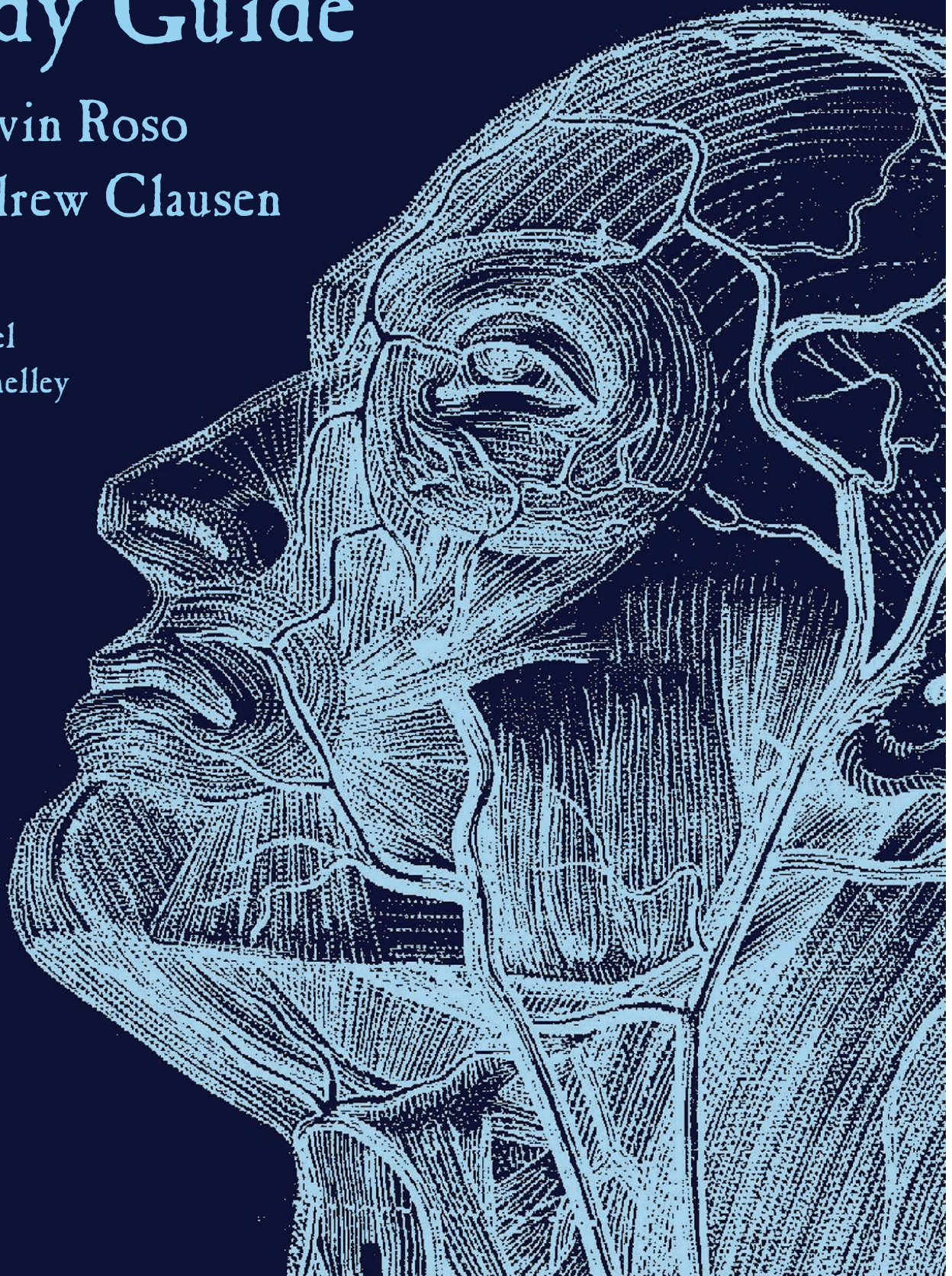


Frankenstein

Study Guide

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for the novel
by Mary Shelley



Frankenstein Study Guide

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Synopsis

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.

—1 Corinthians 3:19

Robert Walton is a young man driven by his desire for knowledge and exploration—he wants to make his mark on the world. In a series of letters to his sister, Walton describes how passion for discovery takes him to the Arctic, and he relates to her his thoughts and experiences as he searches for new frontiers.

But he finds something entirely different. As the sea ice closes in on his ship, he and his crew sight a strange, gigantic being driving a dogsled across the frozen wasteland, finally disappearing into the distance. The next day they find an ill and dying man floating on a fragment of ice and persuade him to come on board for his safety.

As his ship lies trapped by the surrounding ice, Walton spends many hours talking with the ill man, a Victor Frankenstein of Geneva. As they talk, Frankenstein slowly tells his story to Walton.

Frankenstein, too, was driven by a desire to make a name for himself, to forge ahead into realms in which no other man had trod. He searched the fields of biology, chemistry, and electricity for the secret to life and creation.

Frankenstein succeeded in understanding what no other man had comprehended, and he soon put his knowledge to gruesome practical application—making a man. He succeeded also in this; but with his success came horror and consequences beyond his imagination. From death he had created life; but from the life he had created he reaped only death. Frankenstein finally vowed to destroy his creation.

The monster ridiculed and taunted his maker, leading him on a desperate race that would finally end in the icy Arctic.

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5. Why does Frankenstein despise his creation? What does this reveal about Frankenstein's character?
6. What immediate effect does Clerval's appearance in Ingolstadt have on Frankenstein?
7. How does Clerval's continued presence in Ingolstadt affect Frankenstein?

Analysis:

8. While working on his creation, was Frankenstein going mad? Support your opinion with examples from the book.
9. Describe the weather on the night that Frankenstein brings his creation to life. Why might the author have set the creature's awakening during this kind of weather?

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10. *Irony* is a difference between appearance and reality, or between what is expected and what actually occurs. How does Frankenstein's successful creation of life demonstrate irony?
11. *Verisimilitude* is the appearance of truth and actuality in a work of fiction, suggesting that the incidents in a work of fiction really happened. In Chapter 4 Frankenstein suddenly breaks from his story to address Walton (and by extension, the reader). Read the paragraph that begins "I see by your eagerness, and the wonder and hope which your eyes express. . . ." How is this paragraph an example of the author's use of verisimilitude?
12. Soon after the monster comes to life, Frankenstein dreams about Elizabeth. Describe the dream. What does the dream possibly foreshadow?
13. After the monster comes to life, Frankenstein refers to it as "a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived." Explain this allusion.

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Dig Deeper:

14. In Chapter 4, Frankenstein decides to research the causes of life by examining death and decay.

I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. I paused, examining and analysing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death and death to life, . . .

Read Genesis 2:15–3:24; Genesis 6:3; and Romans 5:12, 15–21. According to these verses, what is the origin of death? In what way can death be defeated?

15. Did Frankenstein completely disregard the morality of his actions, or did he know he was doing wrong? Explain your answer with examples from the book.
16. Why do you think people continue to do wrong when they know it's wrong?
17. Read Romans 1:18–23, 28–32. How might these verses apply to what we see happening to Frankenstein in the novel?

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18. During his research and experiments, Frankenstein neglected contact with his family and friends for over two years. Do you think that the author might have been suggesting that stronger ties to home could have kept Frankenstein from his pursuit of conquering death? Why or why not? Read Proverbs 1:7–9, Proverbs 27:17, Galatians 6:1–2. What do these verses say about close relationships and accountability?

For Discussion:

Was Frankenstein wrong to try to find a scientific solution to death? Is there a point at which such exploration *becomes* wrong? If possible, bring into the discussion contemporary issues such as organ donation, blood transfusion, embryonic stem cell research, or cloning.

Optional Essay:

In Chapter 4, Frankenstein says, “If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for the simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind.” Write a one- to two-page opinion essay supporting or refuting this argument.

Frankenstein Study Guide Answer Key

Their conclusions differ, however, with the monster declaring revenge on his creator, and the psalmist declaring praise for his.

18. The five questions are: What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? The monster—like all of us—has questions about his identity and purpose. He desires to know himself. This shows the monster’s humanity and his need for meaning in life.

19. Answers may vary. Some critics have suggested that *Frankenstein* is a treatise against judging people by how they look. The fact that only a blind man accepts the monster is an example of this premise. Answers will vary. The evidence in the story indicates it is not true—the De Laceys reject the monster but gain nothing by doing so. On the other hand, they may have feared for their safety, so it may be argued that driving the monster away would be in their self-interest.

20. Answers will vary. The totality of his condemnation seems unjustified if his reaction is similar. He also takes a few encounters and uses them to make determinations about all of mankind. Examples will vary, as will students’ evaluations. As a sample: the encounter with the young girl who fell into the water. One could argue that the man acted reasonably—he came upon the girl unconscious and a stranger doing unknown things to her. When he takes the girl away from the stranger, the stranger chases him, so the man fires a gun at him. The monster does not say he ever tried to explain or even that he spoke. Even without the monster’s unearthly appearance and size, such a response may be defended, though it may be called too strong a response. On the other hand, the monster clearly has saved the girl’s life, at danger to his own, and his reward is to be shot. In all examples, the perspective determines whether the reactions are justified—arguments may be made for both sides.

Chapters 17–22

Vocabulary:

1. scatter; 2. unquenchable; 3. bloodthirsty; 4. savagery; 5. cliff; 6. forewarning; 7. evil; 8. hurl; 9. arguments; 10. ghost; 11. windstorm; 12. introduction; 13. diligent; 14. insurmountable

Questions:

1. The monster promises to leave Europe with his companion and go to South America to live in the wilds. He promises that Frankenstein will never see them again.

2. First, Frankenstein says that he refuses to create another being capable of the wickedness shown by the monster. “Shall I create another like yourself, whose joint wickedness might desolate the world!” Next, Frankenstein says that because the monster longs for “the love and sympathy of man,” he would never remain in exile. Frankenstein believes the monster would eventually attempt to seek out humans again, would again be rejected, and this time would have a companion to aid him in his destruction. Finally, Frankenstein says that the monster has already shown enough malice to render him untrustworthy. Frankenstein will not take him at his word.

3. Frankenstein agrees to create a female companion for the monster in order to protect his family from the monster, and he feels some responsibility toward the monster.

4. Frankenstein cannot bring himself to marry while still under his oath to the monster. He cannot imagine engaging in the “loathsome task” of creating a second monster while at his father’s house and in the companionship of his family members. He fears he may be discovered by them. He also wishes to learn from the philosophers of England, “whose knowledge and discoveries were of indis-