



Introduction

Schools have differing views about running Halloween activities in their school. Where schools have chosen to join in with Halloween, there is an opportunity to explore deeper ideas about what makes us human. This Idea for collective worship uses Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Bible story of Jesus in the wilderness to explore how we can make better choices.

Preparation

You might want to search out images of Frankenstein as an illustration, but please take great care to only use images that are suitable for a young audience. Searches that include the phrase 'for children' tend to be more helpful. If in doubt, check your choice of images with a senior member of staff.

Development

What makes us alive? What makes you you, and what makes me me? What makes us human? Is it being able to choose between doing the easy thing and doing the right thing?

200 years ago, a young woman called Mary Shelley wrote a novel about a scientist who was trying to do something completely new - to create his own kind of life. The name of the scientist was Dr Viktor Frankenstein. Who's heard of that name? In the story, Viktor uses electricity to bring life to a creature he has assembled in his laboratory. In the story, he succeeds. But then he is disappointed with the creature; he treats it like a wild animal, chains it up and beats it until the poor thing escapes into the mountains, lonely, without a friend in the world. Everybody is scared of the creature. Everyone fears it, until finally it decides to act like the monster everyone thinks it is, and it becomes a murderer. It cries out, 'I am malicious, because I am miserable!'

Dark, isn't it? But stories like this are interesting and exciting because they're all about questions that matter to us, such as:

- *Just because I can do something, does that mean I should do it?*
- *If I own a living creature, does that mean I can do what I like to it?*
- And, of course: *Who says what's right, and what's wrong?*

Mary Shelley's story was later turned into stage plays and films. Nowadays, most people think Frankenstein is the name of the creature, but no. That's the name of the scientist, the doctor. In a way, Viktor is the real monster. He says, 'It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn. One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought.' He becomes very cruel.

Frankenstein is a story about being proud - saying, 'Look at me! I can do what I like, and no one can stop me!' I wonder... what's the opposite of pride? Here's a Bible story about someone facing that



dilemma. (*Children act out the different responses and expressions as the story progresses.*)

Jesus was thinking hard. His name meant 'The Rescuer', but what kind of rescuer was he going to be? Would he use weapons or special skills and clever tricks? He was facing up to the really big problems wrecking the world: selfishness, greed and pride. How do you defeat that sort of thing? He needed time to think, so he went off into the desert without food, fasting to help him concentrate.

It was hot out there during the day, with lots of rocks. Bitter cold at night. Very little to eat. And almost nothing to drink. Sometimes, the wind blew sand in his face, and it was easy to get confused and lose your way. It was lonely and quiet too. In this lonely and dangerous place, Jesus puzzled over the big question: what sort of rescuer-king was he going to be?

Once, he heard a menacing voice: 'Why don't you turn those stones over there into bread and give yourself something to eat?'

Should he use God's power to just fill his own belly and do magic tricks? 'NO! People need more than that to live. They need all the words in God's book!'

He dreamed he was high up, standing at the very top of the big temple in Jerusalem. He heard the menacing voice again. 'Why don't you throw yourself down? See if God's angels will come and catch you!'

That would be impressive. Lots of people would go wow at that! But... 'NO!' said Jesus. 'I'm not going to test God like that!'

Then he dreamed he could see all the countries and kingdoms and armies in the world, all at once, laid out before him. He heard the menacing voice again. 'Serve me.' it said, 'and I'll make you king of the whole world.'

'NO!' Jesus shouted. 'God is love! I'm here to show them how to love each other, not to fight each other!'

Then the voice went away, defeated. Jesus now knew what sort of rescuer-king he was going to be. He stretched out his arms and gave himself to God.

I wonder: what sort of rescuer king was he going to be?

(Based on Matthew 4:1-11.)

Meditation

In the Bible, Jesus taught his followers to pray:

May your kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.



(Matthew 6.10)

I wonder: what difficult choices might we all face today? It might be in lesson time, or at break time, or even after school. When will you, when will I, have to choose between doing the easy thing and doing the right thing? And what might help you and I to do the right thing?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we all face hundreds of choices every day. Help us to learn from you, and make the right choices. Amen

Information for teachers

When Halloween celebrations are a talking point for children in school, teachers can choose either to ignore them or to go with the flow, revelling in the fantasy elements of the season and using them as a basis for cross-curricular work. This idea for collective worship offers another alternative: to explore some of the underlying ideas in the mythology and point out positive elements in the original story that relate to Christian values. *Frankenstein* is a difficult adult novel, and we would not suggest it as suitable reading (or watching) for children. However, Mary Shelley's use of Christian ideas about creation is often passed over today, and well worth rescuing for new audiences.