

Studying FRANKENSTEIN



TOP TIP

1

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!

TOP TIP

2

In the genes!

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**.

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**.

TOP TIP

3

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?'

TOP TIP

4

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!

TOP TIP

5

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**!

TOP TIP

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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

7

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!

TOP TIP

8

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!



TOP TIP

9

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

TOP TIP

10

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!