

FRANKENSTEIN KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



Context – *Frankenstein* was written by Mary Shelley in 1817, and was published in 1818.

Mary Shelley – Mary Shelley (1797-1851) was an English novelist, best known for writing *Frankenstein*. Her husband was the famous romantic poet and philosopher Percy Bysshe Shelley. In 1816, the couple famously spent a summer with Lord Byron, John William Polidori, and Claire Clairmont near Geneva, Switzerland, where they wrote ghost stories – this is where Mary conceived the idea for *Frankenstein!*



Scientific Knowledge – The 17th Century had seen a number of advances in science. Whilst Sir Isaac Newton was detailing his laws of motion, biologists such as William Harvey were finding out a great deal about the human body and its capabilities. A thorough understanding of electricity was not established until later, in about 1820, meaning that people were wary of its capabilities.



Health – Throughout Europe over the preceding hundreds of years there had been multiple pandemics of bubonic plague, which had wiped out huge numbers of the European population. Healthcare was much more limited, and medical knowledge developing, but still extremely basic in relation to today. Even minor diseases could be fatal. Life expectancy in much of Europe was no higher than 30. This is why some characters die of either unknown or fairly minor illnesses in *Frankenstein*.



Major Events – The world was a much more unstable place in 1818. In the late 1700s, many wars and disputes were still taking place all over Europe, as borders and empires were becoming established. For example, there were revolts, in places as varied as Poland, France, and Ireland. In such a world, it must have seemed to Shelley that humans were devoid of compassion for one another. In *Frankenstein*, humans are shown in this light, readily attacking and fleeing the monster.



Religion and the Supernatural – Parts of Europe such as England (where Mary Shelley was from) were far more religious than the present day. Therefore occurrences that could not be explained were viewed as an act of God or from some other supernatural force. Science was beginning to break down those boundaries, which some people felt was dangerous. *Frankenstein* deals with the theme of dangerous knowledge.



Mary Shelley and Death – Mary Shelley experienced a great deal of death in her own life. For example, her mother died from poisoning after giving birth to her, 3 of her 4 children died young, and she dealt with the grief of losing her husband Percy Shelley and good friend Lord Byron. It is not surprising that with all of the suffering that occurred in her life, Shelley's novel contains such a great deal of death within it.



Main Characters – Consider what Orwell intended through his characterisation of each of the below...

Victor Frankenstein – Victor Frankenstein is the doomed protagonist of the novel, and narrates the main section of the story. Studying in Ingolstadt, Victor finds the secret of life and uses it to create his very own intelligent but hideous monster. He feels compelled to keep his monster secret, as he powerlessly watches it destroy both his life and the lives of others.

Alphonse Frankenstein – Alphonse Frankenstein is Victor's father, and husband of Caroline until her death. He is extremely sympathetic towards his son, consoling him when he is clearly anguished, reminding him of the importance of family, and taking him on excursions to try and help him through his lowest moments. He dies a few days after Elizabeth, shocked by her tragic ending.

Quote: How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe (5)

Quote: filled several public situations with honour (9)

The Monster – The Monster is created and then abandoned by Victor Frankenstein (note that it is a common mistake to call the monster Frankenstein – rather it is Frankenstein's monster). The monster is 8 foot tall, and its appearance is grotesque. However, it is highly intelligent and sensitive, and tries to integrate itself with human patterns. Shunned by human society, the monster wreaks havoc upon humanity as it seeks revenge on Frankenstein.

Henry Clerval – Henry is Victor's best friend, who provides assistance to him in times of need. For example, when Victor drives himself to illness through the creation of his monster, Henry nurses him back to health. His cheerfulness counters Victor's depression. Henry is eventually killed by the monster as revenge for Victor not completing the creation of the monster's mate. Victor is accused of Henry's murder, but is eventually freed due to lack of evidence.

Quote: Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? (16)

Quote: perfectly humane, so thoughtful in his generosity (9)

Elizabeth Lavenza – Elizabeth is an orphan who is a few years younger than Victor, who the Frankenstein family adopt. Whilst she is raised as Victor's adopted sister, she later becomes his wife. Elizabeth does her best to keep the family together after the death of Caroline, writing letters to Victor to keep him informed of events at home whilst he is away at university. Elizabeth is a happy character who brings moments of joy to Victor's anguished life, until she is brutally murdered by the monster.

Robert Walton – Captain Walton is a brave seafarer, whose letters open and close the novel. Walton finds the beleaguered Victor on the arctic ice, rescuing him and allowing him to recover on his ship. As the two grow closer, Walton is the person who Victor tells his story to. He records the tale in a series of letters to his sister, Margaret Saville, who lives in England. He remarks to Margaret that although Victor's story is incredible, he is tempted to believe it. This is before he becomes the last person to see the monster for himself.

Quote: A creature who seemed to shed radiance (1)

Quote: Great God! What a scene has just taken place! (Letters)

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Dangerous Knowledge – *Frankenstein* gives a warning about the dangers of relentlessly pursuing knowledge. Walton, for example, is embarking on a dangerous mission across the arctic through lands unknown, whilst Victor aims to break beyond human limits and create life. Ultimately, Walton is able to learn from Victor's downfall, as he sees how destructive the thirst for knowledge can be.

Appearances – *Frankenstein* also shows the damaging effect of judging others based on their appearances. The monster is intelligent, sensitive and caring, and yet humans flee or attack him, horrified by the way that he looks. Even, Victor is so appalled that he flees his creation. The monster's longing for acceptance thus leads to devastating consequences.



Compassion and Forgiveness – Many of the characters in *Frankenstein* fail to show compassion for others at all. The monster alone shows compassion, yet this trait is soon corrupted by the cruel world around him. The monster, like Victor, then demonstrates an unwillingness to forgive. Both spend the remainder of their lives seeking revenge for the cruelty of the other, and so neither is happy until their deaths.

Secrecy – Victor looks upon science as a mystery that should be probed, whilst its secrets should be jealously guarded. He idolises Krempe at university, who is imbued in the secrets of his science. Although Victor cares deeply for characters like Elizabeth, Clerval, and Alphonse, he tells none of them of his secret, (he believes to protect them) and yet each of them ends up dead.



Chapter-by-Chapter Summary – Alongside key quotations from each scene.

Letters 1-4	The novel begins with a series of letters from Walton to his sister. He is captain of a ship on a daring voyage to the North Pole. Walton and his men spot a huge creature pulling a sledge, and later an emaciated man (Victor Frankenstein) with another sledge. They rescue him, and he spends time recuperating on the ship. He eventually shares his story.	'Why not still proceed over the untamed yet obedient element? What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?'	
Chapters 1-2	Victor begins his narration. He tells of his childhood, growing up in Geneva, and of his father (Alphonse) and his mother (Caroline). He also shares that Elizabeth Lavenza was adopted into his family. As a teenager, Victor becomes fascinated by the mysteries of science.	'The innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by heaven, whom to bring up to good'	
Chapters 3-5	Victor's mother dies. Victor leaves to attend university in Ingolstadt. He becomes obsessed with his study of anatomy, and decides to build an animate creature. When he brings it to life he is horrified by its appearance. It leaves Victor's apartment and Victor falls ill.	'... watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.'	
Chapters 6-8	Victor is nursed back to health by his friend Clerval. He receives a letter from his father – his younger brother William has been murdered. Returning to Geneva, Victor sees the monster, and knows it is culpable. Instead, Justine, the Frankenstein servant, is tried and executed.	'...she quickly recovered herself, and a look of sorrowful affection seemed to attest her utter guiltlessness.'	
Chapters 9-10	Victor contemplates suicide, but a trip away to Belrive, planned by his father, helps him to cheer up slightly. When his negative feelings return, however, Victor opts to climb Montanvert, to clear his head. There he sees the monster, who takes him to its ice cave, and tells his story.	'When I reflected on his crimes and malice, my hatred and revenge burst all bounds of moderation.'	
Chapters 11-12	The monster describes the confusion in its first moments of life. He then describes people fleeing whenever he tried to approach them. He decided to try to stay away from people. He learnt how to use fire, and found a novel by an old cottager. There, a young man and woman and old man live. He realises that they are unhappy in poverty. He grows affectionate towards his hosts, secretly helping them, and learning their language.	'It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct.'	
Chapters 13-14	The winter turns into Spring, and the monster has now learnt language exceptionally well. He notes that the people of the cottage seem particularly unhappy, until a girl named Safie arrives. He learns that the people of the cottage are called Felix (young man), Agatha (young woman) and their father (De Lacey) and used to be affluent.	'...her features of a regular proportion, and her complexion wondrously fair, each cheek tinged with a lovely pink.'	
Chapters 15-17	The monster finds books and learns to read. He also learns how he was created. He hopes to befriend the cottage dwellers, starting with the blind (so unprejudiced) De Lacey. However, Felix returns and drives him away. He then tells of how he came across William, and realizing who he was, strangled him, framing Justine. He implores Victor to make him a mate. The monster is persuasive, so Victor reluctantly agrees.	'Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why, in that instant, did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly bestowed?'	
Chapters 18-20	Victor visits England with Clerval. He leaves Clerval in Scotland so that he can complete his monster project alone on the remote Orkney Islands. He starts his work but then destroys it, knowing how horrific it will be. He throws the remains out to sea as he returns to Scotland. When he lands he is greeted rudely by townspeople, who say he is suspected of murder.	'Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? I had before been moved by the sophisms of the being I had created'	
Chapters 21-23	Victor is taken to the body, which is Clerval. He collapses in shock, and is ill for 2 months. When he awakes, he is found innocent of the murder. Plans are made for Victor to marry Elizabeth. He remembers that the monster says he will be with him on his wedding day, and plans to battle him. On the night of the wedding, Elizabeth retires for the night, but the monster breaks in and murders her. Days later his father dies of shock. Victor vows to spend the rest of his life searching for, and destroying, the monster.	'...the whole truth rushed into my mind, my arms dropped, the motion of every muscle and fiber was suspended: I could feel the blood trickling in my veins and tingling in the extremities of my limbs.'	
Chapter 24 and Walton (continuation)	Victor relentlessly tracks the monster, through ice and snow. He is found there by Walton, to whom he tells his story. Just before the ship turns back for England, Victor dies. Days later, Walton hears a noise that he chooses to investigate. It is the monster, who is weeping over his creator's body. He is tormented that he has become a symbol of evil, and states that with his master now dead, he himself is ready to die. He leaves into the darkness.	'I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on.'	

Shelley's Language Devices

Features of the Gothic Novel

Simile	'One vast hand was extended, in colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy.'	Horror Details are included to deliberately make the reader feel tense or scared, for example the description of the monster's appearance or the shrill of Elizabeth's scream from the bedroom.	Death Gothic texts often deal with the issue of death, and <i>Frankenstein</i> contains death in abundance. By the end of the novel, every single main character (except Walton) is dead or about to die!	Settings and Supernatural A gloomy, decaying setting is used in Gothic texts, (e.g. Victor's apartment) as are elements of the supernatural (creating life from electricity is not possible, as far as we know!)
Metaphor	'The world was to me a secret, which I desired divine.'			
Varied Vocabulary	'his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.'			
Imagery	'His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath'			