A Brief Summary of Victor Gilanella’s Frankenstein

Based on Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel as well as subsequent popular film adaptations, Victor Gilanella’s adaptation of Frankenstein brings the classic tale of the inventor Victor Frankenstein and his “Creature” to the stage. Set in 19th century Switzerland, Frankenstein depicts the ill-fated experiments of Dr. Frankenstein as well as their deadly, far-reaching consequences. Motivated by an unbounded passion for knowledge and insights to the secrets of life and death, young Victor Frankenstein creates a Being from various human body parts and, using other scientific advances of the period, successfully brings it to life. The Creature, however, is not what Victor had anticipated, and as Victor tries to rid himself of his Creature the consequences of his experiments take effect – on himself, his friends, his family, and society as a whole.

The Inspiration for Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein

Often called the first science fiction novel and one of the greatest Gothic novels of the Romantic period, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein has long been the basis for numerous adaptations and interpretations, including the stage version written by Victor Gilanella and performed by Central Theatre Ensemble. The inspiration for the novel came to Mary Shelley during the summer of 1816 while she was staying with her husband, Romantic poet Percy Bythre Shelley, and other literary-oriented friends along the shores of Lake Geneva. During their stay, the group read aloud from a collection of German ghost stories and then, inspired by the eerie tales and the accompanying stormy weather, challenged each other to write their own ghost stories. Mary Shelley was initially uninspired but shortly thereafter a discussion regarding scientific manufacturing of humans and a terrifying nightmare germinated the story in her mind. Thus, Frankenstein was born.

Making Connections: The Play versus the Novel

As you will note after seeing the CTE production, the play differs from Shelley’s novel in many ways. However, the basic questions of the essence of humanity and limitations of the power/knowledge of man remain the same. See the Pre and Post show activities for more ideas and information.
Musical composers of the Romantic era include Chopin, Wagner, Tchaikovsky and Liszt. 

Frankenstein is an example of Romantic literature, particularly Gothic Romantic literature. Romantic literature is typically characterized by the idea that feelings are more important than thoughts and that all aspects of nature – including those most ugly and terrible – have beauty and value. Romantic literature also tends to focus on the epic hero and his unbridled passion for higher spiritual fulfillment and truth.

Gothic literature originated during the Romantic Movement and is a sub-genre of Romanticism. Gothic writers still retained many Romantic elements but deepened their focus to accentuate the darker side of human emotion and human nature. Frankenstein contains many Gothic elements as well.

Other European authors of the Romantic period include Alexander Dumas (Camille, The Three Musketeers), Victor Hugo (Les Miserables), and Johann von Goethe (Faust).

American Romantic-Gothic authors include Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry Wordsworth Longfellow.

The CTE Production

This production of Frankenstein is presented by Central Theatre Ensemble of Central Washington University. It is directed by Michael Smith. Costume designs are by Paulette Bond, and lighting design is by Christina Barrigan. Other Members of the design and management team are CWU Theatre Arts majors Albie Clementie, scenic designer; Ryan Wallace, stage manager; Keith Sadowski, assistant lighting designer; and assistant sound designer David Mackie. The cast and crew are all CWU Theatre Arts students. We are excited to welcome guest sound designer, Ronn Campbell.

CTE works as a collaborative team to produce each and every one of our shows. All costumes, set pieces and props are made or worked on in our respective shops and students are involved in the whole process. Each shop is highly involved in the production process. From that collaboration we learn so much more than just the art of theatre, we learn valuable life skills.

Things You Should Know

During this production there will be many special effects including fog and gunshots. There will also be violence and death towards an animal and child portrayed on stage. Please warn students ahead of time, as this might startle or bother some.

Frankenstein brings up a lot of delicate topics. Morals, science, and religion can cause a lot of debate and argument. This study guide is meant to help students understand differences in opinion and that there is no “right” or “wrong” answer to some of the questions posed, and that opening a dialogue is one of the best ways to promote understanding and awareness. If necessary, discuss this with your students before engaging in these delicate but important topics.

“I have never yet seen a being resembling me...what was I? The question again recurred, to be answered only with groans.”

-The Creature
Direction and Concepts

Forming a Concept:

Before beginning a production, every theatre director does extensive research into the play, its inspirations, its history, as well as its cultural connections. During this research process and through multiple readings of the script, the director begins to develop a “concept statement.” This concept statement explains the director’s critical and emotional responses to and thoughts about the play; ultimately a clear and insightful concept statement helps the director truly create the world and atmosphere of the play as well as ensure the play’s main themes are made clear through the performance. This also makes each theater company’s production of the same work to be different from all others.

CTE’s *Frankenstein* is directed by Michael Smith, a professor in the department as well as an experienced professional actor and director. In preparing for *Frankenstein*, Professor Smith – like other directors – imagined his own concept of *Frankenstein*:

Excerpts from Michael Smith’s *Frankenstein* Director’s Concept Statement:

“This story reminds us that we must take into account how any action will affect society, both on the long and short term. While the play is ultimately tragic and melodramatic in theme and structure, it is inhabited by reasonable, hopeful, positive-thinking people who are filled with love, mirth, and concern for their fellow beings. This perhaps is the greatest tragedy of all: that these people – so filled with life – will meet their end due to a monumental error in judgment. With one rash act, Victor Frankenstein sets into motion a sequence of events that result in the death of many innocent people. One might include the Creature in the list of the wronged. This begs the question: Who is the monster in this story? I leave it to the audience to decide.”

It’s Electric!

The belief that human beings can be reanimated after death by a series of electric shocks came from the theories of Luigi Galvani, an Italian Physician. In 1791 Luigi Galvani discovered that when two metal rods were inserted into a frog’s legs, and then given an electrical shock the leg would twitch. Galvani hypothesized that this twitch was caused by an “animal electric fluid” which he believe to be another form of electricity. This form was separate from the “natural form”, found in lighting and eels, and the “artificial form” produced by friction.

Alessandro Volta, a colleague of Galvani’s was the first to prove him wrong. Volta discovered that it was not the “animal fluid” that caused the leg to twitch when given electrical shocks, but instead it was the contact of the two metal rods that caused the twitch. After this discovery Volta went on to invent batteries which furthered his point that what Galvani witnessed was not another form of Electricity Galvanism is still used today, however it is not to raise the dead like Mary Shelly imagined. Strong or weak shocks of electricity are used in different aspects through out science and other areas, one example being the defibrillator, which shocks the human heart. but the movement of electrical currents between two metal rods. It was also later that Volta coined the term’s galvanism, which is the contraction of a muscle caused by an electrical current, and volt, which is the measuring unit for electrical currents.

Terms

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<th>Galvanism</th>
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<td>Volt</td>
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• Talk about the differences between theatre and film/television. What do you think will be the most important difference? Why do we still attend theatre? What is proper theatre etiquette?

• Read the novel by Mary Shelly before seeing the show. How do you think it will be brought to life? What preconceptions do you already have? Did you have preconceptions before you read the book? How did those change?

• Gothic vs. Goth - Frankenstein is done in gothic style, which is very different from the Goth we know of today. Write a brief summary on the differences between the two. What do you initially think of when you hear the word “Goth”? What surprised you when you researched “gothic”? How do you think *Frankenstein* will be a gothic show? *use the suggested websites to research gothic if you will be researching online

• Find one romantic and one gothic painting from an art book. Color copy it and share with the class. Discuss how they were different from any preconceived notions that you had about romantic and gothic.

• Frozen Tableaux part I - This activity asks students to draw on their prior knowledge and exposure to *Frankenstein* and explore their preconceptions of the story and the creature. In this activity students will also review basic elements of plot structure (conflict, climax, etc.) as well as work as a team to physicalize and summarize the story.

The Process:

Review elements of plot structure with the students.

Students should form groups of 4-6. Working as a team, each group must create three frozen physical images, or tableaux. These three images alone should tell the story of *Frankenstein* as the students know it now. (Approximately 10-20 minutes should be allotted for preparation and rehearsal.)

Have each group present their version of *Frankenstein* for the class.

Discuss the different plot points each picture highlighted as well as the differences between each group’s version of the story. Ask what versions of *Frankenstein* the students have already seen and discuss/describe them.

• Before attending the show or discussing *Frankenstein*, ask the students to journal about a situation during which they were presented with a decision that pitted “can” versus “should.” (i.e. “I *can* speed to get there on time” or “I *should* drive the speed limit even though I’ll be late.”) Describe the situation. What did you think or feel at that time. What did you decide? Do you regret the decision – why or why not?

• 19th century show and tell - Research 19th century popular scientific methods and tools. (See Additional Resources List for possible sources.) Create a visual show-and-tell of pictures of items that might appear in Victor Frankenstein’s laboratory and present them to the class, explaining each tool’s use, etc.

EALR’s in the arts Satisfied:
1.4: Applies audience skills
2.1: Applies creative process
2.2: Applies Performance process
4.4: Arts in culture and history
**Now That You’ve Seen It…**

- **The Novel** - Now that you have seen the play, discuss how it differed from the book. Were all the characters the same? Was the set how you envisioned it? How did it portray romanticism and gothic? How would you have done it differently?

- **Current Event** – find a newspaper article about a current event that you feel relates to the story of *Frankenstein*. Write a brief summary and share with the class. *Expand with Modern Frank exercise.*

- **Modern Frank** - Divide into groups and pick one newspaper article that your group thinks relates best to the story. Write a short play that modernizes *Frankenstein* and cast members of your group in different parts. Remember, not everybody needs to act. You will need a director and possibly a designer too. Present your plays to the other groups and talk about what each group came up with.

- **Frozen Tableaux II** - After seeing the play, ask group of 4-6 students to re-tell the story using only three scenes, or frozen tableaux. Like the Pre-Show variation, each group should present to the class and then all discuss the following: Which plot elements did you choose to dramatize this time? Did they change? Why or why not? Was your basic story different than your original preconception? How? Where and how do we get these interpretations of this famous story? **Extension Activity**: Watch a film version of *Frankenstein* and discuss how the film is different from the play is different from their preconceptions.

- **Creative Writing Journal Entry II** – Victor’s Journal Ask the students to re-read their original journal entry. Then, write a Journal entry on the same topic from the perspective of Victor.

- **Hero or Villain, The Great Debate** - Create a class debate centering around the question, “Is Victor Frankenstein a hero or a villain?” Using the play’s events as primary supporting material, ask each side to prove its point. **Extension Activity**: As a class, research the mock trial format and put Victor on trial with this question as its basis.

- **It’s Electric! Experiment**:

  **Material**
  - Insulated wire, 6” long; or one ½ inch wide, 6 inch Long piece of aluminum foil: 2-4 pieces
  - D-cell battery
  - Flash light bulb
  - Tape
  - Vegetable or fruit (potatoes and apples are best)

  **Prep**
  Strip the ends of the wire so that ¾ of an inch is exposed

  **Experiment**
  Have your students connect the wires/aluminum foil, battery, light bulb, and vegetable/fruit, until the bulb lights up

  **Observe**
  Have your students record their attempts by sketching out pictures and explaining, what prevented it from working

  **Questions**
  - What are the differences between the two sides of the battery?
  - Why did the wires have to be placed in a certain order?
  - What was created with this experiment?
  - What kind of current is being used?
Resources

Internet Resources -


<http://knowingpoe.thinkport.org/default_flash.asp>.

- “Knowing Poe” website

<http://www.litgothic.com/LitGothic/general.html>

- Information on gothic and romantic literature

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/exhibits/gothic/index.html>

- Pictures of gothic literature and artifacts


- An activity for a variety of Electricity lessons


- Information on Mary Shelly and the basics of the sciences found in Frankenstein

<http://www.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/frankenstein.html>

- The different aspects of Frankenstein

<http://www.amasci.com/miscon/whatis.html>

- A great resource for answering the question, what is electricity?

Literary Resources -

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. 1674

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. 1567

Film Adaptations


Script and Book