

Welcome to Bard!

My name is Erica Kaufman, and I am the director of the Bard College Language and Thinking Program (L&T). I am writing to introduce myself and to tell you about some of the work that we will be doing together in August.

Before you arrive in Annandale, you should purchase and read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. We request that you read the Penguin edition of the 1818 Text (ISBN-13: 978-0143131847). Please bring the book with you to Bard.

Mary Shelley was 18 when she began writing *Frankenstein*, and the first edition was published in London in 1818 when she was 20. Of course, we are reading this novel in 2026, in a context quite different from Mary Shelley's. However, *Frankenstein* asks many questions that continue to resonate—questions about science and technology; creation and accountability; knowledge and power. Just because we, as humans, can create something, should we? Who takes responsibility for that creation? What does it mean to be human? These are just a few of many exciting avenues for inquiry Shelley's novel of ideas sparks. I encourage you to read *Frankenstein* actively and playfully—you will write with and through the text in August in the company of your peers.

Besides Shelley, much of our work in August will be centered around the Language and Thinking Anthology, which is a collection of texts that you will receive from your instructor on the first day of the program. This year's Anthology engages with the question, "What is Freedom?"—a theme that is both timely and timeless and that encourages us to think expansively across histories and languages. What does freedom make possible, and how might it constrain? As July 4, 2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, a document that describes ideals of liberty and equality, we will also engage directly with different historical conceptions of freedom, exploring how definitions of freedom have changed over time. Moving across art and music, literature and philosophy, politics and science, we will also consider how freedom operates in everyday life, artistic expression, civic experience, and self-understanding. The writers in our Anthology (Robin Wall Kimmerer, Eleanor Roosevelt, Ralph Ellison, Hannah Arendt, and Franz Kafka, among many others) grapple with this question in a myriad of ways.

This year as part of L&T you will attend performances by the internationally renowned Bard Music Festival, which will explore the fascinating world of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. You'll attend a weekend performance of *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, one of Mozart's early and widely popular operas. This experience will extend the thinking we do in our workshops by raising questions about how we listen and how we find meaning in various kinds of texts, both written and aural.

Throughout our work together in the Language and Thinking Program, we will read actively, experiment with writing in various forms, create and perform new work in collaboration, and

think with and listen to each other. We might also write a few ghost stories, as Mary Shelley once did with a couple of friends, with surprising results.

I look forward to meeting all of you in August. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions. I can be reached by email at kaufman@bard.edu.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E Kaufman', with a stylized, cursive script.

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