

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: *Never judge a book by its cover*

a)

“Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch.”

Frankenstein, Volume 1, Chapter V.

For Victor Frankenstein, the creature he has brought to life is wretched simply because his “countenance” is horrific. Before the creature has even learned to speak, let alone before he commits any crime, his creator condemns him as a monster because he is hideous to look at.

Ask your students to write down what they think is “monstrous”. What for them is a “monster”? After the brainstorming, ask them to underline ideas that are linked to physical appearance, and put a circle around those that convey moral judgements of actions or character. Ask them to explain their choices, and then discuss how they feel about Victor Frankenstein’s condemnation of his creation as a monster.

b)

“Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding.”

Frankenstein, Volume III, Chapter VII.

Frankenstein’s monster is painfully aware that his appearance is the cause of his rejection by mankind, and initially hopes to be accepted for his inner character. Ask your students to describe examples in modern society when criteria of physical “perfection” become criteria for discrimination. To help them, suggest thematic areas of life: employment, the media, relationships etc... Have they themselves experienced discrimination of this kind? Ask them to discuss how such discrimination could be avoided. As a class, compile a charter of suggested actions that could encourage non-discriminatory practice.

Activity 2: *Playing at God*

a)

“Mary Shelley explores the idea that life may or may not have a “divine spark”, our modern world is also deeply concerned with the moral dilemma of artificially creating (and ending) life.”

Paul Stebbings, Director of *Frankenstein*

Does man have the right to create human life? Is scientific endeavour legitimate when it delves into the secrets of creation? These questions are at the heart of Shelley’s novel, in which the creature attacks his creator: “How dare you sport thus with life?”

Ask your students to look for newspaper articles or other information on the internet about scientific and medical issues that are the subject of debate today because they are concerned with artificially creating and ending life.

Some suggestions: euthanasia, cloning, test-tube babies and current developments allowing women to give birth later and later in life, abortion...

Ask them to look for information about how different countries have chosen to regulate and/or legalize different scientific practices. Can they think of reasons why positions may differ between certain nations?

b)

Organise a class debate on the subject, allowing each pupil one minute to defend their point of view. Establish a debating point together before beginning: e.g. “Scientists should be free to pursue their research in all fields without Government regulation or restrictions – for or against?” or “Is it possible to define when scientific research is in the interests of mankind and when it is not?” or “It is common

practice for veterinary surgeons to “put down” animals suffering from incurable illnesses. Why is an equivalent possibility for human beings such a morally complex question?”

c)

“Eugenics: the science of improving the (esp.) human population by controlled breeding for desirable inherited characteristics.”

Oxford English Dictionary

Modern medical techniques such as amniocentesis allow doctors to determine the condition of a human embryo in the womb, testing for a range of disorders from a harelip to Down’s syndrome. Discuss with pupils whether they think it is important to know this kind of information before birth? Evoke historical examples of ethnic cleansing and discuss when selection becomes dangerous.

Activity 3: Guilty or not guilty?

“The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature.”

Frankenstein, Volume II, Chapter II.

a)

Ask students to share their views on capital punishment, always giving concrete examples to support their opinion. Ask them to respond to the creature’s words which implicitly challenge man’s right to take away another human being’s life as a punishment for capital crime. Discuss what responsibilities (if any) Frankenstein has towards his creation. Why could Frankenstein’s behaviour be accused of being blasphemous? (The Lord giveth and He taketh away).

b)

Justine, the Frankenstein family’s maid is unjustly convicted of murder; the creature by his own admission is a murderer; Frankenstein often expresses guilt for the deaths of the creature’s victims. Ask students to imagine they are lawyers for the defence and the prosecution in the trial of these three characters. They must come up with arguments to prove their position of guilty or not guilty. Introduce legal concepts such as “innocent until proven guilty”, “miscarriage of justice”, “mitigating circumstances”, “character witnesses”, “murder or manslaughter”. The “lawyers” can call upon fellow classmates to act out the roles of witnesses.

STUDENT WORKSHEET

An extract from *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, Volume II, Chapter VII.

The creature has been hiding for many months in an out-building of the home of the De Lacey family. Although they have never met, by listening to their conversations he has learned their language. He hopes that he will one day be able to seek help from these people, trusting in their generosity to pardon his deformities.

‘I revolved many projects, but that on which I finally fixed was to enter the **dwelling** when the blind old man should be alone. I had **sagacity** enough to discover that the unnatural **hideousness** of my person was the chief object of horror with those who had formerly **beheld** me. My voice, although **harsh**, had nothing terrible in it; I thought, therefore, that if in the absence of his children I could gain the **good will** and mediation of the old De Lacey, I might by his means be tolerated by my younger protectors.

...The creature plucks up the courage to enter the cottage when the blind man, De Lacey, is alone. He is welcomed and the creature tries to explain his situation and that he wishes to seek help from friends...

"I am now going to claim the protection of some friends, whom I sincerely love, and of whose favour I have some hopes."

"Are they Germans?"

"No, they are French. But let us change the subject. I am an **unfortunate** and **deserted** creature, I look around and I have no relation or friend upon earth. These amiable people to whom I go have never seen me and know little of me. I am full of fears, for if I fail there, I am an **outcast** in the world forever."

"Do not despair. To be friendless is indeed to be unfortunate, but the hearts of men, when **unprejudiced** by any obvious self-interest, are full of brotherly love and charity. Rely, therefore, on your hopes; and if these friends are good and amiable, do not **despair**."

"They are kind--they are the most excellent creatures in the world; but, unfortunately, they are prejudiced against me. I have good **dispositions**; my life has been **hitherto** harmless and in some degree beneficial; but a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable monster."

...

"If you will unreservedly **confide** to me the particulars of your tale, I perhaps may be of use in undeceiving them. I am blind and cannot judge of your **countenance**, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere. I am poor and an exile, but it will afford me true pleasure to be in any way serviceable to a human creature."

"Excellent man! I thank you and accept your generous offer. You raise me from the **dust** by this kindness; and I trust that, by your aid, I shall not be driven from the society and sympathy of your fellow creatures."

...Having gained De Lacey's confidence, the creature is on the point of revealing to him that he in reality he seeks protection from the De Lacey family itself, but...

At that moment I heard the steps of my younger protectors. I had not a moment to lose, but seizing the hand of the old man, I cried, "Now is the time! Save and protect me! You and your family are the friends whom I seek."

Do not you **desert** me in the hour of trial!"

"Great God!" exclaimed the old man. "Who are you?"

"At that instant the cottage door was opened, and Felix, Safie, and Agatha entered. Who can describe their horror and **consternation** on beholding me? Agatha fainted, and Safie, unable to attend to her friend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung, in a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sank within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained. I saw him on the point of repeating his blow, when, overcome by pain and **anguish**, I quitted the cottage, and in the general **tumult** escaped unperceived to my **hovel**."

A. Understanding words in context

- Underline any words in the above extract that you can understand because they are similar to French words. Look up in your dictionary their exact meaning to check that they are not "faux amis";
- The word list below contains vocabulary you can understand from its context in the story. It is accompanied by a list of explanations that are not in the correct order. Draw a line from each word to its correct meaning.

anguish:	habitation, home, house, living-place
beheld:	ugliness
confide:	lonely, abandoned
consternation:	looked at
countenance:	good intentions, support
desert:	hard, rough, ugly
deserted:	until now
despair:	wisdom, intelligence
dispositions:	thrown out, rejected person
dust:	pain, suffering
dwelling:	tell, recount
good will:	fear, surprise, shock
harsh:	face, appearance, expression
hideousness:	abandon
hitherto:	to give up hope
hovel:	abilities, character
outcast:	dirt, earth, ground, a metaphor for poverty
sagacity:	unhappy, unlucky
tumult:	without prior opinion, not influenced by former beliefs
unfortunate:	commotion, chaos
unprejudiced:	very small and uncomfortable hut, house

B. Understanding the situation

Paragraph 1: Why does the creature decide to approach the old man when he is alone?

Paragraph 3: What is the creature most afraid of?

Paragraph 4: According to the old man, what prevents human beings from showing kindness to others?

Paragraph 5: What positive aspects does the creature feel should help him?

Paragraph 6: What does the old man ask the creature to do and why?

Paragraph 8: Whose help is the creature looking for?

Paragraph 9: Who attacks who? What does the creature decide not to do?

C. Horror stories

Mary Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* as the result of a ghost storytelling challenge made amongst literary friends.

- Describe an occasion when you have told horror stories with friends: where did it take place? Did you manage to scare each other and how?

- Imagine the opening sentence of a ghost story.

Draw a picture of the setting for your story. Make a list of adjectives that describe where the story takes place.

- Headlines: choose one of the remarkable events in the *Frankenstein* story (e.g. the creation of the monster, Justine's court case, Victor Frankenstein is falsely accused of murdering his friend Henry Clerval etc...) and imagine the headline that would be used in a newspaper or on television. Then write the news article, and imagine which 'photos could be used, or who could be interviewed.