

# Barrington Stoke

## CLASSROOM RESOURCES



## SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

This guide has been produced to provide ideas for guiding readers through Tanya Landman's **Frankenstein**, a brilliantly accessible retelling of Mary Shelley's iconic classic of the same name. This guide is written to be used after reading the full text in order to discuss the book, its characters and its overarching themes as a whole.

A synopsis is followed by quotes from the book with suggestions for discussion points designed to help young readers engage with the complex topics the book covers. The questions assigned to each quote are intended to further understanding of the text and provide opportunities for classroom discussion or written work. There are also suggestions for creative writing exercises and a tie-in author Q&A.

We hope you enjoy using these materials with your students.

**Frankenstein: A Retelling** is a short novel that follows a young man's search for the secret of the spark of life, leading him to a horrific experiment with monstrous results ...

The story begins with Captain Walton, an explorer, who reflects on his recent experience of discovering young scientist Victor Frankenstein out on the Arctic ice. Victor has been pursuing a gigantic figure across the wilderness, and agrees to tell Walton his story.

We hear about Victor's happy childhood, as well as his keen interest in science from a young age. He recounts how this passion grew into an obsession during his time at university, and how eventually, following numerous experiments, he attempted to create a living human from various body parts. Although ultimately successful, Victor is immediately disgusted by his creation and abandons it.

Rejected by his creator, the initially gentle Creature turns monstrous when his desire to find companionship and love is thwarted, and Frankenstein is pulled into a series of gruesome murders.

Creature and Creator are soon locked in a deadly struggle. But which of them is the real monster?

**Before beginning the novel with the group, ask them the following questions:**

- Have you heard of *Frankenstein* before?

**No:**

- What impression do you get of the novel from its front cover and title?
- What do you think a retelling of the original will change?

**Yes:**

- What do you know about the original novel? (Try not to give away too much of the plot!)
- Have you come across this story in other forms – perhaps a film or television series? Did you enjoy it? Do you think these adaptations are also forms of ‘retellings’? Discuss.
- What do you think a retelling of the original will change?



## VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN

- What sort of character is Victor? Do you like him?
  - Would you describe Victor as a 'sympathetic' character? Why?
  - Did you feel the same way about Victor all the way through the book?
  - Were there any points in the book where your feelings about Victor changed?
- Victor is shown to be very ambitious, with an inquisitive scientific mind – in fact, he even makes himself ill at times in his pursuit of his goals.
  - Why do you think Victor chose to pursue the spark of life and create the Creature?
  - What effect does Victor's quest have on other characters in the story? Who do you think is impacted the most by his decisions?
- How do you think Victor sees himself after the achievement of creating life? Can you find any quotes or scenes that show an example of this?
  - How do you think this influences the way that he sees the Creature?
- Think about the end of the book. Do you think Victor feels responsible for his actions?
  - Does Victor ever admit to making a mistake?
  - What do you think Victor has learned from creating the Creature?
- Do you think Victor is the hero or the villain of the story? Try to use specific scenes as evidence.



## THE CREATURE

- Why do you think the Creature has not been given a name in the story? How does this change the way that we view him?
- Think about what we know about the Creature and his personality at the beginning of the story.
  - Do you think he is capable of murder from the beginning, or does he undergo a change?
    - If so, at what point in the story do you think this happens?
  - What do you think motivates his violent actions?
- Think about the Creature's experience with the De Lacey family.
  - What do you think he learns from observing the family?
  - How does this new knowledge change him?
  - Do you think he was happier before or after this experience? Why?
- The Creature begins to learn and express human emotions throughout his story. Can you find some examples from the text where this is shown?
- Think about the Creature's relationship with his creator.
  - How do you think the Creature feels when he finds out that Victor has died? Do you think he regrets his actions?
  - Is there anything that you think Victor and Creature have in common?



## Think about the themes of knowledge and discovery in the book:

*I shall tread the path others have trod before, but then I will go further. I will lead a new way forward. I will explore unknown powers and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.* [page 14]

- When Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* in 1818, the Western world was on the brink of a scientific revolution. Can you identify any important scenes where knowledge and discovery play a key role in the text?
- Victor’s “thirst for knowledge” is a recurring theme throughout the novel.
  - At what point does his passion for science turn into an unhealthy obsession?
  - What are the consequences of his ambition?
- What do you think the author is critiquing about the rising trend in the pursuit of knowledge? Do you think any of these concerns could apply to scientific/technological advancements today?
- Are there any other characters who are pursuing knowledge or discovery?
- How do Walton’s actions differ from Victor’s? Do you think Walton learns something from Victor’s mistakes?

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## Think about the themes of acceptance and companionship in the book:

*“All men hate those who are wretched, and I am more wretched than any living thing.”* [page 40]

- How do you feel about the way *Frankenstein’s Creature* is treated throughout the text?
  - Think about when he reveals himself to the De Lacey family: what kind of language does the author employ to describe their reactions to the creature?
- Why is the Creature so desperate for a companion? What do you think he wants from the world?
- Do you think Victor made the right choice when he decided to destroy the companion he was making for his monster?
- Who else do we see suffering from loneliness and isolation?

## Think about the narrative voice used by the author:

*“Reading [Frankenstein] takes you right inside the heads of Frankenstein and his Creature - you can see the world through their eyes – so it’s a much more intense and electrifying experience.”*

– Tanya Landman

- There are multiple narrative voices throughout the text. How did the differing perspectives alter your experience of the story?
  - Do you think hearing from different characters allows for a greater understanding of the text? Why?
  - Think about the language the author uses to describe the creature when Victor first awakens him.
    - How did it make you feel?
    - What sort of impression does it give about the Creature’s nature?
  - Did hearing from different characters make you see things differently? For example, did hearing from the Creature make you sympathise with him?
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## Think about the theme of revenge in the book, and the consequences this leads to:

*“Should I leave for ever the neighbourhood of man and lead a harmless life? Or should I become the torment of your fellow creatures and be the author of your ruin?” [page 42]*

- Why do you think the Creature decides to ‘torment’ his creator? He is often described in the story as a ‘monster’ – do you think this is fair?
- Victor speaks of Destiny – do you think what happened to him and his loved ones was unavoidable?
- Victor suffers greatly at the hands of his creation – how does his attitude towards violence and revenge change throughout the book? Do you notice a difference in him as the story develops?

*“A beautiful young woman was sleeping on some straw. Here, I thought, is another who would smile at everyone on earth but me.” [page 67]*

- Justine is described as ‘beautiful’ many times in the text. Thinking about the creature’s desire for a companion, what do you think motivated him to frame Justine for murder?
- How do you think the story would have ended if the creature had been treated differently by Victor?

## Think about the role that nature plays in the book:

*“Something long forgotten came to me with each turn in the road – a tingling sense of pleasure. The wind whispered soothing sounds; Mother Nature seemed to be telling me to weep no more.”*

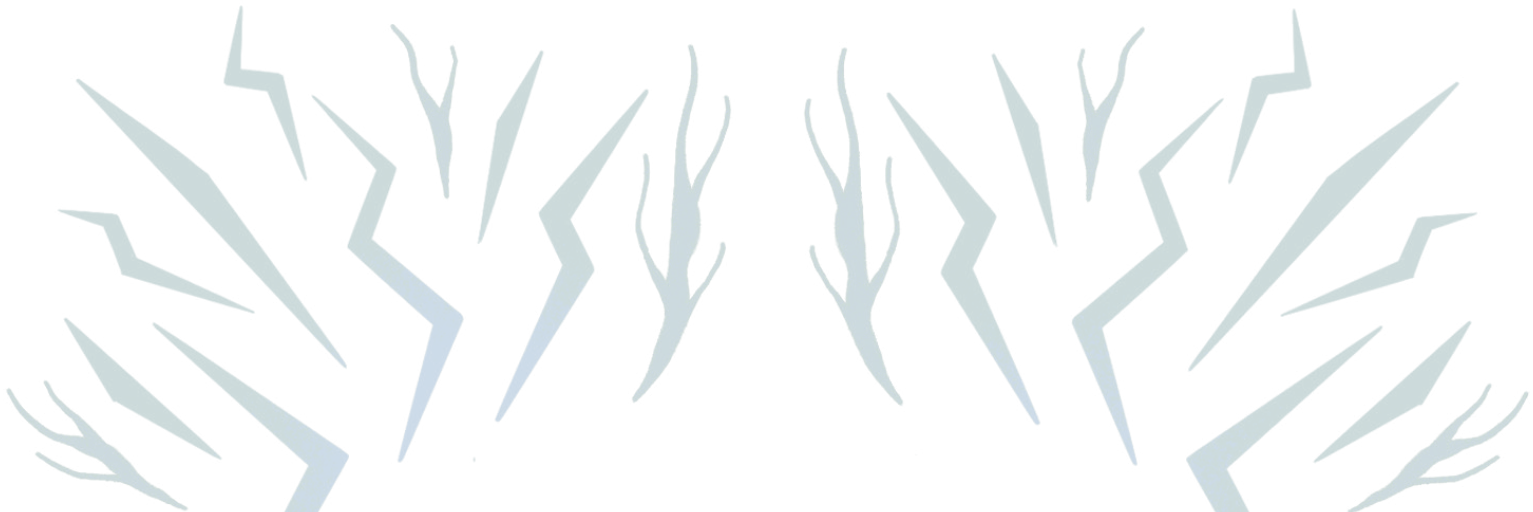
[page 38]

- Both Victor and the Creature travel widely and are often immersed in the natural world. How do they each experience this? Are there any differences that you notice?
  - Find three adjectives that describe Nature in the book. How do you think the author is trying to present Nature to the reader?
  - The ice at the opening and closing chapters of the story are said to represent the isolation that both Victor and the creature experience in the story. Can you find another example of weather being used to help create mood or atmosphere?
  - Victor dreams of creating a ‘human being’ – would you say that he achieves this? Why?
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## Think about what genre/s the book might fit into:

The novel is often described as ‘the first science fiction novel’, as well as having roots in the Gothic horror genre.

- Do you think this is a science fiction story? Why/why not?
- Do you think this is a horror story? Why/why not?
- Frankenstein’s monster is now a world-famous character. Think of a depiction of the monster that you’ve seen (for example, a Halloween costume or as a character in a film). Do you think that he’s been depicted accurately?
- Pick a scene from the book that you find particularly scary or horrifying. How has the language been used to heighten tension?





**Rewrite the awakening scene at the start of the book from the perspective of the monster**

*Consider the scene where Victor Frankenstein gives life to his creation and think about the monster's perspective on events. Think about what his very first thoughts might be and how Frankenstein's reactions impact him. How do you think he feels initially and does it change?*

**Create an obituary announcement for the funeral of a character of your choice**

*Think about the sort of life that character led and what people would want to remember of them. Look online for Victorian examples (Charles Dickens' is a classic example) and remember that in the Victorian era, funerals were as important as weddings – funerals were grand, elaborate and fitting for the life of the one lost. Think about the language that would have been used.*

**Write a 'missing' scene from the book**

*The novel is told through several layers of narration, from three characters – Captain Walton, Frankenstein, and the monster. Pick a scene and write it from the perspective of a different character. How might they relay the events and how might it be different from the way it is told in the story?*

***Why is it so important to make classic texts like this one more accessible?***

Because language changes over the years. What was a perfectly readable sentence two hundred years ago can be difficult to understand now. But – under all that archaic language and endless swathes of descriptive prose – there are truly great stories that modern readers will love!

***How did you go about preserving the story and ‘feel’ of the book whilst paring it back?***

A confession: I hadn’t actually read **Frankenstein** before I agreed to write this version for Barrington Stoke. When I did pick it up I found it really hard going, so I totally empathise with any students who are struggling with the old-fashioned prose! Luckily, I discovered a wonderful audio version. After I’d finished that I wrote a list of all the parts that had really gripped my imagination – the bits that I could see very clearly in my head. I wasn’t interested in the complicated back stories of Elizabeth and the De Laceys, for example. I didn’t warm to the long descriptions of landscape and the glories of Nature. But the character of Frankenstein, and the plight of his Creature absolutely fascinated me, so I concentrated on giving them new life for a modern reader.



***What did you enjoy most about working with Frankenstein?***

I’ve always found producing the first draft of a new book the most painful part of writing. Once it’s finally done, I then really enjoy the re-drafting and the editing process. So doing any retelling is an absolute joy because there’s none of the anguish and self-doubt which comes with writing a new book from scratch. With **Frankenstein** I didn’t have to agonise over plot or character, I just had to concentrate on distilling Mary Shelley’s utterly brilliant, ground-breaking work into a more accessible form.

***Why do you think it’s still important/special to read the book, even if you have watched one of the many adaptations of Frankenstein on TV or on the big screen?***

I think reading **Frankenstein** is important because of the point of view. If you’re watching Frankenstein on film or TV you’re a passive observer – a spectator. But reading it takes you right inside the heads of Frankenstein and his Creature – you can see the world through their eyes – so it’s a much more intense and electrifying experience.