**Frankenstein: Deconstruction Guide**

**Use these questions and activities to help you annotate and guide you through the story.**

While reading Frankenstein, notice the development of these themes and motifs.

- the androgynous dichotomy (*Macbeth*)
- societal expectations of gender roles (*Huckleberry Finn, Macbeth, Julius Caesar*)
- discounting the value of feminine roles
- the ramifications of obsession - losing one’s feminine side (*Macbeth*)
- the ramifications of the desire to dominate (*Macbeth, Julius Caesar*)
- the ramifications of the desire for fame (*Macbeth, Julius Caesar*)
- doppelganger / the shadow self (*Gilgamesh*)
- the power of nature (“The Open Boat”): the ramifications of disturbing or attempting to manipulate nature (*Moby Dick*)
- the ramifications of striving to be God or understand God’s motivations (*Job*)
- the importance of name and identity (*Oedipus, Frankl*)
- the significance of voice, being heard/communication (*Job, To Kill a Mockingbird*)
- the nature of learning and education (*Huckleberry Finn*)
- innate (instinctual) vs. learned behavior (*Huckleberry Finn*)
- peace in nature/the corrupting influence of society (*Huckleberry Finn*)
- the Romantic view of the restrictive nature of the church (*Blake*)
- the nature of revenge (*Moby Dick, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet*)
- the conflict between nature and industry (*Blake*)
- the regenerative power of nature
- isolation (*Moby Dick*)
- self punishment/denial of pleasure, love and human intercourse (*Moby Dick, The Catcher in the Rye*)
- human need for love, friendship and family (*Huckleberry Finn*)
- responsibility (*Prometheus Bound; Frankl*)
- inner vs. outer beauty (*Cyrano de Bergerac*)
- the reaction to physical appearance (*Huckleberry Finn, To Kill a Mockingbird*)
- weather/clouds
- darkness and light
- sickness/disease (*Oedipus, Macbeth*)
- ambiguous nature of light: good, knowledge, and danger (as electricity)
- sleep and dreams
- falling
- guilt
- Biblical allusions: Adam/Genesis/Satan/the fall/Job
- “The Modern Prometheus”

**Author’s Introduction to IV**

1. Consider Shelly’s view of invention and the role of God that she expresses in her introduction. How will she create horror?
2. What do we learn about the contrasting views of Walton’s journey/mission from the opening paragraphs of the first letter? “You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings. I arrived here yesterday, and my first task is to assure my dear sister of my welfare and increasing confidence in the success of my undertaking” (1). What do these contrasts reveal about the characters of Walton and his sister, particularly the roles of men and women?

3. Consider the views of education presented in “Letter II.”

4. Compare the characters of Walton and Frankenstein revealed in “Letter IV.”

5. Consider the significance of the circumstances surrounding Alphonse Frankenstein’s marriage to Caroline Beaufort.

6. Consider the significance: “They consulted their village priest, and the result was that Elizabeth Lavenza became the inmate of my parents' house -- my more than sister -- the beautiful and adored companion of all my occupations and my pleasures” (17).

7. Consider the significance of Frankenstein’s (the narrator’s) language: “She busied herself…” (18). Clerval occupied himself…”(19). What does this tell us about him?

8. Consider the significance: “Wealth was an inferior object, but what glory would attend the discovery if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!”(21-22).

9. Consider the influence Waldman has on Frankenstein as described on pp 27-28.

10. As Frankenstein reveals his story to Walton, he also includes the lessons he has learned in hindsight: “Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” (31). How do these lessons in hindsight contribute to the effectiveness of the novel?

11. Consider Frankenstein’s expectations of his creature (32-33).

12. Consider the psychological ramifications of Frankenstein’s obsession revealed in these chapters.

**V through VIII**

1. Consider the use of light and electricity as the creature comes to life.

2. Consider Victor’s vision of Elizabeth in his “wildest dreams.”

3. Consider Victor’s reaction to his creation.
4. Consider the impact that Clerval’s visit has on Frankenstein while he suffers from “nervous fever.”

5. In her letter to Frankenstein, what do we learn about Elizabeth’s role in the family?

6. Consider the significance of the nature of Clerval’s ambitions.

7. Consider the ironic foreshadowing revealed at the end of Alphonse Frankenstein’s letter in Chapter VII.

8. Consider the weather imagery in Chapter VII.

9. Consider the symbolism of the characters William and Justine.

10. Consider the significance of Justine’s trial as well as her confession.

11. Consider the symbolism of the “never-dying worm in my bosom” (59).

IX-XIV

1. Consider the motifs: “Sleep fled from my eyes”; “dark cloud”; deep, dark, deathlike solitude” (61).

2. Consider: “Alas! Victor, when falsehood can look so like the truth, who can assure themselves of certain happiness? I feel as if I were walking on the edge of a precipice, towards which thousands are crowding and endeavouring to plunge me into the abyss” (63).

3. Consider the daemon’s reaction when confronting his creator. What does the creation fail to understand? Consider the connection to Job.

4. Consider the significance of this imagery: “My place of refuge was constructed of wood, but so low that I could with difficulty sit upright in it” (74).

5. Consider the significance of the creature’s response to music.

6. What tends to move the creature? What greatly endears them to him? Consider the development of the creature’s emotions.

7. What does the creature learn about the significance of communication and language?

8. What does the creature learn about the dualities found in human nature? “Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike” (84).
9. According to the creature, how is esteem and respect achieved?

10. Consider the significance of the Felix and Safie story.

**XV – XX**

1. Consider the comparisons to Adam and Satan that the creature makes in Chapter XV. What does the creature discover about knowledge?

2. What does the monster expect from “these amiable creatures”? Consider the significance of the old man’s attitude toward the creature when he meets him.

3. Consider the significance of the creature’s rejection by the family, “the only link that held me to the world” (99). Consider the symbolic meaning of burning the cottage.

4. Consider the significance: “Thanks to the lessons of Felix and the sanguinary laws of man, I had learned now to work mischief” (103).

5. Consider the significance of the request of Frankenstein the creature makes.

6. Consider the significance and irony surrounding Victor’s potential wedding plans.

7. Consider Frankenstein’s description of Clerval: “Alas, how great was the contrast between us! He was alive to every new scene, joyful when he saw the beauties of the setting sun, and more happy when he beheld it rise and recommence a new day. He pointed out to me the shifting colours of the landscape and the appearances of the sky” (112).

8. Consider the significance of Clerval’s plans for India.

9. Consider: For a moment my soul was elevated from its debasing and miserable fears to contemplate the divine ideas of liberty and self-sacrifice of which these sights were the monuments and the remembrancers. For an instant I dared to shake off my chains and look around me with a free and lofty spirit; but the iron had eaten into my flesh, and I sank again, trembling and hopeless, into my miserable self” (117).

10. Consider the significance of the monster’s newly defined relationship with Victor after he discovers that Victor destroyed the monster’s bride.

**XXI-end**

1. Consider the differences in the treatment of Victor from that of Justine.

2. Consider the symbolism and imagery: “The cup of life was poisoned forever, and although the sun shone upon me, as upon the happy and gay of heart, I saw around me nothing but a dense and frightful darkness, penetrated by no light but the glimmer of two eyes that glared upon me” (134).
3. Consider the significance of Victor’s attitude: “I abhorred the face of man. Oh, not abhorred! They were my brethren, my fellow beings, and I felt attracted even to the most repulsive among them, as to creatures of an angelic nature and celestial mechanism. But I felt that I had no right to share their intercourse. I had unchained an enemy among them whose joy it was to shed their blood and to revel in their groans. How they would, each and all, abhor me and hunt me from the world did they know my unhallowed acts and the crimes which had their source in me!” (136). Compare to statements made by the monster earlier in the novel.

4. Consider Victor’s reaction to Elizabeth’s letter: “…but the apple was already eaten” (139).

5. Why does Victor finally agree to marry Elizabeth? What is his rationale?

6. Victor, once suicidal, no longer wants to do himself in. Consider the evolution of his attitude.

7. Consider the significance of Victor’s ability to sleep.

8. Consider the significance: “At such moments vengeance, that burned within me, died in my heart, and I pursued my path towards the destruction of the demon more as a task enjoined by heaven, as the mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious, than as the ardent desire of my soul” (151-152).

9. Consider how the characters of the monster and Victor have evolved by the end of the novel. Relate to *Macbeth*.

10. Victor addresses the crew of Walton’s ship. Consider the significance of his message.

11. What have Victor and Walton learned?

12. Consider the significance of the monster’s summation of his existence: “Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animal. No guilt, no mischief, no malignity, no misery, can be found comparable to mine. When I run over the frightful catalogue of my sins, I cannot believe that I am the same creature whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone” (165). What does this tell us about human nature?

13. Consider the significance of the plans the creature reveals at the end of the novel.