FRANKENSTEIN: Discussion questions

1. Analyze Frankenstein and the creature. Explain in what ways they are similar and in what ways they are different.
2. Who is responsible for the deaths of William, Justine, Henry and Elizabeth. Whom do you find to be guilty of the crimes, Frankenstein or the creature?
3. Describe the differences between the childhoods of Victor and the creature. How did each childhood affect the adult?
4. How are Frankenstein’s and Walton’s stories parallel?
5. The horror story is just as popular today as it was in Shelley’s early nineteenth century England. What is the appeal of this genre? Discuss elements from Frankenstein that parallel characteristics of modern horror tales such as Stephen King’s, or contemporary films such as “Nightmare on Elm Street”. What are the effects of these elements on the audience, and how might that explain this human fascination?
6. Dreams and nightmares play a recurrent role throughout Shelley’s novel. Trace the use of dreams throughout the book, with emphasis on how they relate to changes in Victor’s character.
7. Why are there so many references to sickness and fever in Frankenstein? Trace these references throughout the novel. What broader theme might Shelley be expressing?
8. Ice is a prevalent image and an integral plot device in Shelley’s Frankenstein. How is it appropriate that the novel ends in ice? What is the symbolism of ice for the characters in the story?
9. One literary critic, Harold Bloom, asserts that “all Romantic horrors are diseases of excessive consciousness, of the self unable to bear the self.” Does this Romantic characteristic apply to Victor and his treatment of the creature? Explain. Consider the fact that Victor never gives the creature a name.
10. Consider the character of Justine Moritz. While her story only takes two chapters of Shelley’s novel, her role as a secondary character is significant. What is Shelley’s purpose in telling Justine’s story? What truths about her time are being revealed?
11. The patriarchal society of Frankenstein is one in which men pursue their goals against hopeless odds. In light of this work ethic, is Robert Walton a failure as he turns his ship around at the end of the novel? How would Victor Frankenstein answer this question? What would Mary Shelley say? What is the reader to think?
12. Compare and contrast the story of Frankenstein and his Creature to the Christian story of God and Adam.
13. Explain how Frankenstein is a characteristic Gothic and Romantic novel. How is nature used to convey tone and mood?
14. The cottagers have the most significant impact on the attitudes/choices of the Creature. Explain how they affect him. What is learned through their experiences? Why does the author go to great lengths to explain their “back story”?