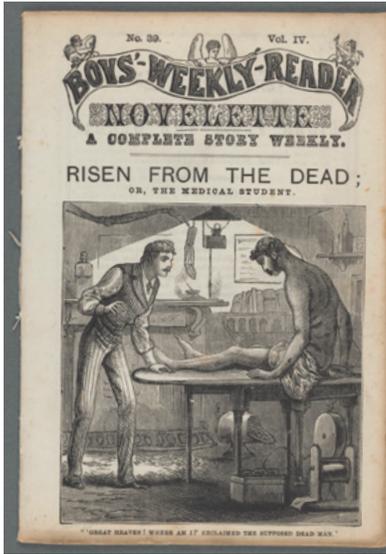


## INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS



LEFT: Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), *The Nightmare*, 1781, oil on canvas, Detroit Institute of Arts, USAFounders Society Purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Bert L. Smokler and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman/Bridgeman Images; CENTER: *Risen from the Dead; or, the medical student*, *Boys' weekly reader* novelette. Vol. IV, no 39 Pamphlet; The Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations; RIGHT: *Carl Laemmle Presents Frankenstein: The Man Who Made a Monster*, 1931, Lithograph poster, Stephen Fishler, comicconnect.com, Courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing LLC, © 1931 Universal Pictures Company, Inc.

Two hundred years after it was written by a teenager over the course of only ten months, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* continues to grip our imaginations. Through its transformation to stage and screen, it has reached the level of oral tradition and myth. The tale of a **creature** constructed from parts of corpses who then turns upon his creator prompts questions about the definition of humanity and monstrosity that are still relevant today.

The exhibition *It's Alive! Frankenstein at 200* at the Morgan Library & Museum investigates Mary Shelley's novel and its legacy. This curriculum follows the exhibition's narrative in four thematic sections. Section One begins by exploring the historical context from which the novel arose, starting with paintings and prints in the **Gothic** tradition. Next, the curriculum explores the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century science and medicine that Mary Shelley referenced when describing Victor Frankenstein's experiments.

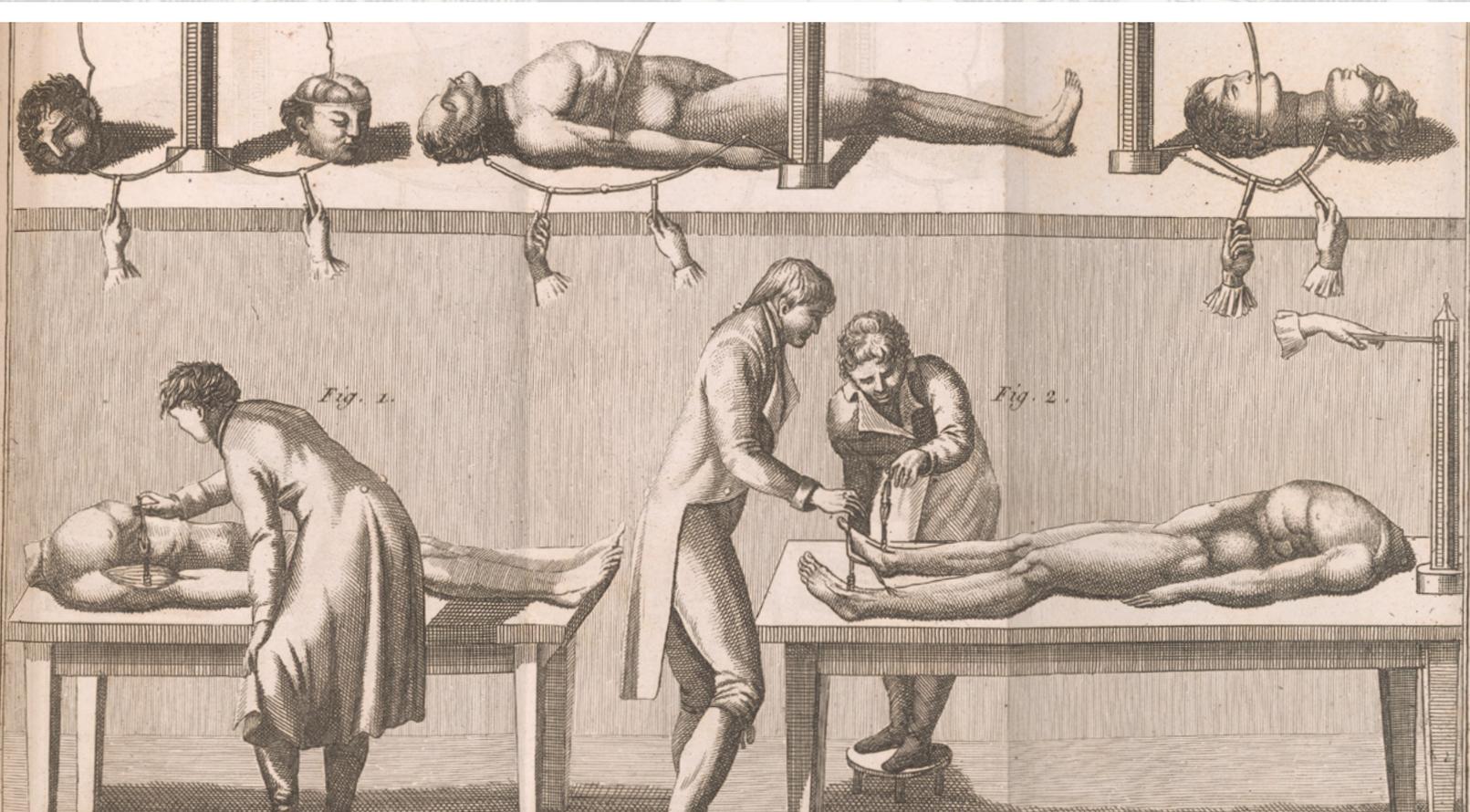
Section Two examines Mary Shelley's life, including her famous family and circle of friends, and the extraordinary circumstances that sparked the novel. Section Three will investigate the novel's composition and editing, including changes made to later editions and literary **allusions**.

Section Four explores the endless adaptations of the novel, beginning with early stage versions produced during Mary Shelley's lifetime. Film

*“We are un-fashioned creatures, but half made up. If one wiser, better, dearer than ourselves—such a friend ought to be—do not lend his aid to perfectionate our weak and faulty natures.”*

—Victor Frankenstein<sup>1</sup>  
(pg. 30)

<sup>1</sup> Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1831). Penguin Books, 2007. p. 30. All subsequent references to this edition will be given as parenthetical citations. Please note that there are variations between the 1818 and 1831 versions of the text.



Benoît Pecheux (1779–1831), plate no. 4, etching and engraving, in Giovanni Aldini (1762–1834), *Essai théorique et expérimental sur le galvanisme, avec une série d'expériences faites en présence des commissaires de l'Institut national de France, et en divers amphithéâtres anatomiques de Londres*, Paris: De l'imprimerie de Fournier fils, 1804. The Morgan Library & Museum, purchased on the Gordon N. Ray Fund, 2016, The Morgan Library & Museum, PML 196238.

adaptations from different periods, especially James Whale's iconic 1931 *Frankenstein: The Man Who Made a Monster* will be discussed alongside more contemporary variations.

This curriculum is designed to be flexible and can be connected to classroom content including English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, History, and Theater and Performing Arts. The novel *Frankenstein* covers a surprising diversity of topics including the Gothic and Romantic movements, scientific ethics, textual interpretation, morality, prejudice and intolerance, pop culture, and feminism. Teachers can adapt it to their individual classroom needs and to suit different age groups and concentrations.

Teachers can use this curriculum in combination with a visit to the exhibition, to enrich their teaching of the novel, or to inspire lesson plans, classroom discussions and activities in any of the many subject areas to which *Frankenstein* relates. It includes condensed versions of catalogue essays, selected objects and discussion prompts, and activity suggestions. In addition, there are supplementary reference materials such as high quality exhibition images, a family tree, a bibliography, a vocabulary list, and timelines.



Please reference the [Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards](#) here.

## **PLOT SYNOPSIS OF *FRANKENSTEIN; OR, THE MODERN PROMETHEUS***

*Frankenstein* was originally published anonymously in 1818 in three volumes. It was dedicated to Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin. In an introduction added to the third edition of the novel, published in 1831, Mary Shelley described the novel's origins. The poet Lord Byron proposed a ghost story writing contest as a way for a group of young writers to entertain themselves during the unusually cold, dark summer of 1816.

The novel is constructed as a nesting narrative comprised of letters and first-person accounts. The story begins with a series of letters from the polar explorer Robert Walton to his sister Margaret Saville. Robert writes of his desire to visit previously unexplored regions to better understand and master nature for the good of humanity, despite the risks to his crew.

When the ship runs into difficulties on the ice, Walton is surprised by the distant sight of a dogsled racing through the uninhabited landscape with what appears to be a giant driving the team. Later, a second sled appears with only one surviving dog and an exhausted man who introduces himself as Victor Frankenstein. Victor and Walton develop a rapport, although Victor expresses dismay at Walton's ambitions, asking, "Do you share my madness?" (29).

Upon asking this question, Victor Frankenstein begins his narrative. He explains the circumstances of his happy childhood in Geneva with his loving parents, adopted sister (and romantic interest) Elizabeth, and childhood friend Henry Clerval. As a young man Victor is an **autodidact** who teaches himself science, unaware that the scientific texts he studies are outdated. His idyllic youth comes to an end at the death of his mother from scarlet fever. During his college education, his professors scorn his love of **alchemy**, but he finds a sympathetic mentor in Professor Waldman. Victor becomes increasingly interested in chemistry and how death changes living flesh.

Victor thinks he now understands what causes the generation of life, and reasons he can use this knowledge to bestow animation on lifeless tissue, even potentially eradicating death itself. Victor decides to act on his theories and spends two years in an obsessive state experimenting. He decides that to make the process faster, he will need to create a larger being.

Victor successfully assembles a new creature from corpses. However, when his creation comes to life, he finds the result not "beautiful," as he had expected, but horrifying (58). Victor runs away from the Creature. (Because Victor declined to give his creation so much as a name, literary scholars conventionally call Victor Frankenstein's creation "the Creature.") Later that night, Victor dreams he holds Elizabeth in his arms, but when he kisses her, she transforms into the corpse of his mother. Awakening from the nightmare, Victor sees the Creature smiling over him, trying to talk and reaching out his hand to his creator. Victor flees his creation a second time. In the morning, Victor is found by Henry Clerval, who brings greetings from his family. Victor hysterically checks his bedroom for the Creature, but finding nothing, joins Henry with relief.

After a period of illness, Victor Frankenstein begins to slowly travel back to his family. He receives a letter from his father with horrifying news: his younger brother William has been found murdered, strangled, near their home. Another childhood friend, Justine Moritz, becomes a suspect in the crime because a valuable necklace with a portrait of Frankenstein's mother, last worn by William, was found on her person. As Victor walks closer to home and grapples with this news, he sees through the storm a distant figure, enormous in scale. Victor suspects that it is his creation and that it is somehow responsible for William's death.

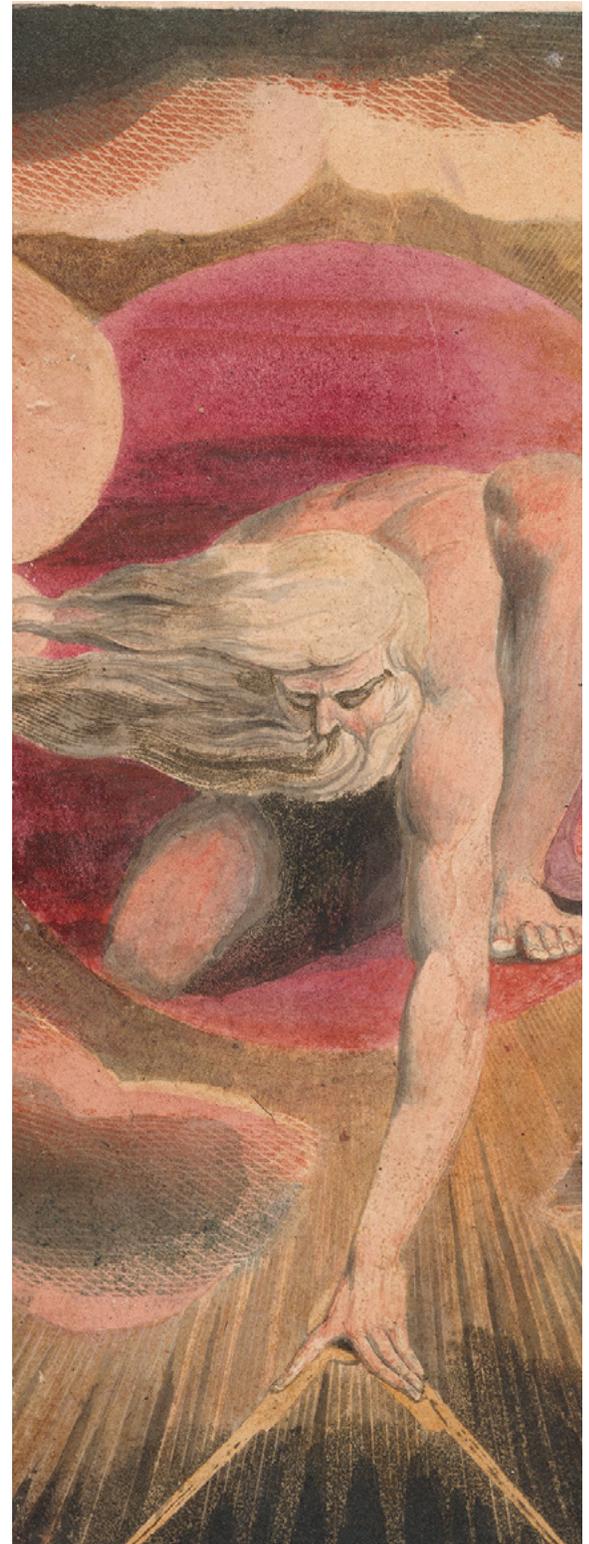
Justine is condemned to death for the murder, and Victor tries to comfort his family and himself. While seeking solitude in nature, Victor is approached by the Creature. Victor is enraged, but the Creature insists that he deserves an audience with his maker. "Do your duty towards me," the Creature demands, and Victor reluctantly agrees to listen as the Creature narrates his brief life (102).

After the night of his creation, the Creature was confused and took shelter in a forest. There he slowly learned how to feed and care for himself, discovering the usefulness of fire. The Creature entered a village, but was attacked by its inhabitants who were afraid of him. He took shelter near the home of impoverished cottagers, the de Lacey family. The Creature hid in an unused shed and watched the household: the senior de Lacey was blind and his adult son Felix and daughter Agatha cared for him. As he observed the family's conversations and habits, he came to learn that they were poor and persecuted for saving the life of a beautiful Arabian woman, Safie, who reciprocated Felix's love. When Safie finally arrived, the family began teaching her to read and write in English, and the Creature followed along and secretly shared in her education.

The Creature's education enabled him to interpret notes that Victor left behind and understand his origins. The Creature wanted to join the de Lacey family, but knowing his appearance would frighten them, approached the blind father first for protection. However, when the children saw their father with the Creature, they reacted violently and drove the Creature away. The de Laceys abandoned their home to escape the Creature, who then furiously burned it down. The Creature became increasingly distraught, and although he tried to make connections with people, such as by rescuing a girl from drowning, he was always violently rejected.

Finally, the Creature encountered a young boy, and hoped his innocence would make the child unafraid of him. The boy was William, who also refused the Creature, and when the Creature recognized William's relationship to Victor Frankenstein, he strangled him, later framing Justine for the murder. At the conclusion to his history, the Creature closes his narrative by asking Victor to make him a mate so they can live together in peace and seclusion.

Victor resumes his narrative, moved by his creation's plea. He accedes to the Creature's request for a companion and promises to make another creature, a woman this time. Later, however, he has doubts about her agreeing to a



William Blake (1757–1827), color relief etching frontispiece in *Europe, a Prophecy*, Lambeth: Printed by Will. Blake, 1794. The Morgan Library & Museum, gift of Mrs. Landon K. Thorne, 1972, PML 77235.1.



LEFT: William Hogarth (1697–1764), *The Reward of Cruelty*, ca. 1751, red chalk with smudging, squared in graphite, on laid paper, incised with stylus; verso rubbed with red chalk for transfer. The Morgan Library & Museum, purchased by Pierpont Morgan in 1909, III, 32c. RIGHT: Franz Joseph Manskirch (1768–1830), *Interior of a Gothic Crypt*, aquatint with etching and some hand coloring and varnish on paper, London: Rudolph Ackermann, 1799. The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

“compact made before her creation,” and he destroys the female creature before she is complete (170). The Creature is overcome with anger and vows, “I shall be with you on your wedding-night” (173).

Victor takes the female creature’s body into the water to dump it and then runs into difficulty sailing home. When he returns, he discovers that Henry has been murdered by the Creature. Victor is urged by his father and Elizabeth to return to his family and resume a normal life; Victor is convinced that the Creature will kill him on his wedding night. He marries Elizabeth regardless, but to his horror realizes too late that Elizabeth was the Creature’s intended victim all along. Victor then begins his hunt for his creation, seeking its destruction and his revenge, leading to the arctic pursuit.

Robert Walton and Victor speak again on Walton’s ambitions, and Victor advises him to “[s]eek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition...Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed” (220). Victor dies, and the Creature visits his body in the ship. Walton is so overcome by the Creature’s frightening appearance that he closes his eyes. The Creature declares his intention to commit suicide via a funeral pyre, to prevent anyone from repeating Victor’s experiments.