

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Frankenstein

by Mary Shelley

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Frankenstein

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the character development of Victor Frankenstein and the creature;
2. identify the uses of the other various characters;
3. compare and contrast Frankenstein to Paradise Lost and other works of literature;
4. identify the major elements of Romantic AND Gothic literature;
5. identify and analyze the use of various literary devices such as foreshadowing, suspense, exposition, climax, and foils;
6. explain and identify examples of how the Romantics railed against the Enlightenment;
7. understand the Romantic concept of Tabula Rasa—the clean slate;
8. understand the significance of the subtitle: “The Modern Prometheus;”
9. debate the culpability of the two main characters, arguing both sides of the issue;
10. explain the importance of time sequence in the novel;
11. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam;
12. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam;
13. offer a close reading of Frankenstein and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

Frankenstein

Lecture Notes

I. Life and Times of Mary Shelley

Mary Shelley was born Mary Wollstoncraft in 1797 to William Godwin and Mary Wollstoncraft—both very prominent and liberal writers. Her mother had written *A Vindication on the Rights of Woman*, which was a very popular feminist work. Mary spent much of her teen years writing stories in Scotland until she returned to London at age 16. She met and fell in love with Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and became pregnant. The two continued their affair until his estranged wife committed suicide, at which point they married. They lost all three of their children, and in 1822 Percy drowned in the Gulf of Spezia in Italy. At the age of 24, she was an impoverished widow, and she supported herself with her writing.

Frankenstein was published in 1818 when she was only 20 years old. It is considered a huge feminist feat because it was written by the female child of a world-renowned early feminist. However, there are very few female characters, and other than Safie (the wife of one of “the cottagers”) they are not particularly strong female roles.

Historical Events:

- **1789:** the start of the French revolution (an attempt of the French people to rid themselves of their absolute monarchy). British liberals were excited that the common people were standing up to their oppressors, but they quickly became disillusioned when the revolution became very bloody and its leaders became tyrants themselves.
- **1793 through 1794:** the French Reign of Terror under Robespierre. British liberals lost all hope for true justice and equality in that year.
- **1804:** Napoleon is crowned Emperor.

During this whole time, Romantic writers were turning towards nature as an escape from the harsh realities of their world. Nature was someplace where human tyranny did not reign.

Frankenstein

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Do a detailed character analysis of Frankenstein and the creature. Explain in what ways they are similar and in what ways they are different.
2. Explain the purposes of each of the following characters in the story. Why does Shelley need them? What do they do? Why?
 - Robert Walton
 - Henry Clerval
 - Elizabeth
3. How is Frankenstein similar to the story of Adam and Eve? How is it different?
4. Imagine you are a judge. The conflict you must resolve is who is responsible for the deaths of William, Justine, Henry, and Elizabeth. Whom do you find to be guilty of the crimes, Frankenstein or the creature? Why?
5. Describe the differences between the childhoods of Victor and the creature. How did each childhood affect the adult?
6. Why do you think Shelley set up the novel as a flashback and a flashback-within-a-flashback? What effect does this technique have on the story?
7. How is Frankenstein a tragic hero?
8. Agree or disagree with the following statement: “We are what society makes us.”
9. How are Frankenstein’s and Walton’s storied parallel?

Frankenstein

Prologue

1. The novel begins with a series of letters in which the narrator of the novel is writing his thoughts and plans to his sister. Where is the narrator going? Why has he chosen to make this voyage? Of what does the narrator dream? What is his goal?

2. Walton says he is a “Romantic.” What is a Romantic person like?

3. What evidence does Walton provide of his Romantic leanings?

4. Aside from personal glory, what two benefits to mankind does Walton hope to achieve?

5. Identify one example of foreshadowing.

Chapters I and II

1. What plot exposition does Shelley offer the reader in these chapters?

2. What are Frankenstein's parents like? How do they feel about each other and about their child?

3. How are Victor and Elizabeth different? What kind of person is Victor?

4. What quality in young Frankenstein proves to be his tragic flaw later in life?

5. Who is Henry Clerval? What is he like? How is he different from Victor?

Chapters V and VI

1. How is the night that the creature is born an example of Gothic prose?

2. What is ironic about the creature's physical appearance?

3. What is Romantic about the creature's physical appearance?

4. How does Dr. Frankenstein feel about his creation? What does he do after the creature comes to life?

5. What event is foreshadowed in the beginning of Chapter V?

6. What does Frankenstein feel when the creature reaches out to him? What do you think is the creature's reason for reaching out for Dr. Frankenstein?

Chapters IX and X

1. What keeps Victor from killing himself at the beginning of this chapter?

2. How does Victor become a disenfranchised member of society himself?

3. As Victor climbs the mountains, what effect do they have on him?

4. Why does Victor climb Montanvent in spite of the rain? How does that identify this as a romantic novel?

5. What are Victor's feelings as his creature approaches him. What is the first thing he says to his creature?

6. How does the creature respond to Victor?

Chapters XV and XVI

1. What is revealed about the creature's character very early in Chapter XV?

2. How does the creature feel about the *Sorrows of Werter*? In what ways is he different from the characters in the book?

3. What is the creature's reaction to *Paradise Lost*? According to the creature, how is he both similar to and dissimilar from Adam?

4. Why couldn't the creature fully sympathize with the characters in Milton's book?

5. What does the creature find in his pocket? How does it make him feel?

6. What happens when the creature introduces himself to the cottagers?

Chapters XIX and XX

1. Describe Victor's feelings as he journeys through England.

2. What does Victor say about his childhood in Chapter XIX?

3. What is Victor's big fear in delaying his trip?

4. Why would the Romantic Mary Shelley call the English Civil War "the most animating epoch of English history"?

5. What style of literature describes the place where Victor begins to work in Scotland? Why?

6. How is his creation of this monster different from the first?
