Study Guide

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein
An Original Adaptation by Jerry Montoya

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SACRAMENTO METROPOLITAN ARTS COMMISSION
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SYNOPSIS
Witness the spark of inspiration that started it all with playwright Jerry Montoya’s imaginative adaptation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. When a sunny weekend in 1816 is ruined by a raging storm, writers Mary and Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, and friends instead compete to craft the best ghost story. Mary’s tragic story of young love, pride, and scientific exploration out of control not only wins the contest, but goes on to spark an entire genre of literature.

THEMES: Classic Literature, Friendship, Science & Morality, Character Counts, Mythology

THEATRE TERMS

VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS
3.0  Historical & Cultural Context

Make sure you know the following terms so you can use them later.

SCRIPT: The written play that tells actors what to say and what to do.

ACTORS: The people who say the words and do the actions on stage.

CHARACTER: The person or thing that an actor pretends to be or portrays.

DIRECTOR: The person who tells the actors how to say the words and how to do the actions.

SCENERY or the SET: The backdrops, furniture, and other pieces that show the audience where the play is happening.

COSTUMES or WARDROBE: The clothes and other things an actor wears to show who they are.

PROPS: The things that actors use (such as a book or broom) during the play.

SOUND: The sound effects (like a doorbell or thunder) that help to tell the story.

LIGHTING: The lights that help the audience to see the actors and scenery on the stage.

THEATER: The place where a play is performed. It is from the Greek word *THEATRÓN*, which means “watching place”.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

READING (Literature): Key Ideas and Details

SPEAKING & LISTENING: Comprehension & Collaboration
3.1  4.1  5.2

SPEAKING & LISTENING: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas
3.6  4.6  5.6

VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS
1.0  Artistic Perception

1. How much of Mary Shelley’s original book *Frankenstein* can you recall? Who were the main characters and what did they do? What were Shelley’s main themes and messages?

2. What does the phrase “just because you can doesn’t mean you should” mean to you? Give some examples of things we can do but shouldn’t and why.

3. Introduce the terms listed in the Theatrical Terms list provided. Can you give examples of these terms from plays or movies you’ve seen?

4. What do you know about the myths of alchemy, the Philosopher’s Stone, and/or the Elixir of Life? What other books, movies, plays, and games make use of these myths? (Ex. *Harry Potter*, *Final Fantasy*, *Fullmetal Alchemist*).

5. What makes a story a ‘ghost story’ or Gothic literature? Must there be certain types of characters? Certain settings? Certain events? Certain tone or themes?
DURING AND AFTER THE PLAY

DURING THE PLAY

AUDIENCE BEHAVIOR

While watching a live theatre performance, it is important to sit quietly and listen. It does not mean that you need to be silent. Be sure to laugh at the funny parts (or cry at the sad parts), and certainly applaud at the end! Actors love it when an audience is involved with the show by actively watching and listening.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

READING (Literature): Key Ideas and Details
5.3  6.3  7.3  8.3
READING (Literature): Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
4.7  5.7  6.7  7.7  8.7
SPEAKING & LISTENING: Comprehension & Collaboration
3.2,3
SPEAKING & LISTENING: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas
3.6  4.6  5.6
VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS
1.0  Artistic Perception
4.0  Aesthetic Valuing
5.0  Connections, Relationships, Applications

1. Compare and contrast Shelley’s *Frankenstein* with Montoya’s adaptation:
   a. How were the characters similar and how were they different?
   b. What and who else was the playwright interested in exploring besides Shelley’s story and her characters?
   c. Did the playwright leave out any major events? Add any new ones?
   d. What other aspects did he change, add, or leave out?
   e. What themes did Montoya develop throughout the play? How did they differ from the themes Shelley developed in her book? How were they similar?

2. Refer back to the Theatrical Terms list on page 3. What examples of these terms did you find in the play?
   a. What did you think of the scenery, costumes, and props? Did they help you understand the story being told? Why or why not?
   b. How did the music, lighting, and sound effects used during the play help you understand the story being told?

3. Use all three of the ‘ghost stories’ depicted in Montoya’s play to answer the following questions:
   a. Which of the three stories best fits your definition of a ‘ghost story’ or Gothic literature according to your pre-show discussion in Question 5?
   b. How did Mary, Lord Byron, Dr. Polidori and the others define ‘ghost stories’ as a genre?
The following words can be used in discussion of the play and in other activities.

1. inn  6. wretched  11. elixir
2. curiosity  7. emaciated  12. reconvene
3. germinate  8. laboratory  13. corpse
4. stature  9. enlightenment  14. creature
5. apparition  10. alchemy  15. immortality

Use a DICTIONARY to do the following:

a. Define the words and identify their parts of speech
b. Divide each word into syllables
c. Identify the language of origin for each word
d. Identify roots and any prefixes or suffixes in each word--can you add/take away any prefixes or suffixes to make different words?
e. Do any of these words have multiple meanings? Describe the different meanings
f. See if you can use any of these three words in a sentence

Activity 2: Going Gothic

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is considered part of the Gothic and Science Fiction genres that became popular during the 19th century. The genre of Gothic literature in particular gained popularity in England during the 1790s and survives today in the work of Steven King and other authors.

Divide the class into groups and have each group choose a short story it feels fits the Gothic genre. Have each group research the author and his/her historical context and critically discuss the following questions:

- What aspects of the story’s setting, plot, characterizations, and themes lead you to agree that the story fits into the Gothic genre?
- For stories with historical settings, how is the story shaped by the cultural, political, and/or socio-economic conditions of the time period? How does the story comment on these conditions?
- What worldview do the tone and themes of the work express?
- Is there an anti-hero in your story? What makes him or her an anti-hero?
Activity 3: Get Inspired!
WRITING: Text Types and Purposes
3.3 4.3 5.3 6.3 7.3 8.3

1. In *Frankenstein*, Lord Byron mentions Aristotle’s Unities—the observation that the best stories take place within a 24-hour time period in the same setting and have one storyline. See if you can write a story that conforms to the Unities.

2. Playwright Jerry Montoya chose not only to explore how Shelley’s *Frankenstein* came to be, but also Mary Shelley herself. Describe a time when you felt inspired to write or act out something, create a craft, or do something new or different.

Activity 4: 3 Bags
WRITING: Text Types and Purposes
3.3 4.3 5.3 6.3 7.3 8.3
VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS:
2.0 Creative Expression

Find 3 paper bags (or other opaque containers) and label them **Characters**, **Settings**, and **Problems**.

Pass out several slips of paper to each student. Have them write suggestions for each category and put them in the appropriate bags.

- **Characters** can be people, animals, animate objects, etc. and can include adjectives
  *Ex. teacher, toaster, lazy dog*

- **Settings** can be times, places or time periods
  *Ex. Summer, morning, Los Angeles, the 60s*

- **Problems** should be stated in a short sentence or phrase
  *Ex. Can’t find car keys, all toys on Earth stolen, dog eats homework*

After the bags have been filled, ask each student to choose one slip from each bag.

Next, have students write a short ghost story that incorporates each element. They will have to use their imaginations to fit them all together! They may also add other characters, settings, and problems if they wish.

For example, a student might select the following:

- **Character**: one-eyed Pirate
- **Setting**: grocery store
- **Problem**: can’t find the car keys

The student could then write a story about what happens when the one-eyed Pirate loses his/her keys at the grocery store.

Have students share their stories with the class.

Extension: Have your students make their **Character**, **Setting**, and **Problem** selections as groups of 3-4. Have them use their selections to create concepts for ghost stories that they then write as plays or depict in storyboards. Share with the class.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

SPEAKING & LISTENING: Comprehension and Collaboration
SPEAKING & LISTENING: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS
5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications

Listen carefully to your classmates’ presentations and ask them questions.

WRITING

WRITING: Production and Distribution of Writing
3.4-5 4.4-5 5.4-5 6.4-5 7.4-5 8.4-5
WRITING: Range of Writing
LANGUAGE: Conventions of Standard English
LANGUAGE: Knowledge of Language
VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS
5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications

Be sure to revise and edit what you write.
Activity 7: The Quest for Immortality

Cultures all over the world have myths and documented histories concerning our alchemical quest for immortality. Some attempts at attaining immortality through the mixing of plants and metals have brought about some important discoveries, while others have found their way into folklore and popular culture.

Explore the myths and histories surrounding the quest for immortality held by a nation or culture you are studying using the examples below (or others you know of). Why are these stories important to people? What are the good and bad consequences of these experiments? Create posters or informational pamphlets to share with the class.

- Lingzhi mushrooms and Chinese alchemy
- Amrita or Soma
- Ambrosia or Nectar
- Medieval alchemy—the Philosopher’s Stone & the Elixir of Life
- Nicholas Flamel and Count St. Germain
Discuss the following questions as a class or assign certain questions for students to answer in a persuasive essay.

Responsibility and Friendship
1. What does it mean to be responsible for yourself and your actions? What does it mean to behave responsibly?
2. Every action can have positive and negative consequences. Decide why you would be or not be responsible for the consequences of the following actions:
   a. You leave a carton of milk out unrefrigerated all night long. It spoils.
   b. You are working on a group project. Your job is to make a poster, but you wait until the last minute and the poster is not written neatly. Your group receives a lower grade.
   c. You want to start a club for people who enjoy playing video games. You only want the club to meet after school, but some club members skip school to meet and play video games. They get detention.
3. In Frankenstein, Victor decides to find and test the Philosopher’s Stone. What consequences do you think Victor should have been prepared to face?
5. Should Victor have created the monster? What positive consequences could have come from this act? Do you think humans should have the power to create life through science?
6. How should Victor have treated his creation?

Science & Morality

SCIENCE: Life Sciences

Have your students conduct further research on the following issues raised if necessary.

1. The idea of humans being able to create life through science rather than natural reproduction, which Frankenstein explores, is at odds with the belief held by many religions that only gods and deities have the power or right to create life spontaneously. If humans had the power to create life as Victor does, what would be the responsible and ethical way to use it? What would the negative consequences be if humans had this power?
2. What use has been made of the knowledge and technologies gained through cloning experiments?
3. Darwin’s concept of Evolution also found itself at odds with those who could not accept the idea of humans being descended from other life forms. When a scientist forms a theory or makes a discovery that goes against previously accepted theories, religious teachings, or conventional wisdom, what pros and cons must he or she weigh in deciding to pursue or publish it?
FURTHER READING & LEARNING

Electronic Resources
Mary Shelley Biography
http://www.biography.com/people/mary-shelley-9481497

5 Ancient Legends About the Secret of Immortality
http://ultraculture.org/blog/2014/05/05/5-ancient-legends-secret-immortality/

List of Best Gothic Reads
http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/1230.Best_Gothic_Books_Of_All_Time?page=2#763497

Science in Context
http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/scic?trialParam=UPpz0M0SpIyjEzvNMSXKK_PejqLcMg9c&p=SCIC&u=special_scirc

Web Activities
Goosebumps: Make Your Own Graphix

Poetry Writing with Karla Ruskin
http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/karla_home.htm

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A Book Without Words???
Word Search

Find these words in the word search.

1. inn
2. curiosity
3. germinate
4. stature
5. apparition
6. wretched
7. emaciated
8. laboratory
9. enlightenment
10. alchemy
11. elixir
12. reconvene
13. corpse
14. creature
15. immortality