

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Frankenstein

by Mary Shelley

Copyright © 2001 by Prestwick House, Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938.
1-800-932-4593. www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for
classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her personal use. *This material,
in whole or part, may not be copied for resale.*

ISBN: 978-1-60389-551-4

Item No. 201320

Author's Introduction

1. This section of *Frankenstein* was written by Mary Shelley in 1831, thirteen years after the publication of the novel in 1818. It has been speculated that her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, actually wrote it, but that has not been proven. The "Author's Introduction" gives us a fine glimpse into Mary Shelley's creative mind. We learn of her childhood daydreams, her imagination, and her writings, in which she says, "I did not make myself the heroine of my tales." Think back on the creative writing you have done during your schooling. Using the "Author's Introduction" as a model, evaluate your own past writing in a one-page essay. Include things like where you think your ideas come from, how imaginative you think your writing is, and how much of your writing is centered on yourself.
2. How *Frankenstein* came to be written by Mary Shelley in 1816-1817 is interesting. She had run away to Switzerland with the married man who would later become her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Because they and some friends were housebound because of incessant rain, they decided to have a competition to see who could write the best ghost story. *Frankenstein* won. It is written in a style called "Gothic Horror" or "Gothic Science Fiction." Works referred to as "Gothic" have a style, which has elements of gloom, the grotesque, or the supernatural, and often take place in centuries past. Usually, castles and large country homes are involved. Write a plot for a story in the Gothic style. Be sure to include when and where the story is set, details about the main character and at least three other characters, what the most exciting part of the story would be, and how it ends.
3. The author states that, in her novel, she wished "to preserve the truth of the elementary principles of human nature." She cites four other literary works that she feels do this. They are: *The Iliad*, *The Tempest*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Paradise Lost*. Look up these works in a dictionary or encyclopedia. List the author of each and write a summary of what the work is about.

Letter I

4. The novel opens with a letter from Captain Robert Walton to his sister, Mrs. Saville, in England. Captain Walton is one of many characters who will narrate parts of the novel. We meet him in the frozen North. He is the owner and captain of a ship in Russia, and he is preparing to set out on a sea journey north with the desire to add to the betterment of mankind by the “enterprise” he has embarked upon. In his letter, he writes, “...do I not deserve to accomplish some great purpose?” Dreams of great accomplishments are not only for characters in fiction. Using Captain Walton’s letter to his sister as a model, write a letter to someone close to you telling of a secret dream you have for a worthwhile accomplishment in your own life.
5. Captain Walton seems to feel much affection for his sister, Margaret, as this letter shows. We do not know whether or not his sister shares this level of affection for her brother. It could be that she resents him for leaving her, or it could be that she resents the fact that she would never be allowed to pursue such an adventure herself because of the century in which she lived. Complete the following dialogue that Margaret might have with her best friend about her brother and his adventure:

Friend: Ah, I see you’ve just received a letter from Robert. You must be so proud of his daring and of his being able to leave all the comforts here to go off to all that snow and ice.

Margaret: Well, Diana, I’m really not so proud of him. What do you think of that? I think he...

Frankenstein

Letter II

6. Captain Walton tells his sister about hiring his crew to begin his “enterprise.” He shares his loneliness and his deep need for a friend with his sister. The need for good friends is a universal one. Write a letter to Captain Walton in which you explain your understanding of his need for a friend. Include an example from your own experience or that of someone close to you when you felt the lack of friendship.
7. Shelley includes a reference to the “Ancient Mariner.” As you probably know, the allusion is to a long narrative poem about the sea, whose full title is “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” It was written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798. Like Coleridge, Captain Walton describes his “passionate enthusiasm for the dangerous mysteries of ocean...” Think about your experiences with the ocean. These could be pleasant or not. Explain the feelings you associate with the ocean to a friend who has never seen it. If you have not seen an ocean in your lifetime, tell that to your friend, explaining what you imagine such a power must be like.

Letter III

8. This brief letter from Captain Walton to his sister in England tells us that he is well on his way to the North Pole. He is assuring his sister that he is feeling secure over “the pathless sea” and, though it is untamed, the sea is “yet obedient.” Many television programs and films have been made about action on the high seas. “Titanic,” “Moby Dick,” “Mutiny on the Bounty,” and even “Love Boat” come to mind. Write a review of one of the above or any other film about the sea which you have seen. Be sure to state how you feel about its portrayal of what life aboard a ship is like.

Letter IV

9. This letter from Captain Walton to his sister is actually three letters written on different dates sent together as one. The first details the events, which happened on a day the ship was ice-bound. A man in a sled drawn by dogs was sighted on the ice about one half-mile from the ship. The captain and crew are astounded to see a stranger in such a remote place. After being rescued, the fatigued and suffering man finally explains his presence by saying that he came, "To seek one who fled from me." As the stranger recuperates, he and Captain Walton become very good friends, the very friend the captain has been yearning to have. Write a dialogue that you think might have taken place between the stranger and Captain Walton a week after the stranger's arrival aboard ship as they walk the deck under the stars.

Captain Walton: I don't want to pry, my dear sir, but who do you seek that fled from you?

The Stranger:

10. The second of Captain Walton's three letters concerns the sharing his dream of "the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race." The stranger's reaction to this ambition shocks the captain. Friendships can sometimes be out of balance. An ideal friendship is one which is completely mutual. In others, one of the friends wants or gives much more than the other wishes or can give. Write a letter to a friend you once had; now the two of you have drifted apart. Try to explain why you are writing, why you stopped being friends, and what you want to do about the future.

Frankenstein

11. The brief third letter from Captain Walton tells of the stranger's certainty about his fate and that he only waits for death. He has told Captain Walton that he will tell him of the misfortunes which have brought him to this sorry state. He assures the captain that he will then understand "how irrevocably it [his fate] is determined." Most people at one time or another have had the feeling "that all is lost." Write down a conversation with a friend about a time when you or someone you know has been convinced that something unpleasant about life could not be changed and that it must be endured. Real names and facts can, of course, be changed. Be sure to tell how everything eventually worked out.

Chapter I

12. This chapter begins with a second narrator, who tells his story in the first person. The narrator, who we know is named Victor, tells of his background and childhood. Victor is an adored only child whose parents bring a beautiful orphaned child, Elizabeth, to live with them. Victor makes no secret of his immediate love for Elizabeth. Sister and brother relationships can be very happy or very troubled. Think about all the brother/sister relationships you know (adult or child ones, relatives or friends). Describe the best sister/brother relationship you know of. Be sure to give your opinion of what makes it the best.
13. The style of writing in *Frankenstein* seems more formal, wordy, and difficult than in novels written today. Below is a list of phrases from Chapter I which might be indicative of the fact that this novel was written approximately 200 years ago. Copy the list. Beside each phrase, write a new one that would have the same general meaning, but is more appropriate to modern times.
- A. "indefatigable attention to public business"
 - B. "from a flourishing state, fell, through numerous mischances"
 - C. "discovered his abode"
 - D. "possessed a mind of uncommon mould"
 - E. "recompensing her for the sorrows she had endured"
 - F. "spoke of penury in its worst shape"
 - G. "motions were lighter than the chamois of the hills"