

Disabilities: The New Age Frankenstein

High School Level Plan

Objective

In this lesson, students will make a connection between themselves and a literary character or historical figure.

Time

This lesson will take 1-2 class periods. The video and dialogue will take 1 class period. The writing may be given as homework or class time may be given.

Materials

- Computer and Smart Board for video
- [Dealing with Disabilities](#) Video (5:25)

Preparation

Ask students to read the book or watch the movie *Frankenstein*.

Learning Activities

Watch the video with students.

Hand out Roxanne's speech to students and have students discuss the following: What is the purpose of Roxanne's speech? Did Roxanne achieve her purpose?

In pairs, have the students dialogue about the "issue" that Roxanne discussed in the video (human rights of people who experience disabilities) and form an opinion/stance on that issue.

TEACHER NOTE:

Both the long and short versions of Roxanne's speech are available at the end of this lesson. The short version was used in the video, but the long version makes more comparisons with Frankenstein.



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Ask students to select a character in a book or movie or an historical figure with strongly defined characteristics. Keeping this character or person in mind, ask the students to write about themselves in the way Roxanne did with Frankenstein.

Assessment/Analysis

Students can be assessed on their engagement in dialogue as well as on their written work.

Activities for Extension and/or Integration

Students could share their writing with the class or in small groups.

After sharing their writing, the class could select one student's story to make into a poem. Each student could come up with a different poem based on the same story. The poems could be posted in the classroom for enjoy to enjoy.

Subject and Level Learner Outcomes

Grades 11 and 12

English

Discern and analyze context (2.1.1)

Connect self, text, culture & milieu (2.3.1)

Develop content (4.1.3)

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Frankenstein's Monster (2009)

I was born with a tiny glitch on my spine and now I live out the prophecy of a brilliant young woman born in the 1800's.

Mary Shelley you suck! You saw the future from a perspective I live and breathe today.

I'm the creation of a New Age Frankenstein. I live completely dependent on a capitalist society where "survival of the fittest" is the norm.

In order to live, I require medical supplies, an adapted home environment and a support network.

I am one of the lucky ones that survive with limited supplies, a moderately wheelchair accessible home environment, and fantastic family and friends.

I credit a rural childhood, 20 years of looking for accessible housing and an amazing support network for my successes in a cruel world.

I am not a monster who needs to be taken care of.

I am an educated, community focused, hard working, thoughtful woman who would like to participate....here, in Alberta, Canada where I was born and raised.

I'm tired of living a nightmare of another thoughtful young woman born centuries ago. This has nothing to do with space or resources.

It is entirely to do with ATTITUDE. Our society's paternalistic, charitable attitude needs a readjustment. Do I have human rights in Canada?

People with disabilities don't want charity; we want jobs, housing and maybe a vacation once a while just like everyone else.

Let's stop creating monsters by celebrating humanity in all.

I have lived a war in a body that was created by man not God. My life, my gift, was altered at eight days old by the educated, intelligent, wise part of our society. My parents relied on that part of society to advise them and raised me accordingly. That same part of society now treats me like a burden and does not include me.

Heaven won't be crowded and I'll bet its wheelchair accessible.

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The New Age Frankenstein (2006)

Mary Shelley was considered a storyteller in 1816 when she wrote the story of Dr. Victor Frankenstein. For almost two centuries, it has been coveted as a surreal and horrific tale. Mary Shelley was more than a storyteller but rather she was a prophet. She saw the future from a perspective that I live and breathe today. Her “monsters” – sharp deviations from normal human development¹ - are my reality. I live in a body that was created by the scientists and physicians of the 20th Century. Had I been born more than 10 years earlier, I would not be alive today.

In Shelley’s time, scientists and physicians were experimenting mostly on the deceased or the terminally ill with little success, today they experiment on the living and manage to sustain and prolong their lives. Children who would have not have lived to adulthood 50 years ago are very much a part of our society today.

Today, we form charities and raise money to help our scientists and physicians experiment on these young subjects. Our media broadcasts how humane and evolved our society is because we treat our “sick” children so well. They are heralded as “miracles” and their stories are shared. Overall, I would have to agree; as a child with a severe disability, the medical treatment and supervision I received for the first 18 years of my life was exceptional. I felt loved, valued and optimistic about my life and my future.

Shelley’s story parallels the lives of adults with disabilities (not children) in the 21st Century. Her vision is of course limited to the knowledge of her time but the message is essentially the same. Frankenstein was altruistic when he decided to recreate life. The tragedy and horror was his mistreatment of the creature he created when he did not achieve the results he wanted. He cast out the monster from the laboratory into the community. The creature lived off of the good graces and charity of the people when left destitute by his creator. Frankenstein’s dying words reflect the realization that it was not his creation that was his mistake but his failure to assume responsibility for his actions.

Our current reality is much more horrific as it is limitless in numbers, although prenatal screening and abortion provide some respite, and our medical knowledge is increasing exponentially. Additionally it is no longer just scientists and physicians who play the role of Frankenstein. We can now add government and elected officials to the list. Society’s vision today has been limited to stopping eugenics, allowing our disabled to live amongst the rest (de-institutionalization) with little support, and vague standards of conduct that limit access to community.

¹ http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/frankenstein/frank_birth.html

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Like Frankenstein, our intentions are honourable; we treat our children, regardless of their ability or affliction with the best of care. But at the age of 18, when we are finished experimenting and supervising their development, we abandon them. Regardless of their abilities, they are forced into a new system of care which requires them to go to family physicians to manage their complicated medical conditions.

Adults with congenital disabilities in Alberta live in a system which forces them to accept poverty and be very humble in order to receive the medical attention and government supports they need. Rather than pay to support adults with severe disabilities to work, our government would rather pay them to stay at home with limited support. This is the proverbial trough of government benevolence where individuals are “fed” and “watered” just enough to sustain their lives.

They are rarely considered dangerous or feared by the general public today but are certainly treated like monsters in our civilized society. The “lucky ones” rely heavily on family and friends to support their independence; financially, physically, and/or emotionally. The really lucky ones, usually the ones less visibly disabled, find employment, get married, and even raise children. Regardless, the cost of disability can be great to those with moderate income, who do not qualify for assistance or even direction from most organizations or government departments.

I find at the age of 40 with a congenital disability I feel worn out and very tired of being treated like a burden to society when trying to meet my basic needs. As a young adult I was proud of the fact that I was economical and saved our government money. I now save our government and medical system money because I’m too bitter and defeated to effectively use their services.

I have also advocated on behalf of others who experience similar barriers (not limited to medical issues) and have found this experience as unrewarding as my own personal experiences. Disability supports are fragmented and misunderstood in an unsupportive political environment.

I have enjoyed meeting others who also live in bodies that no one seems to understand. They are fearful for their futures, but still clinging to the belief that independence is possible, that they can contribute to and feel valued in our society, and that somebody will fix them if they break. Their spirits are bright but already showing the discoloration caused by the bruises of our short sighted and selfish society.

Like all Albertans, we want access to medical care. We want our doctor’s office to be accessible, including the washroom. We want them to refer us to an appropriate specialist and monitor our condition when necessary. We want them to understand our life circumstances and work with us to ensure optimal health. We want equality and dignity that is guaranteed to every Canadian under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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This can be accomplished with better education, adequate funding and the continuation of the exceptional medical care given to children with disabilities into their adulthood. It means our New Age Frankenstein's would accept responsibility for individuals with chronic illness and honour their commitment to the families of children who would not be here otherwise today. They would value and respect all citizens, regardless of age or ability. **Continuation of care would mean that I would no longer feel like a lab rat.** It means that our next generation of youth with chronic illness would not have to feel abandoned and alone or burdens to society. It means that our society would have finally evolved from Mary Shelley's time of the 1800's to a new millennium.

I write this hoping to influence the Victor Frankensteins of today, knowing it is probably no more than a dream...hmm or should I say nightmare.