



Hampstead Stage Company
a not for profit organization

Frankenstein Study Guide

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The Hampstead Stage Company
Proudly Presents
Frankenstein
A Study Guide



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Education Director's Welcome

Thank you so much for bringing Hampstead Stage Company to your students!

The following guide and lesson plans supplement our performance of *Frankenstein*. Please note, no formal preparation is required for seeing our shows, but we hope that these educational materials will help inspire your students to continue learning about Mary Shelley and classic literature.

We hope you enjoy them just as much as we enjoyed creating them for you!

Sincerely,

Amanda Pawlik

Education Director

Hampstead Stage Company



About Hampstead Stage Company

We are a nationally touring educational theatre that brings high quality, professional performances to schools, libraries, and communities all over the 48 contiguous states (everywhere but Hawaii and Alaska!). The Hampstead Stage Company's goal is to bring great books to life through live theatre; sparking an interest in reading, and creating a new way for audiences to use their imaginations and engage with the world.

Our production of *Frankenstein* is in our Young Adult Series, which brings to life literature for grades 7-12. With this series, we hope to continue educating not just about classic literature, but also different styles of theatre. Those students who may have seen a Hampstead performance for grades K-8, will now have the opportunity to continue learning about theatre by seeing a new style of performance. In this series, we select works that ask big questions, honoring the potential of all young adults to seek out the answers to these questions and use them to grow and, hopefully inspire them to make the world a better place.

The Hampstead Stage Company got its name from our founders, who came to America from the Hampstead area of London, England to pursue their dreams. Since its inception, our company has grown into one of the largest educational touring companies in the nation. We have performed for over twenty million audience members!

Our educational tours run year-round and are performed by two professional actors, each playing multiple roles. Our scripts are original adaptations, based directly on literary classics. Our shows run approximately one hour, including a question and answer session after the performance. We travel to your space, and bring our own sets and costumes; designed using extensive historical research. Our productions are flexible enough to fit into any assembly/performance space.



The Hampstead Stage Company is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. All HSC study guides and supporting lesson plans and activities are available to download for free from our website!

Contact: Anna Robbins, Company Manager: info@hampsteadstage.org

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About the Author

Mary Shelley

Mary Shelley was born Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin on August 30, 1797. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was an intellectual, writer, and noted advocate for women's rights, with her famous manifesto, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Sadly, Mary never knew her mother as she died due to complications from childbirth. Her father, William Godwin, was known for his work in political theory, most notably *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). His novel *Caleb Williams* (1794), has often been called the first English detective novel.

When young Mary was four years old, her father remarried to Mary Jane Clairmont. Though not a writer herself, Clairmont took an interest in publishing and Mary's father created M.J. Goodwin Publishing in her name. At the age of eleven, Mary published her first work through this publishing house, a rhymed children's story, "*Mounseer Nongtongpaw; or, the Discoveries of John Bull in a Trip to Paris.*"

The Goodwin household was continuously hosting influential thinkers and writers of the time and intellectual debates and conversation were plentiful. Some noted guests include: literary figures Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth and scientists Humphry Davy and William Nicholson, who both experimented with galvanic electricity (direct current electricity, or electric shock), which would later influence Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Coming from a family of writers and thinkers, it is no surprise that Mary captured the heart of her future husband, writer Percy Bysshe Shelley.



relationship, Percy Shelley encouraged Mary to write. They brought a box of her early writings with them when they eloped and traveled through Europe. Mary Shelley's first adult publication, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), was inspired by this trip.

In the summer of 1816, Shelley began what would become her masterpiece. She and Percy Shelley were vacationing in Switzerland and became neighbors to the writer Lord Byron. During a particularly rainy spell, Shelley, her husband, Lord Byron and a few other friends were confined in doors. To pass the time, they started to read ghost stories. Lord Byron suggested for fun that they all try to write the scariest ghost story. It was for this challenge that Shelley wrote a short story that would then become the inspiration for her larger novel, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*.

Frankenstein was first published anonymously in 1818 and many thought that Percy Shelley had written it, since he wrote the book's introduction. The novel soon became a great success, pulling upon the science and curiosities of the time.

While showered with joy and success for *Frankenstein*, Shelley's life was filled with many heartbreaks. Only one of her four children, Percy Florence Shelley, survived into adulthood. Her half-sister, Fanny, committed suicide. In 1822, her husband drowned while out sailing in the Gulf of Spezia, making her a widow at the age of 24. In these times of grief, Shelley often turned to her writing to find solace and to find a means to support herself and her son.

While she is most known for *Frankenstein*, Shelley is also the author of *Valperga* (1823), *The Last Man* (1826), *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835), *Falkner* (1837), and *Mathilde* (which was published well after her death in the 1950's). She even wrote two short blank verse dramas that were adapted from Ovid's *Proserpine* and *Midas*, each featuring short lyrical pieces by her husband. Her novels have received praise from scholars and her non-fiction and travel writings, including *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844), are considered some of the best of

publication of her husband's poems and prose after his death, assuring that he had a secure place in literary history.

Shelley died on February 1, 1851 in her home in London, England. Her impact, however, lives on. Since its publication, *Frankenstein* has inspired many plays, films, and other works of fiction. Included in this list are Richard Brinsley Peck's play, *Presumption; or the Fate of Frankenstein*, which Shelley saw for herself, the 1931 film *Frankenstein* starring Boris Karloff, the 1974 Mel Brooks parody, *Young Frankenstein*, and the 1994 Kenneth Branagh film, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*.

Plot Summary

Our play opens with shouting and commotion on a ship somewhere in the Arctic Circle. Voices offstage call that there are two figures racing across the ice. Captain Walton enters, calling that a man has collapsed. The men scramble to retrieve him and Walton instructs them to bring the man to his quarters.

The next scene opens in Captain Walton's quarters. He guides an exhausted man, Victor Frankenstein, into the room and offers him some tea. Frankenstein is shaken and tells Walton that he wishes he had left him on the ice. Walton alludes to the second figure that Frankenstein appeared to be chasing -the man was of an abnormal stature.

Frankenstein refuses to go into too much detail, but the Captain prods him to speak further, saying that his men need answers. Frankenstein becomes increasingly upset and urges the Captain to change the course of the ship, saying that there is a monster coming nearer with every passing minute. The Captain is alarmed and leaves the room.

The action begins to flashback as Frankenstein starts to tell his story, speaking to the audience. As a young boy, Frankenstein was interested in natural sciences and loved to explore the outdoors. At the age of sixteen, his world was shattered when his mother became ill and died. We see Frankenstein's father deliver the news, and Frankenstein becomes upset at his father, saying that he could have done more to try and help her. His father asks at what cost. Frankenstein reveals that he



will find out when he attends University at Ingolstadt. He also reveals that he had been reading his father's hidden journals, which show his father's shared interest in giving life back to the dead. His father cautions him and urges him to focus on those who are truly alive, such as Frankenstein's beloved fiancée, Elizabeth.

Over the summer leading up to his first year at university, Frankenstein intently studies his father's books and journals, fueled by the desire to see his mother again. The action shifts to Frankenstein at school at the end of his first class. Henry Clerval runs in, crashing into Frankenstein and causing him to drop his books. Clerval says that he is late to class - Frankenstein tells him the class is over, much to Clerval's dismay. Clerval examines Frankenstein's books, saying they look interesting. Frankenstein remarks that their chemistry professor did not seem to think so.

Clerval asks him what happened in class, and Frankenstein tells Clerval how they discussed chemistry and the natural world. Frankenstein brought up the ideas of the reanimation of dead tissue and using electricity to stimulate the nervous system, which were the points that their professor did not like. Frankenstein shares that he has been thinking about human life and if it would be possible to bring a human back to life after they have died, using electricity, such as that from a bolt of lightning. Henry Clerval says he is not sure if this idea is genius or madness but that he is willing to find out with Frankenstein.

The mood and time shifts. Both Clerval and Frankenstein have aged. Clerval enters into a cemetery carrying two shovels, followed by Frankenstein. The two begin to dig. They are digging up the body that will be used in their first experiment. They find the coffin and remove it from the ground.

The two exit with the coffin and re-enter into Frankenstein's laboratory. Clerval and Frankenstein remove the body from the coffin and place it on the lab table. Both are shaken with nerves: they are going to bring the dead body back to life. Frankenstein goes through with the procedure.



The Creature begins to move. They are successful! Clerval takes the body back into the other room to check its vitals. Suddenly there is a scream from Clerval and Frankenstein rushes back to check on him. The Creature is alive and runs onstage, frightened. Frankenstein tries to calm him, but the Creature runs off.

In the next scene, we see Frankenstein's Creature in the forest looking for food to eat. A young man appears. The Creature approaches him but the young man flees as soon as he sees him. The Creature, confused, runs after the young man. He then comes upon an old man who is blind. The old man is friendlier than the young man and invites the Creature over to him and gives him something to drink. The Creature tries to imitate the old man and begins learning how to speak. They share a few laughs. The old man gently pats the Creature on the back. The Creature reciprocates the gesture and embraces the old man, but not knowing his strength, injures him. The old man doubles over and dies.

The Creature, not understanding what has happened, picks up the old man and brings him in the house. The old man's son (the young man from the forest) is heard off stage entering the house and discovering his father. The young man runs out of the house and attacks the Creature, calling him a "monster". The Creature escapes and runs into the forest.

The Creature, distraught over what has happened, wonders why he is alive and why others are afraid of him. He finds Frankenstein's journal in his coat pocket and realizes that Victor Frankenstein is the one who created him. An angry mob is heard, led by the young man. The young man enters and confronts the Creature. The Creature does not understand why he is being hunted. The young man strikes the Creature, angering him. There is a struggle and the Creature kills the young man. The Creature vows to find Frankenstein and exclaims that Frankenstein is the one responsible for all the destruction, not him.

Frankenstein enters his laboratory looking for his journal. He discovers letters on his desk. Through the series of letters from his Father and



Elizabeth we learn that there have been rumors of a madman or a beast on the loose in Frankenstein's hometown -flocks of sheep have been killed and Frankenstein's father has a feeling that something is watching him.

In the next scene, Frankenstein enters his childhood home and finds the monster there, waiting for him. Frankenstein confronts the Creature, saying that he should destroy him for all the harm he has caused him. The Creature demands that Frankenstein make him a wife of his own kind. If Frankenstein does this, the Creature promises to go off into seclusion. If Frankenstein refuses, the Creature threatens to hurt Elizabeth and everyone Frankenstein has ever loved. Frankenstein reluctantly agrees and the Creature leaves, telling Frankenstein that he will be watching his every move until his task is complete. The Creature then hands back Frankenstein's missing journal.

The time shifts to Frankenstein in the cemetery. He is digging up another body to grant the Creature's request. Clerval enters and discovers Frankenstein. He reveals to Frankenstein that his father is dead and that the Creature has killed him. Frankenstein tells Clerval about the Creature's request for a wife. Clerval convinces an emotional Frankenstein not to honor his request. He exits to prepare the carriage to take them home. In the next moment, we hear Clerval scream, followed by a snap. The Creature enters and confronts Frankenstein. He gives him a final letter from Elizabeth, where she reveals that she can no longer be his wife. She shares that she wishes Frankenstein could have been hers and hers alone. The Creature then reveals that Elizabeth has killed herself. Overwhelmed, Frankenstein faints.

When Frankenstein comes to, he is back in Captain Walton's quarters. The Captain tells Frankenstein he must rest now. Frankenstein says that he feels too weak and that the Creature is there, just out of sight watching them. The Captain goes to fetch the ship's doctor.

Frankenstein calls out to the Creature, telling him to face him. The Creature enters. Frankenstein takes out his journal and begins ripping



out the pages. After he has destroyed the journal, Frankenstein dies. A noise is heard from the other room and the Creature runs off carrying the ripped pages of the journal.

Settings

The Arctic Circle-Our play opens on Captain Walton's ship in the icy seas of the Arctic Circle.

Geneva, Switzerland-Victor Frankenstein's childhood home.

Ingolstadt -University in Germany, located in the city by the same name. This is where Frankenstein attends school. It is the same university his father attended.

Cemetery: The beginning of Frankenstein's experiment.

Frankenstein's Laboratory -Where Frankenstein creates his Creature and later, the Creature's companion.

The Forest -The forest provides a hiding place for the Creature and is the setting for growth within him. Here, he meets the old man who shows him kindness and helps him learn how to speak. It is also where he meets the old man's son who treats him like he is evil and attacks him.

The action of our play takes place during the early 1800's and late 1700's.

Characters

Captain Robert Walton: Walton is the captain of an Arctic vessel. At the start of the play, the ship has been caught in the ice, unable to move. Walton helps care for Frankenstein and listens to his story.

Walton's Crew: Offstage voices; the crew is greatly disturbed by seeing the figure of the Creature at the start of the play.

Dr. Victor Frankenstein: A man driven by his curiosity to discover the secret of life. He creates a living being in human form.



Father: Frankenstein's father, gives Frankenstein his old text books to take with him to university. Encourages Frankenstein to always keep an open mind.

Elizabeth: Though only her voice is heard, she plays a crucial role. She is Frankenstein's childhood friend who grows to become his true love and fiancée.

Henry Clerval: Frankenstein's classmate who quickly becomes one of his closest friends. Clerval assists Frankenstein in bringing his creation to life.

The Creature: Frankenstein's creation, some call him a "monster".

The Old Man: A blind character who is the only person to show the Creature kindness. He offers him tea to drink and helps him learn how to speak. The Creature accidentally kills him, not realizing his own strength.

The Young Man: The old man's son. The first person outside of Frankenstein and Clerval to encounter the Creature. When he first meets the Creature in the woods, he runs away screaming. Later in the play, when he discovers the Creature has killed his father, he gathers people to hunt him down. Eventually, he tries to attack the Creature and is killed.



Mary Shelley's Creative Influences: Science, Philosophy, and Literature of her Time

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is very much a reflection of its time. The following theories and terms are helpful in further appreciating Shelley's masterpiece.

Science

The Royal Humane Society (1774) – This Society was started by two doctors -William Hawes and Thomas Cogan with the purpose of publishing information on how to resuscitate those who had drowned. There was an annual procession of those who had been saved by the Society's methods. These successful recoveries may have fueled the anxiety of the time that one could never be truly sure if a person was dead or not. The Society still exists today and gives honor and recognition to those who have saved (or bravely tried to save) someone's life.

Incomplete vs. Absolute Death -During Shelley's time there was a belief that the only way a person could be truly classified as dead was if their body had begun decaying. Because there were instances, such as drowning, where people seemed to have died and then were brought back to life, there was a belief that death was something that could be "cured". There was also a great interest in physical states such as sleeping, fainting, and coma where a person appears to be dead, but can be woken up.

Galvanism -Luigi Galvani, an Italian physician and physicist, found that frogs' legs moved as if they were alive when touched with a spark of electricity. Galvani's nephew, **Giovanni Aldini**, also a physicist, took Galvani's discoveries a step further and attempted to reanimate the bodies of hanged criminals using electric currents. He found some success when experimenting on the body of George Forester (a criminal who had murdered his wife and children). Aldini found that when an electric current was applied to his dead body, Forester's eye twitched, his legs moved, and his clenched fist raised in the air.



Philosophers

John Locke: In his, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Locke discussed his theory of **tabula rasa** that says when we are born our minds are like a blank slate and it is our experiences in the world that shape who we are.

Jacques Rousseau: Rousseau believed that our minds are not blank slates entirely but that we come into the world with two main instincts: **self-preservation** and **compassion**. People naturally have the instinct to be good, it is the corrupting influence of society that causes someone to stray from this.

Literature

Gothic Style

- Popular 1798-1832
- Features intense emotion
- Shows nature as a powerful and destructive force
- Weather or atmosphere used to depict mood
- Evokes terror or horror

Romantic Style

- Popular 1798-1832
- Shows fascination with the grotesque, bizarre, and the supernatural
- Emphasizes feeling over thinking
- Emphasizes intuition and imagination
- Concern for individual experience's rather than society
- Features a belief in the innate goodness of people
- Shows nature as healing force

Epistolary Novel/Story

- A novel or story told through a series of letters, and sometimes other documents such as diary entries.



Frame Story

- A unifying story in which one or more stories are told.
- Shelley's *Frankenstein* is often appreciated for the intricate way in which the stories are layered. The frame is Captain Walton's letters to his sister. Within this story, Walton tells Frankenstein's story. Within Frankenstein's story, we also hear accounts from the Creature as he speaks to Frankenstein as well as other characters such as Elizabeth and Frankenstein's father through their letters to him.

Preshow Discussion Questions and Introduction

The following questions serve as a guide for getting students excited about seeing the performance and provide background information for watching the show.

Today we are going to see a performance of Frankenstein by Hampstead Stage Company.

- Has anyone read the book or seen a movie version of this story? If so, what do you remember most about it?
- If time is available, share the philosophies of John Locke and Jacques Rousseau (provided on page 13 of this guide). Both philosophies raise the question of **nature vs. nurture**. Ask students → **Do you agree that a person is born inherently good and it is their experiences in the world that make them stray from this?** If so, **who is responsible if this person commits a crime?** Share with students that this is a question they will see explored in Hampstead Stage's production of *Frankenstein*. Encourage them to look for these moments in the play.
- Does anyone know who Mary Shelley is?

If students are not familiar with Mary Shelley, let them know:

- Mary Shelley was born in 1797 in London, England
- She wrote the story of *Frankenstein* at the age of 19!



- Frankenstein was written as part of a friendly challenge to see who could write the scariest ghost story. While watching the performance, see if you can notice what makes the story of *Frankenstein* so frightening.

Post Show Discussion Questions

- Have students share general reactions to the performance
- For those who have read (or are reading) *Frankenstein*:
 - How did the performance capture Shelley's use of nature and the atmosphere to establish mood?
 - How do we see Shelley's frame story in the play (the opening and closing scenes with Captain Walton)?
 - How is it different seeing the story performed vs. reading it? Was there anything that stood out to you more seeing it in the play?
 - What were some differences between the performance and the book? Why do you think the playwright choose to make those changes?
- Referring to the philosophies of John Locke and Jacques Rousseau (provided on page 13 of this guide), →**Do you agree that a person is born inherently good and it is their experiences in the world that make them stray from this? If so, who is responsible if this person commits a crime?** What moments from the play help to support your answer?
- The full title of Shelley's novel is *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. In Greek Mythology, Prometheus creates humans out of clay. He steals fire from the gods to help his creations stay warm and survive. With this fire, also comes the wisdom for men and women to care for themselves and grow strong. Prometheus is severely punished for this action. Why do you think Shelley chose to include Prometheus in the title of *Frankenstein*? Do you see any



- similarities between the story of Frankenstein and the myth of Prometheus?
- Are there any other questions you have about the play or theatre that the actors did not get to answer?
 - Hampstead Stage loves to receive letters and emails! If students have questions or more comments they would like to share, they are encouraged to write to us! All of our contact information may be found on our website.

Lesson Plans

We have prepared the following lesson plans for those who wish to expand upon seeing our performance in the classroom. These activities may be done either before or after seeing the performance. Teachers are encouraged to modify as needed for the needs of their students. A summary of the lesson plans is provided below. The full lesson plans may be downloaded for free from our website.

Grades 7-9

Creating Gothic Soundscapes→

This interactive workshop teaches students about the Gothic literary style and its use of weather and atmosphere to set the mood of a story. To further explore just how powerful these elements can be, students will learn how to create soundscapes (stories using just sound) using their voices and bodies to bring to life a passage from *Frankenstein*.

Grades 10-12

It Was a Dark and Stormy Night -Writing a Gothic Horror Story→

In the spirit that led Mary Shelley to write her masterpiece, *Frankenstein*, students are invited to write their own horror stories using the gothic and romantic literary styles as inspiration.