Lesson plan

Resources
- **Resource A** – Extract from *Frankenstein* – Vol.1, Ch. 4
- **Resource B** – Extract from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*
- Sheets of blank A4 paper
- **Resource C** – The genesis of the novel
- **Resource D** – *An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump* (1768)
- **Resource E** – *Frankenstein* and the Prometheus myth
- **Resource F** – *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost*
- **Resource G** – *Frankenstein* – Vol.1, Ch. 4, with Bible references
- **Resource H** – Film clip of *Frankenstein* Vol.1, Ch. 4.

Learning objectives
- To analyse the text closely
- To consider the text as a Gothic narrative
- To consider the text against the context of other writings on science and creation.

Introduction – reading and understanding the passage
- Divide the class into pairs and distribute **Resource A** to each pair. One person should read the text as a dramatic monologue whilst the other should play the monster, observing the actions described in the text.
  - Try to convey Frankenstein’s sense of rising horror and panic.

Paragraph one - close analysis
(from ‘It was on a dreary night’ to ‘...agitated its limbs’)
- Using **Resource A** in small groups discuss the following points:
  - How would you describe the atmosphere of this passage?
  - Why do you think the author sets this scene in November, at one in the morning?
  - ‘It was on a dreary night’. Find other negative words, in the same field as ‘dreary’
    - What is the cumulative effect of these words?
  - Put in your own words, ‘I beheld the accomplishment of my toils’
    - What are the usual associations of ‘accomplishment’?
    - Do you think the word is used ironically here?
  - Which words or images are suggestive of death in this paragraph?
    - Why would the writer create a feeling of death in a scene about the ‘spark’ of life?
  - Note the choice of word ‘creature’. We normally use this word to denote animals, but what does it mean here?
  - ‘I collected the instruments of life around me’. What do you imagine the ‘instruments of life’ are?
    - Where would Frankenstein collect them?
    - Oddly he says nothing about using them, and in the next sentence his creation awakes. How do you explain this?
  - Having read the whole paragraph, what words would you use to describe Frankenstein’s state of mind?
  - Groups feed back findings in whole class discussion.

*Frankenstein* as a gothic narrative
- Read **Resource B**, a passage from the novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), by Anne Radcliffe. In small groups look through the two passages and discuss what similarities you can find. Use the following pointers:
  - Radcliffe uses the phrase ‘dreadful sublimity’. Here this refers to the vast powers of nature, making man’s power seem very small.
Do any aspects of Frankenstein suggest 'dreadful sublimity'?

Anne Radcliffe was a popular author of Gothic novels. These usually described frightening stories, often with a medieval and supernatural element, set amid ruins, haunted castles and gloomy landscapes.

On this short description, what is - and is not - Gothic about Frankenstein?

Anne Radcliffe was also a pioneer of word-painting, a literary technique whereby we follow the gaze of a character as it moves around a place (like a film camera).

Look at the extract from Frankenstein again. Does the author use word-painting? Does the description match the view of Frankenstein looking around?

Compared to the passage from Udolpho, is the writing here smooth or jumpy?

At the end of paragraph one, what kind of movement is suggested by 'convulsive' and 'agitated'?

What kind of energy is suggested by the words 'spark' and 'convulsive' in combination?

'How can I describe ...' To whom is Frankenstein talking?

What do Frankenstein and the person he is speaking to have in common?

Why do you think Shelley organised the story in this way, so that most of it is spoken aloud, some time after the events described?

Why is the Creature’s breath and motion described as a 'catastrophe' and what do you think Frankenstein means by referring to the creature as a 'wretch'?

What does the description of the creature tell us about Frankenstein himself?

How reliable do you think his description is?

What do you make of the fact that Frankenstein has shifted from ‘it’ to ‘he’ when referring to the creature?

What do you think is the tone of voice of ‘Beautiful! – Great God!’?

Previously Frankenstein has said that he could look on dead bodies without shuddering, yet now he is revolted by the sight of the body he has constructed. How do you explain this change?

The language of alienation

Individually or in pairs, around your picture(s) of the Creature, write all the words that Frankenstein has used to describe the being he has created.

Under each word, write out the ideas and images you associate with it.

In today’s society, when might a person be referred to as something else (for example, an animal)?

What ideas are being expressed when this occurs?

Individually, write a sentence or two explaining Frankenstein’s reaction to his creation. You may find it helpful to refer to the following words:

Paragraphs two & three – shaping the reader’s perceptions
(from ‘How can I describe ...’ to ‘... given life’)
Intertextuality and the context of reception: *Frankenstein - Vol. 1, Ch. 4* by Mary Shelley

- **dehumanise**: 1. to make people stop feeling and behaving like normal people, especially by treating them very badly; 2. to make people seem less real or important than normal people (Macmillan online dictionary)
- **demonize, demonise**: 1. to make into or like a demon 2. to subject to demonic influence 3. to mark out or describe as evil or culpable (Collins)
- **other, othering**: The practice of ‘othering’ generally leads to a polarisation of people into two groups: an ‘us’ group (or ‘in-group’), which normally includes the proponent of an idea, and his or her intended audience; and a ‘them’ group (or ‘out-group’) who are the people who are used as an object for hate or mistrust. (Rational Wiki: [http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Other](http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Other))

- Discuss the different explanations you have come up with.
- To what extent do these terms help us to make sense of Frankenstein’s reaction?
  - What is the effect of the repetition of ‘convulsed’ and ‘yellow’ from earlier in the passage?
  - As well as *what* he says, is there anything in the way Frankenstein speaks which expresses his state of mind?
- Highlight the active verbs in paragraph three, from ‘the beauty vanished ...’
  - What effect does the author create through the use of active verbs?
  - The creature wakes up, and Frankenstein falls on the bed and sleeps. What reason does he give for this bizarre behaviour?
    - How satisfying do you find his explanation?
    - Are we told the events in exactly the order in which they occurred?
    - Does the monster do anything which suggests it is dangerous?
    - ‘Frankenstein’s disgust with the monster is really his disgust with himself’. Discuss this suggestion.
    - Why might Frankenstein feel self-disgust?

- To show your awareness of how Shelley has shaped the reader’s perception of the Creature, write out the same episode as described in [Resource A](http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Other), but told from the point of view of the Creature.

**Frankenstein and the act of creation**

Distribute [Resource C](http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Other) to the class, in which Mary Shelley records how the story came to her in the night, when Lord Byron had suggested to various friends that they should all think of a ghost story overnight.

- Highlight the similarities between Mary Shelley’s account of the creation of the story of *Frankenstein* [Resource C], and Frankenstein’s description of the creation of the monster [Resource A]?
  - What do both passages suggest about the author’s idea of creation and the creative process?

- Look carefully at [Resource D](http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Other), a painting of a scientist, looking out at the viewer, extracting air from inside a glass case, where a bird is dying.
  - What do the painting and the passage in *Frankenstein* have in common?
  - Are there any differences?
  - What feelings about scientific discovery are conveyed by the two works?
Intertextuality and the context of reception: 
*Frankenstein* - Vol. 1, Ch. 4 by Mary Shelley

**Intertextuality and the context of reception**
- Divide the class into three groups, allocating to each one of the literary contexts below with the associated resource(s).
  - When each group has completed their task, jigsaw the groups so that three new groups are formed, each comprising members from groups A B & C.
  - Distribute the resources to everyone and allow class members to address the other tasks guided by the relevant group members.
  - If not feasible previously, watch Resource H as a whole class.

**Group A - The Prometheus Myth**
- *Frankenstein* is subtitled ‘The Modern Prometheus’. According to classical mythology, Prometheus was responsible for creating humankind. Individually fill in the Resource E chart.
  - Feed back responses within the group.

**Group B - Milton, *Paradise Lost***
- Milton was an important influence on Mary Shelley, and later the Creature reads *Paradise Lost* and sees his own story in it. Resource F is Milton’s description of the creation of man, as related by the Archangel Raphael to the first human, Adam.
  - In pairs read it through and consider how the passage from *Frankenstein* relates to it.
  - How do Frankenstein and the Creature resemble Adam, which means ‘man’ in the narrative?
  - Feed back responses within the group.

**Group C - The biblical account of Creation**
- Shelley’s original audience would be very familiar with the biblical account of how God created the world and the first human beings, and his expression of satisfaction that it was ‘good’.
  - Read Resource G which sets the making of the Creature against this context. (For the complete narrative go to http://texts.crossref-it.info/bible/genesis/1 and http://texts.crossref-it.info/bible/genesis/2.)
  - Watch Resource H (or delay this until all the groups have had their plenary sessions).
  - In what ways is Frankenstein a ‘nightmare version’ of the story of the Creation of man in *Genesis*?
    - What might Shelley’s original readership have thought about Dr Frankenstein ‘playing God’?
  - The ethical issue of the creation of life is still discussed, particularly in the fields of cloning and stem cell research.
  - Share (or research) what you can about these fields, and discuss how they inform your reading of the novel – and how the novel might affect your attitude to these issues.
  - Feed back responses within the group.
It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! -- Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. ... At length ... I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. ... I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch -- the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the court-yard ... listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.
Resource B

The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), by Anne Radcliffe

At this point the heroine, Emily, is being taken to Italy by her sinister aunt.

At length, the travellers began to ascend among the Apennines. The immense pine-forests, which, at that period, overhung these mountains, and between which the road wound, excluded all view but of the cliffs aspiring above, except, that, now and then, an opening through the dark woods allowed the eye a momentary glimpse of the country below. The gloom of these shades, their solitary silence, except when the breeze swept over their summits, the tremendous precipices of the mountains, that came partially to the eye, each assisted to raise the solemnity of Emily's feelings into awe; she saw only images of gloomy grandeur, or of dreadful sublimity, around her; other images, equally gloomy and equally terrible, gleamed on her imagination.
When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, —I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handiwork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.
Resource D
Joseph Wright of Derby’s painting, *An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump* (1768) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Experiment_on_a_Bird_in_the_Air_Pump](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Experiment_on_a_Bird_in_the_Air_Pump))
### Resource E - *Frankenstein* and the Prometheus myth

What parallels can you find between *Frankenstein* and these excerpts about Prometheus from *Aesop’s Fables*?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aesop’s account of Prometheus</th>
<th>Shelley’s account of the Creature</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Following Zeus’s orders, Prometheus fashioned humans and animals. When Zeus saw that the animals far outnumbered the humans, he ordered Prometheus to reduce the number of the animals by turning them into people. Prometheus did as he was told, and as a result those people who were originally animals have a human body but the soul of an animal.’ Aesop, Fables 515</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The clay which Prometheus used when he fashioned man was not mixed with water but with tears. Therefore, one should not try to dispense entirely with tears, since they are inevitable. (Aesop, Fables 516 (from Themistius, Orations 32) (trans. Gibbs)</td>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>3. According to classical legend, Prometheus stole fire from the gods to improve man’s condition. For this he was punished by Zeus, the King of the gods (see picture): <a href="http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/T20.1C.html">http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/T20.1C.html</a></td>
<td>3.</td>
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a) What is the equivalent to Prometheus’s torment in *Frankenstein*?

b) In what ways do Frankenstein’s actions make him a modern Prometheus?
Resource F

*Paradise Lost* Bk 7, 1.519-547

Let us make now Man in our image, Man
In our similitude, and let them rule [ 520 ]
Over the Fish and Fowle of Sea and Aire,
Beast of the Field, and over all the Earth,
And every creeping thing that creeps the ground.
This said, he formd thee, Adam, thee O Man
Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breath’d [ 525 ]
The breath of Life; in his own Image hee
Created thee, in the Image of God
Express, and thou becam’st a living Soul.
Male he created thee, but thy consort
Female for Race; then bless’d Mankinde, and said, [ 530 ]
Be fruitful, multiplie, and fill the Earth,
Subdue it, and throughout Dominion hold
Over Fish of the Sea, and Fowle of the Aire,
And every living thing that moves on the Earth.
Wherever thus created, for no place [ 535 ]
Is yet distinct by name, thence, as thou know’st
He brought thee into this delicious Grove,
This Garden, planted with the Trees of God,
Delectable both to behold and taste;
And freely all thir pleasant fruit for food [ 540 ]
Gave thee, all sorts are here that all th’ Earth yields,
Varietie without end; but of the Tree
Which tasted works knowledge of Good and Evil,
Thou mai’st not; in the day thou eat’st, thou di’st;
Death is the penaltie impos’d, beware, [ 545 ]
And govern well thy appetite, least sin
Surprise thee, and her black attendant Death.
Intertextuality and the context of reception: 
*Frankenstein - Vol. 1, Ch. 4* by Mary Shelley

Resource G

*Frankenstein - Vol 1, Ch 4, and the biblical account of Creation*

It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

**Genesis 2:7**  
And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! -- Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips.

**Genesis 1:26-27**  
And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness … So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health.

**Genesis 2:2**  
And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.
I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. ... At length ... I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. ... I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch -- the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the court-yard ... listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.

*Genesis 1:28,31*  
28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it ...  
31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.