



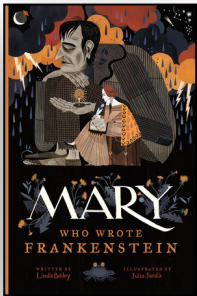
# Cruchley's Collection

Diana Cruchley is an award-winning educator and author, who has taught at elementary and secondary levels. Her workshop are practical, include detailed handouts, and are always enthusiastically received.



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## MARY WHO WROTE FRANKENSTEIN



Linda Bailey, Tundra Books, Random House, ©2018,  
ISBN978-1-77049-559-3

Mary Shelley is the 18 year old author of *Frankenstein (Or the Modern Prometheus)* and this is the story of how, on a stormy night, in a gathering of recognized Romantic period geniuses, she began to write this story which is the inspiration of the entire gothic horror genre.

## Teaching Ideas

### The Myth of Prometheus

Prometheus was the Greek Titan who saw that mankind was starving and cold and gave them fire lit from Mount Olympus as well as the skill to work metal. His punishment from Zeus was to have his liver eaten every day by an eagle while he was chained to a rock, only have it grow again to be eaten the next day.

Remembering that Dr. Frankenstein is the creator of the monster, not the monster itself, discuss with students why Mary Shelley would have said that he was a Prometheus.

This is also a good time to introduce the term “allusions” - making reference to previous works such as the Bible, Greek and Roman myths and legends, even popular songs. Encourage students to think about using allusions in their writing.

### Extreme Writing

Always present three possible topics for Extreme Writing so that students will have a choice. My book, *The Power of Extreme Writing* is available at ASCD for a complete explanation of this unique approach to journaling. There are 4 topics here - choose the best 3 or students will spend too much time deciding.

1. A repeating dream I have.
2. Famous people who inspire me and why.
3. The impact of a storm, or storms, in my life. (Basement flood, tree falling, etc.)
4. These friends are on a vacation together. Write about a vacation adventure.



## An Amazing Family

Mary Shelley has an amazing family and set of friends.

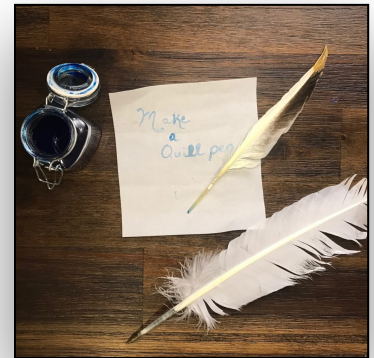
1. Her father, is William Godwin a political philosopher who advocated atheism, anarchism and personal freedom.
2. Her mother is Mary Wollstonecraft who is the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* - considered the first advocate of women's rights, the vote, right to own property, etc.
3. The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a friend of the family.
4. Mary's husband was Percy Bysshe Shelley - one of the most famous poets of the Romantic period in English literature.
5. Lord Byron was a Romantic period poet that all the ladies were dazzled by. The first two lines of *The Destruction of Sennacherib* can be quoted by many people: *The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold, And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold. Mary and Percy met him on the trip to Lake Geneva.*
6. Dr. John Polidori was at the gathering and was not a poet. But, as a result of this challenge he wrote the first vampire story.

This isn't so much something to do with students as something to point out for context - this was an astonishing gathering of people.

## Trying Out the Quill Pen

The young people on the "dark and stormy night" would have written with a quill pen on parchment paper. Metal pen production began around 1822; before that writers used the quill pen made from the primary flight feathers of a goose or turkey (from the left wing for right handed people). The tip was cut with a sharp "pen knife" and then dipped in ink to fill the hollow of the feather. The ink would come out slowly as you wrote. The feathers were shortened to a convenient length for the hand.

If you can get goose or turkey feathers from a farmer that raises them, you can cut a few examples so that students can experience what Mary Shelley would have used in 1815 when she wrote the story. By the time that metal pen nibs were created, they were needed for the paper made from wood chips that we use - which tended to wear out a bird-feather quill. There are online tutorials that will help you to make your own with which to demonstrate.



Buying a few pen holders and a few metal nibs from an art store such as **Opus** can also give you an interesting activity for students as these pens were still in use in schools in the 1950's and you were expected to master the pen in grade 3.

## Dreams To Start a Story

The opening lines of the book are "How does a story begin? Sometimes it begins with a dream." A wonderful evocative opening line that we don't discover the meaning of until almost half way into the book, when we discover that in a kind of waking dream Mary Shelley gets the idea for her book.

Ask students to discuss any repeated dreams they have. Then, they can choose one of theirs, or an idea from someone else's dream as a springboard for a story.

## “What If” Stories

*Frankenstein* is considered the first science fiction novel. Science fiction is different from fantasy stories. In fantasy stories we have magic - witches - dragons - fairies, etc. True science fiction springs out of speculation on possibilities from the current world - what if we could live under the ocean? what if we could create a living thing out of something not alive?

Ask students for the names of their favourite science fiction stories, and then ask them the science that is behind the story..the “what if” if you will. *Ender’s Game* (what if we had to train young people to fight a repeat of an alien invasion); *1984* (what if the population came to be controlled by the government through TV?), *War of the Worlds* (what if we were invaded by aliens?), *Avatar* (what if we found a wonderful planet and then proceeded to destroy its environment to get at the resources?), *The Martian* (what if an astronaut were abandoned on Mars?), *Back to the Future* and *The Terminator* (what would be the consequences of Time Travel?), *Jurassic Park* (what if we could bring back dinosaurs?).

Students could brainstorm in groups some “what if?” possibilities. Gather them s a class and ask students to choose one and create a story. They need to think of what would happen if it could be done and make one of the consequences the “problem” the characters must solve.

## Dreams that Solve Problems

This may be a good time to introduce students to a strategy to deal with large problems. First you work on it; then you sleep on it. Sometimes when someone has been struggling with a problem for some time, it is in the dreams that the solution becomes available. This only happens when the brain is prepared...has struggled for a while. Mary Shelley’s solution came in a kind of waking dream.

Elias Howe was working to invent a sewing machine. After months of trying, he dreamed that he had been captured by cannibals who were going to stab him with spears with a hole in the tip. When he woke up, he realized that the hole to thread the needle could be moved from the end of the needle to the tip and the rest was history.

Dimitry Mendeleev, worked for 10 years to create a pattern that would connect the chemical elements together. One night he finally dreamed of a table where all the elements fell into place and when he awoke he wrote it down.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge also had an experience with a dream that resulted in a poem. He woke up with Kubla Khan complete in his mind, wrote down the first few stanzas and decided to write the rest in the morning. In the morning it was gone. Here is the most famous portion of it.

*Kubla Khan* - a poem in a dream

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.  
So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round;  
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,  
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,

Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

Students could be asked to memorize the first 5 lines which is basically what people know from this poem.

## Experiences that led to the story of Frankenstein

Ask students what experiences “came together” for Mary Shelley to write her story:

1. The challenge on a stormy night to write a story, that started the whole process.
2. Telling ghost stories together.
3. Galvanism - Galvani used an electric charge to make the legs of a dead frog twitch. This first use of electricity made people wonder if you could bring the dead to life. The group talks about it.
4. Castle Frankenstein was passed on their journey.
5. The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the story of a haunted ship because of a curse that fell when the Ancient Mariner kills an albatross, was read to Mary Shelley’s family when she was a little girl, by the author himself who was a friend of the family. This spooky story was an influence on the language and tone of Mary Shelley’s story. It was written in 1797 - the year Mary Shelley was born, but obviously she heard it at a later stage of Coleridge’s career. (Students might be interested in a reading of this poem by you.)

What if students made a list of three things that happened to them? A time I could have been killed, a story where weather affected me, a time I had to clean something up. Then ask them to turn that into a story combining all of those experiences. You might want to model it by showing them a list of 3 things that happened to you, then creating a fictional story that combines those 3 ideas.

## The Actual Plot of Frankenstein

If your students are interested SparcNotes has an illustrated summary of the plot of the story of Frankenstein. Most people think Frankenstein is the monster, and most people know how the monster was created, but they don’t know the actual plot - which is actually very strange and convoluted in today’s ears.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRppXdKDY\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRppXdKDY_c)

## A Dark and Stormy Night

5 bright, young, unconventional people had an evening together on a dark and stormy night and one created Frankenstein while another created the first Vampire story. Amazing.

“It was a dark and stormy night” is a literary cliché for the beginning of a story, often intended humorously. The first line of all stories Snoopy writes is “It was a dark and stormy night.” The first line of *A Wrinkle in Time* is “It was a dark and stormy night.”



It was also used by Bulwer-Lytton in his novel *Paul Clifford* and it is from there that there is now an annual contest to write the absolutely worst first sentence for a novel. This tongue-in-cheek contest started in 1982 and by 1983 was attracting 10,000 entries. The contest rules are located at The Bulwer Lytton Fiction Contest and may be submitted at any time in the year. The challenge is to write a single sentence that starts a novel you know will be truly dreadful. The prize is bragging rights and that’s all. Your students may enjoy reading some and creating their own truly dreadful openings and submitting them.

Here is the 2018 grand prize winner. “*Cassie smiled as she clenched John’s hand off the edge of an abandoned pier while the sun set gracefully over the water, and as the final gasp of light disappeared into a star-filled sky she knew that there was only one thing left to do to finish off this wonderful evening, which was to throw his severed appendage into the ocean’s depths so it could never be found again - and maybe get some custard after.*”

The winner in the Detective category for 2018: *“He glanced at his unsuspecting guests, his sleight smile hiding his hateful mood, his calm eyes hiding his evil intentions, and his smooth skin hiding his tensed muscles, skeletal structure, and internal organs.”*

### **Frankenfish and Other Cool Characters**

What about an art activity where students combine the features of several animals to create a frankenanimal? An elephant with zebra stripes and butterfly wing ears looks great. You might want to give out some basic animal drawings and some drawings of parts (tusks, horns, claws, patterns, wings, fins, tails, etc.) that they could combine to create their frankenanimal.

