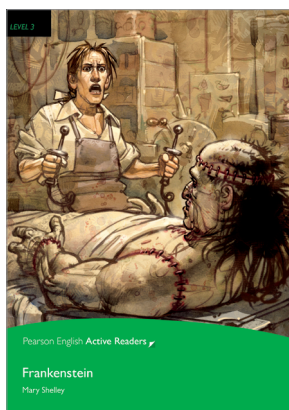


# Frankenstein

Mary Shelley



## About the author

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was born in London in 1797 and died in 1851. She was the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, two great intellectual rebels of the time. Eleven days after her birth, her mother died leaving her father to look after Mary and her sister. Mary developed an intense affection for her father and he for her, but things became tense when Godwin remarried as Mary and her stepmother did not have a good relationship. Mary never had a formal education but learned from the books that she found in her father's library.

In 1814 she met the young poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and went with him to France. They married in 1816, after Shelley's first wife killed herself. They had a happy but short marriage, and on her husband's death in 1822, she returned to England with her son, Percy. There she published many of his poetry and prose works, adding to these her own notes.

Mary had been interested in writing herself from an early age. By the time she was nineteen, she had written *Frankenstein* (1818), one of the most famous novels ever published. She also wrote several other novels, including *Valpurga* (1823), *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1834) and what is often considered her best work *The Last Man* (1833). She also wrote a travel book *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), which is about her trip around Europe in 1814 with her future husband.

## Summary

Young Victor Frankenstein comes from a caring family. His adopted sister, Elizabeth, loves him and he has a good friend called Henry. He is intelligent and deeply interested

in science. At university he learns how to create life from human body parts but, at the moment of his triumph, he realises he has created a monster. The monster wants to be loved but Victor rejects him and the monster escapes from Victor's laboratory. In his anger and frustration, the monster first kills Victor's brother, William, but then comes to believe that he will be happy if he has a mate. He asks Victor to make him a female companion, promising to leave the country and commit no more evil in return. Victor agrees but later has doubts and destroys the female. The monster wants revenge and goes on to kill Henry and finally Elizabeth on the night she marries Victor. Victor pursues the monster across the North Pole and eventually dies. The monster, saddened by the death, vows to kill no more.

**Chapters 1–2:** Victor's family adopt a young girl called Elizabeth and they move to Geneva. Two more sons are born, Ernest, the oldest and later William. Victor makes friends with a boy called Henry Clerval. Victor is very interested in electricity and chemistry and goes to Ingoldstadt University to study. He becomes obsessed with creating life and puts together a human form from parts of dead bodies. The monster comes to life. It opens its eyes and makes sounds. This distresses Victor and he falls very ill. His friend, Henry, nurses him back to health.

**Chapters 3–4:** Victor receives a letter telling him his brother, William, has been murdered. He is very sad and travels to Geneva. On the way, he briefly sees the monster in a forest. Justine Moritz, a servant to the Frankenstein family, is arrested and executed for the murder. Victor is terribly unhappy because he knows who the real murderer is. He travels to the mountains where he meets the monster again. He threatens to destroy the monster. The monster replies that Victor is responsible for everything because he created him and now his life is miserable because people are unkind.

**Chapters 5–6:** The monster tells Victor his story. After leaving the laboratory, he lived in a small hut next to the de Lacey's house. The monster watched the family and secretly helped them by collecting wood. But one day, the children saw the monster with their blind father and they screamed and attacked him. They left their house in fear. The monster was lonely, unhappy and he wanted revenge. He burned the de Lacey's house down and went to look for Victor. Instead, he found his brother, William, and killed him. The monster now wants a female companion and Victor agrees to create one.

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**Chapters 7–8:** Victor tells his father that he wants to marry Elizabeth but first he must travel and study. His friend, Henry, joins him and they travel to London. Victor learns a lot from the scientists there and collects the things he needs for the female monster. He then goes on his own to the north of Scotland. One night, as the monster looks in through the window, Victor destroys the female. The monster is very angry and threatens revenge. Victor takes a boat. He falls asleep and arrives in Ireland. There, someone tells him that a dead body has been found and Victor is arrested for murder.

**Chapters 9–10:** Victor is taken to see Mr Kirwin, the local judge and he discovers that the dead man is his friend, Henry Clerval. Victor is very distressed and spends the next two months very ill in prison. His father goes to see him and a month later Victor is found not guilty of Henry's murder. Father and son start the journey back to Switzerland but stop to rest in Paris. A letter from Elizabeth arrives. She tells Victor that she loves him and wants to marry him. Victor decides they must marry very soon before the monster takes his revenge.

**Chapters 11–12:** Victor and Elizabeth get married and start their holiday in a hotel. That night Elizabeth is murdered in her room. Victor sees the monster through an open window and chases him. The monster escapes. Victor follows the monster to the North Pole. He becomes very ill and is rescued by Walton, the captain of a boat. As he lies dying, he tells Walton his story and asks him to promise to destroy the monster when he is dead. Victor dies. The monster approaches the lifeless Victor and begs forgiveness. When he realises Victor is dead, the monster decides that he must die too and jumps into the water and disappears.

## Background and themes

Mary Shelly was greatly influenced by the Romantic Movement and she wrote *Frankenstein* after Lord Byron introduced a challenge to discern who among the three writers, Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley and Byron himself, could write the best ghost story. Her work was greatly influenced by the mass production and dehumanization of the Industrial Revolution, which posed a threat to the Romantic ideals of the importance of the individual, the beauty of nature, and the emotional and free spirit. *Frankenstein* can be seen as a protest against this scientific revolution.

**Love and friendship:** Victor had two very close friends, Elizabeth and Henry. Their personalities complemented his own. Victor was the scientific, mechanical part, while Henry was the literary part and Elizabeth was the soothing, gentle, feminine influence that balanced out the literary and scientific passion. The monster explained to Victor that he had no friends and was lonely and his quest in life was for companionship and understanding. It was his loneliness and rejection by humans and Victor himself that made him savage. He had no one to comfort him, support him or love him, and he felt that absence strongly. Loneliness recurs as a theme throughout the monster's existence.

**Science and nature:** The theme of scientific intervention in nature is key to this novel. At the time it was written, scientific development in England was becoming of great importance and was beginning to influence every aspect of human life. Shelley portrays the natural environment that surrounds us, the lakes, the mountains and the forests, as both beautiful and consoling whereas when scientists interfere with nature, a hideous monster is created. Whether Shelley intended it or not, her message is of great importance today in serving as a warning of the disastrous consequences that genetic engineering may have if not accompanied by moral and ethical responsibility.

**Judging by appearances:** Another theme is the human tendency to judge a person based on his or her appearance. It is true that the monster appears horrifying, but he is also shown to be more humane than some of the other humans in the story. Indeed, he is at first quite sensitive and tolerant. Unfortunately, no one tries to understand him or to accept him the way he is or see the inner beauty that exists.

## Discussion activities

### Chapters 1–2

#### Before reading

- Discuss:** Talk about horror stories. *Do you like horror stories? What makes them frightening? Do they sometimes have a message? What was the last horror film you saw? Did you like it?*

#### While reading (At the end of p. 2)

- Guess:** Ask students why they think the man that Walton found wants to go to the North Pole.

#### After reading

- Pair work:** Ask students to talk about whether they think Frankenstein should have created the monster or not.

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*Do you think it is all right for scientists to do all kinds of experiments? What kind of experiments do you think could be bad? Do you think it was a good idea for Frankenstein to create the monster?*

## Chapters 3–4

### Before reading

**4 Pair work:** Ask students to talk about the monster Frankenstein has created.

*What does he look like? How do you think he felt when he came alive? Can he talk and think? What problems will he have now that he has run away?*

### After reading

**5 Role play:** Put students in groups of four to write and act out Justine's trial. One student is Justine, one is the prosecutor, one is Frankenstein (defending Justine) and one is the judge (who decides Justine is guilty and sentences her).

## Chapters 5–6

### Before reading

**6 Guess:** Ask the students to imagine in small groups what has happened to the monster since he left Frankenstein's laboratory.

*What do you think happened to the monster after he left Frankenstein's laboratory? Where did he live? What did he eat? Did he meet any people? Why did he kill William?*

### After reading

**7 Role play:** Put students in pairs. Ask them to act out the final conversation between Frankenstein and the monster.

*Student A: You are the monster. Tell Frankenstein you want a wife and why. Promise you will leave the country and never hurt anybody again.*

*Student B: You are Frankenstein. Tell the monster you don't want to create a female monster and why. Agree to make another monster in the end, but make the monster promise to go away and hurt no more people.*

## Chapters 7–8

### Before reading

**8 Discuss:** Ask the students to discuss the possible reasons why Frankenstein is going to England. *Is Frankenstein trying to escape from the monster? Does he need to talk to someone important there? Is there something he needs in London to make the other monster? Will he go alone?*

### After reading

**9 Role play:** Tell the students to imagine that Frankenstein didn't destroy the female monster. Student A is the monster and Student B is the female monster.

*What do they say to each other? Does the monster like the female? Does she like him? What does the monster say about Frankenstein?*

## Chapters 9–10

### After reading

**10 Write:** Students work individually. Ask the students to imagine they are Frankenstein. They have to write a reply to Elizabeth's letter.

*The letter should talk about what happened in Ireland. Describe the prison, the trial and how you felt about the death of your friend. Also say you are afraid of the wedding night.*

## Chapters 11–12

### While reading

**11 Role play:** Put the students into pairs. Refer to page 63, penultimate line 'Elizabeth left me and went to the bedroom.'

Students imagine there was a conversation between Elizabeth and the monster before he killed her.

*Student A: You are the monster. Tell Elizabeth that Frankenstein created you. Tell her that he destroyed your female companion and that you are going to kill her.*

*Student B: You are Elizabeth. Tell the monster that he shouldn't kill you and that you will help him.*

### After reading

**12 Research:** Put students in groups to do some research about a novel or a film in which a monster is the central character. Each group can then do an oral presentation for the rest of the class or a wall display with texts and illustrations.

*You can get information from the Internet or books.*

*Describe the monster, explain what the monster does, its reasons for doing evil things and whether you think it is 100% bad or that there is some good in the monster. Some possible choices are vampires, zombies, bogeymen, ghosts etc.*