

Using  
*Bloom's Taxonomy to  
Explore Literature*

# Levels of Understanding



## *Frankenstein*

*By Mary Shelley*

*written by Derek Spencer*



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## Introduction to Levels of Understanding

FOR MANY STUDENTS, studying literature is like being lost in an alien universe, filled with hidden symbols, structures, and meanings that only a scholar can uncover. Without a teacher's direction, students lack the skills and confidence to evaluate a work of literature on their own, and instead, will frequently turn to resources such as the Internet for guidance. As a result, they assume another writer's views instead of developing their own.

*Levels of Understanding* breaks down complex questions students will encounter into smaller parts, showing the steps a critical reader should take in order to develop a sound evaluation of a text. Each section of the guide contains five types of questions representative of Bloom's learning domains—starting with the most basic and foundational skill, knowledge and comprehension, and gradually building to the highest skill, evaluation. All the way, reluctant students are provided with the scaffolding they need to advance from one level of understanding to the next.

The five types of questions, again, representative of Bloom's domains, are as follows:

- **Comprehension**—will ask the most basic questions to ascertain the students' fundamental understanding of the text: plot facts, character identification, etc.
- **Reader Response**—will ask the students to “respond” to the text by relating it to personal experience or by presenting an opinion on a character or event.
- **Analysis**—will require students to study how various techniques and literary or theatrical devices (diction, symbolism, imagery, metaphors, asides, soliloquies etc.) function in the text. Analysis questions do not ask the student to merely identify or define a literary, theatrical, or rhetorical device.
- **Synthesis**—will bridge the gap between the analysis and evaluation questions, requiring students to look at other scenes in the text and draw conclusions about themes, motifs, or a writer's style. Often, a synthesis question will require the student to draw on prior knowledge—what has been learned in class or through research—and/or information from sources other than the literary title being studied in order to arrive at a satisfactory answer.
- **Evaluation**—will ask the student to make a qualitative judgment on the text and determine whether a particular aspect of it is effective or ineffective.

Other books may list Bloom's taxonomy, define the terms, and offer a general example or two. *Levels of Understanding*, however, provides the teacher with the title-specific questions to allow you to effectively bring Bloom into your classroom.

In addition, unlike other available products that claim to address Bloom's “higher order thinking skills,” *Levels of Understanding* does not teach students how to answer questions about a particular text, but instead, helps them develop skills to evaluate literature critically and without guidance. These are skills that will not only help students prepare for standardized tests like the Advanced Placement Language and Literature exams, the SATs, and the ACTs, but will also give students the self-assurance to develop and articulate a personal view—a skill that will be highly advantageous to them in college.

This product, however, is not geared toward upper-level students only, but is a versatile guide that can be used for students of all ability levels—remedial through honors. The teacher may customize the product to fit the class's objectives and goals, determining which questions the students will answer. Additionally, the guide is entirely reproducible, and each major division begins on a new page, so you may use *Levels of Understanding* for the whole work of literature or only a specific section. ♡



## How to Use this Unit

EACH *Levels of Understanding: Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Explore Literature* unit is intended to be a deep and rich component of your literature program, whether your goal is to prepare your students for a large-scale assessment like the AP Literature exam or to challenge your students to read carefully and to think deeply about what they have read.

The questions in this guide are designed to be flexible and meet your needs. They can be used as

- homework questions when students read the text independently.
- in-class reading check questions and “bell-ringer” journal entries.
- class discussion questions and prompts.
- focus questions for pre-writing and essay planning.
- review and study questions for assessment.

While the Teacher's Guide contains an answer key, you will find that the higher-order questions (especially synthesis and evaluation) have model answers that represent more than one possible response. It would be inappropriate to penalize a student whose well-reasoned and supportable answer did not match the “correct” answer in the guide.

For this reason, we strongly recommend that you view the questions in this guide as learning activities and not as assessment activities.

Many of your students are likely to find the higher domains new and perhaps intimidating. Others might be alarmed at having to support their reader-response reactions and their evaluations with an accurate comprehension of the text. The questions in this guide should act as both scaffolding and safety net, guiding your students through a new reading and thinking process and allowing them to practice without fear of “failure.”

The writing prompts, however, provide rich assessment and evaluation opportunities. Every prompt is designed to invite your students to operate in one of the higher order domains, thus giving students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability, and giving you the opportunity to evaluate their progress.

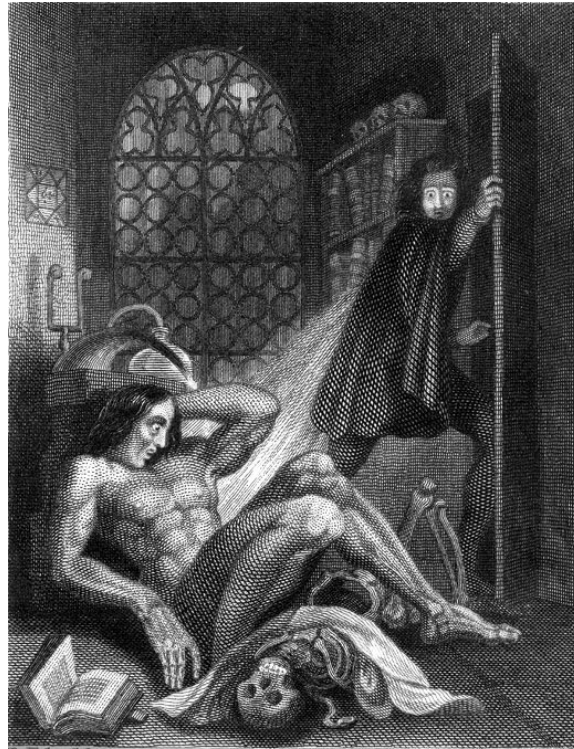
Whether you use *Levels of Understanding: Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Explore Literature* as the core of your literature curriculum or as a supplement, the guide and writing prompts are designed to help your students attain a deep understanding of the works they read. Ideally, they will gain the type of understanding demanded by Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and most state standards, including the Common Core State Standards of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association. 🍷



## Introduction to *Frankenstein*

THE MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTION about *Frankenstein* is that the title refers to the creature and not the obsessive scientist who creates him. However, although this idea is incorrect, it is ironically appropriate for a text that delights in the ambiguity and duality of its two most important characters.

The novel emphasizes the importance of social acceptance and interaction; Frankenstein and his creature both need the society of other human beings in order to be content. The necessity of companionship, and later, the absence of it, destroys both the main characters. The creature's horrible appearance causes him to be spurned and rejected by the rest of society, and when his desire for friendship cannot be satisfied, he lashes out and destroys the people Frankenstein loves. With his friends and family members dead, Frankenstein finds himself as isolated



*Frankenstein* 1831

and alone as the creature, and an equivalent thirst for vengeance possesses him. The same all-consuming rage destroys both in the end; it transforms the creature from an innocent being to a violent murderer, and Victor into a madman obsessed with tracking and destroying his creature.

*Frankenstein* is often described as the first science fiction novel, and its lessons about the dangers of scientific knowledge resonate to this day. It is a highly complex and ambiguous work, and the text supports many different interpretations. However, these interpretations must be shaped through an understanding of two sources to which Shelley alludes: Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus. So essential to the text is Prometheus, in fact, that

*Frankenstein's* subtitle is *The Modern Prometheus*. Pertinent information on the Prometheus myth and *Paradise Lost* is included in this unit. 📖

## Prometheus

THE SUBTITLE OF *FRANKENSTEIN* is *The Modern Prometheus*, an allusion to Prometheus of Greek mythology.

Prometheus was a Titan, the son of Iapetus and Clymene. He was a trickster character, who used his intelligence and wits to fool Zeus. Hesiod's *Theogony* (c. 700 B.C.) relates one of the stories of Prometheus:

Prometheus slaughtered a cow (or ox) and divided the portions between the gods and men, allowing Zeus to choose one of the portions as an offering. One contained the delicious meat and fat of the cow, but it was covered with the cow's stomach. The second portion contained the bones of the cow, but it was covered with an appetizing layer of fat. Zeus chose the second as his offering, and after realizing the trick and Prometheus' partiality for humans, hid the secret of fire from man. However, Prometheus stole the fire by hiding it in a fennel stalk and returned it to mankind. As punishment, Zeus bound him to a rock and sent an

eagle to attack him. During the day, the eagle would eat Prometheus' liver; during the night, Prometheus' liver would regenerate, and the eagle would begin to eat it anew the next day. The punishment continued until Heracles killed the eagle and freed Prometheus.

In the dialogue *Protagoras* (c. 400 B.C.). Plato presents another version of the Prometheus myth. Prometheus and his brother, Epimetheus, were given the responsibility of creating mankind and the animals, giving each species special attributes. Epimetheus gave all of the best characteristics to the animals, including ways to defend themselves against predators and survive in a harsh environment. After that part of the creation process was finished, Prometheus noticed that his foolish brother left humans unarmed and defenseless. As a result, Prometheus gave humans wisdom and the ability to make fire.

Several parallels can be drawn between the stories of Prometheus and *Frankenstein*.

Levels of Understanding:  
Using Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains  
to explore Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

# Writing Prompts

## Letters I – IV: Analysis, Evaluation

Before the main plot of the novel commences, told from the point of view of Victor Frankenstein, Shelley includes letters between Walton and his sister, detailing Walton's Arctic expedition and encounter with the mysterious stranger. In terms of thematic, character, and plot development, what does Shelley accomplish in this section? Overall, is the opening effective? Explain your answer with examples from the text.

## Chapters I – IV: Analysis, Synthesis

In Chapters I – IV, *Frankenstein* frequently references fate and destiny. Reflect on both the exposition about Frankenstein's education and the events in the novel; then, in a well-developed essay, argue whether Frankenstein was fated to live a life of suffering or if he was responsible for his own misery.

## Chapters V – VII: Analysis, Synthesis

In a well-organized essay, explain the extent to which these chapters establish Victor Frankenstein as a Byronic hero. Be sure to support your assertions with references to the text.

## Chapters VIII – X: Analysis

Examine the ways in which Chapters VII – X explore the discrepancy between justice as an abstract idea and justice as it is actually enforced. Support your thesis using examples from the text.

## Chapters XI – XIII: Comprehension, Analysis, Synthesis

Examine the similarities between the creature's pursuit of the "godlike science" of human language and Frankenstein's study of natural philosophy. In a well-organized essay, explain what these similarities contribute to the novel's plot, characterization, and themes.

## Chapters XIV – XVII: Analysis, Synthesis

A reader might expect that a novel written by the daughter of the most-renowned feminist of her time would be populated with strong, unconventional female characters. These characters might play key roles in plot and thematic development and challenge contemporaneous stereotypes of the role of women in society.

In Chapters XIV – XVII, the reader is introduced to Safie. Compare and contrast Safie to Elizabeth, the most

important female character in *Frankenstein*. In what way(s) are they similar to one another? In what ways are they different? What role does each play in advancing the plot of the novel? In developing the theme? Then, write a thoughtful and well-supported essay in which you argue whether or not Mary Shelley fulfills the readers' expectations of her female characters.

## Chapters XVIII – XX: Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation

Support or refute the following thesis, citing evidence from the text:

*Although Elizabeth's murder in Chapter XXIII is commonly identified as the climax of Frankenstein, the true climax occurs when Frankenstein destroys the creature's mate in Chapter XX.*

## Chapters XXI – XXII: Analysis, Synthesis

In Chapter XXII, Frankenstein employs a Biblical reference in predicting an unhappy future for himself:

*I read and re-read [Elizabeth's] letter and some softened feelings stole into my heart and dared to whisper paradisiacal dreams of love and joy; but the apple was already eaten, and the angel's arm bared to drive me from all hope.*

In a well-organized essay, explain this allusion and explain its greater significance in terms of the novel's plot, character development, and themes.

## Chapters XXIII – XXIV: Comprehension, Analysis, Synthesis

The subtitle of *Frankenstein* is *The Modern Prometheus*. In a well-organized essay, examine the relationship between Prometheus and Frankenstein and explain why *The Modern Prometheus* is an appropriate subtitle for the novel. Be certain to support all of your assertions with direct references to the text.

## Entire Novel: Analysis, Synthesis

Walton's introductory letters perform an important service besides that of setting up the frame narrative: they introduce an important theme of *Frankenstein*, one that is more fully explored in Victor's portion of the narrative. Explain what this theme is and how Shelley develops it throughout the novel.



Levels of Understanding:  
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# Frankenstein

LETTERS I – IV

## Comprehension

1. Who or what is the Prometheus alluded to in the novel's subtitle?

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2. What does Walton intend to accomplish? How do you know?

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3. Describe Walton's education.

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4. Why does Walton desire a friend?

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5. What does Walton write to his sister in Letter III that foreshadows impending disaster for him and his crew?

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6. What does the following remark in Letter III reveal about Walton's character:

"[Why] not still proceed over the untamed yet obedient element? What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?"

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**Frankenstein**

## CHAPTERS I – IV

**Comprehension**

1. Who is the narrator of these chapters?

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2. What is Elizabeth's relationship to the narrator?

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3. According to the narrator, how did his father fail to correctly influence him?

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4. Who are Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus? Why is Frankenstein's interest in their work important?

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5. How does the blasted stump contribute to Frankenstein's search for the secret of life?

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6. How does the narrator's mother, Caroline Beaufort, die?

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7. What great secret does the narrator discover?

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**Frankenstein**

CHAPTERS V – VII

**Comprehension**

1. Describe the weather during the night of the animation and the following morning.

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2. Why does Frankenstein reject the creature he has created?

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3. How did Justine Moritz come to live with Frankenstein's family?

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4. Read Elizabeth's letter to Victor carefully. Who is the "aunt" to whom Elizabeth refers? Who is the "uncle"? How do you know?

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5. Describe Frankenstein's recovery from his lengthy illness.

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6. What is the subject of Alphonse Frankenstein's letter to Victor?

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7. Why does Elizabeth claim that she has murdered William?

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**Frankenstein**

CHAPTERS VIII – X

**Comprehension**

1. What is the evidence against Justine?

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2. How does Elizabeth's appearance at Justine's trial ironically assure Justine's execution?

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3. What causes Justine to confess?

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4. At the beginning of Chapter IX, how does Frankenstein characterize his past actions and contrast them with his intent?

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5. How have William's murder and Justine's execution affected the members of the Frankenstein household?

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6. What helps Frankenstein escape—if only momentarily—his feelings of despair?

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7. What does the creature demand of Frankenstein? Why does Frankenstein agree to the demand?

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**Frankenstein**

## CHAPTERS XI – XIII

**Comprehension**

1. Describe the layers of narration that Shelley has developed at this point in the story.

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2. What is happening to the creature in the first five paragraphs of Chapter XI?

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3. Briefly describe the creature's dwelling.

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4. What reason does the creature cite for the misery of the cottagers?

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5. What changes Felix's attitude from one of melancholy to happiness?

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6. How does the creature learn to speak more proficiently, as well as to read and write?

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7. Cite evidence of the creature's moral growth in these chapters.

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