

Language and Thinking Program 2025

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. You are also encouraged to purchase Sophocles' *Antigone* ahead of your arrival. We'll read *Antigone* together during August, so you don't need to have read it before you come. (You may also purchase *Antigone* at the College bookstore when you arrive on campus.)

Mary Shelley was 18 when she began writing *Frankenstein*, and the first edition was published in London in 1818 when she was 20. Sophocles is thought to have been much older when he wrote *Antigone*, about 56 years old, and the play was first performed in Athens in 441 BCE. Yet, despite the differences in the authors' ages and historical contexts, the texts overlap in startling ways. Both Shelley and Sophocles pose difficult and searching questions about life and death; they also explore the rival and conflicting claims of family, love, law, and the differences that imagination and language make to our conceptions of human life and our place in nature. We will read these two extraordinary writers both separately and in dialogue with one another, and I suspect that we will discover that many of Sophocles' and Shelley's questions are still very much alive.

Besides Shelley and Sophocles, 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 theme of "History and Translation," a theme that encourages us to think across histories and languages. Through reading and writing together, we will engage with these two terms as a way to ask questions of our current moment (and of each other) in order to discover connections between languages and cultures, but also between genres of art and music, scientific disciplines, political movements, social identities, and even forms of life. The writers in our Anthology (Robin Wall Kimmerer, Audre Lorde, Etel Adnan, Ralph Ellison, Hannah Arendt, and Franz Kafka, among many others) grapple with these same terms 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 the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů. You'll attend weekend concerts as well as the dress rehearsal of Martinů's oratorio *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, conducted by Bard's president, Leon Botstein. These experiences 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,

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