

Frankenstein
Study Questions

Students are responsible for one study question per reading. While sometimes a particular question will be assigned, sometimes the student may choose a question. Extra questions can count for extra credit, but please ask before completing more than what is assigned.

These questions are not just for discussion, although we will use them that way. The purpose of this assignment is to give students steady, low-pressure ways to practice good academic writing. An acceptable answer generally features 5–6 sentences with a topic sentence that serves as a mini-thesis for the paragraph; short, frequent quotations that are blended into your sentences and cited correctly in MLA style. Answers will be checked against the errors on the Unlucky 13 sheet as well as other fundamental usage and grammar conventions. Work must be individual—this is more like a paper than like “a homework,” as they say.

Reading 1: 7–26: Letters 1–4

1. What does the **epistolary style** add to the text? That is, what does the device of telling the story through letters clarify for the reader?
2. What does the first letter make clear about **setting**, **tone**, and the **character** of Robert Walton?
3. Do you trust this **narrator** to tell the story truly, as he understands it?
4. Walton "feels the want of a friend" (13). How does this loneliness make sense, given his position?
5. How does Walton feel about his education?
6. Explain the character of the master.
7. How does the weather on Monday, July 31, contribute to the **mood** of the story? To the **plot**?
8. What odd question does the man ask before he will consent to be saved?
9. How does Walton feel about the stranger?
10. How does nature affect the stranger's emotional or spiritual state?_

literary terms
epistolary style
setting
tone
character
narrator
mood
plot

terms from class
allusion
Romanticism

Reading 2: 27–45: Chapters I–II

1. (Ch. 1) How does the shift in **narrator** affect what you notice about the text?
2. Briefly identify the narrator’s father, mother, and cousin.
3. How are the narrator (Victor), Clerval, and Elizabeth educated?
4. Explore the **metaphor** and **simile**: “...the birth of that passion...I find it arisen, like a mountain river, from ignoble and almost forgotten sources; but, swelling as it proceeded, it became the torrent which in its course, has swept away all my hopes and joys” (32–33). How do the comparisons work, and what do they add to the text?
5. What is the effect of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus on the development of Victor’s scientific thinking and endeavors?
6. Explore the **image** (**symbol**?) of the split tree (35).
7. (Ch. 2) How does Elizabeth respond to the death of Caroline?
8. How does Ch. 2 relate to Victor’s passage to adulthood (**coming of age**)? What does it mean to “exchange chimeras of boundless grandeur for realities of little worth” (43)?
9. Compare and contrast M. Krempe and M. Waldman.
10. How does M. Waldman regard the modern scientists? Compare and contrast this view with many of our own culture’s attitudes toward technology.

literary terms

metaphor

simile

image

symbol

coming of age/Bildungsroman

Reading 3: 46–63: Chapters III–IV

1. (Ch. 3). Throughout the text so far, we have been tracking the **theme** of friendship and the theme of education. How do the two themes come together at the beginning of Ch. 3?
2. As Victor discovers the secret of animation, his narration shows a consciousness of **audience**. Who is his audience? How does the writing show this consciousness of audience? What are the implications of this narrative choice for us as readers?
3. Why does Victor decide to make the monster so large?
4. Why does Victor want to make life? What does he hope to accomplish for the world and for himself? Give at least two goals.
5. “A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquility” (53). Explain this wisdom in light of Victor’s situation; what does Victor, obsessed, not notice in the larger world? Victor the narrator has experienced more than Victor the character at this point. What do you think has happened between this point in his story and the present that gives rise to this idea?
6. Why do you think Victor suffers poor health as he builds the creature?
- (Ch. 4) 7. How do the season, time of day, and weather reflect the action at the beginning of this chapter?
8. Using only cues from the novel, draw the creature.
9. Give some possible **symbolism** of the color yellow as we see it in this chapter.
10. Clerval describes Victor as “ill...thin and pale” (59). How does Victor’s appearance relate to that of the monster? To what degree can you read the creature as a **double** for Victor?
11. How does Victor feel about the departure of the monster? As a reader, how do you react?
12. Overall, how does Shelley’s use of the seasons echo happenings in the story? literary

terms

theme
narrative distance
setting
symbolism
double/doppelganger

terms from class

objective correlative
pathetic fallacy

Reading 4: 64–86: Chapters V–VI

(Ch. 5) 1. Consider the novel’s use of **bricolage** techniques so far: the letters at the beginning, Victor’s narration within Walton’s larger story, the selections of poetry, and now more letters from home. What does the novel gain from the use of these techniques? How do these multiple voices enrich your understanding of the text?

2. Summarize the story of Justine Moritz.

3. Late in Ch. 5, Victor addresses Clerval, using the literary device of **apostrophe**, which also occurs elsewhere in the text, when Victor returns to Switzerland (79). What does the use of apostrophe add to the text?

(Ch. 6) 4. Alphonse suggests he has wanted to leave out important information in his letter to Victor, but says doing so would be a “cruel kindness” (74). Explain the **oxymoron**, how it works, and what it adds to the text.

5. What is the relationship of Victor to the murder of William?

6. What do the descriptions of nature add to the **mood** of the scene where Victor sees the monster?

7. Why doesn’t Victor come forward in order to exonerate Justine?_

literary terms

bricolage

apostrophe

oxymoron

mood

Reading 5: 87–108: Chapter VII–Part 2, Chapter I

- (Ch. 7) 1. What is Elizabeth’s role in the trial? Compare her role with that of Victor.
2. Why does Justine confess to the crime? Explore the **irony** of her action.
3. Elizabeth rails against the “shews and mockeries” of the world (95). How do these elements relate to the story beyond what Elizabeth refers to?
4. Consider Victor’s position at the end of Ch. 7. Write him a letter in the style of the novel that shows your understanding of his position and emotions. Give him good advice for his next move.
- (Vol 2, Ch.1) 5. Explain Victor’s anguish at the beginning of Ch. 1.
6. “[B]ut now misery has come home, and men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other’s blood” (104). How do these monsters serve as a **simile** for certain aspects of human behavior? What is their relationship to the creature and his possible **symbolism** or **metonymy**? What aspects have we seen so far in the novel that might touch upon what’s referred to here?
7. Trace the settings so far in the novel. What inferences do you draw?
8. What are the features of the valley of Chamounix? What do these features add to the **mood** of the novel?
9. Explore the symbolism of Mont Blanc, as it has appeared in the novel so far.

literary terms

irony
symbolism
metaphor
mood

terms from class

Gothic
Romanticism

Reading 6: 109–126: Chapters II–III

1. (Ch. 2) In what way is Victor consoled by nature?
2. Draw the scene with Victor ascending to the summit of Montanvert.
3. How do you react to the monster’s speaking? To his style of speech? Why?
4. “I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed” (114). First, **paraphrase** this statement. Then, explore in what way this is so.
5. At this point, what do you think the monster symbolizes?
6. (Ch. 3) How does the monster educate himself about the world and about mankind?
7. Explore the **simile** and **allusion**: The hut “presented to me then as exquisite and divine a retreat as Pandaemonium appeared to the daemons of hell after their sufferings in the lake of fire” (121). How does the allusion work? What terms are being compared in the simile?
8. What do you make of the creature’s cottage people? What predictions can you make?
9. Do you like the creature? Why or why not?_

literary terms

paraphrase
simile
allusion

terms from class

psychoanalytical criticism
Sigmund Freud: id, ego, superego

Reading 7: 127–149: Chapters IV–VI

- (Ch. 4) 1. Explore the idea of **register** as you consider the monster’s style. Choose a particularly appealing sentence. Write it again more simply, in “lower register.” Write it again, even more formally. Does the creature speak in higher or lower register than Victor? What do you think Shelley is up to with these choices?
2. The monster’s sadness and longing for the simplicity of his original wood (140) seem not dissimilar from Victor’s anguish upon understanding the implications of his creation. Considering the text’s relationship to *Paradise Lost*, which the monster has read—you find this out in the next reading—what do you make of this idea?
 3. What is the significance of Shelley’s choice of *Ruins of Empires* as the book for Safie and the monster to learn history from?

4. What is the result of the monster's adolescent questions: Who am I? What is my origin? Etc. Consider the **Bildungsroman** of the creature.

5. Summarize the story of Felix, Agatha, De Lacey, and Safie. What is the importance of this story to the larger text? What does it echo? What themes does it emphasize?

literary term

register

Bildungsroman

terms from class

theme: return to Paradise

archetype: noble savage

Reading 8: 150–171: Chapters VII–VIII

(Ch. 7) 1. The monster has read three important books: *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives*, and *Sorrows of Werther*. Briefly research one of these titles and explore the relationship of the books to the creature's experience and to the larger text of *Frankenstein*.

2. What three books have shaped you most? Why? Make substantial connections between your own education and that of the creature (and/or of Victor, Clerval, or Safie).

3. What are the implications of Victor's having abandoned the creature? Explore this abandonment on the thoughts and feelings of the creature. Explore biblical parallels if they occur to you.

4. Explore the way the creature approaches De Lacey and the others. What are the implications of their rejection of him?

5. What is human? Is it possible that at this point the monster is more human than the people? Explain.

6. The creature tells us that "the cold stars shone in mockery..." (161). Objective correlative, pathetic fallacy, or an aspect of point of view? (See reading 3.)

7. Why do the people not return to the cottage?

8. What, according to the text, has "bent [the creature's] mind towards injury and death"? (164).

9. How does the change of seasons reflect the monster's experience (166)? As above, is this use of nature an example of the pathetic fallacy, an objective correlative, or some other aspect of the narrator's point of view?

10. Nature affects the creature's mood as we have seen with Victor. Does this point of connection tell us about the characters as doubles, or does it tell us something important about nature?

11. Why does the monster kill William?

12. What does the monster demand of Victor? Explore biblical parallels as well as the relation of this idea to the themes of the novel.

Reading 9: 172–192: Chapters IX–Part 3, Chapter I

(Ch. 9) 1. Analyze the monster's argument for Victor's making him a companion. What is the means of persuasion he uses? How does he appeal to Victor? Does he use ethos (character), logos (logic), pathos (emotion), or a combination of appeals? Is his argument effective?

(Vol. 3, Ch. 1) 2. Just as Victor is tasked with building a companion monster, Victor's father approaches him about Victor's wedding to Elizabeth. What does this parallel signify?

3. Why do Victor and Clerval visit England?

4. What is the knowable purpose Shelley's including the excerpt of the poem by Wordsworth (191)?

literary terms

rhetoric ethos

logos

pathos

Reading 10: 193–214: Chapters II–III

(Ch. 2) 1. If we might read the other characters in the novel as representations of different aspects of the main character (i.e., as **foils**) how does Clerval fit in? The creature? Elizabeth?

2. How does the setting of Oxford affect Victor's state of mind?

3. "But I am a blasted tree" (196). How so? Where have we seen a blasted tree earlier in this story? How does the **metaphor** work and what does it say about Victor?

4. Why does Victor choose the Orkneys for his work?

(Ch. 3) 5. What leads Victor to destroy the new creature? Is he right to do this?

6. "You are my creator, but I am your master" (206). How does this statement fit in with the **theme of technology**? To what degree is this a valid statement in our world?

7. Interpret the monster's threat that he "will be with [Victor] on [his] wedding-night" (207 and elsewhere). What plan do you infer he has?

8. Victor lands in Ireland. How is he received? Explore parallels between Victor and other characters, including Justine Moritz, Safie, and the creature. Does the text suggest we should notice more strongly a certain parallel?

literary terms

foil

Reading 11: 215–239: Chapters IV–V

1. (Ch. 4) Of what is Victor accused in Ireland?
2. Now that you have read further into the story, which plot parallel feels strongest to you?
3. Why does Victor persist in keeping his secret, even as the bodies pile up? (Ch. 5)
4. How does Victor's sin parallel the Fall?
5. Victor decides to go through with his wedding, and he decides to tell Elizabeth his secret after the wedding. What do you think of these decisions?
6. Victor, as narrator, tells us that the monster actually plans to kill Elizabeth: "[T]he monster had blinded me to his real intentions; and when I thought that I prepared only my own death, I hastened that of a far dearer victim" (236). What is the effect of this move? What is the effect of the **dramatic irony** created here? Compare the effect with other instances of dramatic irony in other texts you have read.

literary term

dramatic irony

Reading 12: 240–260: Chapters VI–Part way through VII

(Ch. 6) 1. Because narrator Victor has already told us, we know about the impending death of Elizabeth. Why does the novel then give us the description of the murder as Victor experiences it? What are the effects of this choice?

2. At the end of Ch. 6, the magistrate treats Victor as a madman. Given what Victor says and does, how would you describe his state of mind? Is he mad?

(Ch. 7) 3. Describe the narrator's voice at the beginning of Ch. 7. How does it compare with Victor's voice elsewhere in the text? Be sure your response has to do with the style: **diction** (word choice), **syntax** (sentence structure), etc.

4. Are there places in the narration where you feel the narrator has become **unreliable**?
5. What are the moral implications of Victor’s pursuit of the monster?
6. “At such moments vengeance, that burned within me, died in my heart, and I pursued my path towards the destruction of the daemon, more as a task enjoined by heaven, as the mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious, than as the ardent desire of my soul” (253). Paraphrase this passage, then speculate about what it means. Is Victor dispensing heavenly justice or something else? Explain and defend your answer.
7. Thinking of the ice floe Victor finds himself clinging to, how does the setting reflect the themes of the text?
8. The monster has made Victor into a monster. To what degree do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your answer.
9. What are the effects of the change in narrator at the end of the reading?_

literary terms

diction

syntax

unreliable narrator

Reading 13: 261–end; End of Chapter VII

1. Consider the symbolism of the letters as Walton discusses them (263–264).
2. “We are still surrounded my mountains of ice, still in imminent danger of being crushed in their conflict” (264). Explore the symbolism of this setting.
3. Compare and contrast the characters of Victor and Walton and their attitudes toward discovery, risk, and hope, as emblemized by Walton’s choice about the expedition and Victor’s final words.
4. Goth moment: Draw the image of the monster, as described in the text, with the body of Victor. While we may find this macabre, the Romantics—Percy Shelley and Byron, the first audience for the text—would have found it emotionally true and compelling.
5. People often counsel others, particularly teenagers, to respond to situations with “curiosity and compassion” rather than revulsion or other instant, negative reactions (270). Here, Walton does just that. What does it add to your ideas of his character that he responds in this way?

6. The monster explains the turning in his moral character and approach to his situation (271– 272). First, trace the progress of the monster’s attitude toward his murders. Then, consider the allusion to *Paradise Lost*. Here, “[e]vil thenceforth became my good” refers to a similar statement from the Satan character in the poem. What is the effect of the allusion? What does it add to the text?

7. Walton recalls Victor’s warning about the monster’s power of rhetoric. Consider the what Aristotle would call the “visible means of persuasion” as we see them in the monster’s speech (270–275, with interruptions from Walton). Which rhetorical appeals does he use to persuade his audience? How?

8. What is the overall emotional effect of the novel’s final scene? How is it achieved? literary

terms

allusion

rhetoric

rhetorical appeals (see Reading 9)

overall emotional effect

Some overall thoughts

The novel’s explanatory notes offer an interpretation: “Oddly, the tragedy of the story is not that the hatred shared by two living beings caused such suffering around them, but that their love for each other—though real—could never be expressed or admitted” (299). What do you think of this interpretation? To what degree do you agree with this claim? Why or why not?

Monstrosity. What comprises monstrosity? To what degree does Victor exhibit monstrosity through his selfishness and overreaching?

Relationship to the myth of Prometheus.

Items to track throughout the text

theme of friendship

theme of education

theme of technology

importance of weather or the seasons (setting)

importance of nature

map the locations and geographic features as we go (fairly specific: Belrive, Mont Blanc, the ice floe)

role of narration (shifting narration, letters, perception/perspective)