

RELATED FILMS




NOTE FOR TEACHERS:

This supplement expands on curriculum **Section Four: Frankenstein on Stage and Screen; Other Adaptations**. It contains an alternate discussion focus for the James Whale film and additional film suggestions related to Frankenstein with discussion points and activities.

1. *Frankenstein: The Man Who Made a Monster* (James Whale/1931/71 minutes)

While the Creature is never precisely described in Mary Shelley's novel, it can be argued that Boris Karloff's portrayal of the Creature continues to be the dominant visual image to this day. This can be attributed to various creative decisions on Karloff's part as an actor, but is also in large part due to the makeup. Jack P. Pierce, who went on to provide makeup for other horror films such as *Dracula*, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *The Wolf Man*, and *Phantom of the Opera*, worked for weeks with Karloff to combine Pierce and Whale's ideas and create the look of the movie's monster. However, contemporary viewers may struggle to find the 1931 film as scary today as it was to its original audiences. It is theorized that "...horror like humor is a cultural construct redefined by each new generation."¹

DISCUSSION PROMPTS:




-  Once the students have read the novel, have them reflect on whether they find the story frightening. Do the ideas presented in the book feel outdated or too familiar?
-  Have the students screen *Frankenstein: The Man Who Made a Monster*. Ask students to discuss cinematic elements that may have been terrifying to a 1931 audience. Are these techniques still used today in film? What do you think defines a horror/scary movie? Do any modern films remind them of Whale's film?
-  Ask students to reimagine a scene from the 1931 film. Develop a performance style for the Creature or the bride from the 1935 sequel. Include elements such as costume design or effects makeup. For example, will their version speak? How will he/she move? How will they depict the otherness of the Creature?

¹ Single, Lori Leathers. "Reading Against the Grain: The U.S. Reception of Branagh's "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein." *Studies in Popular Culture*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (October 1998), p.5.

2. *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (Kenneth Branagh/1994/123 minutes)

In the 1994 film *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, director and star Kenneth Branagh attempted to adapt the novel more faithfully than the 1931 Whale film. Despite innovative makeup, modern special effects, and the inclusion of novel elements such as the Robert Walton storyline, the film is generally considered to be a flop.² It is criticized for lacking the iconic power of either the original novel or the Whale film.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS:





-  Ask the students to discuss the idea of adaptation. What are some of their favorite literary adaptations (to film)? Why are they successful? How do the films differ from the books?
-  Ask students to debate the idea of the “book is always better than the movie.” Are there exceptions to this? What are examples?
-  Compare *The Bride of Frankenstein* and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* and their attempts to add Mary Shelley as a character to her own novel. In *Bride*, Elsa Lanchester plays a double role as Mary Shelley/The Bride. In the Branagh film, the character of Elizabeth is updated to resemble Branagh's version of Mary Shelley's personality. After Elizabeth is murdered, she is reanimated as a second Creature (using other body parts from the character of Justine) and is ultimately so distraught to find out what's been done to her that she commits suicide. Ask students to discuss how they might add Mary Shelley to an adaptation of the novel.

² Single, Lori Leathers. “Reading Against the Grain: The U.S. Reception of Branagh’s “Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein.” *Studies in Popular Culture*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (October 1998), p.1.

3. *The Iron Giant* (Brad Bird/1999/86-90 minutes)

The film *The Iron Giant* “tells the tale of an artificial being that, in precise contrast to Frankenstein’s monster, receives the proper nurturing and moral education from a warm-hearted surrogate parent...”³ This animated film tells the story of an interstellar robot who crashes on Earth with no memories or programming and is adopted by a human boy, Hogarth. Like the Creature of Shelley’s novel, the robot is a blank slate. *The Iron Giant* “...matches Shelley’s novel almost point for point in terms of the monster’s education and emotional development, with each deviation remaining explicitly within the bounds of how, in [director] Bird’s understanding, Shelley’s monster might have ended up.”⁴ This contemporary reimagining features an absent creator, but unlike Mary Shelley’s novel, imagines a scenario where characters reminiscent of the de Lacey family actually accept the Creature. The character of the Iron Giant is a destructive machine built for war. But, due to his education from Hogarth, the giant is able to override his programming and protect his new human family.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS:

-  Before viewing *The Iron Giant*, ask the students to reflect on the Creature’s lack of parenting and discuss how this influenced the development of his character.
-  Ask students to consider nature vs. nurture. Do they think the Creature’s true nature was violent? Or is it a product of his lack of nurturing by Victor Frankenstein?
-  Now view *The Iron Giant* and ask students to draw parallels between the two “monster” characters.
-  If students have also viewed other film adaptations, such as James Whale’s, ask them if they see any similarities between *The Iron Giant* and other Frankenstein film adaptations. Where are they similar? Where do they deviate? Is the Iron Giant more similar to one adaptation over another?

³ Miller, T.S. “Frankenstein without Frankenstein: ‘The Iron Giant’ and the Absent Creator.” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2009, p. 385-405.






⁴ *Ibid*, p. 386.

4. Reimaginings: *Frankenweenie* and *Edward Scissorhands* (Tim Burton/1984/29 minutes) (Tim Burton/2012/87 minutes) (Tim Burton/1990/105 minutes)

Director Tim Burton has paid tribute, or **homage**, to the *Frankenstein* story in his films, often including strong visual references to the work of James Whale. The most direct example of this is his 1984 live action short *Frankenweenie*. Set in suburbia, this film reimagines the *Frankenstein* story by making the Creature the reanimated dog of a young boy. The short was one of Burton's first projects while working as an animator for Walt Disney Pictures. Clearly a project that stuck with Burton, he was able to expand the short in 2012 into an animated feature-length film for none other than Walt Disney Pictures.

Burton regularly includes elements of his suburban upbringing in his films. Oftentimes, these visual representations of Burton's suburbia are parodies of Burbank, California, where Burton was raised. A prime example of this is the 1990 film *Edward Scissorhands*. While Burton himself likens this film to a fairy tale, and scholarship around the film highlights particular elements of *Beauty and the Beast*, there are similarities and visual representations that bear strong resemblance to *Frankenstein* as well.⁵ Edward is a man-made being left only partially complete after his creator dies unexpectedly. Edward's otherness is represented by his hands, which are scissor blades.⁶ This film depicts a scenario where Edward is initially kindly cared for by his creator. Upon his creator's death and absence, he is then taken in by a sympathetic family and continues his discovery of the outside world. However, Edward's journey is ultimately circular; although embraced by some members of the community, he is ostracized by others and eventually targeted, prompting the town's residents and "...the housewives in *Edward Scissorhands* [to] turn into the villagers in *Frankenstein*..."⁷

DISCUSSION PROMPTS:

-  Ask students how they feel about the Creature being a dog in *Frankenweenie*. How does a dog's inability to talk reflect other adaptations of the Creature?
-  Can they provide examples of characters in different films that are labeled "monster" or evil but who they also find sympathetic?
-  Discuss the idea of "**parody**," an imitation of a style with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect. How does the 1984 short *Frankenweenie* parody imagery and scenes from the 1931 *Frankenstein*?
-  Can you think of other literary adaptations or horror films that also have parodies? What are those films? What cinematic elements are similar among these parody examples?
-  While Johnny Depp still has visible scars, his character in *Edward Scissorhands* is more attractive than most adaptations of *Frankenstein*. How does this affect the plot in both stories? If the creature in the novel had been "beautiful," would his life have been different?

⁵ Ray, Brian. "Tim Burton and the Idea of Fairy Tales," *Fairy Tale Films*, 200-201.

⁶ Smith, Gavin. "Punching Holes in Reality: Tim Burton interviewed by Gavin Smith." *Film Comment*, vol. 30, no. 6, November-December 1994, p. 57.

⁷ Gavin, p. 63.