

Brainstorming for *Frankenstein/1984* MLA Argumentative/Literary Essays
Proposal due date (See instructions at end of ideas list): No later than Fri., February 22nd.
Final draft due: Mon., March 11th

***Frankenstein* Topics**

1. Science can go too far

The term "Frankenstein foods" - applied to genetically modified products - suggests the name of the novel has become a byword for bad science. But this metaphor is unfair, says Angela Wright, a lecturer in Romantic literature at the University of Sheffield.

"There's evidence that she was very conversant with the scientists of her day. But she believed in the sanctity of human life and knew the work of Lawrence and Abernethy, who were working in Edinburgh in the 1810s in dissection theatres, on the re-animation of corpses. [Her husband] Percy Shelley was also very interested in that."

She thought these people had crossed a line, says Wright, but she had a lot of admiration for scientific thought in general.

2. Actions have consequences

It's not just the responsibility of creating life that Shelley wants to emphasize, says Wright, and this is clear in the letters of Robert Walton that frame the Frankenstein story - the wider narrative that is often overlooked.

Walton is the seafarer who rescues Frankenstein from an ice float deep in the Arctic, as the scientist pursues the monster. Encouraged by Frankenstein, the captain ignores the pleas of his crew to turn back, actions that Shelley appears to condemn.

"Walton doesn't take responsibility for the safety of his men and that is criticised within the novel. He comes round but regretfully, simply because the atmospheric conditions are against him, not out of concern for his men.

"He seems to be a very shadowy double of Victor Frankenstein in many ways, because he pants for tales of romance and adventure in the same way."

3. Don't play God

"As suggested by the novel's subtitle, *The Modern Prometheus*, Victor Frankenstein is an example of the Romantic over-reacher, who transgresses boundaries between the human and the divine," says Marie Mulvey-Roberts, author of *Dangerous Bodies: Corporeality and the Gothic*.

According to Greek myth, Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to man, and suffered eternal punishment. The sense that Frankenstein has pursued forbidden knowledge is further underlined by the references to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a work the creature reads and recites. His rejection by his creator can be seen as a second Fall of Man.

4. Shelley's maternal guilt

Many critics think the novel is shaped by the tragic events in Shelley's own life. Her mother died days after she was born and Shelley herself lost her first child, born prematurely.

"The author expels her own guilt both for having caused her mother's death and for having failed to produce a healthy son for Percy, as his legal wife Harriet had done three months earlier.

5. Monsters are not born monsters

The creature's initial innocence suggests you are not born a monster, says Vic Sage, a professor at the University of East Anglia who has written extensively on the Gothic tradition.

"When he looks into the pool and sees himself, you want to shout out at him 'You're not a monster, you're OK.'" Many of the old films didn't even give the monster a voice, he says, only capable of

grunting the odd word. Even with [director] James Whale, it doesn't ever feel like history could ever be on Boris Karloff's side. They are thought to be great films but they missed the point of the book. "Mary Shelley gave him a voice. It's great that he talks like an 18th Century philosopher because then you have this disparity between his appearance and his speech, which tests the viewer."

6. Difference should be celebrated, not shunned

Today's society has a greater understanding of the notion of difference, says Dr Sage, so the scene where Frankenstein rejects his creation, so repulsed is he by his disfigurement, has a wider resonance. "Everyone reading it now knows that she's dramatizing difference in the most absolute way possible. Differences in race and class. That's why it's very important to think that the creature is a creature and not a monster, and that he has a voice."

7. Christian allegory

The book is really a dialogue between reactionary and progressive points of view, says Sage, and this applies to the question of the presence of Milton and the Christian story - the treatment of the Fall - which it puts under the glass.

"The creature has read Milton but, as he says, he feels more like the fallen angel than Adam in that story, because he has to play the part of the outcast. Mary Shelley dramatises the conflict between the Romantic view of Satan as a Promethean hero, out to take God's place, which was the projection of a set of male poets - Blake, Shelley, Byron, others, for example - and the havoc that such idealistic projects wreak domestically, in people's actual lives."

1984 Topics

1. **Mass Surveillance.** Because of course, this is what the story is most well known for, although we'll see there's a lot more to it than that. The protagonist, a gov't party man named Winston, lives in a world covered in cameras, and under 24/7 surveillance. This is eerily similar to the recent leaks by Snowden, PRISM, and everything we're learning about the NSA surveillance in our world. Privacy is a relic.
2. **Endless War on Ever-Changing Enemies.** The book takes place in a totalitarian England, under the rule of English Socialism, or INGSOC. This land, now called Oceania, is allied with Eastasia and at constant war with Eurasia. Or was it the other way around? The tides of war constantly shift and once the government says The Enemy is now renamed, it must be so. Everything changes to reflect this fact, and mentioning the shift is a crime. This is similar to the constant New Face of Terror we've seen with Taliban/Al Qaeda/ISIS, or how war changes from Iran/Iraq/Afghanistan/Syria constantly, as if these nations were interchangeable.
3. **Mass Mind Control through Press and Propaganda.** Winston works as a media journalist whose job it is to edit and rewrite historical records to support the INGSOC causes. This means altering facts, fabricating entirely false information and then printing it as war propaganda, and destroying the evidence of his tampering. He's done this for years without question, to him it's just a job. Again, we are familiar with the way the Press controls and contains the flow of information in our society, and as Winston realizes in the book, If It isn't recorded in history... it never happened. He writes a fact out of existence, and it ceases having ever been true at all.

4. **Subversive Mind Control through Education and Language.** Another branch of government is in control of education and begins to rewrite language into Newspeak. Words like "bad" are replaced with the less offensive "ungood". The idea being that by contorting language you can control the direction of peoples' very thoughts, and make certain lines of logic impossible to consider and literally unspeakable. If this is occurring in our current society? What recent concerns are there about education and vocabulary?
5. **The Criminalization of Free Thought.** Thought Crime in Winston's world is the act of having any subversive, original, or unsanctioned thought, and results in the individual suspected to be made to Disappear. Literally every trace and record of your existence is wiped from the public memory. Enemies who don't exist are the easiest to control. Of course Big Brother doesn't have to prove you had a criminal thought, just arrest you under the suspicion that you might have. We haven't seen anything like that recently, have we? It's not like banning people for free thinking speech and erasing their posts...
6. **Psychological Mind Control through Paranoia and Ritual.** Every day, the citizenry are forced to partake in The 2 Minute Hate, a brainwashing exercise where citizens spew curses and rage against Goldstein, the leader of an underground resistance party and terrorist cell group. Again, the similarities are almost too obvious to mention. Are we expected to hate all members of a certain race or country, or spew hateful words against people we don't even know in order to promote the needs of government?
7. In another major plot twist, we eventually discover that the Resistance which Winston runs away to join, does not even exist. In order to trap would-be rebels, INGSOC fabricated their own dummy-resistance army. Anyone who seeks to fight them gets swept into it and eliminated. Even Goldstein, the man everyone is conditioned to hate, is illusory. What matters is they are being conditioned to obey, and hate the idea of what he represents: Free Thought, and Resistance. Limited hangouts, media skills, pinning the blame for attacks on individuals who could not possibly be responsible for them... It's all there to control us.
8. **The Hope Lies with the People.** Winston, a member of government, realizes that the only way change will ever occur is if the regular members of the population, the proletarians, or "Proles" as he calls them, openly choose to revolt. The problem is these people live relatively comfortable lives, are ignorant of the truth, and seem resistant to the idea of the government conspiracies he tries to express to them. He knows that they are so numerous and influential that the course of the future will be determined by their action or failure to act. He also knows that the herd mentality of the masses means that change will probably never happen.

Based on the 15 choices above...# _____ reminds me of today because...

Directions: Below, jot down your ideas for a thesis statement, counterclaim, and two claims. Write a proposal in the space below for your MLA argumentative/literary essay. Note two outside resources and two text references.

Also, prepare your arguments to share with Mrs. O'Janpa no later than Fri., February 22nd.

* First come...first serve. No more than four students per topic above. Not guaranteed until after prepared interview with teacher.