



# Frankenstein

By Mary Shelley (1818)



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## Discussion Questions taken from *LitLovers*

1. The horror story is just as popular today as it was in Shelley's early nineteenth century England. What is the appeal of this genre? Discuss elements from *Frankenstein* that parallel characteristics of modern horror tales such as Stephen King's, or contemporary films such as *Nightmare on Elm Street*. What are the effects of these elements on the audience, and how might that explain our fascination?
2. Dr. Frankenstein finds himself unable to "mother" the being he creates. Why does Shelley characterize Victor in this way? What does this choice say about the role of women during Shelley's era? Discuss the significance of parent-child relationships and birth references throughout the novel.
3. Dreams and nightmares play a recurrent role throughout Shelley's novel. Trace the use of dreams throughout the book, with emphasis on how they relate to changes in Victor's character.
4. Why are there so many references to sickness and fever in *Frankenstein*? Trace these references throughout the novel. What broader theme might Shelley be expressing?
5. Re-visit some of your pre-reading activities, such as the journal entry on the "Philosopher's Stone" and the anticipation guide on parenting. Now that you have completed *Frankenstein*, have your views changed? Why or why not?
6. Ice is a prevalent image and an integral plot device in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. How is it appropriate that the novel ends in ice? What is the symbolism of ice for the characters and the story?
7. In his afterword in the Signet Classics edition of *Frankenstein*, Harold Bloom asserts that "all Romantic horrors are diseases of excessive consciousness, of the self unable to bear the self." Does this Romantic characteristic apply to Victor and his treatment of the creature? Explain. Consider the fact that Victor never gives the creature a name.
8. Place *Frankenstein's* creature in modern times. Suppose he had a family that raises him, includes him, and even enrolls him in school. How might today's society treat Victor's creature differently? How would it mimic the time period of the novel?
9. Consider the character of Justine Moritz. While her story only takes two chapters of Shelley's novel, her role as a secondary character is significant. What is Shelley's purpose in telling Justine's story? What truths about her time is Shelley revealing?

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10. The patriarchal society of Frankenstein is one in which men pursue their goals against hopeless odds. In light of this work ethic, is Robert Walton a failure when he turns his ship around at the end of the novel? How would Victor Frankenstein answer this question? What would Mary Shelley say? What do you think?

(Questions from A Teachers Guide issued by Signet Classics.)



### Author Bio:

- Birth—August 30, 1797
- Where—London, England, UK
- Death—February 1, 1851
- Where—London, England, UK
- Education—home tutored

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (nee Godwin) was an English novelist, short story writer, dramatist, essayist, biographer, and travel writer, best known for her Gothic novel *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818).

She also edited and promoted the works of her husband, the Romantic poet and philosopher Percy Bysshe Shelley. Her father was the political philosopher William Godwin, and her mother was the philosopher and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft.

In 1814, Mary began a romance with one of her father's political followers, the then married Percy Bysshe Shelley. Together with Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, Mary and Shelley left for France and traveled through Europe. Upon their return to England, Mary was pregnant with Percy's child. Over the next two years, she and Percy faced ostracism, constant debt, and the death of their prematurely born daughter. They married in late 1816, after the suicide of Percy Shelley's first wife, Harriet.

In 1822, her husband drowned when his sailing boat sank during a storm near Viareggio. A year later, Mary Shelley returned to England and from then on devoted herself to the upbringing of her son and a career as a professional author. The last decade of her life was dogged by illness, probably caused by the brain tumour that was to kill her at the age of 53.

### Read-Alikes:

*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson

*The Island of Dr. Moreau* by H.G. (Herbert George) Wells

*The Curiosity* by Stephen P. Kiernan



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