t Have

Age and Discipline: This lesson is most suitable for high school English/Language Arts classes.

Goals:

- To teach students close reading of a literary text
- To exercise student imagination and creativity
- To expose students to a 19th century work of fiction

Objectives:

Students will utilize analysis, and oral and written communication skills.

Materials: Text of *Frankenstein* (E-Text preferred)

Timeframe: This lesson will take 1 day to complete.

PROCESS AND PROCEDURE:

1. The Creature reads Victor’s diary of the creation of the Creature himself. This is an extremely interesting moment in the novel, but Mary Shelley does not provide us with contents or even an excerpt from Victor’s actual diary.
2. Have students recreate Victor’s diary of the creation of the Creature.
3. Students should make sure the diary they write
 - a. is in the style of the writing of Victor (students will need to look carefully at Victor’s style of writing and speaking in the novel and attempt to imitate that style (which vocabulary choice, grammar, diction, tone, syntax, etc.) in their diaries
 - b. Reflect accurately the character of Victor in the novel (students will need to look carefully at Victor’s character, ideas, attitudes, beliefs to make sure they are presenting the events as Victor himself might have).
4. These diaries could be shared with the class
 - a. by having them read aloud in class
 - b. by uploading them into a Course Management System and allowing all the students access to each others’ workor
 - c. by printing them and making them into a book or portfolio
 - d. Adventuresome teachers might have students purchase pocket diaries and handwrite the diaries to create the illusion of authenticity.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Safie’s letters are missing. So are Felix’s letters. The above assignment can be applied to other “missing” texts in the novel.

Assessment: Evaluation of both creativity and plausibility (Is this what Victor might have written? Is this how Victor might have written?) of written work.

CLASSICS IN CONTEXT

Classics in Context is a series of seminars that take a fresh look at universally established and contemporary literary classics. Offered to area educators by the Chicago Humanities Festival, the four programs consist of lectures by university faculty on a classic literary work, followed by a discussion with a curriculum developer on strategies for integrating the text into their classrooms.

The 2010 Classics in Context Program included: *Confabulario and Other Inventions* by Juan Jose Arreola, cosponsored by the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Chicago, featuring Professor Mauricio Tenorio and Nelly Palafox; *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, cosponsored by the Franke Institute for the Humanities at the University of Chicago, featuring Professors Heather Keenleyside and Timothy Campbell; *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, cosponsored by the DePaul Humanities Center, featuring Professor Francesca Royster and director Phyllis E. Griffin; and *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner, cosponsored by the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities at Northwestern University, featuring Professor Julia Stern.

ABOUT THE CHICAGO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL

The Chicago Humanities Festival (CHF) creates year-round opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and economic circumstances to explore, to enjoy, and to support the arts and humanities. We accomplish this by presenting programs throughout the year, culminating in two annual Festivals of the Humanities, one in the spring specifically for children and families and one in the fall for the general public. CHF’s mission of providing broad access to the humanities—at a low ticket price—depends in part on the generosity of its committed and enthusiastic supporters.

www.chicagohumanities.org

STRATEGIES FOR BRINGING

FRANKENSTEIN INTO THE CLASSROOM

There are a number of things to consider when deciding to teach Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to a middle school or high school class.

1. Will you teach the 1818 version or the more commonly available 1831 version?
 - a. 1831 edition is seen by some as more conventional, easily reconcilable, less blasphemous, less incestuous.
 - b. The radical science aspect is more present in the 1818 edition.
2. Will you teach the text version or the public domain electronic version (1831)?
 - a. Electronic version allows for more scholarly investigation using tools (Search, Replace, Copy, Paste...) within Microsoft WORD.
 - b. Electronic version allows for students to annotate their own text using tools (Highlight, Comment, Track Changes) within Microsoft WORD.
 - c. Electronic version is free. Teacher does not need a class set.
 - d. Students are familiar with paper texts. Students need to be taught to work with an electronic text.
3. Will you work with external considerations, e.g. images of the monster from theatre, illustration, and films, or will you just work with the text itself?
4. Will you work with external considerations, e.g. texts that inform *Frankenstein*?
 - a. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* ("I dare do all that may become a man. / Who dare do more is none.")
 - b. Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* [Creature's

- mood and worldview shifts radically like Timon's]
- c. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* [Create brings wood to cottagers as Ferdinand hauls logs for Miranda; Caliban as "monster"]
 - d. Ossian's Fingal
 - e. Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (available electronically)
 - f. Mary Shelley's Journals
 - g. Works by Percy Shelley
 - h. Plutarch's *Lives* (available electronically)
 - i. Milton's *Paradise Lost* (available electronically)
 - j. Volney's *Ruins of Empires* (available electronically)
 - k. Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*
 - l. Laurie R. King's *A Monster's Notes* (story from monster's point of view)
5. Will you show a film version of the novel in class? Which version?
- a. J. Searle Dawley's version (1910)--available in public domain
 - b. James Whale version with Boris Karloff (1931)
 - c. James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935)
 - d. Mel Brook's *Young Frankenstein* (1974)
 - e. Kenneth Branagh version with Robert De Niro (1994)
 - f. Steven Spielberg's *A.I.* (2001)
- [There are many more possibilities! Many, however, are inappropriate for student view. Always preview first!]
6. Will you look at the novel through the eyes of science? [Materialist (Lawrence) vs. Vitalist (Abernathy) debate]
 7. Will you look at the novel through the eyes of religion? [Volney's atheism. Percy Shelley's atheism. Role of God in the novel.]
 8. Will you look at the novel through the eyes of feminism? [passiveness of female characters, critique of masculinity in novel...]
 9. Will you look at the novel through the eyes of

philosophers? [Bacon's "new empirical method" in *Novum Organum*. Locke's categories from observation in "Essay on Human Understanding." ("Shall a defect in the body make a monster?")]

10. Will you look at the novel through the eyes of literary criticism? [reliability and unreliability of three major narrators: Walton, Victor, Creature and the subsidiary narrators of authors of the letters in the novel; "The Creature narration at center of the narrative frames privileges the Creature" ...]

11. Will you look at the novel through the eyes of literary critics? [the movement from discussions of "the monster" by early critics to the discussion of "the Creature" by modern critics]

12. Will you look at the novel through the lens of the 18th century category of "the last of the race"? [cf. Ossian, Logan in "Logan's Lament" ...]

13. Will you look at the novel through the lens of ethics? [Creature's insistence that if he's treated well he'll be virtuous; if he's treated badly he'll become vicious. (cf. bullying, ostracization, the Columbine shootings.) Samuel Johnson's "The wretched have no compassion." Modern day ethical concerns: parental responsibility, the nature of the family unit, cloning...]

14. Will you look at the novel through the lens of a theme or idea? [e.g. the monstrous body; deviance; "visual logic"; the "homomonstrous" (Linnaeus), the paucity of physical descriptions, the idea of "The Modern Prometheus"; seeing and blindness in the novel ...]

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* invites many approaches. That is probably one of the reasons that the novel is more popular as a teaching text today than it ever was before.