

# English Literature Activities



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# Frankenstein by Mary Shelley



First read the small text about the author's life and decide if the sentences that follow are True or False:

Mary Shelley (1797–1851) was an English writer best known for her groundbreaking novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Born Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, she was the daughter of the influential philosopher William Godwin and the pioneering feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft. Her upbringing in a literary household profoundly influenced her creative development.



Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* at the age of 18, inspired by a ghost story challenge posed by Lord Byron during a summer spent in Geneva with her future husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Byron. The novel, published anonymously, is celebrated for its exploration of themes such as the dangers of unchecked scientific ambition and the ethical questions surrounding creation and responsibility. It has become a cornerstone of gothic literature and science fiction.

In addition to *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley wrote other novels, including *Valperga* (1823) and *The Last Man* (1826), which explores themes of dystopia and survival. Her life was marked by personal tragedy, including the deaths of her husband and children. Despite these hardships, Shelley's innovative storytelling and profound thematic concerns have cemented her legacy as a pioneering figure in literature.

1. Mary Shelley was born in the 18th century.
2. Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* was published under her own name.
3. She wrote *Frankenstein* when she was 30 years old.
4. Her father was a well-known philosopher and her mother a feminist writer.
5. She wrote *The Last Man*, a novel about a dystopian future.
6. She spent a summer in Geneva with Lord Byron, which inspired her to write *Frankenstein*.
7. Mary Shelley's husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, was a famous poet.
8. Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* explores themes related to scientific ambition and creation.
9. Mary Shelley lived a long and uneventful life without personal tragedy.

## Watch the video about Mary Shelley and answer the question:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4p96vqI3zA>

**What was special about the summer Mary Shelley spent in the villa in Geneva with the other artists?**

**Read the excerpt from the book below and answer the questions that follow. This is the scene where Victor Frankenstein first animates his creature (excerpt from Chapter 5), an eerie and emotionally intense scene.**

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his 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.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a





shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed: when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, 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 down stairs. 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.

- 1. How does the first-person narrative affect the tone and mood of the scene? Do you feel sympathy for Victor or the creature, or neither? Why is that?**
- 2. Why do you think Victor is horrified by his creation, even though he worked so hard to bring it to life?**
- 3. How does Shelley create a sense of horror and dread in this passage?**
- 4. What does Victor’s reaction to the creature suggest about human fears of the unknown or the unnatural?**
- 5. Can you compare Victor’s experience with modern-day concerns about science and technology (e.g., artificial intelligence, genetic engineering)? How does Shelley’s novel reflect contemporary fears about “playing God”?**



# Frankenstein by Mary Shelley Teacher's C1-C2

## Answers to Mary Shelley text:

1. True
2. False
3. False
4. True
5. True
6. True
7. True
8. True
9. False

## Answer to the video about Shelley:

That summer was special because everybody came to the villa to see the legendary poet Lord Byron, people even had telescopes to spy on the residents' actions. More importantly, there were major events in Europe, the weather was terrible with many thunderstorms, crops failed, there was social unrest. These created a hyperintense state which was what gave birth to Frankenstein.

## Answers to the literary extract

1. Shelley's use of Victor's perspective intensifies the emotional depth and the horror
2. This touches themes of ambition, responsibility, and the clash between idealism and reality.
3. First of all with the setting (e.g., "dreary night of November," "rain pattered dismally"), the descriptions of the creature, and the sensory imagery (the candlelight, the sounds).
4. Shelley explores the fear of creation or science gone wrong. Victor's immediate disgust reflects societal fears of "otherness" or what's considered monstrous.
5. This opens a discussion on the ethics of scientific experimentation, relevant to both the novel's context and modern scientific debates (e.g., AI, cloning). This is also connected to the next questions.





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