

Stanford House Classics - Elementary

FRANKENSTEIN

Mary Shelley

literature analysis and response



Frankenstein

Mary Shelley

MARY SHELLEY was born in London in 1797. In 1816 she married Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of England's most famous poets.

"Frankenstein, or the modern Prometheus", written in 1818, is her most famous novel. The idea came to her while on holiday in Switzerland with her husband and their friend, Lord Byron. The three of them decided to each write a horror story but hers was the only one to be completed.

In 1826 she wrote "The Last Man", a novel about the end of humanity, exterminated by a plague that leaves only one man alive.



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FRANKENSTEIN

A SEA OF ICE

“Look! Look!” shouted the sailor. The Captain and all the crew ¹ looked out across the vast expanse ² of ice which almost completely surrounded their ship.

“It’s a sledge ³,” said Captain Walton. “But my God! Look at the size of that man!”

Through his binoculars, he could just ⁴ make out the shape of the man driving the sledge: he was enormous. The dogs were running very fast and soon the vision had disappeared from sight.

Captain Walton and his men were amazed ⁵ at what they had seen. So far from any place where man could survive, on their way to discover the most desolate parts of the earth, the last thing they expected to see was a sledge! But there was another surprise waiting for them. The next morning, another sledge was seen by a sailor; this time it came near to the ship. The man driving it seemed exhausted by cold and fatigue.

“Where are you going?” was his surprising question, before coming on board. (As if it mattered ⁶, under those conditions!)

It took two days for the man to recover sufficiently to tell his story.

“Let me introduce myself,” he said to Captain Walton; “my name is Victor Frankenstein. I’m following someone who has escaped.”

“I thought so,” was the Captain’s answer.

1. Complete the following:

- 1) The ship was almost completely surrounded by
.....
- 2) The man driving the first sledge was very
.....
- 3) The Captain was surprised to see
.....
- 4) The man in the second sledge was very
.....
- 5) He was not able to speak for
.....
- 6) He told the Captain he was
.....
- 7) He was obviously following
.....

2. Find the words in the passage which match these definitions:

- a) an instrument used for seeing a long way -
.....
- b) very isolated -
.....
- c) tiredness caused by hard work -
.....
- d) going after -
.....
- e) run away -
.....
- f) member of a ship’s crew -
.....

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1. crew: team of men working together.
 2. expanse: wide area.
 3. sledge: vehicle without wheels, pulled by dogs.
 4. just: with difficulty.
 5. amazed: very surprised.
 6. mattered: were important.

“Have you seen him?”

The Captain told him about the apparition¹ they had seen.

FRANKENSTEIN BEGINS HIS STORY

I was born in Geneva, Switzerland. My father was a well-respected, important man. I was the eldest son. When I was four years old, my aunt died and her daughter, Elizabeth, came to live with us. My family adored her and she was a playmate² for me. My mother planned for us to marry when we grew up. My two brothers, Ernest and William, were born when Elizabeth and I were already quite big. Then a young woman called Justine came to live with us to help my mother look after the boys. It was a very happy family. I also had a best friend at school whose name was Henry Clerval.

At the age of thirteen, I began to be very interested in natural philosophy and read lots of books about the secrets of life.

Two years later an incident³ happened which I found very inspiring. During a violent thunderstorm⁴, a flash of lightning struck⁵ a tree near our house and, in a few seconds, the tree was reduced to a hollow⁶ piece of black wood two metres high.

“How could it happen?” I asked my father.

“Electricity,” was his answer.

I wanted to find out all I could about electricity and its incredible power, and my father helped me. Together we made some interesting experiments.

3. Rewrite the first paragraph of Frankenstein's story in the 3rd. person.

Begin:

He was born

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4. Write a similar paragraph about yourself. (Use the present tense!)

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1. **apparition:** *figure like a ghost or spirit.*
2. **playmate:** *someone to play with, companion.*
3. **incident:** *event (not to be confused with “accident”).*
4. **thunderstorm:** *violent weather conditions, with rain, loud noises and lightning.*
5. **struck:** *(to strike; struck; struck) hit.*
6. **hollow:** *empty.*

FRANKENSTEIN GOES TO UNIVERSITY

When I was seventeen years old, my mother fell ¹ ill and the doctors were unable to cure her.

As she lay ² dying, she called Elizabeth and me and said: "My children, I love you very much and I am very happy for you and wish you a happy life together. Elizabeth dear, I ask you to take my place and look after your two little cousins. Then I can die peacefully."

Shortly after my mother's death, I left home to go to University. I was keen ³ to go, but sad to leave my family and friends; especially Elizabeth and Henry, whose parents would not allow him to go with me. At the University, I found many great scientists and was completely absorbed⁴ by my studies. My obsession with the mystery of life encouraged me to work hard and, for two years, I never took a day off⁵ and wrote fewer and fewer letters to my family. Frequent visits to the hospital and the cemetery helped me in my study of the human body. In this way I began to understand about death and dying, so that I could find the answers to questions like: how does life begin? Is it possible to put life into dead things?

FRANKENSTEIN MAKES HIS DISCOVERY

One day, the answer came to me. After days and nights of endless work, I managed ⁶ to make my discovery! Really! I had found the secret of life; even more, I had found out how to generate life! (A discovery so great and so miraculous that I disregarded ⁷ the terrible steps that had progressively led ⁸ me to it, and

5. Answer the questions:

- 1) How old was Victor when his mother died?
.....
- 2) Who was Elizabeth? (see P. 6)
.....
- 3) Who was Henry? (see P. 6)
.....
- 4) Why didn't Henry go to University with Victor?
.....
- 5) What interested Victor most at University?
.....
- 6) Where did he go to study the human body?
.....
- 7) What did he discover?
.....

6. Look at this: *my mother fell ill.*

To fall can have different meanings - fall in love, fall over, fall off, fall out, fall asleep, etc.

Insert the correct one in the following sentences (remember to use the right tense):

- 1) Mary is very distracted these days. She must have
..... again.
- 2) When you ride that horse you must be careful not to
..... He is very wild.
- 3) I often
..... during history lessons because they are so boring.
- 4) My little brother is always
..... because he has only just learnt to walk.
- 5) John had planned a lovely holiday in Greece but he
..... and couldn't go.

1. **fell:** (to fall; fell; fallen) *became* (here).

2. **lay:** (to lie; lay; lain) *in a horizontal position* (e.g. in bed).

3. **keen:** *enthusiastic*.

4. **absorbed:** *taken up, totally interested*.

5. **a day off:** *a free day*.

6. **managed:** *succeeded*.

7. **disregarded:** *ignored*.

8. **led:** (to lead; led; led) *guided, brought*.