

**Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*:
The *Bildungsroman* and the Search for Self**

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INTRODUCTION

Many novels contain characters who, as they grow and become more aware of the world outside their own frames of reference, struggle to determine who they are and what place they have in this greater world. These novels fall into the genre of *bildungsroman*, novels of development, and they are excellent tools through which to encourage high school students to examine their own selves, their feelings of identity, and the places they imagine for themselves in the world beyond high school. It is important for students to see relevance in the works that they read, but the opportunity for students to analyze themselves as well as literature is a valuable opportunity for any teacher.

For this unit, I have chosen Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, an interesting example of a *bildungsroman*. Because he was a being created, not a human born, the creature brought to life by Dr. Victor Frankenstein is thrust into a world that does not and can not understand him. He was created by science, and yet neither science nor philosophy can help him determine his unique role in the universe; he is forced to define himself as others see him, a "monster," and thus he becomes a "miserable, unhappy wretch" (Shelley 108).

This curriculum unit will center on a study of *Frankenstein*, its "monster," and the theme of defining one's self; students will participate in discussions and activities that will enable them to understand Mary Shelley's / Dr. Frankenstein's creation, the attempts of the creation to define himself, the events that eventually do shape his development, and his roles as both a scientific creation and an individual. The unit will also serve as a link from the literature to the students' lives and encourage them to question their own identities, their places in society, their responsibilities to other humans, and their methods of defining themselves.

ACADEMIC CONTEXT

Academic Setting

The school in which this unit will be taught is a high school in urban Houston, Texas. It serves approximately 2,000 students, many of whom speak English as a second or third language and many of whom are making a transition from other countries or from pre-hurricane life in New Orleans to a new life in Houston. Most of my students have had life-changing experiences, including wars in their native lands, murders of family members, early pregnancies, many moves and new schools, or forced deportations or evacuations, so a novel that encourages them to question their sense of self and their place in the world will allow for important discussions and self-realizations.

This curriculum unit has been designed for a senior-level Advanced Placement (English Literature and Composition) course. The unit will be taught over a span of approximately four weeks. Courses meet three times a week, once for 40 minutes and twice for 95 minutes; therefore, each lesson plan is designed for a 40 or a 95 minute class period.

Unit Objectives

Through class activities and readings of fiction and philosophy, students will not only become familiar with the genre of *bildungsroman* but also be able to recognize the challenges that humans negotiate as they develop into mature, self-aware adults. This unit will include an introductory study of philosophy and man's quest to define "self," and it will, through Victor and his creation, help to stress the students' very important attempts to define themselves. As seniors in high school, they will be preparing themselves to make weighty decisions about their future, and students can best make these decisions with a full understanding of who they are, what they want to be, and what role they would like to play in their worlds.

Additional Advanced Placement Objectives

Students at Lee High School are not all typical Advanced Placement students, and many of them have not had the benefit of strong vertical Pre-AP to AP courses. They have been schooled – not always consistently – in different middle schools, different states, and different countries, and so their skill levels are incredibly varied. This unit will be designed to meet the needs of as many students as possible and to bring as many students as possible to the level desired by the College Board's Advanced Placement program.

Additionally, this unit will strive to meet the goals set by the College Board; through this study of *Frankenstein*, students will continue to "deepen their understanding of the ways writers use language to provide both meaning and pleasure for their readers" and "consider a work's structure, style and themes as well as such smaller scale elements as the use of figurative language, imagery, symbolism, and tone" (*College Board AP English Course Description*).

SECTION I: UNIT BACKGROUND

This unit will begin with a study of the genre of *bildungsroman*. Students will likely have read "coming of age" stories previously, though they may not be familiar with the term; the definition "novel of personal development or of education" (Rau) will be on the board when students enter the classroom at the start of this unit, and they will be encouraged to write on the board any titles which they feel fit this category. After the list (which may include *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the Harry Potter novels, or even the "Back to the Future" or "Star Wars" movies) has been completed, the term *bildungsroman* will be introduced and class discussions will center on the specific elements of these stories that exemplify the genre. We will center on the fact that these novels chart the protagonist's actual or metaphorical journey from youth to maturity where the aim of this journey is reconciliation between the desire for self-fulfillment and the demands of adapting to a given social reality (Rau). Many novels, like *Frankenstein*, that are concerned with psychological characterization and questions of identity use elements of the *bildungsroman* (Rau).

The entire unit will center around Mary Shelley's creature and his moral development; we will consistently refer back to the idea of the *bildungsroman* to help determine how and why the creature travels from "newborn" to fully cognizant adult and to discuss how (or even whether) the students develop themselves.

At this point in the unit, students will enter into a brief study of philosophy and the concept of "self." During the reading of *Frankenstein* they will be encouraged to examine the creature's growing awareness of himself, specifically as he reveals in his tale to his creator; students' arguments will be supported, and often validated, by the philosophies and philosophers we discuss in this introduction. Students will use the novel *Sophie's World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy* by Jostein Gaarder to study the Natural Philosophers, Descartes, Kant, and Romanticism in a context that is tenable to them; these chapters will give students vocabulary and

thoughts to form a platform for the discussions of the creature's self-awareness (see Lesson Plan One below for details on readings and assignments).

Upon completion of their Introduction to Philosophy, students will be asked to delve into their own understandings of the oft-quoted, "I think; therefore, I am." Once the study of *Frankenstein* has begun, debates will likely ensue as to whether or not the creature is "human," and readings from Terrel Miedaner about chimpanzees and machines as having "minds" and personalities can help to give the students a foundation for these discussions. Miedaner's "The Soul of Martha, A Beast" describes a chimpanzee, Martha, who is able to speak due to a small computer that is connected to her brain. Through the course of a courtroom examination, the reader meets and is enchanted by the simple language of Martha, and is thus devastated when she is "terminated" and utters, "Hurt Martha Hurt Martha... Why Why Why Why" (106). Similarly, in Miedaner's "The Soul of the Mark III Beast," a machine is so anthropomorphized that a woman who is challenged to kill it finds it very difficult to do so when confronted with the fact that this machine can "sense its own doom and cry out for succor" (113). In the course of analyzing these stories, students will likely be upset with the murder of Martha, an animal, and will have the most trouble with Mark III – what rights does this machine have? Do we agree with the majority who seem to find it upsetting when Mark III is attacked? If so, why? Finally, how might this machine be different from a reanimated being built with decomposing human parts? Do all of these creations "think" and should they therefore be treated as humans are treated?

In a more concrete exercise, students will complete a brief study of Mary Shelley herself. In order to understand the characters in the novel, they should know the historical and personal context that went in to the creation of the novel. Shelley may have written a large part of herself into Victor Frankenstein's creation – she, too, was essentially "born motherless, nameless and illegitimate" (Freeland 32) and likely felt the need to search for a family and a place to fit into "society" (Mellor 25). In fact, if her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, offered to her "the opportunity to replicate her parents' love and to create the supportive family she craved" (Mellor 20), why shouldn't she create a character who is merely looking for the same creature comforts?

Students may read biographical excerpts from Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (Chapters 1 and 2), Miranda Seymour's *Mary Shelley* and/or Diane Johnson's introduction to the novel to formulate a picture of Mary Shelley and her search for identity; this will give them insight into Victor Frankenstein's creation but also into the young Shelley's own insecurities, to which many modern students can likely relate. Most importantly, students should recognize that Shelley was intellectually formed by many events that had occurred in her life:

Mary's [first child] was born at seven months in February 1815 and died soon afterward....Her next child, William, was born...in January 1816....In October, while she was writing the early parts of her novel, her half-sister, Fanny Imlay, committed suicide, and in December Shelley's wife Harriet drowned herself.... And Mary at about the same time became pregnant for the third time. She was to lose both this child and William. These terrible events and apprehensions account for the preoccupation with the solemn terrors of giving birth which form a central motif in her novel. (Johnson viii)

Though few students will have had to overcome as many hurdles by their 19th birthday, they will certainly see how young adults can be molded and changed by the events in their lives; this can help them begin to link themselves with *Frankenstein*. If they can relate to the author, they will likely relate to the creature's story as well.

Finally, students will be transitioned to the text by a series of motivational questions drawn from Amy Martin's unit plan, from Eileen Simmons's article, and from a philosophy and ethics review. Martin's pre-reading quiz is a list of true-false statements regarding topics from revenge to cloning, and the questions in Simmons's article encourage students to ponder the morals in

medically prolonging life and the ethics behind parental roles. The lively “do you agree with this” discussions should prepare the students to tackle the moral and ethical questions that will abound when reading *Frankenstein*.

Some of these questions will be previewed in the philosophy and ethics review handout (see Lesson Plan Two below). They will form groups to discuss and defend their opinions on topics ranging from “what makes a human, human?” to “what is the role of a parent in raising a child?” We will return to them throughout our reading of *Frankenstein* and students will be expected to discuss these questions as they apply both to the novel and to themselves.

SECTION II: *FRANKENSTEIN*

Students will begin the actual study of the topics and themes broached in *Frankenstein* by creating a “creature” of their own (See Lesson Plan Three below) from a very limited and mismatched selection of “building material.” They will be encouraged to imagine the life of their creature if he or she were to have to live in modern-day America. Each “creator” will imagine strengths and weaknesses, both physical and intellectual, for their “creature,” and the students will determine whether or not their creation would “fit in” and why. Through teacher-led discussions, students will be forced to investigate and to qualify their answers to the following: how their beings feel and define themselves, how similar they may be to their creations, and how similar the problems of their “creations” are to their own problems.

Smaller daily assignments throughout the reading will focus students’ attention on character interactions, the healing aspect of nature, Victor’s intriguing relationships with Elizabeth and Clerval, the problems with modern science, figurative language in the novel, the characters’ feelings of self-worth, the creature’s apparent changes from “creation” to “monstrosity,” and Victor’s Promethean role and how he copes with it. The problem of “whether either the man or his monster is more good than evil is difficult to decide when reading the book” (Freeland 25), and it will likely be central in the students’ debates; they may need to determine for themselves if the creature is good or evil in order to discuss what is at the heart of this unit, the *bildungsroman*, and what it can teach the students about themselves.

Part 1: The Narration of Walton and Victor’s Story through the Creation (Letter 1 – Chapter 5)

Though there will be discussions on the multiple narrators and on Victor’s idyllic childhood, the primary focus when studying Part 1 will be on the concept of creation. What in Victor’s life leads him to the point where he decides to “[create] his monster with the best of intentions – to prevent death by learning to create life” (Simmons 30)? Many students will likely deplore Victor for “playing God,” and lively conversations are bound to ensue when questions are posed regarding any rights humans may have to manipulate and/or create new life; how far is too far when it comes to medical science? Do we respect Victor for his scientific talents, or dismiss him as a madman?

Students will also likely note that during his creative frenzy, Frankenstein never considers the possibility that his creature might not wish the existence he is about to receive; he assumes the creature will “bless” him and be filled with gratitude and he never considers how such a giant will exist among others (Mellor 41); Victor creates a being that is taller and faster than a human with a face of “loathsome and appalling hideousness” (Reichardt 142). Not only is the creation of such a monstrous creature controversial, but it is careless in many ways; how can one expect a “child” to grow healthily and happily when its own “father” admits to being “unable to endure the aspect of the being” he has created (Shelley 43)? Finally, students may note that Victor was a relatively young 19, the same age as Mary Shelley as she wrote *Frankenstein*, when he began to embark on his journey of scientific discovery. Is a young man of that age capable of making decisions that

will affect his life and the lives of many others for years to come? Because of Victor's age, students will likely be able to relate to the strengths of his convictions and may understand his passion, thus making him seem like a peer. Therefore, the question of what he is or is not capable of doing or deciding will be potent and relevant one to analyze.

At the completion of this section of the novel, students will generate a two-columned chart, or dialectical journal, as a graphic representation of the development of the character of Victor Frankenstein (see "Dialectical Journal" for formatting details). In the first column, they will list the major events of Victor's intellectual growth, from the support of his father to the patronage of his professors, and in the second column they will respond to each entry, with either a comment or a question of their own. This section of the novel is where the *bildungsroman* of Victor begins, and students will be encouraged to compare their own intellectual growth to that of Victor. How are we, as developing beings, supported and influenced by our parents, guardians, or educators? What role should parents have in our lives, and what can happen if they, or their support, is absent? At what age is an individual considered to be capable of making the weighty decisions like those Victor makes in this section?

Part 2: Victor's Post-Creation Illness through His Reunion with the Creature (Chapter 6 – Chapter 10)

Chapter 6 begins a temporary rejuvenation for Victor. Through a letter from Elizabeth, the company of his cherished friend Clerval, and springtime walks which "filled [him] with ecstasy," Victor began to "[bound] along with unbridled joy and hilarity" (Shelley 57). However, in Chapter 7 news arrives that Victor's beloved younger brother, William, is dead (as we discover later, at the hands of the creature); when Victor spies his creation in a tempest, he realizes that "*he* [the creature] was the murderer!" and that "the mere presence of the idea was an irresistible proof of the fact" (Shelley 63). As discussion of this section unfolds, students can return to the chart they created in the previous section and add the changes they have seen in Victor. They will likely understand his mood swings and the power his friends have to heal him, and many students may also (unfortunately) be able to relate to the death of a loved one and the pain and guilt which follow.

Students will likely begin to see in Chapter 7 some of the anguish of the creator or parent in Victor, and we can begin to discuss at this point the rights of the creation: is he similar to Martha and the Mark III mentioned in Miedaner's essays in that we sympathize with him? Is he truly evil or trying to define himself in a world which has no place for him? Finally, if he is uncontrollably evil, should Victor take the life of the being he created (or does he have the right to do so)? Student can hypothesize about the creation before he begins to tell his own story and they will begin a dialectical journal to chart his *bildungsroman* as well (which may be revised and will be supplemented when the creature begins to speak in Chapter 10).

Victor's reuniting with his family and the subsequent trial of Justine serve to personalize the horrors perpetrated by the creature, and the students will very likely feel great animosity about Victor's "offspring" and be able to compare him to the hideous "Frankenstein" of Hollywood movie fame. They will also perhaps sense a hint of regret in the author's tone, regret at having created a new life at all; this is a chance for students to return to what they learned of the young Mary Shelley and her relationship with Percy. Victor's apparent abandonment of his creation can perhaps be linked to Percy's lack of parental concern with the health and deaths of his female children (Mellor 32).

With the number of teen and/or unwelcome pregnancies in the lives of my students, this theme will be very relevant to them and can lead to conversations concerning everything from the ethics of birth control and abortions to the difficulties of properly raising an initially unplanned and/or unwanted child. This may also further their feelings of kinship with Mary Shelley and her

understandable hesitancy surrounding bringing new life into the world; students will be reminded of their reading in the introduction to the novel (see Johnson quote in Introduction above) that caused them to discuss how events can shape young adults as they begin to form.

Finally, the true study of the creature's *bildungsroman* will begin in Chapter 10 when the creature, having been called a "vile insect" and a devil, responds with a calm, well-spoken, perfectly understandable request that Victor do his duty towards him and make him happy (Shelley 86-87). The creature truly shines in these pages and stuns students who picture "Frankenstein" as the caricature seen on Halloween; he already has a deep sense of what he wants and needs and who can give it to him, and he is aware of his progression from a "benevolent" being whose "soul glowed with love and humanity" to a truly "miserable" wretch who plans to swallow Victor's family and thousands of others "in the whirlwinds of [his] rage" (Shelley 87). But what caused him to progress this far in his apparent hatred of self, creator, and mankind? This is the question students will ponder as they complete their study of this section.

For the visual learners in the class, we will create a bulletin board in the form of a two-axis graph. The *x* (horizontal) axis will represent time in the novel ("age" of the creature or chapter number), and the *y* (vertical) axis the level of "benevolence" or "misery" / "anger" the creature reaches; the higher on the *y* axis, the angrier and more miserable the creature. A laminated, blank piece of paper will be affixed at intervals throughout the reading (mostly in Chapters 11 – 16 as the creature tells his own story); the class will, as a group, determine where on the *y* axis to place the paper and then will write on the paper the factors that caused the creature to reach this level of anger (or happiness). This will serve to reemphasize topics discussed earlier and again have students question just what it is that helps them begin to define themselves and just what factors cause them (impressionable teenagers that they are) to think and act the way they do.

Part 3: The Creature Speaks: His Tale and His Request for a Mate (Chapter 11 – Chapter 16)

It is during this portion of the novel that the creature truly becomes real to the students; even more so than Martha and Mark III, he is, or was, one of us, and yet he was given no name. We will begin study of this section with a return to the question on Descartes's statement of identity from Lesson Plan Two, below. Simplifying it and referring also to the tribulations of the creatures the students created earlier, we will discuss whether Frankenstein's creature ought to be treated as a human should be treated. As his story unfolds, we see that he, like us and like Victor, rejoices in nature and craves knowledge and a sense of belonging. We see that he, like us and like Victor, has elegant language and reads the likes of Milton, Plutarch, and Goethe; through his "emotive language," we see his humanity (Reichardt 149). However, once he is exposed to "society" and relies on external forces to begin to form his identity, he more often than not defines himself by the fact that not one person treats him as anything other than a monster.

Few people see the creature face to face in the novel, but those who do have an immense effect on his understanding of his place in the civilized world: an old man in a hut yells and flees, children scream and a woman faints, William (Victor's younger brother whom the creature tries to befriend) calls him a "hideous monster, ugly wretch" and is afraid the creature will eat him, members of the DeLacey household faint, run, or "dash [him] to the ground and [strike him] violently with a stick" and his own creator calls him "fiend," "demon," and "devil" (Reichardt 141-142). How can we not pity him like we pitied our creations, Martha, and the Mark III?

All readers can relate to the feelings of isolation and desolation the creature describes in this section; O'Flinn states, "for people together, problems can be solved; for the man alone, they can overwhelm" (28). Students will be given questions to discuss in a small group setting and then they will report and defend their answers to their classmates: How much of what the creature does is due to the fact that he is alone, rejected by not only strangers but his creator, his God, his

Prometheus? How much is he affected (or is our judgment of him affected) by the fact that he has no name, no identity? How much of his development is stunted (or at least affected) by these continual rejections? How much blame do we place on him, and how much on his creator?

The “creation” section of the students’ dialectical journal (started above) will mostly contain notes taken during this section of the novel; they will document details of how the creature defines himself, mostly based on how various individuals respond to the “monster” they see and how these experiences affect him. Students will use this information to determine how much of the plot of the novel is a result of these rejections. [For example, upon his rejection by Felix’s family, the creature begins to define himself in relation to the rest of the world: “When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?” (Shelley 108)]. Since the narrators change in the novel, students will also note the changes in point of view in their journals as well; many of our discussions will focus on how the creature views himself as opposed to how he is viewed.

The bulletin board will be continued as well, and students will continue to note what factors cause the creature to become so angry and miserable; they will be encouraged to be as specific as possible and to ponder as a class whether any of the same factors or similar factors affect them. Are they ever driven to desperation by something someone has said to them? Have they ever wanted revenge because someone has hurt them, inadvertently or blatantly?

Part 4: Victor’s Response and Subsequent Struggles with His Conscience (Chapter 17 – page 199 in Chapter 24)

At the beginning of Chapter 17, the creature appeals to Victor and the readers when he explains that “[he is] malicious because [he is] miserable” and that “[he] would bestow every benefit upon [man] with tears of gratitude” if only man would show him some kindness (Shelley 134-135). Because of this reasoning, Victor is moved to create a mate for his creation, and this leads to additional ethical questions in his mind and in the minds of the readers. If students were upset about Victor “playing God” earlier in the novel, how do they feel about him doing it again, even when he has seen a hint of the disastrous consequences? Does he have the right to bring to life another creature which may inflict more damage than his original creation has? For that matter, does the creature deserve a mate – or does he deserve only to be punished for his actions?

As Victor struggles with his decision to create a female, an Eve for his Adam, the readers struggle along with him. Even beyond the questions of creation mentioned above, students will begin to wonder what can become of a “future...[where] scientific inquiry continue[s] to outstrip ethics and responsibility on a planet where a billion people face starvation” (Poston 28). If Victor does agree and create the female creature, what is next? What if these creatures want children, or find themselves sterile and demand that Victor create children for them? Will they then want neighbors and friends with whom to share their exile? Does every being deserve this chance at happiness? This can naturally lead into conversations about more contemporary matters like “designer babies,” where parents may be able to have doctors manipulate DNA to create a certain kind of child, or about cloning pets or even people. The possibilities are endless.

However, as our overall focus is the creature’s search for self, we will return to his story. Within this section, students will likely again feel distaste for the creature, especially after he kills Victor’s wife, Elizabeth. Students will add to their journals for both Victor and the creature during this section: they will likely have much to say about the creature’s continuing vindictiveness and should add these latest events to his section of the journal, and they will also chart Victor’s decisions to create and then destroy the female being. Once we return to the bulletin board to track the creature’s intellectual growth through this point of the novel, it will likely be a unanimous decision to place the creature very low on the “benevolence” / “anger” scale, but students may have difficulty agreeing with what has brought him so far. Does the

creature need to be blamed, or is this situation entirely Victor's fault? On a larger scale, how much are we affected by the actions of our parents, whether it be crime, alcohol or smoking while pregnant, or other mistreatment?

Part 5: Walton's Conclusion and the Creature's Disappearance (page 199 – end)

As the novel comes to completion, the tale is resumed by our original narrator, Robert Walton, so we see the denouement of the novel through the eyes of a relative outsider. We watch as Victor sums up his experiences:

In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature and was bound towards him to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty, but there was still another paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. (Shelley 207)

He then renews his request that Walton kill the creature, and readers may imagine an ending which contains at least some satisfaction – though Victor and Elizabeth can never live happily ever after, their deaths and those of Victor's family and friends can be avenged! But many students found fault with Victor for feeling that he had the right to give life, so how does he have the right to take it away? Or does he? Again, students may make a comparison to contemporary issues like abortion and the death penalty and will be encouraged to add them to their journals with their comments about the narration surrounding the end of the story of Victor's life.

Finally, the creature himself reemerges to write the end of his *bildungsroman*. When he sees his creator lying dead, he is wretched and it appears that he would like to ask Victor's forgiveness. He explains his pain to Walton: "My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy, and when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture such as you cannot even imagine" (Shelley 209-210). He admits that "crime has degraded [him] beneath the meanest animal" (Shelley 211), and that though Victor should be held partially accountable for all that has happened, the creature knows that he is a wretch and his agony is greater than Victor's (Shelley 211, 213). As the creature leaps off the boat to apparently commit suicide and rid the world of his evil self, he shows that he has finally come to terms with who he is. He has developed into a monster, and he can accept much of the blame. Students should be able to complete their journals and the bulletin board on a relatively positive note; the creature defines himself not as others see him, but as he sees himself. He traces his growth (or moral deterioration) very rationally and comes to the conclusion that only he can resolve his distress by killing himself – a mature and intelligent, if painful, process.

Students will likely want to discuss the open ending: Is the creature really going to kill himself? Or did he just use his powers of speech to lull us once again into believing that he is not completely evil? Why doesn't Mary Shelley have the creature die? What does this signify? How might the creature's life end?

Unit Conclusion

Upon completion of the novel, students will be encouraged to actively debate the roles of Victor Frankenstein and the creation – is either one, or are both, the protagonist(s) of the novel? How do these characters continue to define themselves, and how do others view them? Because of the "frame" aspect of this novel, Shelley presents us with multiple narrators, each of whom tells his own story in his own voice; how does this affect the readers' interpretations of Victor and his creation? Can readers consider the creation a "complete" self if his creator does not give him a name or an identity? Does *Frankenstein* represent a *bildungsroman* for Victor, for the creation, or for both? Finally, does the novel end with any of the narrators (Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, or the creature) being satisfied with his view of himself and his place in the world?

A whole-class discussion will return students to some of the initial questions asked in the unit: How does the “creature” define himself, and how does he grow throughout the novel? How much does the “creature” rely on others to define himself, and does that hinder his intellectual growth? Are the narrators of the novel ever happy with their status in life, and what allows that to happen? How similar are we to the “creature” and what can we learn from him? We will also return to the questions in Lesson Two, below, and discuss how they apply to the students and to the novel – and if the novel changed any of their initial answers.

A culminating writing assignment will require students to analyze the *bildungsroman* in *Frankenstein*. In an AP-style question, they will be asked to choose the character whose experiences best fit the *bildungsroman* genre; in other words, is *Frankenstein* a *bildungsroman* tracing the development of Victor, of the creature, or even of Walton? When proving their thesis, students will be encouraged to discuss dialogue and diction, direct and indirect characterization, point of view, setting, and/or tone, but to avoid plot summary.

As an in-class conclusion to the personal issues discussed throughout the novel, students in small groups will create posters representing an idea similar to the bulletin board created above: this new chart will follow a similar format but will list how modern American teenagers define themselves (for example, feelings of self, effects of television/media, interactions with peers, or feedback from teachers and other adults). As a class, we will choose ages to be represented on the x-axis, and then students will chart overall feelings of “happiness” or “wretchedness” and what may have caused them to feel that way at that age. (For example, students may rate a high happy score at age 5 because they had a great birthday party with all of the guests, gifts, food, and family they wanted). Finally, groups will present their charts to the class and we will discuss what they tell us about how we grow and how we view ourselves in today’s society. Can we see comparisons with Victor’s creation? Most importantly, what can we learn from *Frankenstein* about the choices we make and about how we let the outside world shape who we become?

LESSON PLANS

Lesson One (95 minutes): Introduction to Philosophy

This lesson will center on sections of *Sophie’s World: A Novel about the History of Philosophy* by Jostein Gaarder, a book which is, incidentally, a bit of a *bildungsroman* itself. The structure of this novel is that of a young teenage girl being taught by a philosopher, initially by letter and then in person. Because the philosopher is presenting his lessons to a fifteen-year-old girl, the novel provides an understandable and interesting introduction to philosophy. For the intents and purposes of this curriculum unit, students will study chapters on the Natural Philosophers (earliest Greek philosophers concerned with the natural world and its processes) (Gaarder 30), René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, and Romanticism.

All students will receive a copy of *Sophie’s World* and will have read all of the aforementioned chapters outside of class prior to this lesson. For today’s activity, students will be divided into groups (one per each chapter mentioned above) to delve further into the contents of their assigned chapter. (In a larger class, teachers may need two groups per chapter in order to keep group sizes productive and manageable).

Each group will be asked to summarize the ideas put forth in its assigned chapter and to discuss the relevance of the chapter’s epigram to the reading itself. [For example, the chapter on Descartes begins with “...he wanted to clear all the rubble off the site” (Gaarder 233). When students place this excerpt in its context within the reading, they can see that Descartes felt it important to “rid himself of all handed down, or received, learning before beginning his own philosophical construction” (Gaarder 237); in other words, Descartes wanted to use only new information to form his thoughts.] Groups will also be asked to relate the epigram to their own

lives or beliefs and devise at least two open-ended questions based on their reading that can relate to our society.

Finally, students will present their summaries and analyses to the class, concluding their mini-lesson with their questions. A question like, “What do you think about Descartes’ question, ‘How can you be certain your whole life is not a dream’ (Gaarder 238)?” should spark a philosophical discussion; it will also prepare them for the next part of the unit in which they will read and debate essays on both animals and machines being “human,” assess how humans treat each other and other beings, attempt to discover what the motivations for these decisions are, and discuss what the results of these actions might be.

Lesson Two (95 minutes): Philosophy and Ethics Review

At the end of the introductory portion of this unit, students will be given a handout that contains a series of questions pertaining to ethics and to the philosophies they have studied and discussed to this point. Each question will have a general application (How does this apply to modern American society?) and two specific applications (How does this apply to *Frankenstein*? How does this apply to you?) Today in class students will focus solely on the general application.

Questions will include, but not be limited to, the following: Were the Natural Philosophers correct that “nothing can come from nothing” (Gaarder 28)? Do you agree with Descartes’ assertion, “*Cogito, ergo sum*”? What makes something “human”? Should animals and machines that can think be treated like humans? Can animals or things that are built by man have identities, and are they entitled to the same rights as humans? How do these beings and others define themselves? Is it true that “everybody knows what is right or wrong, not because we’ve learned it but because it is born in the mind” as is attributed to Kant (Gaarder 334)? What moral and ethical considerations should apply to scientists who are investigating manipulating genetic material (Simmons 30)? Do parents have certain obligations to their offspring? Finally, who am I and who does society say I am? Students may have devised their own questions during the initial reading, and these will be added as well.

During this lesson, which serves as a segue from the general introduction to the study of *Frankenstein*, students will be asked to, based on their opinions and their readings, determine what the majority of Americans are likely to believe and why. Then, working with a partner, they should see if they can address and support multiple responses to each question. For example, if students themselves agree that animals should be treated like humans, they should also attempt to list reasons supporting testing medicines on animals that can’t defend themselves.

The lesson will progress to a student vote as to which topic they would most like to debate. One student will serve as a “devil’s advocate” and attempt to start a rebuttal whenever necessary as well as monitor the amount of participation from each “side.”

Finally, the day will end with a reminder that these topics will recur in our discussions throughout the novel, so students should keep these questions handy.

Lesson Three: Create Your Own “Creature”

Day One (95 minutes): Building the “Creature”

Before beginning this unit, I will need to prepare a selection of “body parts” from which the students can build their “creatures.” I will obtain many arts and crafts supplies, office supplies, and perhaps mechanical parts, including, but not limited to, the following: plastic eyes, beads of various sizes and colors, pipe cleaners, colored pieces of felt (which will be cut into pieces of multiple shapes and sizes), yarn, craft “popsicle” sticks, paper clips, bolts and washers. These will be portioned into small plastic bags, one per student.

I want them to create human-like beings, but I don't want them to find it easy, since Victor Frankenstein did not have an easy time building his "creation." Therefore, the individual bags will contain odd assortments of "body parts" to make it difficult for them to make realistic humans; for example, the bags may only contain one eye with one craft stick, a washer and a very large piece of felt.

Students will receive a handout with directions for them to create a human-like being using only the materials in their bags. They should not trade pieces, and they must use every piece they are given. However, they may alter the pieces by cutting, coloring, or using glue or tape. Once they have crafted their "creature," students are to develop a personality for him or her. (I do not mention naming, though many students do anyway. Since Victor Frankenstein's creation is not named, this will be an interesting point to return to during our discussion of the novel and the "creature's" problems with dignity and identity.) Finally, students are told that they will be presenting their creatures and their stories to the class the following time we meet.

In order to spark conversations about the identity of their "creatures," students are prompted to answer a set of questions, which may include, but may not be limited to, the following:

- Does your creation have any physical or mental shortcomings? Explain. (Most will, due to the limitations I placed upon the "creators" with my choice of "body parts.")
- What physical or intellectual strengths does your creation have? Do they compensate for the shortcomings you mentioned earlier? Explain.
- Describe how other people respond to your creation. Would your creation have friends? Would he or she feel accepted into society? Why or why not? (Here they are encouraged to be realistic and keep their own school and peers in mind. Would a person with a magical eye and only one arm be accepted by the students and teachers at Lee High School? Students often have a hard time with this because they are already starting to feel badly for their "abnormal" creation.)
- How did your creature's sense of self develop? What affected his/her self-esteem?
- Describe your creation's personality. What kind of self-worth does he or she have? Is your creation shy or outgoing? Is he or she superficial? Does your creation feel unhappy, and if so, whom does he or she blame?
- Describe what your creation does for fun and/or what kinds of hobbies your creation has. Do these activities involve other people?
- How similar is your creation to you? Does it have a soul, feelings, and emotions like you do? Does it deserve respect and to be treated like a human? Why?
- Describe an episode in the life of your creation. (It may be a day or a week or a weekend; it is up to the students, and it will vary based on the lives they have imagined for their creations.)

I will provide the students with a piece of colored construction paper on which they can write the answers to these questions in any format they choose. I encourage them to choose a color that they feel complements their creation so that the whole package is representative of the "personality" they have devised. Many will create a booklet and affix their creation to the cover, but they are not required to do so.

The handout with which the students are provided also informs them that they will be graded not on their artistic ability, but on their effort and neatness and the durability of their "creation." These will be passed around the room and displayed for all to see, and I wouldn't want any creations to be broken or damaged or to disintegrate before the creators are ready for this to happen. They will also be graded on the grammar, usage, mechanics and spelling of their writing as well as on their oral presentations (comprehensiveness, originality and clarity).

Day Two (95 minutes): Creature Presentations

Students will present the stories of their creatures in any way they feel comfortable. They may read from the card, but they are encouraged to make eye contact and tell the audience a story instead. The idea is for everyone in the room to be able to imagine each creation as it “comes to life.” The audience is expected to ask clarifying questions and to delve deeper into the characters of the creations. As more and more creations are presented, students will begin to notice some similarities (naming or creating wonderful strengths to overcompensate for physical or mental shortcomings, for example).

Upon completion of presentations, students will be asked to determine which, if any, of the creatures would be friends and why. I will then ask them how they feel as creators – are they guilty or uneasy at having forced this being into the world? Would they feel obligated to make its life better or to end its life? How would they feel to be in the place of their creation? I will lead a class discussion in which we will summarize the similarities we have noticed and analyze why we believe they have occurred. If a positive trend like the one I mentioned above is acknowledged, I will ask the “creators” what motivated them to add these strengths to the lives of their creations. What will likely be observed is that each creator, each god, each Prometheus, felt a certain responsibility for his or her creation and did not want him/her/it to suffer.

I will then return to the philosophical questions we discussed earlier (see Lesson Two above) to see if any students have changed their minds about how humanoids are treated and should be treated, and if so, why? Finally, this lesson will conclude with a transition to reading *Frankenstein*, and I will encourage students to keep their feelings of responsibility in mind as they begin to experience Victor Frankenstein’s story of his manic construction of his creature.

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