

The miserable monster

from *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* Mary Shelley, 1818

WARM UP

- 1 What do you know about Frankenstein? How do you imagine the monster?

Glossary

behold to see or to look at something
wretch someone that you feel sorry for
hold up to move something in your hand in a particular direction
jaw one of the two bones that your teeth are in
mutter to speak in a low voice
grin a wide smile
wrinkle small lines appear on your face
detain to stop someone from leaving
rush to move quickly
corpse a dead body
countenance face or expression

A young science student, Victor Frankenstein, wants to create life through science. In the passage you are going to read Dr Frankenstein's experiments come to an end. He finally succeeds in bringing to life "the thing" he has assembled.

I beheld the wretch — the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped and rushed downstairs. I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited, where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life. Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance.

(Chapter V)



► WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

The full title of Mary Shelley's novel is *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*.

In Ancient Greek mythology Prometheus went against the rules of the gods and stole their fire to give it to human beings. As a result, he was eternally chained to a rock and suffered the daily torment of having an eagle tear through his skin and devour his liver. This story reinforces the dominant theme in Shelley's work: there are certain actions that are off limits to human beings. When human beings cross these boundaries, they and society suffer terrible personal consequences.

4 Read the quotes (1-3) from different parts of the book and match them to the main themes (a-c) of the novel listed below.

- a the pursuit of knowledge and the dangerous consequences it can bring
- b revenge
- c scientists and their responsibility

1 "how gladly I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope, to the furtherance of my enterprise. One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought"

2 "[Scientists] penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows."

3 "...I swear to pursue the daemon who caused this misery, until he or I shall perish in mortal conflict."



► DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

2 **1.184** Read and listen to the text. Are the following statements true (T) or false (F)? Correct the false ones.

- 1 Victor Frankenstein immediately realises the creature is a monster.
- 2 The creature is unable to move.
- 3 When Victor Frankenstein first sees the creature he is full of horror and disgust.
- 4 Victor Frankenstein can understand what the creature says.
- 5 Victor Frankenstein runs away because he is afraid.
- 6 That night Victor Frankenstein can't sleep.

3 **PERSONAL RESPONSE** Go back to the passage, underline the words used to describe the monster's terrible appearance and circle the words connected with Dr Frankenstein's feelings and reactions. Answer the following questions.

- 1 Does Victor Frankenstein's reaction surprise you? Why?
- 2 Do you feel Victor Frankenstein is abandoning his "child"? Or do you feel his response is justified? Why?
- 3 What do you think Victor Frankenstein will do after this episode?
 - a He will run away from his creature.
 - b He will kill the creature.
 - c He will keep the creature in an isolated place.
 - d He will try to transform the creature into a better one.
 - e Other (explain): ...



LURCH

Frankenstein is a huge part of pop culture today. It has inspired countless monster movies, Halloween costumes, parodies, TV characters and commercials.

- ▶ **The Addams Family** was a 1960s sitcom about a family of horror-movie characters including a Frankenstein-type character named Lurch, the manservant.
- ▶ **The Incredible Hulk** was inspired partly by the *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* story and *Frankenstein*.
- ▶ The film adaptations of *Dracula*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Frankenstein* were all produced in 1931, which can be considered a key year in the history of **horror cinema**.
- ▶ The Monster appeared on a US **postage stamp** in 1997 and again in 2002.



HULK

▶ THE CHARACTERS' GALLERY

5 Match the main characters (a-c) of the novel with their descriptions (1-3).

- a Robert Walton, the storyteller
- b the Monster
- c Victor Frankenstein

- ▶ 1
He is an explorer on a journey to the North Pole who meets the scientist Frankenstein before he dies. We first see him at the beginning of the novel writing letters. He tells the story in **letters** * to his sister.
- ▶ 2
He created the "monster" and now suffers the consequences of that experiment. He feels ashamed and guilty throughout the novel.
- ▶ 3
He is a "monstrous looking" creature. People are frightened by his appearance, but in the beginning he is almost an innocent creature. He is unnamed. Frankenstein is his creator. The name Frankenstein, however, now popularly refers to the creature, not his creator.

* An **epistolary novel** is told through a series of **letters** written by one or more of the characters.

▶ THE BOOK AND ITS TIME

6 Read the text and complete it with the following words.

authority • punished • critical • revolutions • life

Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* during the Romantic Age, a time of great changes and 1 Some of the ideas she expressed in the book were highly revolutionary. Victor challenges 2 (God) by creating 3 himself. The creature is also hostile towards authority (Victor, its "father"). However, both the creature and Victor are 4 with death. Mary Shelley was obviously 5 of the revolutions of her time.

► THE LANGUAGE OF BOOKS

Frankenstein or Franken- is sometimes used as a prefix to imply artificial monstrosity as in the word “frankenfood”. The earliest use of the term “Frankenstein food” to refer to genetically modified food was in 1989. “Frankenfood” followed in 1992, followed by “frankenfruit”, “frankenplants” and “frankenscience”.

7 Read the following definition of “frankenfood”. How is it connected to Frankenstein?

FRANKENFOOD noun [countable usually plural] informal

food that has been produced by plants that were genetically modified – used when you disapprove of this process



8 Now surf the Net and look for the word “Frankenstorm”: what does it mean?



Let's meet the author



Mary Shelley (1797-1851)

She was the daughter of two rebels: William Godwin, a political philosopher and the writer, philosopher, and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. During her life Mary Shelley challenged the ideas and conventions on gender roles, sexual freedom, and religion that were typical of her time. When she was

16, she met Percy B. Shelley, the Romantic poet, and together, they ran off to Europe where they spent their summer with Lord Byron and other writers. On a stormy night in June 1816, Lord Byron suggested they each should write a ghost story. A few nights later, she had a nightmare which inspired the novel of Frankenstein. She was the only one of the group who completed the task, publishing her work two years after marrying Percy B. Shelley.



Ever since the first film which told the Frankenstein story in 1910, numerous film and television adaptations have followed.

Frankenstein

USA 1910, Directed by James Searle Dawley

Frankenstein

USA 1931, Directed by James Whale

Probably the most memorable image of Frankenstein and his monster was created in 1931, when Universal Pictures released *Frankenstein*. Boris Karloff played the monster and became a star. The flat-head monster mask with bolts in his neck has become part of popular culture. That iconic impersonation of the monster has become synonymous with the word “Frankenstein”.

It was make-up artist Jack Pierce who made Boris Karloff into the monster as we now know him after studying and researching anatomy and surgery for three months.

Young Frankenstein

USA 1974, Directed by Mel Brooks

Young Frankenstein is a parody in black and white of the classic horror film genre, with Gene Wilder as the grandson of the infamous Dr Victor Frankenstein.

A box office smash considered as one of the funniest American movies of all time.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

USA 1994, Directed by Kenneth Branagh



9 Surf the Net for the images of the monster as it appears in different film versions or adaptations. What do all the images have in common? How is each image unique?