SOUTHWEST Company

proudly presents

Mary Shelley's

FRANKENSTEIN

Mesa Arts Center
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Student Guide

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with any questions, concerns, or more fascinating Shakespeare trivia
I AM NOT A MONSTER!
1823 started it all with Richard Brinsley Peake’s stage adaptation
PREASSUMPTION; OR, THE FATE OF FRANKENSTEIN. This
production was noted to have had the Creature name listed as
"------" in the playbill. Since then, however, roughly 97 stage
and film versions of FRANKENSTEIN have filled our heads with
a MONSTER who is generally described to have bolts in his
neck, green skin, and the name of Frankenstein. This was not
Mary Shelley’s original intention. The Creature in the novel is
nameless because Shelley’s intention was for the reader to
decide who deserves the title of monster: Victor or his creation.
The word “monster” in our production is far less present than
the other words used to refer to the nameless being: “creature,”
“monstrosity,” “it,” “my creation,” “error,” “hideous wretch,”
“beast,” “abomination,” “fiend,” and “thing.” The novel has even
more ways to describe the nameless being:
"demon", "devil", vile insect", "aborred monster", "wretched
devil", and "aborred devil" just to name a few.

Shelley was only 18 when the ghost story challenge began in 1816. Over the next two
years, she expanded and completed the story
of FRANKENSTEIN and, at 20, the first
publication was released anonymously on
January 1, 1818. Why anonymously? It was
considered improper for women to read and
write, let alone write a HORROR story in the
19th century. It wasn’t until 1831 that Mary’s
name appeared as the author of the story.

EVERY WONDER WHY THIS NOVEL, WRITTEN BY A
WOMAN, HAS NO STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS?
That’s kind of the point and one of the major
literary themes of the novel. Writer and
professor Charlotte Gordon says it best in her
introduction to FRANKENSTEIN: THE 1818
TEXT: "When women are not allowed to have a
voice, or to play important roles in society...loss
ensues. Unchecked male ambition will lead to
destruction, injustice, and devastation."

A REFLECTION
OF HERSELF
Over the years, scholars have
made many connections
between the life of Mary Shelley
and her novel. Shelley was even
known to refer to her book as
her “offspring.” Interesting ties
to the novel include:

~Dates of the letters: The first
letter in the novel is dated “Dec
11, 17,” and the last “Sept 17.”
Shelley’s mother, Mary
Wollstonecraft conceived her
dughter in December of 1796,
and died on September 10, 1797
due to complications from
childbirth

~The initials of Walton’s sister
to whom he corresponds via
letter in the novel are MWS, the
same as Mary Wollstonecraft
Shelley

~It is suggested that Mary
wrote herself into her two main
characters: abandoned by her
creator and rejected by society
like the creature and constantly
in need to create like Victor.

The title page of the novel includes a quote from John Milton’s PARADISE
LOST. It is believed that the inspiration for the name Victor came from
this classic; "the Victor" is commonly used to reference God. Shelley likens
her Victor as playing god by creating life. Along with this, the Creature
reads the poem in the novel and mentions that he empathizes with Satan.

REJECTED BY TWO ACCOMPLISHED PUBLISHING FIRMS,
accepted by a publishing house with no notable
authors and using the cheapest materials, the first
publication of FRANKENSTEIN was not expected to
be a success. And it wasn’t. With only 500 copies on
the shelves January 1, 1818 and receiving very mixed
reviews, advertisements for the book were in the
newspapers by August of that year; a bad sign in the
19th century. An advertisement meant the
bookseller wanted to clear it from the shelf. Stage
adaptations took the idea of this story and ran and
began thrilling audiences with their house version
of the story. Without the theatre, one of our
favorite monsters may have been lost in history!

Shelley’s use of a triple narrative to tell one
story was innovative for the time. Walton
and the Creature’s versions of the story allow
the reader to draw his or her own conclusion
as to who is the hero and villain of the tale
rather than the accepted convention of a
parable of obvious good and evil.

WHAT’S WITH
THAT SUBTITLE?
Have you ever pondered the full title
of the novel: FRANKENSTEIN; OR,
THE MODERN PROMETHEUS? In
Greek mythology, Prometheus was the
Titan who, against Zeus’ order,
created man and stole fire from
Zeus to give to humanity. Though
usually considered a hero, some
believe Shelley saw Prometheus
more as an antagonist (the bad
guy). By gifting fire to humans,
Prometheus lured humanity into
eating meat; a vice in Shelley’s eyes.
Along with this, Victor creating life
parallels the actions of Prometheus.
Welcome to Shelley's world through the eyes of Southwest Shakespeare. Our original adaptation jumps through time (nonlinear) as we unravel the story of Victor's scientific ambition and explore the question, "What does it mean to be human?" Though quite true to the original story, we've taken a few liberties such as taking away the storyline of the explorer Walton and his letters to his sister. Below is a brief summary of our version of this classic horror story:

**Act 1**

takes us on a nonlinear journey from Ingolstadt to Geneva as Victor Frankenstein begins to discover who he is and what he is capable of doing and being. We meet the woman who loves him, Elizabeth, we meet the Professors who admonish and admire him, Professors Krempe and Waldmann, and we meet his most loyal friend, Henry Clerval. Finally, we meet his Creation.

...is a journey into what it means to be human and the question of nurture vs. nature. The Creature relates his journey to Victor in the hopes of eliciting empathy from him: he tells him of the family in Germany, Felix, Grace, Agatha, and De Lacey, the man who taught him speech. He describes his life to Victor and the cruelty with which he has been met and asks Victor to make him a mate. Victor makes his decision on the Creature's request and the play concludes with the ramifications of that decision.

**Act 2**

**Hold On!**

In the novel, The Creature learns language and reading from John Milton's PARADISE LOST. Along with this title, Mary Shelley gave the Creature two other books to read, one of which was PLUTARCH'S LIVES. That book is source material for many of Shakespeare's plays. So in our adaptation, we switch out LOST with THE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE. Can you identify all of the plays referenced in the dialogue? Here's a hint, the playwright has sprinkled in text from HAMLET, KING LEAR, THE TAMING OF THE SHREW, THE MERCHANT OF VENICE, OTHELLO, MACBETH, KING JOHN, THE TEMPEST, RICHARD THE SECOND and THIRD, HENRY IV: PART 1, A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, AND TITUS ANDRONICUS.

**Words, Words, Words**

Word frequency can tell us a lot about major themes in a text. Check out these word counts from the script:

- Life: 57 / Death: 40
- Truth: 18 / Lie: 39
- Blood: 20 / Hand: 57
- Monster: 13 / Man: 34 / Human: 31
- Silent: 23 / Story: 16
- Love: 10 / Hate: 9
- Home: 34

and the BIG WINNER... Time: 76
That's Latin for "the masks of the drama". It's the old school way to say cast of characters.

**Dramatis Personae**

**FRANKENSTEIN**

**FACT:**
In our production, the character MARY is JUSTINE in the novel. Playwright Quinn Mattfeld thought it would be a nice little nod to Shelley.

**Ingolstadt**
The University

**The Country Family**

**DE LACEY**
the blind old man who teaches the Creature language

**FELIX**
the father

**AGATHA**
the mother

**GRACE**
the daughter

**PROF. KREMPE**
He and Victor do NOT see eye to eye

**PROF. WALDMANN**
Sees potential in Victor, becomes his mentor

**HENRY CLERVAL**
Victor's best friend

**Geneva**
Victor's Home

**ERNST**
Victor's brother

**WILLIAM**
Victor's brother

**MARY**
Confesses to William's murder, hanged.

Also servants, students, gravediggers, townspeople, intoxicated people...the usual suspects

~ killed by the creature

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**HAPPY BIRTHDAY, FRANKENSTEIN!**
2018 marks the 200th birthday of our introduction to Victor and his Creation
It was a dark and stormy night...well, a wet, drab evening in an unseasonably wet summer in Geneva, Switzerland, 1816, thanks to the volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815. June 15th...ish, 1816. Bored to tears at the Villa Diodati, which he rented for the summer, Lord Byron. Yes, THAT Lord Byron. One of the most famous British poets ever. The guy who wrote the satiric poem DON JUAN.

Anyway, Lord Byron looked at his equally bored friends Percy and Mary Shelley, both of whom were also writers. As well as married.

The following is paraphrased: "You guys. I don't know about you, but I am tired of being stuck inside with these derivative novels. I need something original and interesting.

I mean, we could...we, WE could write better than all of this! I've got it! What if we have a little friendly competition to pass the time while it is so unseasonably wet. A horror story contest. Truly original. Scariest story wins. Okay? Go!"

So, Lord Byron and Percy got bored with the competition pretty quickly, although during this time, Lord Byron did write A FRAGMENT, the first vampire story that led to John Polidori’s THE VAMPYRE which led to DRACULA, and Mary Shelley’s FRANKENSTEIN. We can thank two of our most iconic monsters in history to a dark and stormy night.
Did you know Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN is considered to be the first Science-Fiction novel? It is! Think about it. Part of the definition of science fiction is "fiction based on imagined future scientific or technological advances..." (thanks, Merriam-Webster). The ENTIRE novel is based on EXACTLY this. Below is a quick list of all of the scientists and mathematicians mentioned in our play:

(SIR) FRANCIS BACON
- One of the leading minds of the scientific revolution of the 16th-17th century.
- Father of the Scientific Method. You know, from science class.
- Wrote a book about the prolongation of life

PYTHAGORAS
- You know, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$
- Greek philosopher who influenced Plato.
- One of history's first noted vegetarians.

ISSAC NEWTON
- One of the greatest scientists of all time.
- Creator of Calculus
- All those laws of physics? He did that. It's called classical mechanics.

ALBERTUS MAGNUS
- 13th century friar (eventually became a saint).
- Credited for discovering the element arsenic.
- All that alchemy talk? Falsely attributed to him...in some circles.

PIERRE de FERMAT
- French intellectual and mathematician.
- Also credited with the early developments of Calculus.
- Creator of Analytical Geometry.

JAMES BLUNDELL
- 19th century English obstetrician
- Performed the first successful blood transfusion.
- First guy to realize it was good idea to get all of the air out of a syringe.
Meet the Players

this is the term used for 'actor' during Shakespeare's time.
Potential additional page with final thoughts and critical thinking questions.