

# Lesson Plan: The Modern Prometheus - Crafting a Story with Mary Shelley

## Materials Needed:

- Access to the internet for research (biographies, articles, videos)
- A copy of or access to excerpts from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Project Gutenberg offers it for free)
- Notebook and pen/pencil or a word processing program
- Optional: Art supplies (for comic strip option), tea and biscuits (for atmosphere!)

## 1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Analyze how Mary Shelley's personal experiences, particularly loss, intellectual upbringing, and relationships, influenced the themes in *Frankenstein*.
- Identify key elements of the Gothic and Romantic literary movements in Shelley's work.
- Synthesize research and literary analysis to create an original piece of narrative writing inspired by the themes and circumstances of *Frankenstein's* creation.
- Evaluate the connection between an author's life and their creative output, moving beyond simple biography to understand artistic inspiration.

## 2. Alignment with ELA Standards (High School Level)

- **RL.11-12.2:** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text.
- **RL.11-12.3:** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story.
- **W.11-12.3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

## 3. Lesson Activities & Instructional Strategy

### Part 1: The Spark of an Idea (30 minutes)

**Goal:** To set the scene and engage the student's curiosity.

1. **Warm-Up Discussion:** Begin with a "what if" scenario. Ask the student: "*Imagine you are trapped indoors on a stormy, gloomy holiday with a group of famous, competitive, and brilliant writers. To pass the time, your host challenges everyone to write the most terrifying ghost story they can imagine. What would you write about? What fears would you tap into?*" Discuss their ideas.
2. **Introduce the Context:** Explain that this exact scenario happened in 1816 at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland. The guests included Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and 18-year-old Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (soon to be Mary Shelley). This challenge led to the creation of *Frankenstein*.

3. **Guided Research:** Have the student spend 20 minutes researching the "year without a summer" and the key events in Mary Shelley's life up to 1816. Encourage them to focus on:
- Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft (a famous feminist philosopher who died just after Mary was born).
  - Her father, William Godwin (a radical political philosopher).
  - Her relationship with Percy Bysshe Shelley.
  - Her experiences with childbirth and the loss of her first child.

The student should take notes, focusing on feelings and major life events, not just dates.

## Part 2: Anatomy of a Masterpiece (45 minutes)

**Goal:** To connect Shelley's life to the core themes of her novel.

1. **Thematic Discussion:** Using their research notes, discuss how Shelley's life might have influenced the major themes of *Frankenstein*. Use these guiding questions:

**Creation & Abandonment:** How might Mary's feelings about her own mother's death or the loss of her baby connect to Victor Frankenstein creating life and then immediately abandoning it?

**The Outsider:** Mary ran away with a married man and was often seen as an outcast. How is this reflected in the Creature's experience?

**Dangerous Knowledge:** Mary grew up surrounded by brilliant, radical thinkers. How does the novel explore the idea that ambition and the pursuit of knowledge can be dangerous?

2. **Textual Evidence:** Have the student find one short passage from *Frankenstein* that strongly reflects one of these themes. For example, the Creature's plea to Victor, or Victor's anguish after his creation comes to life. They should read it aloud and explain the connection.

## Part 3: The Creative Challenge - Your Ghost Story (60-90 minutes)

**Goal:** To apply understanding through a creative, hands-on project.

1. **The Prompt:** "It's your turn to participate in the ghost story challenge at Villa Diodati. Drawing inspiration from one of the major life events or themes you studied in Mary Shelley's life, write your own short, atmospheric story or scene. Your story should not be a summary of *Frankenstein*, but a new tale that explores a similar feeling: loneliness, the horror of unnatural creation, the grief of loss, or the guilt of abandonment."
2. **Student Choice & Brainstorming:** Offer several formats for the final product to cater to different strengths:
- A 500-750 word short story.
  - A diary entry from the perspective of a new character who has created something they regret.
  - A one-page comic strip or graphic narrative telling the story visually.
  - A script for a short, two-character scene.

Help the student brainstorm their core idea before they begin writing.

3. **Creative Work Time:** Allow the student ample time to draft their story. Encourage them to focus on creating a strong mood and emotional impact, just as Shelley did. (This is a great time to put on some stormy sound effects and brew some tea for atmosphere!)

## Part 4: Reflection and Sharing (15 minutes)

**Goal:** To articulate the creative process and solidify learning.

1. **Author's Chair:** Have the student share their completed work.
2. **Wrap-Up Discussion:** Ask the student to reflect on the process.
  - Which part of Mary Shelley's story or themes did you choose to focus on, and why?
  - How did trying to write your own story change your perspective on what Mary Shelley accomplished?
  - Do you think an author's personal life is essential to understanding their work? Why or why not?

## 4. Differentiation and Extensions

- **For Support:** Provide a story starter, such as: "The rain had not stopped for days. In my workshop, the thing I had pieced together from forgotten parts was beginning to stir, and all I felt was dread..." Or, offer a list of "mood words" (e.g., desolate, grotesque, yearning, ominous) to help guide their writing tone.
- **For Extension:** Challenge the student to research another guest from the Villa Diodati (like Lord Byron or John Polidori, who wrote "The Vampyre," a precursor to Dracula) and write a short analysis comparing their creative output from that summer to Shelley's. Another option is to compare a chapter from *Frankenstein* with a scene from a modern film adaptation and analyze the changes made.

## 5. Assessment

The student's creative project will be assessed based on the following simple rubric:

- **Thematic Connection (1-5 pts):** How clearly does the story connect to a core theme from Mary Shelley's life or *Frankenstein* (e.g., creation, abandonment, loneliness)?
- **Creativity & Originality (1-5 pts):** Does the project present a fresh idea while still honoring the spirit of the inspiration?
- **Atmosphere & Tone (1-5 pts):** How effectively does the writing or art establish a Gothic, moody, or emotionally resonant tone?
- **Effort & Completion (1-5 pts):** Was the project completed thoughtfully and did it meet the requirements of the chosen format?

The student's participation in discussions will be formatively assessed to check for understanding throughout the lesson.