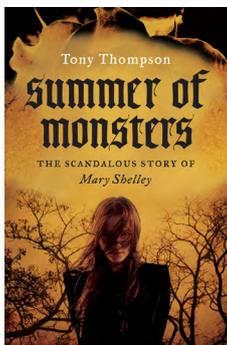


Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Summer of Monsters

Tony Thompson
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NZRRP: \$19.99
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

Mary's life began in shadow. Unwanted and overlooked, her desire was to make something of her existence. So how would meeting a young poet change her path forever? Scandal. Passion. Desire. Mary's choices were clear – but would she ever be free of her loneliness?

Tony Thompson's enthralling novel explores Mary Shelley's early life and the famous summer she spent with Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, John Polidori and her stepsister Claire Clairmont, which inspired her iconic novel *Frankenstein*.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Tony Thompson grew up in Toronto, Canada. He attended Trent University where he hosted his own radio show, wrote short stories and strongly identified with Shakespeare's Prince Hal. After he collected his degree, he headed overseas for a short trip that has now lasted almost 25 years. His CV includes stints as a gravedigger, a music journalist and an English teacher at a water village in Brunei Darussalam. He lives in Melbourne's inner west with his son, his girlfriend and far too many guitars.

How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

<p>These notes are for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary years 9+ • Ages 14+ 	<p>Key Learning Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English • History 	<p>Example of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novel • Historical fiction 	<p>Themes/ Ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature • Love/Romance • Coming-of-age • The Romantics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics • Philosophy • Feminism • History
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National Curriculum Focus:*					
English Year 9	Year 10	Senior Unit 1	Senior Unit 2	Senior Unit 4	History Year 9
ACELA1551	ACELA1565	ACEEN004	ACEEN024	ACEEN060	ACOKFH016
ACELA1553	ACELT1639	ACEEN006	ACEEN027	ACEEN061	ACOKFH017
ACELA1561	ACELT1640	ACEEN008	ACEEN031	ACEEN062	ACOKFH019
ACELA1562	ACELT1812	ACEEN009	ACEEN034	ACEEN063	ACDSEH017
ACELT1633	ACELT1814	ACEEN010	ACEEN038	ACEEN066	ACDSEH081
ACELT1771	ACELT1815	ACEEN011			ACDSEH082
ACELT1634	ACELT1644	ACEEN014	Senior Unit 3		ACHHS164
ACELT1635	ACELY1749	ACEEN018	ACEEN043		ACHHS166
ACELT1636	ACELY1751		ACEEN045		ACHHS168
ACELT1773	ACELY1754		ACEEN048		ACHHS169
ACELY1741	ACELY1756		ACEEN049		
ACELY1745					
ACELY1746					

*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.

Tony Thompson on *Summer of Monsters*

About ten years ago, I was teaching a unit on the Romantic poets to a Year 11 Literature class at a high school in Melbourne. At some point, I told the students the story of that night on Lake Geneva when Mary Shelley came up with the idea for the novel *Frankenstein*. The students loved hearing about Lord Byron and Polidori but they were particularly interested in the fact that Mary was only 18 at the time. It occurred to me that she was only very slightly older than the students themselves.

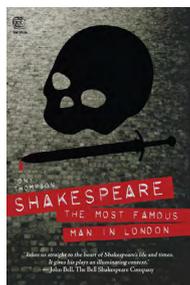
Frankenstein is quite possibly the most famous novel of all time. It comes from the early days of the novel form and contemporary readers might find it a confounding read at points. However, the story itself has continued to resonate with audiences for almost 200 years. It seems to anticipate the turmoil of the industrial revolution, the fear of nuclear weapons and our current angst over information technology. How did a teenager in 1816 come up with such a significant story? That was the question I started with when I began thinking about the book.

It's true that Mary's parents were both remarkable people and that she grew up in a household of ideas and debate. But, to me, *Frankenstein* is one of those novels where you sense that the writer is throwing everything they have at the story. Articles appear regularly claiming to have found the 'real' source of *Frankenstein*. In fact, one appeared recently relating to a pioneer of electricity called Andrew Crosse who is mentioned briefly in my book. I believe that there are many sources for the story and that's what I tried to convey in *Summer of Monsters*.

Since I was a teenager, I have enjoyed reading about various literary movements. The Beat writers of the 1950s were a profound influence on me and I love the stories of Paris in the 1920s. The Romantics, however, may be the most interesting group of them all. Percy Shelley and Lord Byron were both talented poets but also utterly unique individuals whose lives are nearly as interesting as anything they wrote. In *Summer of Monsters*, I wanted to give a flavour of their circle and the period they lived in. I hope that readers will go on to read more about the Romantics. The summer in Geneva was dramatic but wait until you hear about the summer in Italy a few years later!

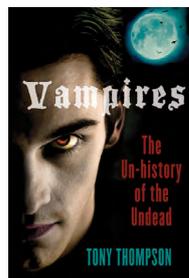


Also by Tony Thompson



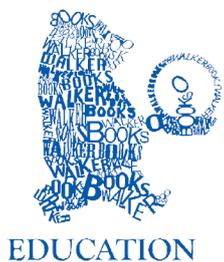
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Discussion Questions and Activities

Before Reading

This book is based on Mary Shelley's life from age five to when she begins to write *Frankenstein*. Have a class discussion on Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, the other characters mentioned in the blurb and that period in history. What do you already know about these topics? What do you think will happen in the book? Make notes of your ideas during this discussion and revisit them after reading the novel.

Exploring the Novel

How does Mary Godwin develop as a character over the course of the novel? Identify moments from the novel that are key to her development as a character and present these on a timeline.

The novel is divided into three parts with an intermission. Write a short summary of each part, identifying the key plot elements and defining moments in each character's arc.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a very famous novel and it is safe to assume most people would have some knowledge of the story. How do you think reading *Summer of Monsters* would be different if you had never heard of *Frankenstein* or Mary Shelley?

Why do you think the author chose to include *Intermission: The Education of Mad Shelley*? Why did he position it out of chronological order with the rest of the story? How would the effect have been different had this section been at the beginning of the novel? Or not included at all?

The novel culminates in Mary Godwin beginning work on *Frankenstein* which became one of the most important science fiction/horror books of all time. Create a timeline or mind-map of incidents that contributed to Mary's inspiration for her novel. Include the time, place, a description of each event and why you think the memory stuck with her.

The title of the book has more than one meaning. Discuss what these meanings are.

In groups, find works by Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, John Polidori, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Shelley. Choose an excerpt to read to the class and create a short presentation on what the work is about, why you chose it and why/if you think it is an important piece of literature.

"I think the lame little boy with the cruel mother fabricated a completely different person and sent him out into the world. I also think that he will be destroyed by that person someday," said Mary. (Page 303).

Mary believes that Lord Byron's personality is a facade, hiding his true self. Do you agree with her? Do you think that all people present a somewhat fabricated version of themselves to others? Why do you think people do this? What are the dangers in taking this too far?

"Look!" said Byron. "It's alive!" (Page 322). Why do you think the author chose to write "it's" rather than "he's" when referring to Polidori in this scene?

Using the epilogue as a guide, choose one character and write a fictionalised version of a key moment in their life after the end of *Summer of Monsters* in a similar style to Tony Thompson.

Rumours/Reputation

William Godwin's biography of Mary Wollstonecraft destroyed her reputation by focusing on her "scandalous" life rather than her radical philosophical ideas on women's rights. How did this reputation affect Mary Godwin throughout the novel? Find examples from the text to support your argument.

"The king was a fool, but Mme Antionette was very sympathetic to the revolution. It was those newspapers that insisted she was an aristocrat who knew nothing of life in the streets. I suppose you are aware of the lies printed by newspaper?" (Pages 197-8)

In the period in which this novel is set, rumours were spread by people gossiping, newspapers and books. These rumours could be very damaging to a person's prospects for employment and marriage. Compare this to how rumours/gossip are spread today and the effect it can have on people.

Feminism

Discuss the traditional role of women during the early 1800s. What career choices were available to women during this time? What would a woman need to do to ensure a safe and comfortable life? What did Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Godwin do to change public opinion on this matter? Compare this to a modern/current civil rights issue.



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“I don’t mean that she looks like a young man,” said Byron impatiently, “I mean that she has the mind of a man. She is sharp. Sharper than either of us.” (Page 254)

Discuss how this quote illustrates the opinion of women and their abilities during this time. How did people like Mary Shelley contributing to changing public opinion of women?

It was very difficult for women to be seen as intellectually equal or superior to men during this time and therefore they were not permitted to vote or be granted a position of power. What methods could women use to influence those who held power?

Industrial Revolution

“Humanity is under threat. Is that what you believe?”

“I do. Something has changed, Mary. No one seems to think of anything but money. Money and power. Opinions on anything else seem frivolous.” (Page 258)

This novel is set during the industrial revolution of the United Kingdom. What opinions does Mary have about this? Which characters influence her opinion? Are the concerns of the industrial revolution still relevant today? Consider how machines/automations increasingly change the nature of production and communication even today.

History/Historical Fiction

Historical fiction can be a great tool for exploring periods in history. However, what must the reader be aware of when using historical fiction as a research tool? How can a reader effectively use historical fiction when researching a particular period in history?

This novel features characters and events that are based on actual people and events. What is meant by the term “artistic licence”? To what extent do you think authors have the right to use artistic license when writing about real people and events? If a person or event is represented differently to how they are presented in historical sources, can this be considered as misleading the reader? Should an author of historical fiction be more concerned with presenting historically accurate facts or creating an interesting story?

Choose one of the main characters from the book and research them by finding photos and reading reports of these people from other sources. Prepare a presentation comparing the real person to their character in *Summer of Monsters*. Create a Venn diagram comparing what this character is like in the novel to what you believe they were like in real life based on your research.

Geography

Trace Mary’s movements on a world map, from the area she grew up in to the villa where she begins work on *Frankenstein*.

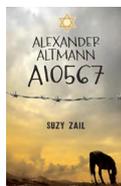
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