

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Frankenstein (Unabridged)

by  
Mary Shelley

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## Book Information

Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (Unabridged)

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Book Level: 12.4

Interest Level: UG

A monster assembled by a scientist from parts of dead bodies develops a mind of his own as he learns to loathe himself and hate his creator.

**Topics:** Classics, Classics (All);  
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Horror/Thriller, Monsters; Recommended  
Reading, California Recommended Lit.,  
English, 9-12; Science Fiction, Misc./Other;  
Series, Kaplan SAT Score-Raising Novel;  
What Kids Are Reading, 2012, 100 Most  
Read Fiction, ATOS Book Levels 9.0-12.9;  
What Kids Are Reading, 2013, 100 Most  
Read Fiction, ATOS Book Levels 9.0-12.9;  
What Kids Are Reading, 2013, Grades  
9-12: 40 Most Read Books Overall; What  
Kids Are Reading, 2014, 75 Most Read  
Fiction, ATOS Book Levels 9.7-14.1; What  
Kids Are Reading, 2014, Grade 12: 20 Most  
Read Books Overall

## Main Characters

Elizabeth Lavenza an orphaned girl raised by  
Victor's parents, who is expected to marry Victor  
Felix, Safie, Agatha and De Lacey the people who  
live in the cottage near the place where the  
monster resides for some time  
Henry Clerval a childhood friend of Victor's  
Justine another girl raised by Victor's family  
Robert Walton a ship's captain who rescues Victor  
from an ice floe  
the monster or fiend the hideous and lonely  
creation of Victor Frankenstein  
Victor Frankenstein a chemist who creates a  
human life from inanimate objects  
Victor's father and brothers, William and Ernest  
Victor's family

## Vocabulary

**ameliorate** to make or grow better; improve  
**barbarity** lack of culture or refinement; merciless  
harshness and cruelty  
**countenance** the human face, especially as an  
indicator of mood  
**filial love** a son or daughter's love for family and  
parents  
**ignominy** dishonor  
**lassitude** weariness; fatigue

## Synopsis

Victor Frankenstein, a chemist from Geneva, Switzerland, is rescued from an ice floe by a ship in the northern reaches of the world. He relates the story of his life to the ship's captain, Robert Walton. Mr. Walton in turn relates the story to his sister.

Victor became interested in the mysteries of science as a young teenager in Geneva. By his later teen years, he leaves home to study science in Ingolstadt. There he discovers that he can create human life from inanimate matter. He sets out on a mission to do so, and when he finally succeeds, he is so horrified by the creation that he abandons it. The creature exits the scientist's laboratory and soon discovers that his body is so hideous that no one will befriend him. Lonely and angry, he finds shelter in a small hovel attached to a cottage in the countryside. The monster stays hidden in the structure for over a year while he learns the language of the people and tries to find a way to make friends with the inhabitants of the cottage.

When he finally decides it is time to attempt to make contact with the people, he first befriends the blind father. Initially, he manages to win over the father who is not prejudiced by his sight. When the blind man's family returns and views the hideous creature, he is attacked and flees the cottage. Enraged and vengeful, the creature decides to wage war on all humankind, especially his creator.

The creature's first victim is Victor's young brother,

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William. Blamed as William's killer, a family friend, Justine, is executed. These tragedies send Victor into despair and on a long trek into the mountains. It is there that he meets with the monster, who requests that Victor create a companion for him. Victor eventually consents and begins the creation. He later decides he cannot complete the creation and destroys it. Enraged, the monster kills Victor's friend, Henry Clerval, and threatens Victor with harm on his wedding night.

Victor weds Elizabeth, a family friend. On their wedding night, Victor leaves her unprotected, believing himself to be the intended victim of the monster. The monster kills Elizabeth and vows to battle Victor to the end. Victor also vows to pursue the monster until either he or the monster is dead. Victor follows the monster across the continent and into the northern icy regions of the world. There he finds himself stranded on an ice floe where he is rescued by Robert Walton. Victor tells his story to Robert and eventually dies. The monster then states that he will end his own life, thus ending the violence.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

How can scientific experimentation go awry? Could something like this happen today in light of scientific advancements in genetics and cloning?

*Unscrupulous scientists could use genetic engineering and/or cloning to create organisms that could harm other forms of life. Such manipulation could lead to a chain reaction of unforeseen consequences.*

### Literary Analysis

The monster claimed that when he was created, he was benevolent and loving. Find examples that prove that. List the events that happened to him that changed him into such an evil creature.

*He initially traveled around the countryside trying to make contact with people and never hurt them. In fact, he couldn't even imagine hurting a human life immediately after being shunned by the cottagers. However, his abandonment by the cottagers and his subsequent loneliness and rejection enraged him. He was shot by a man after he rescued a girl.*

### Inferential Comprehension

The reactions of the people who met the monster combined fear with disgust. Why were the people so afraid and upset by the monster? Based on his appearance, what did they know about the monster? What didn't they know?

*The people were probably afraid because he was so large and he surprised them. They were disgusted because his physical appearance was crude and, in their minds, horrific. The monster's appearance put a barrier between himself and the rest of society. He was unable to convey to others that he was loving and gentle because he wasn't given a chance. Given a chance, they could have learned this, and he might never have become hateful and destructive.*

### Constructing Meaning

The monster became more and more angry because he was being rejected merely because of his looks. Discuss examples of this happening in real life and the emotional harm it does to the victim. Relate a story of rejection or ridicule that you have encountered or read about.

*The stories of The Elephant Man and The Hunchback of Notre Dame are classic examples of this. Also, stories of children shooting classmates is a clear consequence of individuals reacting to the ridicule and rejection of their peers.*

## Teachable Skills

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**Understanding Hist/Cultural Factors** Essentially all of Victor's early scientific knowledge came from books by Cornelius Agrippa. When he relayed this fact to his two teachers, they had different reactions to the value of Agrippa's work. One said his work was useless and outdated, while the other said his work provided a good foundation. Research and gather information on Cornelius Agrippa's work. Write a paper either supporting or denouncing one or both of the professor's views. Support your assertions with references to modern scientific practices.

**Comparing and Contrasting** It could be argued that the work of the fictional Victor Frankenstein could be compared to the work of scientists in the field of cloning. This science endeavors to recreate life at the hands of humans, essentially bypassing the "natural" process of reproduction. The author felt this type of work was horrific to imagine and best left in the hands of "the Creator." Explore the potential positive and negative consequences of humans creating life out of inanimate matter. Hold a class debate on the subject, or write a position paper. Choose another modern medical practice and debate the ethics of the process.

**Responding to Literature** Imagine that you were Victor Frankenstein. Imagine that the creature requested that you create a companion for it. What would you do? Would you comply with the request? If no, why? If yes, why, and what kind of creature would you strive to create? Would it be the same as, better than, or worse than the first creature?