

## Instructions for reading *Frankenstein* + Study Guide:

This 1818 Broadview edition of *Frankenstein* contains the novel itself plus a number of other materials (Introduction, Appendices, etc.), some of which we'll discuss in the fall.

This summer, you **only need to read the novel itself**, which is about 171 pages long. It begins on page 51 and ends on page 221. Look also at the original Title Page of the 1818 edition, though (page 47)—which contains an important quotation from *Paradise Lost*.

Look over these Questions carefully as you read the book and write down responses on notebook paper (or type your responses). Include quotations from the book as you respond.

This Study Guide is due the second week of class.

***Frankenstein* is a rich and fascinating work...and it was written by an 18-year-old!**

**I'm looking forward to talking about it with you.**

**Feel free to email me with any questions: [ljohnson@greenvilleclassical.com](mailto:ljohnson@greenvilleclassical.com).**

### Character Profiles:

Jot down adjectives to describe each of these characters and find at least one quotation (with a page #) that best illustrates him/her.

Robert Walton:
Victor Frankenstein:
The Creature:
M. Waldman:
M. Krempe:
Alphonse Frankenstein:
Elizabeth Lavenza:
Henry Clerval:
William Frankenstein:
Justine Moritz:
De Lacey:
Felix, Safie, and Agatha:

Feel free also to indicate whether you empathize with any of these characters, or whether they annoy you, interest you, etc. (e.g., "it really frustrated me when Felix and Agatha...")

*Frankenstein* Study Guide Questions:

1. What similarities do you see between the narrator (Robert Walton) and the young Victor?

2. Consider the full title of the book: “*Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus.*”

In ancient Greek myth, the Titan brothers Prometheus (literally: “forethought”) and Epimetheus (“hindsight”/“afterthinker”) were tasked with the creation of creatures on Earth. The impulsive Epimetheus rapidly gifted the creatures of the earth with various traits: swift flight, claws, protective feathers, fur coats, etc. Prometheus, meanwhile, painstakingly sculpted the first humans from clay in the noble image of the gods, walking on two legs and looking heavenward—only to discover that his brother had used up all of the gods’ gifts and left none for mankind.

When he saw his vulnerable, naked creations struggling to survive, Prometheus stole fire from the gods and taught them to craft tools from iron ore. In punishment for this crime, Zeus sentenced Prometheus to be chained to a rock where, every day, an eagle would come and tear his liver from his body.

Prometheus has often been seen as a metaphor for overreaching our limits.

Why do you think that Shelley titled her book *The Modern Prometheus*? Cite at least one instance from the book as you respond.

3. Why does Victor create a new species: what motivates him? Use the text.

4. Was it right or wrong for Victor to have created the creature? Why/why not?

5. **Playing God:** Some scholars have used *Frankenstein* as a central piece in their argument against the development of cloning technology. Others argue that the problem was not with Victor Frankenstein’s scientific methods but with his *responses* to his creation—that we should develop cloning or gene-editing technology but use it wisely. Relate the novel to modern genetic engineering, CRISPR genome-editing technology, and the ethics of “playing God.” Discuss whether the novel is either “for” or “against.” Support your argument with passages from the book (consider, for example, the climactic Chapter 5).

6. One of the tragedies of *Frankenstein* is the refusal of characters in the novel to recognize the creature as a full human being. Brainstorm a list of the qualities that make us human. Which of these qualities does the creature have? Which does he not have?

7. Compare Victor Frankenstein with the “monster” that he creates. In what ways are their life experiences similar? In what ways are they different?

8. Which character in *Frankenstein* is most monstrous? Support your answer.

9. **Satan from *Paradise Lost*:** Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is partly an homage to John Milton's great epic *Paradise Lost*, which tells the story of how Satan seeks revenge on God for ejecting him from heaven by corrupting mankind in the Garden of Eden. Milton's Satan is a dynamic, rebellious, complicated villain.

**In some of the epic's most famous lines, Satan says,**

"The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven..." (I. 254-5).

"Which way shall I fly infinite wrath...?  
Which way I fly is hell; *myself* am hell  
And in the lowest deep, a lower deep  
Still threatening to devour me opens wide" (IV.73-77, my italics).

We might see Victor Frankenstein as a twisted God/Satan figure: creator *AND* destroyer.

- a. What echoes of Milton's Satan do you see in the characters of this novel? (e.g., 109)
- b. Mary Shelley's fellow Romantic writers—William Blake, Lord Byron, and Percy Shelley (Mary's husband), in particular—were fascinated by Milton's Satan, whom they saw as an isolated, rebellious hero who defies God's power & the establishment. What seems to be **Mary's** perspective, however? Does she portray Victor as admirable or as monstrous?

10. *Frankenstein* is both a **Gothic** and a **Romantic novel**. We will discuss Gothicism in more detail this year, but for the moment, here's a very brief background to the form.

In the words of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the Gothic novel is a form of European Romantic "pseudomedieval fiction" with a "prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror." The form had its origins in the late 1700s with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), the more respectable *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis's lurid, sensational *The Monk* (1796)—works that challenged 18<sup>th</sup>-century rationalism with scenes of mystery, horror, and wonder.

The term "Gothic" derives from architecture and carries connotations of darkness, superstition, the fantastical, madness, extravagance, and the supernatural. Gothic works often involve dark, gloomy, and terrifying settings that highlight characters' isolation.

- a. Discuss what you noticed about Mary Shelley's use of Gothic elements throughout the novel. Why, for example, does she use the Arctic as the setting for Victor Frankenstein's final confrontation with his creation?
- b. What are some other Gothic elements in the novel?
11. What were the most moving and/or interesting parts of the novel for you? Respond to what you liked and disliked; what you found controversial, and why.