

# MEETING OUR MONSTERS: TEXT SYNTHESIS

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## LESSON CONTEXT

This lesson is a compressed version of a longer lesson in which students work to juxtapose more than one text in order to develop a conceptual understanding that will be pertinent to continued reading that is focused and purposeful. It's also important that students will come to develop a more nuanced and rich understanding of the concept of "monster" by focusing on specific words and lines within the selected texts. As a way to synthesize their learning, they will work collaboratively to develop a focused explanation of the relationship between monstrosity and human nature. We will enter this lesson with students already having "read" the article "Our Monsters, Our Selves."

Also important in this lesson is the content selection that includes classic literature, literary nonfiction, informative and visual texts.

## TEACHING CONTEXT

As we know, students will read more closely when they have an explicit reason for reading. We also know that in order to enter into those skills of analysis and synthesis that we so often see in Common Core, they must have a conceptual understanding to attach new learning to. So, this lesson would most likely be found early or late in a unit of study, either as a way to develop a conceptual understanding or as a way to synthesize texts already studied. We'll see learners engaging in independent close-reading, focused small-group discussion, and brief writing with an incorporation of basic technology.

## STANDARDS ADDRESSED\*

The pacing of this particular demonstration lesson makes it more appropriate for the 11-12 grade band; although, with more time the texts are appropriate for 9-10 as well.

### Reading for Literature

1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
10. Read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the 11-12 CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

### Reading for Informational Text

7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
10. Read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the 11-12 CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

### Writing

2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.
  - 2f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g. articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

### Speaking and Listening

- 1a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched materials under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

\*While portions of many standards are addressed in this lesson, these standards are most specifically targeted. Also, each of the targeted standards would be considered with more scaffolds over the course of several class meetings.

**Learning goal:** Learn how to develop a concept by synthesizing the textual evidence of multiple perspectives or texts

**Essential question:** What do monsters teach us about human nature?

Time	Lesson Component	Teacher Role	Learner Role
2 min.	<b>Introduction to the lesson with images and purpose</b>	<p>In these first moments of the lesson, I will aim to activate the learner's background knowledge of monsters with familiar images of many different kinds of monsters.</p> <p>Also, in these first minutes I want to establish both what we want to learn by the end of the lesson as well as the essential question that will guide our inquiry.</p>	Learners use this time to activate prior knowledge and determine purpose for their learning.
3 min.	<b>Review and task set-up</b>	<p>I will use these next few minutes to review our "big findings" from a recently read essay that will further create a context and background for the task they will begin.</p> <p>I will set up the task with directions and context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I provide a brief description of the four texts found at their tables already.</li> <li>• I explain that half the table will be reading 2 "letter A" texts and half the table will be reading "letter B" texts.</li> <li>• I give an example of what annotation of the texts should look like.</li> <li>• A table leader (the person who lives furthest away) assigns half the table as "letter A" and half as "letter B".</li> </ul>	Learners take in the logistics of the task, paying special attention to the context of each reading as well as how to annotate the text for engaged discourse later.
7 min.	<b>Read and annotate</b>	I will walk around to answer questions or help when necessary.	Learners will read their <b>two</b> texts, annotating and thinking about how the reading helps to answer our essential question.
2 min.	<b>Similar group discussion</b>	I will ask everyone to find one other person who read the same texts as they did. They each get 1 minute to explain how the lines they chose help answer the essential question.	<p>Learners verbalize the anchor lines they've chosen and how those lines help answer the essential question.</p> <p>As listeners, they will consider both consistencies with their own annotations as well as the usefulness of divergent readings.</p>

7 min.	<b>Synthesis discussion</b>	<p>Now that learners have had the chance to talk together, they need to learn about the two texts they <i>didn't</i> read by "making their pair a square."</p> <p>I'll prompt this sharing by telling the newly formed groups that they will need to synthesize what they've learned from all four texts by responding to the following prompt:</p> <p><b>Using at least THREE words from your texts, BRIEFLY (in about 10 words) explain what monsters reveal about human nature.</b></p>	Learners synthesize by comparing, contrasting, choosing and generating a response to our essential question.
4 min.	<b>Share and see the concept</b>	<p>As definitions are formed, I'll open up a PollEverywhere question and have one person from each group of 4 text in their definition to our live poll.</p> <p>Once the responses are texted in, I'll take all of their words and make a word cloud that will show the concept in a new and visual way.</p>	<p>Learners will work to codify their insight about monsters and human nature through this writing. Because there are a couple of constraints to the writing prompt (the 3 text-based words AND the brevity of it) they will need to further refine their thinking.</p> <p>As they text in responses, learners will be able to read what others have said and consider insights they may not have already thought of.</p> <p><i>I may have them do a few basic hand signals here to show their response to others' contributions.</i></p>
1 min.	<b>What did you learn?</b>	<p>I'll invite learners to draw a quick conclusion about the word cloud by writing down their new understanding on note card at the table.</p> <p>I'll be able to collect the note cards as formative assessments to determine what tomorrow's lesson will be.</p>	Having learners come back to their own learning shows the progression of the lesson that moves from individual to pairs to groups and back to the individual. Through this process the learner is responsible for constructing his own insight and I can use their notecard as important formative assessment for further instruction.
<b>Extensions to full lesson</b>		<p>There are a few quick ways this lesson could be extended.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All learners read all of the passages.</li> <li>• Before the synthesis work, have individuals rank how effectively each passage addresses the essential question and/or the "Our Monsters, Our Selves" essay take-aways.</li> <li>• Instead of a brief response at the end, learners could write an extended definition of monstrosity as it applies to human nature.</li> </ul>	

**Materials/Sources**

Allchin, Douglas. "Monsters & the Tyranny of Normality: How do biologists interpret anomalous forms?" *The American Biology Teacher* 70.2 (2008): 117-119. Print.

Beal, Timothy K. "Our Monsters, Ourselves." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 9 Nov. 2001.

Ernst, Max. *L'Ange de Foyer*. ABCGallery.com. Web 22 Sept. 2013.

Hughes, Robert. "Art: Max Ernst: The Compleat Experimenter." *Time* 12 April. 1976.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. New York, NY: Signet, 2000. Print.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000. Print.

# READING MATERIALS

## MEETING OUR MONSTERS

### GROUP A

#### CONTEXT

This is from the moment in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, where Dr. Frankenstein creates his monster. Remember, "Frankenstein" is actually the scientists, not the monster (as Hollywood portrays it).

**AS YOU'RE READING** underline the key words or phrases that help you answer what this text reveals about human nature. In the margin, explain why or how.

#### Chapter 5

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 endeavored 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; this hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriance's only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost the same color as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled 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. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep.

Shelly, Mary. *Frankenstein*. New York, NY: Signet, 2000. Print.

# GROUP A

## CONTEXT

This is from an article that addresses how biologists define monstrosity.

**AS YOU'RE READING** underline the key words or phrases that help you answer what this text reveals about human nature. In the margin, explain why or how.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, monsters were wonders (Allchin, 2007b). Anomalous forms – like conjoined twins, hermaphrodites, hydrocephalic babies, or the extraordinarily hairy Petrus Gonsalus and his equally hairy children – amazed people. They evoked a spirit of inquiry that helped fuel the emergence of modern science. Today, however, such bodies tend to strike us as freakish or grotesque – possibly even “against nature.” How did our cultural perspective, and with it, our values and emotional responses change so radically?

With faith in lawlike regularities, philosophical anatomy, teratology and statistics, monsters changed in the 1800s from anomalous wonders to pathological errors. Consider, for example, the case of Joseph Merrick also known as “the Elephant Man,” in mid-century. Merrick exhibited the Proteus syndrome (genetically based excessive bone growth). His head was enormous and bulbous, his right arm and left leg inflated with pendulous folded tissue (even while his left arm seemed utterly familiar). His body was strikingly asymmetrical, resulting in uneven movements. Eventually, Merrick reached the care of physician Frederick Treves and was welcomed in London’s elite society. But such care was deliberately protective. Treves described how earlier, “he had been ill-treated and reviled and bespattered with the mud of Disdain” (Howell & Ford, 1980, p. 189). Even under Treves care, he went hooded and cloaked when traveling in public lest he spark incident. Merrick himself never stopped dreaming of being ordinary. Merrick’s unusual form did not evoke fascination, but an alienation to be overcome.

## Naturalizing the “Normal”

The concept of laws of nature has a powerful hold on our minds. Their very language is highly charged. In human society, laws specify what we ought to do. They ensure social order. We tend to interpret laws of nature in the same way, as the guarantors of natural order, profiling how nature should act. Once established, descriptive laws take on a prescriptive character. The laws of “normal” development easily become standards for how organisms “ought” to grow. The normal becomes naturalized, or apparently constitutive of nature’s order (Allchin, 2007a). At the same time, the abnormal comes to reflect undesirable disorder or chaos. Facts thereby become imperceptibly—but inappropriately—imbued with values. The irony of monsters is that while they are plainly products of nature, they are often viewed as “unnatural” because they seem to “violate” its “laws.” The term “monstrous” now implies impropriety, not merely unusualness.

The effect of naturalizing the “normal” is not unlike a paradox of democracy. When one honors exclusively the wishes of the majority, the minority can be wholly disenfranchised. Such “tyranny of the majority” eclipses the political question of how to address dissent. In a similar way, undue focus on the laws of nature, or the normal can eclipse understanding of exceptions or phenomena not fully described by the laws. One may call it, by comparison, “the tyranny of normality.” Scientifically, it means our interpretations of nature may be skewed or incomplete. Culturally, it means monsters—according to the “natural” categories established by “science”—are shunned (or pitied) as abnormal, not welcomed or celebrated as unique.

Allchin, Douglas. “Monsters & the Tyranny of Normality: How do biologists interpret anomalous forms?” *The American Biology Teacher* 70.2 (2008): 117-119. Print

## GROUP B

### CONTEXT

This passage comes from Elie Wiesel's memoir, *Night*. Wiesel was a concentration camp survivor in WWII.

**AS YOU'RE READING** underline the key words or phrases that help you answer what this text reveals about human nature. In the margin, explain why or how.

Some years later, I watched the same kind of scene at Aden. The passengers on our boat were amusing themselves by throwing coins to the "natives," who were diving in to get them. An attractive, aristocratic Parisienne was deriving special pleasure from the game. I suddenly noticed that two children were engaged in a death struggle, trying to strangle each other. I turned to the lady.

"Please," I begged, "don't throw any more money in!"

"Why not?" she said. "I like to give charity..."

In the wagon where the bread had fallen, a real battle had broken out. Men threw themselves on top of each other, stamping on each other, tearing at each other, biting each other. Wild beasts of prey, with animal hatred in their eyes; an extraordinary vitality had seized them, sharpening their teeth and nails.

A crowd of workmen and curious spectators had collected along the train. They had probably never seen a train with such cargo. Soon, nearly everywhere, pieces of bread were being dropped into the wagons. The audience stared at these skeletons of men, fighting one another to the death for a mouthful.

A piece fell into our wagon, I decided that I would not move. Anyway, I knew that I would never have the strength to fight with a dozen savage men! Not far away I noticed an old man dragging himself along on all fours. He was trying to disengage himself from the struggle. He held one hand to his heart. I thought at first he received a blow to the chest. Then I understood; He had a bit of bread under his shirt. With remarkable speed he drew it out and put it to his mouth. His eyes gleamed; a smile, like a grimace, lit up his dead face. And was immediately extinguished. A shadow just loomed up near him. The shadow threw itself upon him. Felled to the ground, stunned with blows, the old man cried:

"Meir, Meir, my boy! Don't you recognize me? I'm your father... you're hurting me ...you're killing your father! I've got some bread...for you too...for your too..."

He collapsed. His fist was still clenched around a small piece. He tried to carry it to his mouth. But the other one threw himself upon him and snatched it. The old man again whispered something, let out a rattle, and died amid the general indifference. His son searched him, took the bread, and began to devour it. He was not able to get very far. Two men had seen and hurled themselves upon him. Others joined in. When they withdrew, next to me were two corpses, side by side, the father and the son.

I was fifteen years old.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000. Print.

## GROUP B

### CONTEXT

This passage comes from Elie Wiesel's memoir, *Night*. Wiesel was a concentration camp survivor in WWII.

**AS YOU'RE READING** underline the key words or phrases that help you answer what this text reveals about human nature. In the margin, explain why or how.

**Some questions to help you unpack the painting:** What does this figure remind you of? Is this monster elated or frightening? What is the impact of the color? What do you make of the landscape behind the monster?



"Rebellious, heterogeneous, full of contradiction, [my work] is unacceptable to specialists of art, culture, morality. But it does have the ability to enchant my accomplices: poets, pataphysicians and a few illiterates. Thus Max Ernst (tongue poked its usual quarter-length into one rubicund cheek) summed up his own career at the age of 68. "Accomplices" was the key word, for it is hard to look at Max Ernst without feeling a pact between his secret language and one's own fantasies. The carnivorous or petrified landscapes, the enchanted pencil forests, the enigmatic rooms in which sinister things happen - these constitute a world on the other side of the mirror, access to which depends on an involuntary conspiracy with the artist" (Hughes).

Ernst, Max. L'Ange de Foyer. ABCGallery.com. Web 22 Sept. 2013.

Hughes, Robert. "Art: Max Ernst: The Compleat Experimenter." Time 12 April. 1976.