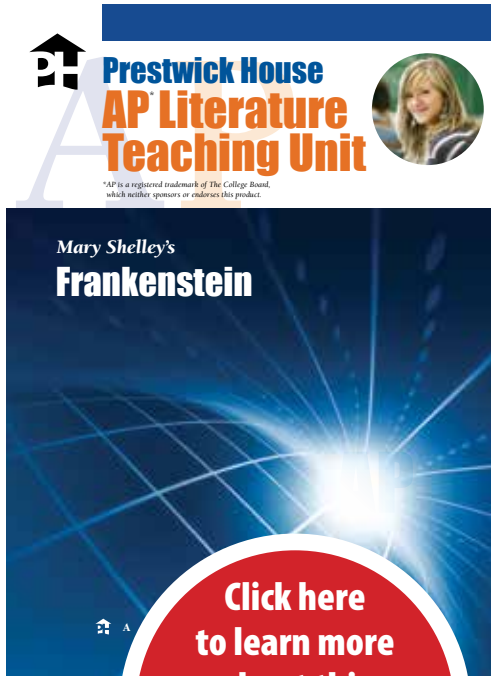




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Teaching Unit

Frankenstein

by Mary Shelley

Written by Rebecca Grudzina



Prestwick House

Item No. 300368

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.

Lecture Notes

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.

ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

- The Romantics were, for the most part, disheartened liberals.
- They sought solitude in nature, believing that the key to all emotional healing could be found in nature. Nature imagery is the most predominant feature of Romantic literature.

“The weather was fine: it was about the middle of August...The weight upon my spirit was sensibly lightened as I plunged into the precipices that overhung me on every side—the sound of the river raging among the rocks, and the dashing of the waterfalls around, spoke of a power mighty as Omnipotence—and I ceased to fear, or to bend before any less almighty than that which had created and ruled the elements...”.

“During my youthful days discontent never visited my mind; and if I was ever overcome by ennui, the sight of what is beautiful in nature, or the study of what is excellent and sublime in the productions of man, could always interest my heart, and communicate elasticity to my spirits.”
— Chapter XIX

“Liberty, however, had been an useless gift to me had I not, as I awakened to reason, at the same time awakened to revenge. As the memory of past misfortunes pressed upon me, I began to reflect on their cause—the monster whom I had created, the miserable daemon whom I had sent abroad into the world for my destruction. I was possessed by a maddening rage when I thought of him, and desired and ardently prayed that I might have him within my grasp to wreak a great revenge on his cursed head.” — Chapter XXIII

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #6

The following passages are both from Chapter 24 of the novel *Frankenstein*. The first is Victor Frankenstein talking to Robert Walton. The second is the Creature speaking to Walton. In a well-organized essay, analyze the source of the irony in the two passages when they are compared to one another and discuss what this final irony contributes to the overall meaning of the novel. Do not merely summarize the passages or offer a basic comparison-contrast.

“I possessed a coolness of judgment that fitted me for illustrious achievements. This sentiment of the worth of my nature supported me, when others would have been oppressed; for I deemed it criminal to throw away in useless grief those talents that might be useful to my fellow-creatures. When I reflected on the work I had completed, no less a one than the creation of a sensitive and rational animal, I could not rank myself with the herd of common projectors. But this thought, which supported me in the commencement of my career, now serves only to plunge me lower than the dust. All my speculations and hopes are as nothing; and, like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell...I trod heaven in my thoughts, now exulting my powers, now burning with the idea of their effects. From infancy, I was imbued with high hopes and lofty ambition; but how I am sunk! Oh! My friend, if you had known me as I once was, you would not recognize me in this state of degradation.”—Victor Frankenstein, — Chapter XXIV

“Once my fancy was soothed with dreams of virtue, of fame, and of enjoyment. Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding. I was nourished of high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animal. No guilt, no mischief, no misery can be found comparable to mine. When I run over the catalog of my sins, I cannot believe I am the same creature whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone.” — The Creature, Chapter XXIV

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 XIII and XIV

1. Explain the second sentence of this chapter: "I shall relate events that impressed me with feelings which...have made me what I am."

2. What practical purpose does the beautiful stranger serve?

3. Why does the creature call the cottagers his "protectors?"

4. What paradox does the creature see in humankind through his study of human history?

5. In what way does his study of human society make him what he eventually becomes?

Chapters XVII and XVIII

1. What, according to the creature, is the cause of his wickedness and what will be the remedy?

2. What does Victor suggest is a creator's obligation to his creation?

3. Follow Victor's and the creature's lines of reasoning in their debate over the creation of the companion. Whose reasoning is most sound?

4. Why does Victor refuse to make a female monster? Do you feel he is justified in his refusal?

Chapters XXI and XXII

1. What is familiar about the method of the murder discovered in this chapter?

2. Who has been murdered, and why is Victor accused of the murder?

3. Why does Victor think he survived all that he had been through? How is the fact that he lives ironic?

4. Victor makes several references to his destiny in this chapter. What does he believe his destiny to be?

5. What does the word “torpor” mean in the following context?: “But my general state of being was a **torpor**, in which a prison was as welcome a residence as the divinest scene in nature”?

6. Why does Victor feel he can't be with people? What opinion does Victor express about his creation?

