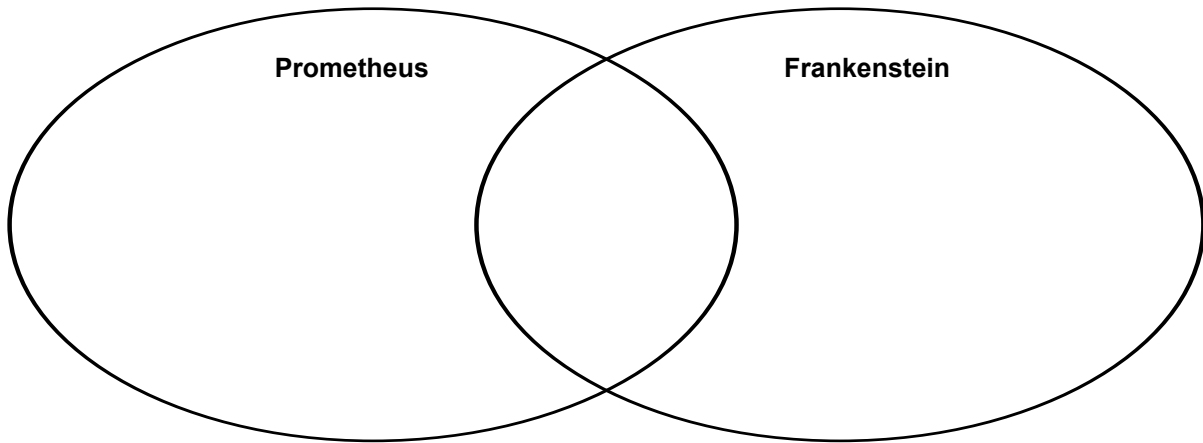


The monster mash: Frankenstein is reanimated for dance, stitched together with Greek myths

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

- a. Do you know the myth of Prometheus and the story of Frankenstein? Summarise in your own words. Then complete the Venn diagram.



2 Key words

- a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to complete the definitions below. Then find and highlight the words in the article to read them in context.

adaptation	choreographer	dreamscape	fascination	flawed
jigsaw	lifelong	montage	mythic	outlet
psyche	shred	spark	subconsciously	transcend

1. a small thin piece that has been torn or cut from something _____
2. a mysterious situation in which it is not easy to understand why things are happening; a complicated problem _____
3. a person whose job involves designing and arranging the steps and movements in dances _____
4. a very strong attraction that makes something very interesting _____
5. lasting or existing throughout your whole life _____
6. a way of expressing or making good use of strong feelings, ideas, or energy _____
7. something that has become very famous, like somebody/something in a myth or ancient legend _____

The monster mash: Frankenstein is reanimated for dance, stitched together with Greek myths

Level 3: Advanced

8. cause something to start or develop, especially suddenly _____
9. the action or process of changing something, or of being changed, to work in a new purpose or situation _____
10. a picture, film or piece of music or writing consisting of many separate items put together, especially in an interesting or unusual combination _____
11. as a result of feelings that influence your behaviour even though you are not aware of them _____
12. be above or go beyond the usual limits of something _____
13. an image that is or looks like something from a dream, or a work of art that represents this _____
14. the mind, or the deepest thoughts, feelings or beliefs of a person or group _____
15. not perfect or containing mistakes _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. It is healthy to have a creative _____ for your emotions and ideas.
2. His _____ logic was exposed when they fact-checked the article.
3. The kitten ripped the pillow to _____.
4. With 20 books, it's clear that writing has been her _____ passion.
5. The murder-mystery film had a _____ of clues for the audience.
6. The film studio asked for permission to make an _____ of the best-selling novel.
7. Salvador Dalí's paintings are considered _____.
8. The artist's _____ with nature is clear in his art.
9. To develop a believable character, a writer or actor must think about that character's _____.
10. When art has universal themes, it can _____ place and time.

The monster mash: Frankenstein is reanimated for dance, stitched together with Greek myths

Level 3: Advanced

A decade after his award-winning Dracula, Mark Bruce has pared down Mary Shelley's gothic classic and taken a cue from its subtitle 'The Modern Prometheus'

Sanjoy Roy

12 March, 2024

- 1 'The idea of a creature made of shreds of other people – well, that's all of us, isn't it? We're all jigsaws of some kind, full of suggestions of other things.' Choreographer Mark Bruce is sitting in his rehearsal studio in the picturesque town of Frome, Somerset, trying to explain the enduring fascination of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the inspiration for his latest work of dance-theatre. As he speaks, it strikes me that he's talking not only about the creature, nor even about the novel – but about himself. What kind of jigsaw is he?
- 2 At first sight, it looks as if he was born into dance. His father is eminent choreographer Christopher Bruce and his mother, Marian Bruce, is a dancer turned visual artist and stage designer. Mark began to dance relatively late, aged 17. More importantly for him as an artist is a lifelong sense that his ideas come not from himself but visit him from elsewhere – "like in a dream" – and that he must then piece them together.
- 3 "At school, I was told I suffer from an overactive imagination," he remembers. As a teenager, he was always writing and drawing and he dreamed of becoming a graphic novelist. Some of the stories he wrote at the time resurfaced in his 2010 short-story collection, *Blackout Zones* (he has just finished writing another collection, *Fury Parades*). Another enduring obsession has been music. A guitarist and sometimes vocalist, songwriter and composer, Bruce played in a band for many years, and he continues to record with the Mute Song label as well as sometimes scoring music for his own choreography.
- 4 Dance, though, has been his main creative outlet since he founded his company in 1991, and a glance through his back catalogue shows some recurring patterns that mix the mythic with the modern. He's attracted many top-notch contemporary dancers over the years, and typically choreographs in "old-school" style by creating steps and phrases himself ("he makes the steps," says dancer Eleanor Duval, "then I make them mine") rather than creating conditions for dancers to generate "movement material", as is more widespread today. Indeed, Bruce has never swum in any current of common practice: there's no one else in dance quite like him, nor does he – or rather, his jigsaw self – look quite like anyone else.
- 5 Which brings us to *Frankenstein*, a story that Shelley herself said had come to her in a dream. The idea of adapting the story had been put to Bruce several times after his award-winning *Dracula* from 2013, "but I always said no because the idea of how to do it hadn't come to me." It was while struggling on a different project that was failing to spark into life (a treatment of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, as it happens) that he decided to re-read Shelley's book. Result: "Suddenly I could see this creature, this presence in which something is not quite right, and I thought: oh, this is how you do it. Then the structure of the piece made itself quite quickly."
- 6 Bruce's *Frankenstein* is not an adaptation of Shelley's book but rather a sequence of scenes in a montage-style (or monster-style). He has also taken licence from the book's subtitle – "The Modern Prometheus" – and allowed himself to introduce figures from Greek myth where they seemed to match the story's spirit. "I wanted just enough for people to imagine what the story is saying to them," says Bruce. "I like work that suggests things subconsciously, that transcends words."
- 7 *Frankenstein* will tour alongside a shorter piece called *Liberation Day*, a suite of dances to a playlist of songs Bruce has been writing. Created concurrently, *Liberation Day*, *Fury Parades* and *Frankenstein* in fact turned out to circle similar themes. "If *Frankenstein* is really a theatrical work, stripped to its elements," says Bruce, "*Liberation Day* is very much a dance work, studies in choreographic material, while *Fury Parades* is a set of 12 separate but interconnected stories. Different approaches, similar subjects."

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Level 3: Advanced

- 8 Among his own different approaches – creating dances, composing music, writing stories – Bruce himself seems to circle recurring subjects: myth, dreamscapes, the psyche. “As you get older,” says Bruce, “you realise: oh, this happened before, and it’s happening again. We think we’re breaking out of loops, then find ourselves repeating them. I do that as a creator as well, but I’m always also trying to both identify loops and push beyond them by risking something new.”
- 9 The new and the old, creating and repeating, dreaming and realising – these are key to the fascination of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and perhaps why not only Bruce but we too keep remaking, revisiting and reimagining it. “It’s such a strange and flawed novel, and it doesn’t quite piece together,” says Bruce “But we keep coming back to it.”

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Level 3: Advanced

3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Who is Mark Bruce?
2. What were his parents' occupations?
3. When did Bruce begin to dance?
4. Where does Bruce say his ideas come from?
5. What did he dream of becoming as a teenager?
6. What is Bruce's relationship with music?
7. Why is his choreography style considered "old school"?
8. Why did Bruce say "no" to adapting *Frankenstein* in the past?
9. According to the article, Bruce's *Frankenstein* is not an adaptation. How is it described?
10. Which of Bruce's two other works have similar themes as *Frankenstein*?

4 Key language

a. Match the prefixes to their definitions.

- | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------|
| 1. sub- | a. between, from one to another |
| 2. inter- | b. with or together |
| 3. re- | c. below, less than |
| 4. over- | d. across, beyond |
| 5. trans- | e. again |
| 6. con- | f. more than usual, too much |

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Level 3: Advanced

b. Use the prefixes above to make words from the article.

1. _____ make
2. _____ consciously
3. _____ cend
4. _____ active
5. _____ connected
6. _____ currently

c. Use the words above and write personalised sentences using them.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Artists take the old and make it new again.”
- “Classic works of art can inspire new generations.”
- “Adaptations are not as good as original works.”

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about novels that have been adapted into plays or films.

- What are some recent novel adaptations you've seen?
- Did you like the novel or the play / film / dance better? Why?
- In your opinion, which are usually better, the novel or the play / film / dance?

b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinions. Here are some phrases to help you when you discuss facts.

According to my research, ...

One example is ...

Some ways artists do this are ...

One survey said that ...

Another thing that happens is ...

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Level 3: Advanced

Here are some phrases to use when stating your opinion.

I prefer ...

From what I have seen / read, ...

My experience was ...

In my understanding / opinion, ...

I (dis)agree with ...