

Frankenstein and the Birth of Science Fiction

An introduction to Sci-Fi

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Edizioni Marzo 2018

1. Read

Frankenstein is one of the most famous science fiction books ever written, but did you know that it is also considered to be the first? This is quite amazing for two reasons: one, it was written by a woman, and two, it was written way back in 1818. Sci-Fi is often regarded as a relatively new genre and one which appeals to men, but that is obviously not the case. So, 200 years after *Frankenstein* came on the scene, let's take a closer look at Sci-Fi and what it really is.

Sci-Fi is a genre of story (book or film) which is totally based on imaginary events; events that could never really happen but which are made possible thanks to advanced science and technology which are not available in the real world. This is why lots of sci-fi stories involve aliens, spaceships, time machines and dead people coming back to life, for example.

Frankenstein himself was created by Doctor Frankenstein, who brought him to life by continuously pushing the boundaries of science. Frankenstein was widely regarded as a monster but his very existence brings out lots of moral and ethical issues and so the key question on which readers must reflect is: who is the real monster in all of this?

Shelley may have been the first to experiment with this genre but she certainly wasn't the last: Another British author, HG Wells, wrote *The War of the Worlds* in 1897 about an alien invasion which terrified the British people; the French author Jules Verne wrote *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* in 1870 about an underwater world and the American author Orson Scott Card wrote *Ender's Game* more recently in 1985, again about the planet Earth under attack from aliens.

The attraction of Sci-Fi is that the imagination knows no limits; there are no rules about what can and can't happen in your story. Not really a fan? Try mixing genres. How about Sci-Fi Romance? It's always touching when two star struck aliens fall in love over the Milky Way!

2. Write 'True' or 'False' next to each sentence.

- a. *Frankenstein* was written by a man.
- b. Mary Shelley was a 20th century author.
- c. Sci-Fi is not realistic.
- d. *Frankenstein* was Dr. Frankenstein's biological son.
- e. Mary Shelley and HG Wells were both British.
- f. There can never be romance in a Sci-Fi story.

3. Underline the six Sci-Fi words & phrases in these story extracts.

- a. The aliens have invaded our planet.
- b. Spaceships have landed all over the country.
- c. They have invisibility cloaks.
- d. Many people have abandoned Earth in their time machines.
- e. This is the start of a huge intergalactic war.
- f. We must send our avatars to stop them.

4. Think of your own Sci-Fi story. To tell a good story you must always consider 5 key elements.

WHO.....

WHAT.....

WHERE.....

WHY.....

HOW.....

Plan your story by deciding on the key elements. Write your answers in the spaces above.

5. Write your story for radio. Use a news broadcast format. Start with this sentence:

'Good morning listeners. We have an emergency broadcast. The aliens are coming. I repeat, the aliens are coming.'



Teacher's Notes

1. Before reading ask the students what they know about sci-fi, if they like it and if they can name any famous authors.
2. Write 'true' or 'false' next to each sentence.
 - a. *Frankenstein* was written by a man. FALSE
 - b. Mary Shelley was a 20th century author. FALSE
 - c. Sci-Fi is not realistic. TRUE
 - d. *Frankenstein* was Dr. Frankenstein's biological son. FALSE
 - e. Mary Shelley and HG Wells were both British. TRUE
 - f. There can never be romance in a Sci-Fi story. FALSE
3. Before doing exercise 3 try and elicit some sci-fi story ideas from your class. What elements are often present in these stories? Aliens that INVADE planets. Spaceships that TRAVEL around the galaxy, for example.
 - a. The aliens have invaded our planet.
 - b. Spaceships have landed all over the country.
 - c. They have invisibility cloaks.
 - d. Many people have abandoned Earth in their time machines.
 - e. This is the start of a huge *intergalactic* war.
 - f. We must send our *avatars* to stop them.
4. Sample answer.

WHO: Aliens
WHAT: Invading Earth
WHERE: In spaceships
WHY: Because some astronauts stole their life rock
WHEN: Now
5. Put the students into groups so that they could write their radio broadcasts. If you have time, get them to listen to the prank that HG Wells played on the American people in his 1938 radio broadcast of War of the Worlds. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWD9Q6klzco>

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