

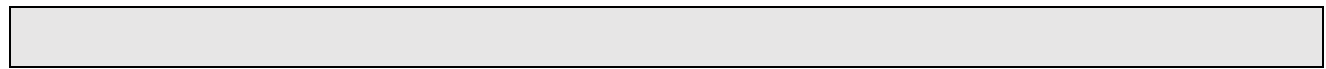


# Manual Cinema's *Frankenstein*

Streaming February 10 – 17

CAL PERFORMANCES  
**DIGITAL**  
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# How to use this Engagement Guide

If you have photos or lesson plans to share, please let us know! Use #ManualCinema@cal

This engagement guide is organized around 4 key artistic practices (as identified by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards at <http://nccas.wikispaces.com/>)

**Investigating:** Questioning, exploring and challenging.

**Imagining:** Opening the door to what's possible, and even to what seems impossible.

**Creating:** Making artistic choices with a work of art in mind.

**Connecting:** Reflecting on both process and product and making connections to other aspects of life and study.

This Engagement Guide invites exploration before and after the performance, giving each student tools to make personal and meaningful connections during the show. You'll be able to link to specific subjects that you or your students may want more information about.

We've included a pre-performance engagement activity and a post-performance activity for artistic practice and reflection. By no means should you feel limited by these suggestions! Go, make art, learn more...and share your experiences where you can.

**Artistic Literacy:** Having the skills and knowledge you need to connect meaningfully with works of art—that's what we mean by artistic literacy. We think that means something different than knowing the names of all the different instruments musicians might play, or being able to reproduce the exact melodies you might hear during a show. To us at Cal Performances, it means you and your students will have a significant glimpse into the artistic process and will have a chance to try to solve the problems the artists aim to solve creatively. It means that the next time you see a performance, you'll be able to use these same insights to connect with a work of art through the artist's process and that this will deepen your experience as an audience member.

Artistically literate student audiences come to understand that every artist draws from a core set of concepts skillfully chosen and applied in performance to create a work of art both unique to the artist, and connected to other works of art.

And along the way, we hope that students of all ages—and their teachers and adult mentors—will be inspired to experiment with artistic decision-making and creativity themselves.

**Enjoy the show!**



## About Manual Cinema & *Frankenstein*

Manual Cinema is an Emmy Award-winning performance collective, design studio, and film/video production company founded in 2010 by Drew Dir, Sarah Fornace, Ben Kauffman, Julia Miller, and Kyle Vegter.

The company combines handmade shadow puppetry, cinematic techniques, and innovative sound and music to create immersive stories for stage and screen. Using vintage overhead projectors, multiple screens, puppets, actors, live feed cameras, multi-channel sound design, and a live music ensemble, Manual Cinema transforms the experience of attending the cinema and imbues it with liveness, ingenuity, and theatricality.

**Manual Cinema's *Frankenstein*** is an original movie created live onstage in front of the audience with live musicians, music playing robots, a mad science lab of percussion instruments, 5 puppeteer/actors, 2 cameras, and over 500 handmade puppets. The show not only adapts *Frankenstein* but also digs into Mary Shelley's biography with an all-female acting/puppetry cast. Motherhood, loss, and ambition weave through this supernatural tale of abandonment and creation.

Mary Shelley's story (based on her essay introducing the 1832 edition of the novel) is told in shadow puppetry with hand painted backgrounds. Victor Frankenstein's story is told in black and white silent film-style, over-the-top live video. And the Creature's story, the heart of the show, is told in both styles and also through live video made by shooting small tabletop puppets with a handheld camera. Throughout all of this an amazing character ensemble is playing dozens of instruments including a giant percussion rack. They are accompanied by robots with mallets that play a variety of percussion.



# Thoughts on the Performance

By Drew Dir, Manual Cinema's lead deviser and co-artistic director

Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*—which, among its myriad other contributions to popular culture, single-handedly founded the modern genre of science fiction—casts a long shadow over the medium of cinema. The story of Victor Frankenstein and the unnamed Creature he brings to life has itself been perennially re-animated for movie audiences; from the first 1910 silent film adaptation produced by Thomas Edison's studio, to Boris Karloff's iconic visage in the 1933 Universal Studios classic, to more recent Hollywood reboots, riffs, and parodies. With each new era, *Frankenstein* manages to connect with our sympathy and revulsion at Frankenstein's "monster," our ambivalence about the progress of science and technology, and our anxieties about the mysterious threshold between life and death.

Cal Performances presents *Frankenstein*, a new adaptation by Manual Cinema, a theater company that seeks to create cinema on stage through an ingenious choreography of live music, object theater, and shadow puppetry using old-school overhead projectors. The work of Manual Cinema shares a special affinity with Mary Shelley's story about the reanimation of obsolete materials, and their adaptation aims to capture the breadth of *Frankenstein*'s legacy in film: the novel's cinematic afterlife, so to speak. The artists are doing so by taking a cue from Mary Shelley herself, who gave her novel a "gothic" structure—the story is told in a series of narrative frames, like Russian nesting dolls, with each frame narrated by a different character (the centermost frame being an account by the Creature itself). In Manual Cinema's adaptation, each "frame" of the story will be told through a different cinematic genre or style, depending on which character's point-of-view is being presented. Like the Creature itself, the production becomes a pastiche of different visual idioms scavenged from a century of cinema.

Manual Cinema has also written an additional frame: the story of Mary Shelley herself, and how she came to write a novel of such enduring relevance. *Frankenstein* was originally conceived by Mary as a ghost story—a response to a friendly competition with the poets Percy Shelley and Lord Byron during an unusually stormy summer on Lake Geneva.

Manual Cinema's adaptation aims to re-animate its own *Frankenstein* against the backdrop of Mary Shelley's fascinating, tragic, and little-told biography.



# Illuminating the Art: Framing Facts and Fiction

***How does Manual Cinema use theatrical frames to tell the stories of Frankenstein's fictional characters and of the novel's real life author, Mary Shelley?***



Frames around pictures serve a couple of different purposes. They make it clear to anyone viewing what's inside of them (photo, painting, document, anything) is considered valuable by someone, that it is worth focusing on for a while. And they encourage the viewer to focus on the object within its borders with a kind of attention that separates that object or that moment, from the environment in which it is displayed.

## **Narrative Frames in *Frankenstein***

When it comes to telling or showing stories, literature, movies, and theater also use frames – narrative frames. For example, in *Frankenstein*, the story is revealed from the points of view of different characters who share their experiences in the moment, as well as their thoughts, and feelings. As we move through these various perspectives, or frames, our impressions of and connections to the characters shift and deepen. When we are introduced to the Creature, it is from Victor Frankenstein's perspective, with all the horror and disgust he feels for his unnatural creation. However, when the frame shifts to the Creature's voice, our idea of him expands, we feel sympathy for his loneliness and hurt. Shelley brings us deeper into understanding and empathizing her characters with each shift of the narrative frame.

## **Manual Cinema's Frames**

In his notes above, Drew Dir mentions that not only did Manual Cinema borrow from Mary Shelley's narrative framing when staging their production of *Frankenstein*, the company added a further frame that Shelley did not – the events in Shelley's own life that brought her novel into existence.

By adding this additional narrative frame, Manual Cinema also acknowledges *Frankenstein's* ripple effect in popular culture. How Mary Shelley was inspired to write *Frankenstein* is a well-known legend in its own right, one that encircles her novel, and is itself the subject of books and movies. Pregnant, and still haunted by the death of her first child, Shelley takes up a dare to write a ghost story. She draws from her recent experience, which include a dream in which she brings her baby back to life. (Another "frame" that may have inspired Shelley, and added to her complicated feelings about birth and death was her own mother's death after giving birth to her.)

Yet other cultural ripples include the many film versions of *Frankenstein* – images from which are burned into our collective memory. There's the iconic black and white film image of scientist

Victor Frankenstein pulling a big lever that electrifies the Creature into life, and shrieking, “It’s Alive!”, the green-faced monster with a bolt through his neck clumsily wandering, confused, unloved and lonely, then angry and vengeful. Manual Cinema knows we come to their production with these images in our minds, so the company deliberately addresses this in their work, for example, choosing the exaggerated style of silent film as the frame through which to tell Victor Frankenstein’s story.

Blending references to classic images with their own rich and evocative world of shadow and light, Manual Cinema creates a unique and resonant production that deeply explores the emotion, humor, and horror of this enduring story.

As you watch the show, notice the many different frames Manual Cinema uses throughout their production, and consider these questions:

- How does adding the frame of Mary Shelley’s own story enhance our understanding and experience of *Frankenstein*?
- What does each character’s stylistic frame (the visual style used to explore their point of view) tell us about them?

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## Engagement Activities

### Engagement Activity #1 (Pre-performance) FRAMING THE STORY IN FROZEN PICTURES & SHADOW IMAGES: Artistic Exploration

#### Overview

**Time needed: 30-60 minutes** (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will create a story tableau, and then a shadow picture play in order to explore narrative drama told through a series of visual images.

#### Guiding Questions

How do images or pictures tell a story?

How can we recreate a picture using just our bodies (or shadows of our bodies?)

How is a story tableau different from a shadow picture play?

#### Artistic Tool Box

Narrative scaffolding. Tableau (Frozen pictures). Shadow pictures. Movement transitions. Soundscapes.



## Supplies and Prep

- Open space for students to make frozen pictures with their bodies.
- Light-colored sheet (preferably solid color, no patterns or designs), and clips, rope or clothesline.
- Flashlight or other directed light source.
- Writing materials for students (journal, paper, writing implements).
- Smart phone or camera to take photos and video, and play sounds/music.
- *Optional*: craft paper and skewer or popsicle sticks (for shadow puppets)

## Instructions

**Step 1**      **Read or watch** a short video summary of *Frankenstein*. (See Resources on page 14 for websites.)

**Step 2**      **Consider the beginning, middle, and end of the *Frankenstein* story.** If you were to show a picture or image that would represent the beginning of the story, what would it be? What would a picture showing the middle of the story include? What about a picture for the end of the story? Write down descriptions for how you'd show the beginning, middle, and end of *Frankenstein*. What characters are included in each picture? What is the scenery or landscape within the pictures? What furniture, and what objects (or props) might you include?

**Step 3**      **Make frozen pictures** (called ***tableau*** in theater) of your beginning, middle and end pictures using your body.

- If you are playing a character, how are they holding their body, what is their pose? Need more characters? Ask other members of your family to join in!
- You can also embody objects or even scenery using your body. Or, you can create shadow puppets of characters, objects, and scenery, for example, mountains, trees, icebergs, etc. (See Resources on page 14 for websites on making shadow puppets.)
- Experiment with your beginning, middle, and end pictures. Are your poses as strong and expressive as possible? If there are several characters in your picture, can you try different levels like one higher and one lower? What else can you do to make your picture more dynamic and interesting?
- You might see how your pictures look in a mirror, or ask someone to take photos of them on their phone.



**Step 4**      **Hang up a light colored sheet across the room.** You can use clips or pins, or hang a sheet outside across a rope or clothesline at night to add to the spooky fun! You are now going to make shadow versions of your beginning, middle and end frozen pictures or tableaux.

- Using a flashlight or other light source behind you, restage your three tableaux behind the sheet.
  - What changes can you make to your tableaux to make them more effective as shadow images?
  - Experiment with where you position the flashlight to make the shadows larger or smaller, sharper or more distorted.



- Ask someone to take photos or video of you creating the three tableaux.
- Consider adding other tableaux between your beginning and middle frozen pictures, between your middle and end pictures. What would these look like? You can continue to add other frozen pictures that enhance your presentation of the *Frankenstein* story.
- Add in movement transitions between your tableaux. Does the quality of your movement (fast and jerky, slow and fluid, etc.) set the stage for what you show in your next tableau, or carry forward the feeling from the last tableau?
- Now, try adding sound to your tableaux, and your transitions. Manual Cinema layers live music, percussion, and sound effects in their production of *Frankenstein*. Experiment with “soundscapes” for each of your tableaux. You can choose to add realistic sounds (for example, the footsteps of the Creature), or abstract sounds (like repetitive or high-pitched noises) or even music (humming, singing, playing music through a speaker.)
- Record your tableaux on video.

*Optional:*

Manual Cinema tells Victor Frankenstein’s story using the style of old black and white silent films. You can choose to show your beginning, middle and end frozen pictures in this style as well.

- On a smartphone, you can either:
  - choose a Black and White filter and take photos of your three tableaux, or
  - edit your photos after taking them using a Black and White filter.
- Then, you can add text and put a silent film frame around your photo at: <https://imgflip.com/memegenerator/23646296/Silent-Movie-Card>

**Step 5**

**Share your images** with each other. Notice all the different choices everyone made for their beginning, middle, and end tableaux.

- **Discuss:**
  - What was it like to create your frozen pictures?
  - Did your first ideas for your beginning, middle, and end pictures shift when you staged them? What changed?
  - How are your original tableaux different from your shadow play ones? What adjustments did you make to your tableaux when you turned them into shadow play images?

## Engagement Activity #2 (Post-Performance)

### OBSERVING & UNDERSTANDING FRAMES: Reflection & Artistic Exploration

#### Overview

**Time needed: 20-30 minutes** (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will reflect on Manual Cinema's performance of *Frankenstein* through individual reflection and group discussion to understand how artists' choices influence our experience of a performance.

#### Guiding Questions

How does Manual Cinema use different visual styles in *Frankenstein*?

How are different characters' "frames" shown in the performance?

How does Manual Cinema's use of sound in *Frankenstein* add to the production?



#### Artistic Literacy Tool Box

Attentive observing, listening and responding.  
Layered images & sounds. Gestures.

Theatrical genres or styles.

#### Supplies and Prep

- Writing materials for students (journal, paper, writing implements)

#### Instructions

**Step 1** **Think back** to Manual Cinema's production of *Frankenstein* and jot or sketch some of their memories of the performance.





- Where did you see different styles used in the production?
- How did using different styles as a frame for each character's experience lend a unique quality to how each story was told?
- What did the music and sound effects add to the performance?
- What stood out, or was most memorable to you?

**Step 2** **What did you See and Hear?**

In order to understand what choices the artists of Manual Cinema made when creating *Frankenstein*, it helps to understand what they actually put on stage, not what we may be interpreting or projecting onto the stage using our imaginations.



- Before you jump into sharing your impressions of the performance, try to remember what you actually saw on the screen. (Not what was in your imagination or “mind’s eye”, but what visual information your eyes took in.)
- Share with others the images and elements you saw in the performance.
- Now, think back to what you actually heard. (Again, not the impression the sounds made on you, but the sounds your ears took in.)
- Share with others the sounds and music you heard in the performance.

SEE 	HEAR 
THINK 	FEEL 

### Step 3

#### What did you Think and Feel?

Now let’s talk about how the artist’s choices of what to show visually and what sounds and music to include, brought up certain thoughts and feelings for you.

- What do remember thinking during the performance?
- What did you wonder about? What other stories or impressions come mind when you were watching?
- And how did you feel as you watched the performance? What emotions emerged as you watched the characters’ experiences?

### Step 4

**Discuss:** Manual Cinema very intentionally chooses certain images, even gestures (like when a character playfully taps on another’s nose) throughout *Frankenstein*.

- Which images captured the essence of the characters most for you? Why?
- How did Manual Cinema use sound and music to add to the performance and heighten your emotional response?

*Suggestion for Teachers:* Share your screen and capture what your students saw, heard, thought, and felt.

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## Engagement Activity #3 (Post-Performance)

### STORY FRAMES WITHIN FRAMES: Reflection & Artistic Exploration

#### Overview

**Time needed: 30-60 minutes** (can be extended with layers of exploration).

Students will imagine a creation story behind an author’s work, and will stage a shadow picture play of nested narratives using tableau, movement transitions, and soundscapes to bring it to life.

#### Guiding Questions

How can the story of how an artist created their work inform that work?

How do separate narrative frames work together to tell a more complex story?

How can soundscapes and movement transitions enhance a shadow picture play?



### Artistic Literacy Tool Box

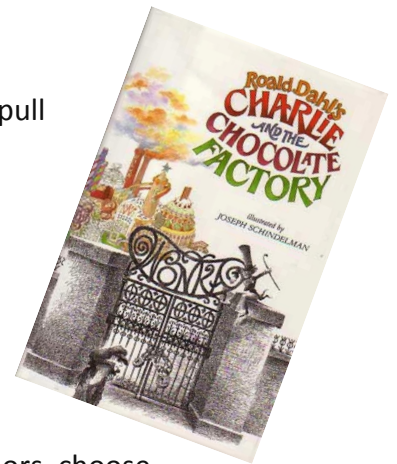
Research. Narrative scaffolding. Creative writing. Tableau (Frozen pictures).  
Shadow pictures. Movement transitions. Soundscapes.

### Supplies and Prep

- Open space for students to make frozen pictures with their bodies.
- Light-colored sheet (preferably solid color, no patterns or designs), and clips, rope or clothesline.
- Flashlight or other directed light source.
- Writing materials for students (journal, paper, writing implements).
- Online/Search engine access
- Smart phone or camera to take photos and video, and play sounds/music.
- *Optional*: craft paper and skewer or popsicle sticks (for shadow puppets)

### Instructions

You've probably heard the phrase, "Write what you know." Many authors pull from their own life experiences for inspiration, just as Mary Shelley did for *Frankenstein*. For example, elementary students at author Roald Dahl's school tasted and rated new products for Cadbury Chocolates. (Great school, right?) Some believe that not only did Dahl's lifelong love of chocolate start there, but the experience later sparked the idea for his novel, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.



**Step 1**      **Make a list** of some of your favorite books.

- If you know some information about one of the authors, choose that book.
- If you don't know about any of the authors of the books you've listed, just choose the book you like best.

**Step 2**      **Outline what happens in the beginning, middle and end** of the book. A sentence to describe each section is fine.

**Step 3**      **Do an online search** for the author, and read a biography from their own website, or from a Wikipedia, or other article about them.



- Take note of some biographical details that stand out for you. From what you've learned about them, is there something from their own lives that may have inspired them to write this book?

#### Step 4

**Consider some themes and events** from the book.

- Now, be as creative as you wish, and imagine the author as if they themselves are a character in a book.
- What's the story behind why they wrote this book? Don't worry about sticking closely to the details of the author's life, or even what they themselves may have said about what inspired them to write the book. You're now writing a kind of historical fiction, taking an idea from their life and reimagining a creation myth for how this book came into existence.
- Write down some of your ideas.

#### Step 5

**Choose an idea and write** a brief (2-3) paragraph story about how the author came to write the book.

- Share what you've written with each other. Now that you've heard different stories, did they spark any new ideas or fresh elements to add to your story? (For example, a different setting, or more specific character qualities? Is there a relationship that might be important?)
- Revise and edit your story. What is the clear beginning of the story, the middle, the end?

#### Step 6

**Shadow Tableau Time!** (You knew we were headed back here, right?)

- What tableau shadow pictures would you create to show the beginning of your story, the middle, the end? Experiment with these until you hit upon the choices that tell the story in the most interesting way.
- Revisit the beginning, middle and end sentences you wrote describing the author's book and create shadow pictures for each of these moments.
- Now we're going to borrow from Manual Cinema's production and bring together the shadow pictures of your creation story, with the shadow pictures showing the beginning, middle and end of the author's book.
- Is there a picture at the end you'd like to add that combines the author and something from their book? (Remember at the end of Manual Cinema's *Frankenstein*, when Mary Shelley holds the Creature?)
- As you did in the first tableau activity, layer in physical transitions between the shadow pictures.
- Create a soundscape for your piece.
- If you wish, create shadow puppets (other characters, objects, scenery, etc.)
- Record your shadow picture play on video and share with others!
- Discuss:
  - What was it like to create your piece?
  - What changes did you make along the way?
  - What stood out for you from other students' shadow picture plays, and why?

You might consider seeking curricular connections in history, science, or literature. If you design a lesson that you'd like to share, please let us know! We'd like to include it on our blog or in future workshops for teachers...

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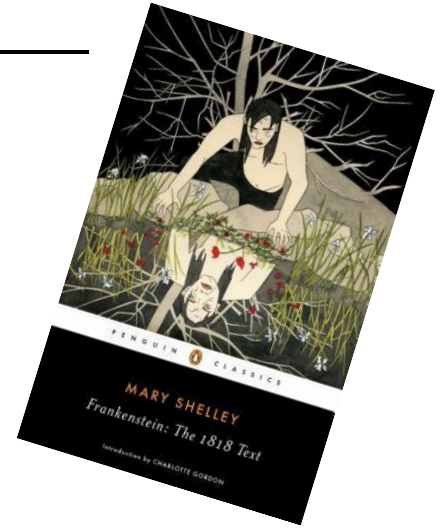
## Resources

**Manual Cinema's *Frankenstein* web site:**

<https://manualcinema.com/frankenstein/>

**Artist Conversation with Manual Cinema:**

<https://calperformances.org/related-events/pre-performance-conversation-for-frankenstein/>



### ***Frankenstein* Plot summary**

- Written - <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/frankenstein/summary>
- Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8heuW2Roilo>

### **Books**

- *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, by Mary Shelley
- *She Made A Monster: How Mary Shelley Created Frankenstein*, by Lynn Fulton
- *Monster, The Story of a Young Mary Shelley*, by M.R. Arnold

### **Lesson Plans**

- Manual Cinema: The Maker's Guide to Cinematic Shadow Puppetry: [https://krannertcenter.com/sites/krannertcenter.com/files/makers\\_guide\\_to\\_manual\\_cinema.pdf](https://krannertcenter.com/sites/krannertcenter.com/files/makers_guide_to_manual_cinema.pdf)
- Kennedy Center: The Science of Shadow Puppets: <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/lessons-and-activities/lessons/6-8/the-science-of-shadow-puppets/>
- Creating shadow puppets: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OsdMqNlcrIs>

**Local shadow theater:** ShadowLight Productions: <https://www.shadowlight.org/>



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