## Top Ten Tips

#### YORK NOTES

### Studying FRANKENSTEIN



#### Read, read, read!

Frankenstein is a fairly short, intense read and has been described by leading *Frankenstein* academic George Levine as 'the most important minor novel in English'.

So, what's stopping you? At 200-odd pages, it really won't take

you long! More importantly, though, it is only through reading the **book for yourself** that you will be able to **fully appreciate**, understand and interpret this unique and influential novel. You

might even find that it's not quite what you expected!



#### In the genes!

FRANKENSTEIN

Mary Shelley was born into a famous literary circle. Her mother was the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft who died 10 days after Mary was born. Her father was the philosopher and political radical William Godwin.

FRANKENSTEIN

She married the poet **Percy Bysshe Shelley**,

and the preface to *Frankenstein* details their holiday in Switzerland with the likes of Lord Byron. All these well-known characters influenced Mary Shelley's writing, so explore their legacy in contemporary society as well as within her narrative.

REMEMBER: Knowing about the **author** you are studying is often a fruitful way to begin unlocking the novel and its influences.



#### **Signpost**

Make your essay as easy to follow and engaging as you can by signposting your ideas.

There are many phrases you can use to guide the examiner through your argument, such as: 'On the other hand ...'; 'This idea is explored by ...'; 'It is important to mention/remember

that ...'; 'There is one other factor to consider ...'; 'Conversely ...'; 'One could argue that ...'

REMEMBER: Always keep the essay title in mind! After each paragraph, ask yourself, 'Does this answer the question?'



#### **Don't overpack – unpack!**

It is tempting to make a good point as quickly as possible, but you risk 'overpacking' your sentences and paragraphs. Don't rush: **unpack** your argument. Take it step-by-step to clarify and refine your **argument**.

There's nothing more frustrating than a good point made badly – it can take the punch out of your essay!

The key to not overpacking your answer is - surprise, surprise planning effectively before you begin your response! Check out the Essay wizard and Essay plans in the Revise section of our online guide for tips and guidance on writing your way to a great grade!



#### Will the real monster please stand up?

A common misconception is that Frankenstein, the novel's namesake, is the monster. Wrong! Frankenstein in fact is the doctor, Victor Frankenstein, the creator of the monster. A second misconception is that there is **only** one monster in the book.

Who is the *real* monster in the novel? This is a well-established debate in *Frankenstein* criticism. Whilst we have the archetypal monster - an unnatural being who is physically monstrous



– he was not born a murderer or evil: he was

kind, gentle and wanted to love and be loved. It could be argued that his mistreatment by society, and Frankenstein's abandonment of his creation, are the real cause of his monstrous behaviour.

One way in which to really deepen your critical analysis is to look at seemingly simple questions from different angles. There are many different approaches to this question, so why not draw up a spider-diagram and see what conclusions you come to? Support your ideas with quotations and critical points of view!



#### Language

Frankenstein is a novel all about language. We have the language acquisition of the monster, melodramatic and Gothic descriptive language, and the sublime Romantic musings of Victor Frankenstein.

Many of the **central themes** depend on powerful rhetoric, as do the many literary allusions, especially those of mythical and biblical origin.

Whilst Victor is on the one hand extremely **articulate** and **eloquent**, there is a preoccupation with the unnameable, the unspeakable, which is linked to the theme of **The monstrous and the human**. There are vast passages of **description**, of **recollection**, rather than action that takes place in the present – why do you think Shelley may have chosen this approach?

You should also examine the **Godlike science of language** (which links to the theme of **Creation and divine aspirations**) and the problem of voice (this links to the theme of The double). What are the effects of these?

REMEMBER: To get a **high grade**, consider the way in which the structure, form and language evoke particular **responses** in the reader.

# TOP TIP

#### Know your literary criticism!

Whether you use psychoanalytic theory or you apply a feminist reading to the novel, make sure you are aware of the critical debates that surround Frankenstein.

Try and group together different critical perspectives on *Frankenstein* – perhaps using a spider-diagram to organise the different

opinions for each school of thought!

REMEMBER: Literary criticism can be used to **bolster** your argument as well as providing something to argue against! Be brave and argue well!

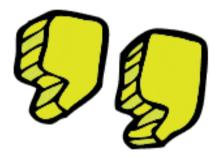


#### **Analogies and allusions**

Much like the monster, who is composed of fragments of other corpses, so too the text of *Frankenstein* has been said to mirror the monster's amalgamated identity.

There are plenty of **analogies** drawn between the characters in the text and those from myth.

More striking is perhaps the common view that Shelley reappropriates and reworks Milton's Paradise Lost (1667) and Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798), so make sure you read up on these two texts in order to refute or agree with this claim!





#### **Scientific approach**

The context of *Frankenstein* is really important to understanding the furore the book met with when it was published. For example:

- The 18th century marked the Age of the Enlightenment, when huge progress in Natural philosophy (science) was made, as well as a move away from religious doctrine
- The French Revolution in 1789 delineated a major shift in society and the way institutions were run
- ✓ **The Industrial Revolution** was well underway, revealing a rapid growth in industry and technological progress
- ✓ **Galvinism** the power of electricity, of bringing things back to life by charging them with **electricity** – had been developed



#### Frankenstein and the **Gothic**

Frankenstein cannot be discussed without knowing about the **Gothic** tradition in literature. But is it a straightforwardly Gothic novel? Consider the following in relation to **Frankenstein**:

- The language of the Gothic alongside expressions of the **sublime**
- Chaos of the Gothic vs order of the scientific method
- Eloquence versus the unspeakable /
- The Gothic genre itself what was it borne from? Who are the influences on Gothic novelists?

REMEMBER: In order to write well about Frankenstein you must be able to situate it **appropriately** within the **Gothic** genre. Simply saying it is a **Gothic novel** will not suffice!

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