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English 112B

Unit of Study

Rationale

I chose *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley, as my canonical text to teach for this exercise. I chose *Frankenstein* for a myriad of reasons. First, the text’s authorship was disputed for a long time. Next, the text is written by an 18-year-old woman, which partly reveals why the authorship of the text was disputed. Also, it is the first text with a man made monster. Furthermore, the text entered the cannon recently because of the bastardization of Shelley’s novel through Hollywood.

The text is also a short read; it also has numerous articles written about it for easy research. *Frankenstein* is one of my favorite novels, and I argue that in order to teach literature teachers need to love that literature. However and more importantly, I chose this text because has some human questions that humanity is still dealing with today. For example, should humans play God? Some scientists do not believe in God, so they argue that it is okay to play the role. Moreover, the question of where science ends and spirituality starts is examined through this novel. Victor creates a creature to defeat death because of the loss of his mother. So, the question becomes just because we know how to do something, does it mean we should? The question that the text tackles that I want to focus on for high school is looks. Looks are what most things in high school are based on, and this unit will allow students to question that construct. The Creature is horribly disfigured; after all, he is reanimated from dead body parts, which causes him to become ostracized amongst humanity. His intellect and kindness are not taken into account, so he becomes the monster that the society in the novel sees him as. This leads us into another question: Are monsters born or are they created? Therefore, my theme is how to get students to look beyond the surface and explore the deeper meanings of texts, life, and themselves. First, I would have the students write a short 3-4 page narrative essay about they are pigeon holed into a group because of how they look. I would have them explain what they like and dislike about the group as well as some of the stigmas attached to that group. Next, I would have students write about a time that they are aware of where looks were the only factor in determining a person’s worth, i.e., when women are shown as weaker because they are women. This assignment can be a personal or non personal account. I would then have them read the text. After reading *Frankenstein*, I would assign the students to watch a movie based on the novel; they could choose any movie they wanted. Students would present how closely the movie followed the novel, what was lost, if the movie kept the same message(s), and how the movie keeps the myth of Frankenstein and his creature alive. I would present a list of movies that the students could use for this assignment[[1]](#footnote-1); for this assignment students would only turn to the text and the movie. Next, I would have them read *The Walls Around Us*, by Nova Ren Suma because it pairs well with *Frankenstein*. Students would then find a literary argument and compare the two novels. For this paper students would use outside research[[2]](#footnote-2). Last, students would conduct a stasis theory trial of Victor Frankenstein. The Stasis theory is a four question process, (the facts, the definition, the quality, and the policy), that allows students to understand both sides of an argument. Students would play Victor, Elizabeth, and the Creature. Students would also play lawyers. Students would come dressed in their appointed roles. Students would then conduct a two day trial to determine Victor’s innocence or guilt in regards to the Creature’s actions. Students would use the text to format their argument. Those who are characters would use the text to defend themselves. I have used the stasis theory to end my English 1A classes and it, so far, has been a resounding success. Students become passionate when arguing in front of their peers; this passion should translate to their writing as well.

**Into the Text**

In order to get students into the text, I will assign a narrative essay. The narrative essay will be about how the students are placed into groups because of their looks. The essay will be 3-4 pages long. The students will argue how this affects them, their friends, and high school life. Although students will have an argument, they will not argue how their experience is more valid than anyone else’s experience. They will also not argue against a point or one another. Their job is to create a cohesive argument that moves the reader through the paper. Moreover, their argument should build on itself and have a lasting impact. Last, their argument should demonstrate an understanding of themselves and others in their social group. Narrative writing sometimes comes under fire; however, I have found it extremely helpful in my English 1A class. Narrative writing allows students to connect with an issue in a text in a personal way. This connection is key for a lot of students. For example, through Dr. Jonathan Lovell’s writing project class teachers explained that their students connected with the pieces through personal writing. Also, narrative writing enables students to understand that they have a voice and that someone cares what they have to say. These two things are essential to writing, getting students to write, and getting students to write with passion. In order to write a paper there must be a voice, the writer’s voice. Students have been conditioned that they do not have a voice, so teaching them that they have a voice is needed to begin the writing process. Furthermore, students have been taught that their voice does not matter. If their voice does not matter, then why should they write an essay? Students need to understand that their voice matters. They also must know that someone hears what they have to say. This move validates them not only as students but as people too. Students need to use their voice in a personal way before they can use their voice in an academic way. Furthermore, narrative writing has moves that students can use in an academic paper. For instance, structure, building an argument, and understanding how to talk to audience are some of the things narrative writing helps students begin to understand. Also, narrative writing uses descriptive language. Descriptive language is an invaluable tool. If a student can describe something in great detail, then they can take that language in order to demonstrate an argument. Last, narrative writing engenders growth on a personal level. Literature also can engender growth on a personal level; however, if students do not connect with themselves first, then they cannot connect to a text outside of them. Furthermore, these are 14-18 year olds who are trying to discover who they are and who they want to be. Part of my goal as a teacher is to teach students about themselves as well as literature. After all, literature reflects society. How can I get them to love something before I get them to love themselves? What better way to access that then narrative writing?

**Through Resources**

The through resources I will use to pair with *Frankenstein* are twofold.

1. First, I would have students watch the new *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* movie. The movie takes four high school students and forces them to enter different bodies when the students enter the Jumanji game. These body changes are not similar to who they are in real life. For example, the nerdy kid (Young Spencer played by Alex Wolff) is transformed into the muscle bound Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson. Since these characters have to undergo bodily changes but keep the same mind, this forces the teens to understand those different from themselves. It also forces the teens to act outside of their comfort zones. This body change also forces the students to develop a friendship with people who are different from them and would not fit into their high school social group. I would have the students do a short paper, 2 pages, on a character in *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*. Students would explain what bodily change that character underwent and how it affects them once they were out of the game. Students would create a small argument about how seeing people without our eyes is beneficial to all. In the conclusion students would explain how this process of changing bodies could have aided both Victor and the Creature.
2. The other through assignment I would have is for students to compare the novel to a film about the novel. Students can select their own film to compare the novel with. The students would give a presentation about what was lost in the movie. The presentation would be 4-6 slides. Also, the presentation would last about 10-15 minutes per student. The students could use images, charts, or words to explain what the movie changes. The students would then argue what these changes took away from the novel; how did these changes change our understanding of Mary Shelley’s novel. If the movie changes our understanding of the novel, what does the movie argue is the take away from the myth. Moreover, how might someone become confused between the real Frankenstein and his Creature versus Hollywood’s portrayal of them. Last, students would discuss how these film adaptation help keep Frankenstein and his Creature alive in today’s culture. Students might argue how these adaptations, while against the novel, still add to our love of the work. If Hollywood stops producing Frankenstein movies, what becomes of the legend? Students would end their presentation by explaining if the movie was good or bad as a movie and how their knowledge skews their view of the movie. This move forces students to understand that they must turn to the original source of anything before they can comment on that material. It also helps students demonstrate that movies are not complex as novels, which will hopefully encourage more reading.

**Teaching the Text**

First, I would have students read the letters at the beginning of the novel as a class. These letters are a good precursor to the novel. Also, they help unpack Victor’s frame of mind. Next, we would discuss how death is the catalyst for Victor’s creation. Should we try to defeat death, or should we accept that death is just another path; one that we all must take. The class would then discuss why Victor sees the Creature differently when he is dead versus when he is brought to life. Why does Victor have this reaction? What changes? I would try to get them to understand that Shelley might argue that death is final. So, when Victor imbues the Creature with life, Victor is in direct contrast with nature and religion, which are central themes that connect to the time of the text. The class would then need to learn about symbolism and metaphors. For example, of a metaphor Victor claims that the Creature is “my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave” (Shelley 78). The students would have to understand the anti-hero role and his/her role in texts. The class would then discuss the foreshadowing in the text. Next, the class will read until the Creature kills William. We would analyze the steps that led the Creature to come to this point. How has society created this monster? The class would also need to understand the context of *Paradise Lost*. Why is it important that the Creature learns from this text instead of *The Bible*? I will explain Milton’s text for context. The class can use the information about *Paradise Lost* to speculate how the Creature new to frame Justine. The class would discuss the trail of Justine extensively. Why did Victor do nothing? Why is Elizabeth the only one to testify on Justine’s behalf? What does this say about Victor’s character? The class will then discuss hubris and the imagery present in the text up to this point in the novel. The class would next read up to the scene where Victor destroys the Creature’s bride. Once again, the imagery present at this point in the novel needs to be discussed. We would then discuss nemesis. Is the Creature Victors nemesis or vice versa? Why? Also, the suspense in the scene needs analyzing as well. The students will then read to the end of the novel. However, we will focus on the scene where Victor and the Creature come face to face. Here the setting of this argument needs further analyzing. Furthermore, I would put the lines from Victor and the Creature side by side and see if the students can tell which one said which line. I want students to see Shelley’s juxtaposition of Victor and the Creature through this activity. Also, this would be a difficult task because at the end of the novel it is hard to distinguish Victor from the Creature, which I argue is part of Shelley’s goal in writing this novel. This argument has merit because a recent production had Johnny Lee Miller play Victor and Benedict Cumberbatch play the Creature one night and then the two would swap roles, demonstrating that looks are deceiving. Also, it illustrates that these roles are mirror images of one another, which carries on the idea that we must look beyond our eyes to find the truth. A couple of last questions: 1. How have these ideas allowed *Frankenstein* to become an Archetype for all man made monsters? 2. Who has more humanity, Victor or the Creature?

**Beyond the Text**

To go beyond the text, I would use the Stasis Theory from the Owl Purdue website.[[3]](#footnote-3) The stasis theory is a four part question based exercise. The four questions are fact, definition, quality, and policy.

1. The Fact section of the theory has questions like: What are the facts? And What happened?
2. The Definition section has questions like: What kind of problem is it? What is the nature of the problem?
3. The Quality section has questions like: Whom does it affect? How serious is the problem?
4. The Policy section has questions like: What action should be taken? What needs to happen to solve this problem. (From the Owl Purdue website).

The students would receive a comprehensive sheet with all the questions on it. The students would put Victor Frankenstein on trial; the students would try him for the Creations actions and his abonnement of his “son.” One student would play the role of Victor; one student the role of the Creature; and one student the role of Elizabeth. One student would be the judge. The judge would decide about objections, if the questions fit the stasis theory, if the questions were leading, and when to dismiss the witness. The rest of the class would be split into lawyers. The lawyers would then be split into two teams. Team A would argue for the conviction of Victor; team B would argue for Victor’s innocence. Then the teams would be broken down further. Team A would have four teams of two. For example, team A would have two members arguing the facts together. One lawyer would handle the beginning of the questions and the other lawyer would handle the cross examination. These teams would continue until the trial was complete. There would also be an opening statement lawyer and a closing statement lawyer for each team. Each lawyer would have 3-5 minutes to make their argument. This exercise helps students understand how English can be used outside of class. It also helps them understand how literature can aid in different types of arguments. Last, it lets students realize the power of their voice and their argumentative skills, all of which are essential to a good student and person. I would be the jury for the trail. I have tried to make the students be the jury, but that ends up in unfair work for the students who are lawyers and the performers. Since I am grading them, I can stand in for the jury. The lawyers and performers will come dressed for their respective roles. Dressing the part helps students get into the mindset of the character/lawyer they are portraying. This dress also helps them understand that they cannot show up to an interview in non-professional clothing. This trial has become a success in my 1A class and was a success in Dr. Mitchell’s Homer to Dante class, so I argue it will work in high school as well.

**Introduction to the Unit**

In order to introduce the unit, I would assign a group presentation. The groups would have between 4-6 students; there will be six teams to present. They will report on movies that have a similar construct to *Frankenstein*. What I mean is that these movies have a protagonist and an antagonist. For example, the students would analyze *Coco*. In *Coco* the protagonist is painted as Ernesto De La Cruz. Cruz is shown as a handsome man and has reached his dream. However, Cruz steals the songs from his best friend Hector. So, the movie shows one person (Cruz) as the hero and the hero is painted as a handsome successful man; however, the truth is that the successful person is the “ugly” skeleton. Another movie that students will present is the new *Beauty and the Beast* film. Since everyone is familiar with this story, I will move on to the next movie that the students will discuss. However, students would specifically analyze the difference between Gaston, a handsome and confident man, versus the Beast, an ugly monster who is sensitive. Another movie that the students will analyze is *The Usual Suspects*. This movie is about a group of criminals who are brought to a police lineup together. The criminals then form a group to do criminal activity together. The movie displays that Verbal (played by Kevin Spacey) is not seen as an orchestrator of the criminal group because he is disabled. The movie shows that Keaton (played by Gabriel Byrne) is the only one capable of orchestrating these heinous crimes. So, the students would analyze the difference between what is shown and what is reality. The next group of students will analyze the movie *Small Soldiers*. In the movie the strong toys are shown as soldiers, men, strong, and smart. The weak toys are the monsters who are shown as weak, hiding, non-human, and lacking intelligence. However, who becomes the true monster? Again students will discuss the difference between looks and reality. Students will comment on what the message of the movie might be as well. The last movie students will discuss is *Megamind*. In the movie Megamind, voiced by Will Ferrell, is evil because of his outward appearance. Moreover, Metro Man, voiced by Brad Pitt, is the hero because of his outward appearance. However, the movie depicts what happens when Megamind casts off his villainy because he disconnects from his looks. What does this movie argue about looks and what does it say about society?

**Resources to Extend the Unit**

*I Thought It Was Just Me (But it Isn’t)* by Dr. Brene Brown: (I read it).

This book is nonfiction. It explains shame. It defines, lets students understand, and gives an overview on shame. The book then discusses shame further by showing how it relates to fear. The book then discusses how humanity (specifically younger people) need to be aware of who they are and their surroundings and how that can influence shame and its role in life. The book then goes onto explain that the best strategy for overcoming shame is to reach out and talk to people about. For example, people should discuss shame with parents, teachers, or siblings. The book also has ways to communicate your shame to others. For instance, there are leading ways to get people to respond in a constructive way: “I need you to be supportive” is an example of one of the leading directions (169). Last, the book explains that we need to have compassion for ourselves and others about shame and not living up to our expiations. This book relates to my theme because it explains how we can see ourselves in a different and hopefully better light.

*The Bone Witch* by Rin Chupeco (I did not read): Summary from Amazon.

“In the captivating start to a new, darkly lyrical fantasy series for readers of Leigh Bardugo and Sabaa Tahir, Tea can raise the dead, but resurrection comes at a price.”

Tea brings her brother back from the dead. She finds out that she is a bone witch (something that does not sit well with others). A wise witch helps Tea and her brother with training. Tea tries to become a witch that uses elemental magic. Since she makes this choice, it leads to a much more difficult choice.

*Scythe* by Neal Shusterman (I read it):

*Scythe* is a fantasy novel. It is set in the future. At this point in time humanity has conquered all things, including death. The Thunderhead, a massive machine with a conscience, runs the world and monitors humanity. It monitors everyone excepts the scythes. Since humanity no longer dies, scythes keep population down. Scythes are the only ones who can end a life. These scythes kill people in a process known as gleaning. If a scythe gleans someone, then their family gets immunity for one year. Immunity is a treasured thing, so people treat these scythes like royalty; however, a scythe is supposed to only live with the barest of means. The book pits two teenagers, Rowan and Citra, against one another. An older scythe, Scythe Faraday, recruits these two to be his apprentices. Only one of them can get the ring, the ring which allows scythes to carry out gleanings and immunity. The novel has many twists and turns. Moreover, Rowan’s and Citra’s battle is a stand in for the main battle of the book: Old guard scythes versus the new guard. To find out which one comes out on top and which one leaves in disgrace one will have to read the novel. This novel relates because it shows students how celebrity causes a misjudgment of people, for both good and bad. We see celebrities differently; we judge them differently too.

*Hope[Less]* by Melissa Haag: (I did not read it): Summary from Amazon

“Our world is being judged, and we remain unaware.”

Gaby, the main character, is alone. She does not yet understand why she has her gift. She meets a werewolf in a different world who wants to date her, but she is not interested in him. The werewolf follows Gaby back to our world. This causes other werewolves to follow her around. Everyone Gaby sees is light a spark in her mind, which relates (although obscurely) to how we judge and how we are judged by looks.   
*Dr. Frankenstein’s Daughters* by Suzanne Weyn (I read it):

WORDS GO HERE.

*Mister Creecher* by Chris Priestley (I did not read it): Summary from Amazon

Billy, the main character, is a pickpocket and a petty thief. Mister Creecher terrifies everyone he comes in contact with. The two form a friendship that leads them Dr. Frankenstein. Frankenstein has once again promised a bride to a monster; will he deliver it this time? Mister Creecher (probably a play on words), just like Frankenstein’s Creature, will not let Victor Frankenstein go until the bride is delivered. This novel relates to my theme because it carries on the tradition of the original text. Therefore, some or most of the same themes must be carried on in this new text.

**Y.A. Pairing**

*The Walls Around Us* by Nova Ren Suma pairs well with *Frankenstein*. *The Walls Around Us* pairs well because of a myriad of reasons. First, both novels are by female authors. Although female authorship has increased over the years, it still does not compare with male authorship. Next, both novels have a wrong person convicted of a crime and sentenced to death. For instance, in *Frankenstein* Justine is wrongly convicted and sentenced to death because of William’s death. In Suma’s text Orianna Speerling is convicted of two murders and sentenced to life in prison, which is the same as death; however, she too is innocent. In both cases the evidence appears to be against the two female characters; however, little investigating is done. They look guilty; therefore, they are guilty. Moreover, in each case the true monster is guilty of the crimes. In Suma’s text the monster is Violet Dumont. She is not even brought on trial, even though she was at the scene of the crime. Everyone just assumes she is innocent because she has money and is white. In Shelley’s text the monster is Victor Frankenstein. Although the Creature kills William, I argue that if Victor takes care of his creation, then the Creature has no reason to kill. He only kills because of his appearance, which relates to why Orianna is convicted of the crime. Next, both texts have the monster lamenting the deaths of the victims; however, neither character stands up for the victims. In Violet’s case she willingly testifies against Orianna, so she is more active in the conviction than Victor is. Victor laments Justine’s conviction, but he only discusses his issue with the audience and does not speak up at Justine’s trial. Also, both novels have the characters confront their victim. For instance, Violet confronts Orianna as a ghost at the prison she was incarcerated at. Victor confronts his Creature in that famous scene on the mountain top in the snow. Since Violet confronts Orianna’s ghost, *The Walls Around Us* has a bit of magical realism to it. It also has magical realism because the things that Violet does at the prison after it has closed affects the prison in the past. Although *Frankenstein* does not have magical realism, it does have essences of it. For example, the Creature was created through a new science; a science that Victor refuses to release, which gives it a magical air. Also, when the Creature is imbued with life, the lightning and the Creature coming to life have a bit of magic (along with pseudo-science) mixed in the scene. *The Walls Around Us* has more of today’s biases, which will help students connect to the text. For example, Orianna is convicted because she has taken the weapon from Violet (so Orianna is holding the weapon when police arrive); however, Orianna is specifically convicted because she is poor and black. This will show students that Shelley’s theme still applies to today’s world. Last, both texts have part of the story told by the monstrous protagonist. This allows me to understand what lead these characters to their actions; hopefully, it will also allow the students to understand the character’s choices.

Observed Canonical Text

The text that I observed was *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. The professor I observed was Joseph Flores at Yerba Buena high school. He brought students into the lesson by creating a vocabulary list. The list were words that either he thought the students would not know or were words that the students needed to know in order to understand the text. I liked this approach to the text and will incorporate it into my teaching. Next, he had a popcorn read for act one of the text. A popcorn read is where students read a short bit and then another student reads. I like the idea of reading Shakespeare aloud; however, I would assign roles and make sure that each student at least read something. During the popcorn read, Flores would stop at times to make sure students understood the text and a metaphor or image. I intend to stop the students during the readings for my class as well. Since the text has a lot of sonnets, especially the opening to the play, Flores had students practice poems as homework. I would spend a lot more time explaining the sonnet, what its form is for, why it was popular, and unpacking the sonnets in the text. However, Flores did have the students write a sonnet as part of their activities. I will also have my students write a sonnet and put them on my walls. Last, Flores gave his students good prompts to write about in connection with the text. However, he did not give a final exam on the text, which is something I would want to incorporate. Overall, I enjoyed Flores’s class and learned a lot from it.

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2. Mellor, Anne K. *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*. Routledge, New York & London: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, Inc. 1998. This book is a great source of research. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/736/1/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)