Dear Educators,

Thank you for engaging your students in Milwaukee Film’s Education Screening of *The Angry Black Girl and her Monster*. This film “follows anti-hero Vicaria, a brilliant teenager who believes death is a disease that can be cured. After the brutal murder of her brother, she embarks on a dangerous journey to bring him back to life. Inspired by Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, the film’s writer and director, Bomani J. Story, crafts a thrilling tale about a family that will survive and is reborn again despite the terrors of systemic pressure.

In this film, we are inviting high school students to engage both individually and collectively as it explores themes of systemic and reactionary violence through a horror lens through a series of discussion and reflection questions, as well as group activities. These activities are designed to prompt students’ thinking on what societal pressures can do to us mentally and physically, and call into question how reactions to those pressures have been moralized. Therefore, we invite educators to tailor these activities as they see fit for the comprehension and understanding of their students. This could include allowing each student to share their findings with the class, formalizing how they share into an actual class presentation, or allowing students to read the entirety of the activity’s essay or article.
**A Note from the Curriculum Writer:**

“I got this infection from my mama” is my response anytime anyone asks me about my love for horror. She introduced me to a world of unknowns when she sat me down to watch *Blade*. He was and still is my introduction to horror, although many people would not consider those films to be horror. But like an infection, it sometimes takes time for your immune system to recognize that it is being infiltrated, thus prompting your body to kick into gear and prepare to fight it off.

My mama would tell you in great detail how I screamed for minutes on end when I first watched *Darkness Falls*, my body’s attempt at refusing the infection I thought I loved. I could not get the image of the boogeyman or, in the context of that film, the boogey-woman out of my head. It was not until I watched the movie again for understanding that I became interested in what horror could teach me about critiques of society and how it defied the logic that did not seem to hold up in moments of fear. Before I knew it, I was hooked.

To be able to design a discussion guide to address themes of systemic oppression, revenge, communal grief, and Black life through the lens of horror is not only rewarding but an innovative way to understand how real life shows up in films, especially the scary ones. If it’s one thing we can learn from watching horror films, it is always to remain curious because not everything is what it seems, and relying too heavily on one fact or inkling can cost you.

We urge those interacting with this curriculum to be curious about Vicaria’s journey in processing grief, sadness, joy, and anger. Bear witness to her attempts to go the extra mile to restore life where it was taken. In response, we also urge you to think about Vicaria’s position. Do you understand her to be a ‘mad scientist,’ a ‘body snatcher,’ or just a young Black girl desperate to cure the disease of death that ravaged her community and her family? The decision is yours. Choose wisely.

**Breanna Taylor**

Curriculum & Impact Coordinator, Langston League

Souls of Young Folk Co-Facilitator, Black Lens
Curriculum Packet Work Submission Overview:

You can send evidence of the work you did to integrate the film into your classroom electronically or by mail. This could include: links to online content, Google Drive folders, scanned material, photocopied or original student work concerning the film/film-going experience, or even your own anecdotal, narrative accounts. **We should receive this evidence of your integration of the film into your classroom by June 20, 2023.** All of what you send us will help us write and fulfill the grants allowing us to bring these films to you and your students at a low cost. We may also post some of the best work on our website (with students’ first names and school only) later in the year (if you prefer we not share your students’ work publicly, please let us know).

**There is an Essay Contest in this packet!** Submit writing from your students in response to the standard prompt we offer here by December 31, 2023, for consideration. A panel of judges will select the best essay, and a runner-up in each grade range to receive a bookstore gift certificate as a prize. See the Essay Contest handout in this packet for more details.

**Send student work or evidence via email to marielle@mkefilm.org or by mail to:**

Milwaukee Film  
Attn: Marielle Allschwang, Education Manager  
1037 W. McKinley Ave, Suite 200  
Milwaukee, WI 53205
Curriculum At-A-Glance

Activity Wisconsin Common Core Standards:

The order provided here is the recommended order for the activities provided in this packet. Activities are designed for a 45-50 minute class period. The following activities align with the Common Core Standards of 9-12 Grade for English & Language Arts (ELA) and science.

Activity One: ‘Putting the Pieces Together’ (Link to full article HERE)

- **EE.R.9-10.1** Determine which citations demonstrate what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially. (RI&RL)
- **EE.R.11-12.1** Analyze a text to determine its meaning and cite textual evidence to support explicit and implicit understandings. (RI&RL)
- **R.9-10.2** Objectively and accurately summarize texts, from a variety of genres, to determine one or more themes or central ideas and analyze its development, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details. (RI&RL)
- **R.11-12.2** Objectively and accurately summarize a complex text to determine two or more themes or central ideas and analyze their development, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details. (RI&RL)
- **SCI.SEP6.A.h** Students create explanations that are supported by multiple and independent student-generated sources of evidence consistent with scientific ideas, principles, and theories. This includes the following: Make quantitative and qualitative claims regarding the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Construct and revise an explanation based on valid and reliable evidence obtained from a variety of sources, including students’ own investigations, models, theories, simulations, and peer review.
- **SCI.SEP6.A.h** Explanations should reflect the assumption that theories and laws that describe the natural world operate today as they did in the past and will continue to do so in the future.
- **SCI.SEP7.h** Students use appropriate and sufficient evidence and scientific reasoning to defend and critique claims and explanations about the natural and designed world. Arguments may also come from current scientific or historical episodes in science. This includes the following: Compare and evaluate competing arguments or design solutions in light of
currently accepted explanations, new evidence, limitations (e.g., trade-offs), constraints, and ethical issues. Evaluate the claims, evidence, and reasoning behind currently accepted explanations or solutions to determine the merits of arguments.

- **SCI.LS1.A.h** Systems of specialized cells within organisms help perform essential functions of life. Any one system in an organism is made up of numerous parts. Feedback mechanisms maintain an organism’s internal conditions within certain limits and mediate behaviors.

**Activity Two: ‘Understanding the Monster’ (Link to full essay [HERE](#))**

- **EE.R.9-10.1** Determine which citations demonstrate what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially. (RI&RL)
- **EE.R.11-12.1** Analyze a text to determine its meaning and cite textual evidence to support explicit and implicit understandings. (RI&RL)
- **R.9-10.8 | R.11-12.8** Delineate and evaluate an argument and specific claims in a text, assessing the validity or fallacy of key statements by examining whether the supporting evidence is relevant and sufficient. (RI)
- **W.9-10.1 | W.11-12.1** Compose reflective, formal, and creative writing, which may happen simultaneously or independently, for a variety of high-stakes and low-stakes purposes.
- **SL.9-10.1 | SL.11-12.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, listening actively, and building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
Pre-Class Work on ‘What is Black Horror?’:

Professor Tananarive Due, a Black horror scholar, historian, filmmaker, and writer, walks us through the depths of Black horror and its representation in Hollywood. Movies like *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster* are added to the canon of black horror to make us think about what black filmmakers are saying about the world they inhabit. Most famously, professor Due has declared that "black history is black horror," allowing audience members to grapple with how much of what we see is real life and, if it is not, how much of what we see has been inspired by real life.

Take the next few moments to watch a clip of professor Due explaining the history of black horror films related to *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster*. By the end of the clip, you should be able to identify connecting themes that could help them understand why horror is essential in understanding topics such as race, class, and systemic pressures.

**Educator Note:** Please instruct students to watch the following video and prepare for a mini-class discussion using the following questions:

- What were your initial reactions to the clip? What stood out? What shifted your thinking?
- What topics or themes do you notice are often addressed in Black horror films?
- What similarities and/or differences do you notice throughout Black horror film history?
- Which character archetypes can you identify?

Students will learn about the sub-genre of Black horror films related to *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster*. It is vital for students to identify connecting themes that could help them understand why horror is essential in understanding topics such as race, class, and systemic pressures. This activity should be completed first to equip students with the language commonly used to describe horror content and to generate a deeper understanding of what they have seen in the film and other horror films as well.
Section One: Vicaria Frankenstein?

Director Bomani J. Story cites *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster* as a modern-day spin on the classic science-fiction horror story *Frankenstein*. Vicaria, a girl obsessed with curing death, embarks on a journey to bring her brother back to life after being murdered. We learn that Vicaria has battled with the impact of death in her family for as long as she can remember, further driving her need to cure it. Like Mary Shelley's writing of *Frankenstein*, we see that Vicaria positions herself between life and death to usher people back to the side of the living. In doing so, she sets off a chain reaction in which her brother Chris does not return to live in his former glory but that of a monster or what he has believed himself to be. Chris begins to haunt the neighborhood through his murderous killing spree, allowing the disease of death to continue to spread. This prompts Vicaria to question what she has created and whether death is truly curable, especially with her at the helm of its spread through her recreation of Chris.

Unlike Dr. Victor Frankenstein, in Shelley's story, Vicaria does not go against the grain of life and death for fame or glory but to prove that the incessant amount of death she and other people in her community have endured can be halted. These continuous moments of death are depicted in the film through police violence in black communities, lack of resources in underdeveloped neighborhoods, and community violence. These depictions also challenge viewers to reconsider what it means to be alive and under what conditions we are expected to keep going.

While Vicaria's intentions can be distinguishable from those of Dr. Frankenstein, both characters unintentionally release horror on the people around them through their 'creations.' in realizing this, both characters struggle to accept what they have created. Their creations are left to make sense of their newfound lives independently. Is this the work of a 'mad scientist' or someone who wants to turn back the hands of time for someone they loved?

“I do know that for the sympathy of one living being, I would make peace with all. I have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine and rage the likes of which you would not believe. If I cannot satisfy the one, I will indulge the other.”

*The Creature.* -Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein
Section One: Reflection Question: (Reflection questions are meant to be done individually.)

What are your initial thoughts about Vicaria as a character? How would you describe her? Using what you have seen in the Black Horror clip, where does she fit within the canon of Black Horror characters?

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Section Two: ‘Death is a Disease’

When thinking of the phrase ‘death is a disease,’ many things come to mind. Considering the conditions Vicaria and her community live through calls into question what is allowing death to spread so often and rapidly. Before reading the analysis below, take a moment to read the definition of death according to dictionary.com and then read the breakdown of death as a disease.

DEATH: the act of dying; the end of life; the total and permanent cessation of all the vital functions of an organism; extinction; destruction.

PUBLIC HEALTH: defined by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the branch of medicine dealing with public health, including hygiene, epidemiology, and disease prevention.

In 2021, CONGRESS declared racism to be a public health crisis, impacting the everyday lives of “African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and other People of Color;” who have endured “a longstanding history and legacy of racism, mistreatment, and discrimination.” What this indicates is that at a systemic level, there has been a great amount of death and destruction that has impacted marginalized communities.

On a mental and psychological level, the declaration of racism as a public health crisis has led to a series of health disadvantages as described by Congress:

"WHEREAS RESEARCHERS HAVE DEVELOPED THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF ‘WEATHERING’ TO DESCRIBE HOW THE CONSTANT STRESS OF RACISM LEADS TO POOR HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR BLACK AMERICANS; WHEREAS THE DAILY EXPERIENCE OF RACISM IS ASSOCIATED WITH STRESS, DEPRESSION, AND ANXIETY AND MAY CAUSE PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIVITY OR CONTRIBUTE TO CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS; WHEREAS RACISM IS LINKED TO MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS;"
On a physical level, the declaration of racism as a public health crisis has led to a series of health disadvantages as described by Congress:

"WHEREAS SEVERAL FEDERAL PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED TO ADDRESS SOME, BUT NOT ALL, OF THE HEALTH OUTCOMES THAT ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY EXPERIENCED BY COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, INCLUDING SICKLE CELL DISEASE, TUBERCULOSIS, INFANT MORTALITY, AND HIV/AIDS; WHEREAS LIFE EXPECTANCY RATES FOR BLACK AND NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES ARE SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER THAN THOSE OF WHITE PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES;"

**Activity One: ‘Putting the Piece Together’**

Like Dr. Frankenstein, Vicaria reanimates Chris using the body parts of other victims in her neighborhood. But what happens to a person’s soul when the memories and experiences of other people are kept within the body parts used to keep them alive? According to an essay written by Mitchell B. Liester in *Science Direct*, patients who received heart transplant operations experienced a series of personality changes. In the essay, it notes:

"Two types of emotional changes are reported following heart transplantation. First, some recipients experience specific emotions that they identify as originating from the donor. Second, recipients' temperament, or emotional reactivity to stimuli, is sometimes altered."

Considering that we have all experienced trauma that may have gone unresolved in our lives and has been stored away in our bodies, it calls into question: how much control did Chris and Dr. Frankenstein’s creation have over themselves? According to SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration) of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, trauma is defined as:

"SAMHSA describes individual trauma as an event or circumstance resulting in physical harm, emotional harm, and/or life-threatening harm. The event or circumstance has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s: mental health, physical health, emotional health, social well-being, and/or spiritual well-being."
Directions:

- Read the descriptions below and match them to the body organ that best describes it.
- Take a moment and discuss with your classmates what you have learned about trauma and how it shows up in the body.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Body Organ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTIVATES THE SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM WHEN IT IDENTIFIES A POTENTIAL THREAT.</td>
<td>SPINAL CORD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHRINKS OVER TIME IF CONSTANTLY IN STATE OF HYPER-ACTIVITY OR RESPONSE. STRESS MAKES IT HARD TO HAVE EMOTIONAL REGULATION.</td>
<td>AMYGDALA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT CAN FEEL TIGHT, TENSE, OR THE SENSATION THAT SOMETHING IS PULLING IF THERE IS NO RELEASE OF THE TRAUMA OR STORED EMOTIONS.</td>
<td>HIPPOCAMPUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAN RESULT IN CHRONIC PAIN, STIFFNESS, AND TIGHTNESS IF TRAUMA GOES UNRESOLVED.</td>
<td>HIP FLEXORS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correct Answers:

- 1. Amygdala
- 2. Hippocampus
- 3. Hip Flexors
- 4. Spinal Cord
Activity One: Discussion Question

Discussion questions are meant to be done individually and then shared with other students.

Where do you notice pain or discomfort in your body at this current moment? Take a moment to compare answers with someone. What similarities or differences do you notice between one another?

**BONUS:** Take a moment and research how trauma can be resolved in the organs mentioned in the activity. Write down some tips that you feel would be helpful to you.

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Activity Two: ‘Understanding the Monster’

Before his final death, Vicaria poses the question to Chris, “Why did you do this?” He responds by saying, “Because I’m a monster.” When thinking of what it means to be a monster or to be monstrous, what comes to mind? Would you define Chris as a monster? Would define Vicaria as a monster? Below you will find an excerpt from Salvatore S. DiBono who discusses "HOW MONSTROUS SUBJECTIVITIES AFFECT FUTURITY IN GOTHIC HORROR."

"There is a form of subjectivity unique to the monstrous which situates the monstrous as being in opposition to the hegemony of the white, patriarchal, heterosexual, and capitalistic American ideology. This “monstrous subjectivity is not a valorization or fetishization of otherness, but rather a reimagining of the subject positionality of those who are considered monstrous and a giving of power to the monstrous as a form of radical resistance to an oppressive hegemonic structure. Instead of viewing the monster as a disguise for ideology in order to keep its subjects in line, we should focus on how the monstrous also functions as a diametric resistance to dominant ideology, thus becoming a subjectivity that demands to be perceived in a context of its own making in response to the dominant culture.

In order to identify what constitutes a literary figure as possessing or claiming “monstrous subjectivity” it is important to first define this term. Most important to this understanding of “monstrous subjectivity” is the concept of hegemony originally developed by Antonio Gramsci but furthered by the Althusserian theory of ideological state apparatuses. Hegemony is defined as a “shorthand to describe the relatively dominant position of a particular set of ideas and their associated tendency to become commonsensical and intuitive, thereby inhibiting the dissemination or even the articulation of alternative ideas” (Rosemond, brittanica.com). “Monstrous subjectivity” is the realization or the claiming of subjecthood outside of hegemonic—or, more plainly, normative—conceptions of subjecthood. Subjectivity is the possession of a consciousness, perspective, experience, and agency, or in plainer terms being in control of one’s own individuality."
Activity Two: Discussion Question

After reading the excerpt from Salvatore S. DiBono’s essay, how has your understanding of the monster shifted? Why or why not? Feel free to use textual examples to support your statement.

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Activity Two: ‘Understanding the Monster Pt. 2’

Write a love letter to your inner ‘monster.’ What would you say? What does your inner ‘monster’ need from you at this moment? Be prepared to share with the group.

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Section Three: In Case You Missed It (ICYMI)

Please read below for a few film easter eggs that you may have missed to enhance your viewing experience for a second, third, and infinite watch.

- Aisha’s baby is named after Dr. Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* story.
- When Aisha says, “he’s alive” it is a nod to the famous quote “it’s alive” spoken after Dr. Frankenstein brings the creature to life.
- Vicaria’s neighborhood nickname as the ‘body snatcher’ is a nod to another horror classic, *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers*.
- While the trope of the ‘mad scientist’ as we know him today is credited to Mary Shelley’s creation of *Frankenstein*, it is believed there are earlier versions of this trope that emerged in Greek mythology to describe *Prometheus*, who stole fire from the gods to give to mankind.
- Vicaria’s name could be a possible nod to the word ‘vicarious’ which means “experienced in the imagination through the feelings or actions of another person.” Or in the physiological sense, “noting or pertaining to a situation in which one organ performs part of the functions normally performed by another.” This definition would make sense seeing that Chris’ reanimation relies on the help of others’ organs to keep him alive after he is brought back to life.
- **BONUS:** research the following names and be prepared to talk about what you found.
  - Valerie Thomas
  - Alice H. Parker
  - Sister Rosetta Tharpe

“LEARN FROM THE GREATS. ALL OF THEM.”
2023 ESSAY CONTEST

For a fifth year, Milwaukee Film is hosting an Essay Contest in conjunction with our Education Screenings. A judging panel will select the best essay and a runner-up from essays submitted in response to each screening's standard, provided essay prompt. Winners and runners-up will receive an award in the form of a certificate and a gift card to a local bookstore. Submissions will be read anonymously, with name and school information removed from each essay prior to distribution to judges. Judges will assess each essay using a rubric informed by the Common Core State Standards for writing appropriate to the grade band into which the writing falls.

Submission Details:
- You may elect to send all of your students’ work or just a selection.
- For each submission, attach a completed and signed release slip (a set of these forms is attached).
- Mail all submissions to:
  Milwaukee Film attn: Essay Contest
  1037 W. McKinley Ave #200
  Milwaukee, WI 53205
- Submissions must be postmarked by {date needed}
- Teachers of winning entries will be notified by {date needed}, 2023 and we will coordinate a date/time to present the award to the student. Due to anticipated volume, we unfortunately cannot inform all submissions’ teachers.

**Essay Prompt — Grades 9-12:** Considering that *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster* are a modern-day spin on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, write an essay focusing on a community issue that you are passionate about in creation of a modern-day spin on your favorite movie. Consider the following questions:
- What is the movie you will create a modern-day spin on?
- What community issue will you focus on?
  - Ex. The generational disconnect between teens and adults? Bullying?
- Who are your characters?
- What is their goal in the movie?
- What is the conflict?
- What is the solution?

Your essay should be a minimum of five paragraphs and include specific examples from the film.

Good luck writers!

Teachers, feel free to do preparatory work in your classroom to help students do their best writing on this topic. After students have completed a first draft, feel free to have them workshop their writing and revise/edit their work accordingly. Submissions may be handwritten or typed, depending on your resources.
MILWAUKEE FILM ESSAY CONTEST RELEASE FORM

Include a completed copy of this slip with each submission for the 2023 Essay Contest. Please type or print legibly.

Student Full Name ____________________________________________________________

Teacher Full Name ____________________________________________________________

Teacher Email ________________________________________________________________

Teacher Phone Number _________________________________________________________

School Name _________________________________________________________________

I hereby authorize the above named child’s writing to be submitted for consideration in the
Milwaukee Film 2023 Essay Contest:

Parent/Guardian Signature ___________________________________________ Date __________

Parent/Guardian Full Name (printed) ____________________________________________

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