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Frankenstein

AQA GCSE English Literature



YORK NOTES

York Notes Rapid Revision

Frankenstein

AQA GCSE English Literature

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INTRODUCTION Who was Mary Shelley?

Three key things about Mary Shelley

1. Her parents were William Godwin, the radical philosopher and novelist, and Mary Wollstonecraft, the defender of women's rights.
2. Mary's mother died a few days after giving birth to her.
3. Mary eloped aged sixteen with a married man, Percy Bysshe Shelley. They were later married.



What was her early life like?

- Mary was brought up in London by her father, who remarried. Mary had a difficult relationship with her stepmother.
- Her interest in writing developed early. She was mainly educated at home by tutors, including her father, who strongly influenced her social and political views.
- Her elopement with Percy Bysshe Shelley caused a family uproar. She gave birth to a premature baby who did not survive.

Why did she write *Frankenstein*?

- She wrote a story in the summer of 1816, while on holiday in Switzerland with Shelley and other writers. On a stormy evening they set themselves a ghost story challenge and Mary later developed her story into *Frankenstein*.
- She had been reading several ghost stories but the creative spark for her own story came from a nightmare she'd had of a 'pale student' (Victor) 'kneeling beside the thing he had put together' (from 1831 preface to *Frankenstein*).
- She wanted her story to be as frightening and haunting as her vision.

What was the response to *Frankenstein*?

- The novel was published anonymously and widely reviewed.
- Several reviewers thought it had been written by a man.
- The novel was instantly popular because of its mix of **Gothic** and **realism**.

INTRODUCTION Plot summary

Letters I–IV

- Walton, an explorer, describes his expedition to the North Pole.
- The crew first glimpse the monster. Then Victor Frankenstein is taken on board.
- Victor promises to tell his story, which Walton records.

Chapters 1–4

- Victor recalls his childhood and how Elizabeth was fostered by his family.
- Victor's scientific interests develop at university.
- Victor obsesses about 'the principle of life' after his mother dies.

Chapters 9–12

- Victor goes to the mountains.
- The monster confronts him and begs him to listen.
- The monster recounts his early experiences and life in the hovel.

Chapters 5–8

- Victor brings the monster to life, rejects him and runs.
- Clerval visits. He realises Victor is ill, stays to nurse him and suggests a walking tour.
- Victor learns of his brother, William's, murder. He realises the monster is the murderer. Justine is accused of William's murder, 'confesses' and is hanged.

Chapters 13–16

- Safie arrives. The reasons for the De Lacey's poverty are explained.
- The monster visits De Lacey. The family flee.
- The monster sets fire to their cottage and leaves for Geneva. When William rejects him, the monster murders William and plants the locket on Justine.

Chapters 17–20

- Victor eventually agrees to the monster's request for a mate.
- Victor reassures his father of his intention to marry Elizabeth, the daughter whom Alphonse had fostered. Victor tours Britain with Clerval before departing alone for the Orkneys.
- Victor creates, then destroys, the female mate. The monster vows revenge. Victor disposes of her body at sea, drifts ashore and is arrested in Ireland for the murder of Clerval.

Chapters 21–24

- Clerval's murder is another of the monster's revenge-killings. Victor is found innocent and set free.
- The monster kills Elizabeth. Alphonse dies of sorrow.
- Victor pursues the monster and dies on Walton's ship. The monster mourns his death.

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Letters I-IV

Three key things about Letters I-IV

1. The progress of **Walton's expedition** is **documented**, alongside the **power, beauty** and **bleakness** of the Arctic.
2. The main character, **Victor Frankenstein**, is introduced and a context is provided for his story.
3. Key **themes** are introduced: **knowledge** and **wisdom, adventure, education, friendship, alienation** and **loneliness**.

What happens in Letters I and II?

- **Letter I:** Walton writes from St Petersburg to reassure his sister, Margaret, of his safety.
- He describes the cold climate and his careful preparations, determination and enthusiasm.
- He outlines his plan to travel to Archangel by sledge and hire a ship and crew.
- **Letter II:** Walton chooses an obedient and courageous crew but feels lonely and in need of a close friend.
- He confesses mixed feelings of pleasure, loneliness and fear when he considers the possible dangers lying ahead.



What happens in Letters III and IV?

- **Letter III:** Having embarked on his journey, Walton feels a great responsibility to his ship and crew but also a desire to take risks in order to pursue his goal to reach the North Pole.
- **Letter IV:** The ice-bound crew catch sight of a '**gigantic**' man on a sledge in the distance, heading northwards.
- After the thaw, the crew see another man, adrift on the ice but close to the ship, who is welcomed on board.
- Walton warms towards this man, who has been in pursuit of somebody and is physically and emotionally exhausted.
- Walton confides in him about his ambitions but the man responds with despair, promising to tell a story of his own as a warning to Walton.

Five key quotations

1. Walton on discovery and exploration: **'I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited'** (Letter I)
2. Walton on friendship: **'I desire the company of a man who could sympathise with me; whose eyes would reply to mine.'** (Letter II)
3. Walton's desire for glory: **'But success shall crown my endeavours.'** (Letter III)
4. First description of the monster – Walton: **'a being which had the shape of man, but apparently of gigantic stature'** (Letter IV)
5. Victor's warning to Walton: **'You seek for knowledge and wisdom ... I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been.'** (Letter IV)

Note it!

These four letters provide an opening **frame** to the novel, in **epistolary** form. The novel, however, does not continue to be written in letters and Walton, the letter writer, is not the main character of the novel as might have been expected.

Exam focus

How can I write about Walton's opening letters? AO2

You can use these letters to write about Walton's mindset as an explorer.

Walton's opening letters reveal someone obsessed by exploration. He writes grandly: 'I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited'. He uses powerfully emotional language, such as the verb 'satisfy', the adjective 'ardent' and the phrase 'never before' to convey his desire to be the first to make his mark on the North Pole. His passion for adventure, discovery and glory mirrors that of Victor.

Topic sentence refers to Walton's letters

Relevant quotation is fluently embedded

Explains quotation and comments on language

Makes a structural link with Victor's character

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about Walton's letters. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Walton's letters introduce the important theme of friendship when

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Chapters 1-4

Five key things about Chapters 1-4

1. **Victor's parents** provide him with **stability**, a **happy childhood** and a set of **moral values**, ideas revisited in Victor's relationship with the monster.
2. Victor is attached to his **foster sister, Elizabeth**, and his **friend, Clerval**. Both are **very different from Victor** but are **much-loved companions**.
3. **Themes** of **science** and **knowledge** are introduced and **Victor's** early **unchecked interest in the world's 'secrets'** develops at university into a **desire to create life**.
4. Victor's **deteriorating health** and **behaviour foreshadow** a **more serious decline**.
5. Linked themes are introduced: **family, love, kindness** and **friendship**.

What happens in Chapters 1 and 2?

- Alphonse, Victor's father, is a 'syndic' or magistrate. Late in life he marries Caroline, the poor, orphaned daughter of his deceased best friend.
- They are happily married and have a family of their own as well as fostering an orphan, Elizabeth.
- Victor's passion for life's mysteries contrasts with Elizabeth's appreciation of poetry and nature and Clerval's interest in chivalry and romance.
- Alphonse's disregard for the writer Cornelius Agrippa encourages, rather than deters, Victor's reading. This develops into an obsession with immortality, eternal youth and raising ghosts and devils.
- A lightning strike develops Victor's interest in galvanism – the use of electric currents to create movement in the muscles of animal corpses.

What happens in Chapters 3 and 4?

- Caroline dies, having sacrificed her own health to nurse Elizabeth. Her death-bed wish is that Victor and Elizabeth marry.
- Victor departs for university alone, without Clerval, whose merchant father does not value an extended education. There Victor focuses on creating life from the dead, to the detriment of his health and family relationships.



Five key quotations

1. Clerval's goodness: **'could aught ill entrench on the noble spirit of Clerval?'** (Chapter 2)
2. Elizabeth's goodness: **'The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp'** (Chapter 2)
3. Victor's use of **hyperbole** about his childhood: **'No human being could have passed a happier childhood'** (Chapter 2)
4. Victor's thirst for learning: **'It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn'** (Chapter 2)
5. Waldman to Victor on the achievements of modern scientists: **""They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places.""** (Chapter 3)

Note it!

There are hints that Victor feels his father could have better guided his reading or explained why a writer such as Agrippa was **'sad trash'**. Victor also suggests that his father might be partly to blame for his **'ruin'**.

Exam focus

How can I write about Victor's childhood?

AO1

You can explore the joy of Victor's childhood depicted in Chapters 1–4.

Victor's childhood is presented as idyllic. He categorically states: 'No human being could have passed a happier childhood'. He sees himself as the most fortunate child, using hyperbole for emphasis in the phrase 'No human being' and reinforcing this idea with the intensifying phrase 'happier'. He is nostalgic as he looks back from a position of ruin and misery.

Topic sentence refers to Victor's childhood

Quotation is fluently embedded

Explains quotation and comments on language

Develops a linking and explanatory point

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the function of the first four chapters. Use one of the quotations from the list.

The first four chapters introduce Victor's childhood interests and in particular his thirst for learning, when

My progress

Needs more work ☐

Getting there ☐

Sorted! ☐

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Chapters 5–8

Five key things about Chapters 5–8

1. Victor **succeeds in creating** the monster but **misunderstands** and **rejects** it.
2. **Clerval's devotion** represents ideals of **love, responsibility** and **friendship**.
3. In letters, Elizabeth tells Victor of the **return of Justine Moritz**, a much-loved **servant** of **the Frankensteins**, and his father tells him of **William's murder**.
4. The **monster's brief appearance** to Victor **in the mountains** makes Victor realise that the **monster is William's murderer**.
5. **Justine's wrongful execution** and **William's death** emphasise the **tragic repercussions** of Victor's actions.

What happens in Chapters 5 and 6?

- The monster is brought to life in Victor's workshop and Victor's initial reaction of '**horror and disgust**' foreshadows much of what is to come.
- In a nightmare Victor kisses Elizabeth, who turns into his dead mother. He wakes up to find the monster at his bedside, and flees, despite its signs of friendship.
- Clerval comes to visit Victor the next morning, stays, nurses him and proposes walking therapy, which temporarily lifts Victor's spirits.
- A letter from Elizabeth brings news of Justine's return to the Frankensteins, after her mother's death.

What happens in Chapters 7 and 8?

- A letter from Alphonse brings news of William's murder.
- On his way home, Victor sees the monster in the mountains, just after addressing William's spirit. He connects the monster with William's murder.
- Justine is arrested and put on trial for William's murder. She is incriminated by having the locket which Elizabeth had let William wear.
- After being bullied into confessing, Justine is hanged. Elizabeth's speech in Justine's defence is disregarded.
- Victor agonises over his guilt in causing so much grief to his family.



Five key quotations

1. The monster comes to life: **'I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open'** (Chapter 5)
2. The monster's first communication attempt: **'His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks.'** (Chapter 5)
3. Clerval's positive influence: **'Clerval called forth the better feelings of my heart'** (Chapter 6)
4. Elizabeth to Justine on female goodness: **'I will melt the stony hearts of your enemies by my tears and prayers.'** (Chapter 8)
5. Victor's guilt: **'William and Justine, the first hapless victims to my unhallowed arts'** (Chapter 8)

Note it!

Victor's belief that nobody else's suffering is as bad as his can be seen as self-centred. Justine is **'sustained by innocence'** whereas **'fangs of remorse'** tear him. The language of his pain is more violent than the imagined pain of others. His use of **abstract nouns** and **Faustian imagery** adds emphasis.

Exam focus

How can I write about Victor's response to the monster? AO1

You can refer to Victor's negative response to the monster's first actions.

Victor's initial response to the monster is fear and incomprehension. He describes how its 'jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks'. Victor sees his creation in terms of body parts such as 'jaws' and 'cheeks' and is blind to the possibility that the 'grin' and 'inarticulate sounds' are attempts at friendship. From the outset Victor perceives the monster negatively and this persists throughout much of the novel.

Topic sentence refers to Victor's response

Quotation is fluently embedded

Explains quotation and comments on language

Develops the point

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about Chapters 5–8. Use one of the quotations from the list.

The important theme of female goodness is explored in Chapter 8 when Elizabeth

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Chapters 9–12

Five key things about Chapters 9–12

1. **Men and monsters** are frequently compared, notably by Elizabeth's statement '**men appear to me as monsters**' and also by Victor's observations and behaviour.
2. The **monster speaks to Victor** for the first time.
3. The monster's story begins in **Chapter 11**, where the **narrative voice changes from Victor's to the monster's**. There is a contrast between the monster's **archaic** language learned from books and Victor's educated, but more **natural-sounding**, language.
4. The **monster's** experience of **abandonment** is the **antithesis** of Victor's comfortable childhood.
5. The **De Laceys** provide a **positive model** of family relationships.

What happens in Chapters 9 and 10?

- Victor escapes from his misery over William's death to the isolation and comfort of the natural world in Chamonix.
- The awe-inspiring view at the top of Montanvert makes Victor speak aloud. The monster instantly appears.
- The monster understands Victor's hostility but questions his sense of duty and appeals to his better nature.
- The monster demands the right to tell his story and gives Victor the choice of acting kindly towards him or being the '**author**' of his own '**ruin**'.

What happens in Chapters 11 and 12?

- The monster recollects his experiences in the natural world and his first interactions with humans.
- In a '**hovel**' next to the De Laceys, the monster observes their behaviour, emotions and routines as well as admiring their '**gentle manners**'.
- The monster secretly helps them, gradually masters language and, despite the shock of seeing his own reflection, remains happy and hopeful.



Five key quotations

1. Men and monsters – Victor about himself: **'the fiend that lurked in my heart'** (Chapter 9)
2. Victor on the healing qualities of nature: **'The very winds whispered in soothing accents'** (Chapter 9)
3. The monster negotiates his terms with Victor: **'I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part'** (Chapter 10)
4. The monster's curiosity about the De Laceys: **'I longed to discover the motives and feelings of these lovely creatures.'** (Chapter 12)
5. The monster's excitement at mastering language: **'I cannot describe the delight I felt when I learned the ideas appropriated to each of these sounds'** (Chapter 12)

Note it!

When in mourning for William and Justine, Elizabeth's language suggests an **uncanny** understanding of what has happened: **'men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood'**. She is unsettled by the **'expression of despair, and ... revenge'** on Victor's face.

Exam focus

How can I write about the monster's voice?

AO2

You can analyse the monster's **tone** in **dialogue** and **monologue**.

The monster's voice is heard in conversation with Victor. His ability to negotiate is shown in the formal archaic language: 'I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part'. His subservience is signalled by 'thy creature' but his terms are outlined in the conditions of the 'if' clause. His speech style reveals respect for Victor and a desire to be respected.

Topic sentence refers to monster's voice

Quotation is fluently embedded

Explains quotation and comments on language

Develops and summarises point

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the theme of human understanding. Use one of the quotations from the list.

The monster's natural curiosity about humans is explored in Chapter 12 when.....

My progress

Needs more work ☐

Getting there ☐

Sorted! ☐

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Chapters 13–16

Five key things about Chapters 13–16

1. The **De Laceys' sad history** and link to **Safie** is a **story within a story**. Its **themes** of injustice, exclusion and betrayal **mirror the main story**.
2. The effect of **reading** on the monster's knowledge and understanding of the world links with Victor's passion for **book learning**.
3. The monster's visit to De Lacey leads to a **tragic sequence of events**, resulting in **chaos, rejection, injustice** and **murder**.
4. The **themes** of **kindness** and **respect** are developed in the presentation of the De Laceys.
5. The **themes** of **learning** and **knowledge** are explored through the monster's education.

What happens in Chapters 13 and 14?

- Safie arrives at the De Laceys. The monster observes how her appearance and language differ from the others and her positive effect on the family and Felix in particular.
- He listens and learns about human nature when Felix teaches Safie to read.
- He learns about the De Laceys' history, the reason for their poverty and their connection with Safie.

What happens in Chapters 15 and 16?

- The three books the monster reads independently make him think deeply. He also reads Victor's journal, which saddens him.
- He visits De Lacey and tells him of his desire to **'claim the protection of some friends'**. De Lacey treats him with respect.
- The family arrive home to find the monster and are horrified. They flee. Hurt and enraged, the monster sets fire to their cottage and leaves to find Victor.
- The monster's motivation in rescuing the drowning girl is misunderstood. In seeking out an unprejudiced child, he ends up murdering William and planting incriminating evidence on Justine. His alienation makes him want a female companion **'of the same species'** with **'the same defects'**.



Five key quotations

1. The monster to Victor on knowledge: **'Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind ... like a lichen on the rock.'** (Chapter 13)
2. His developing sense of a negative identity: **'but my form is a filthy type of yours'** (Chapter 15)
3. The monster identifies with Satan: **'I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me'** (Chapter 16)
4. His anger against Victor: **'Unfeeling, heartless creator!'** (Chapter 16)
5. The monster's alienation: **'I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me'** (Chapter 16)

Note it!

Books transform the monster's thinking and imagination. *Ruins of Empires* informs him about history. Adam and Satan are characters he can identify with in *Paradise Lost*. *Plutarch's Lives* heightens his understanding of morality. *The Sorrows of Werther* provokes empathy. They all have a humanising effect.

Exam focus

How can I write about the monster's feeling of alienation? AO1

You can explore the monster's increasing feelings of alienation in his **dialogue** with De Lacey.

The monster gradually loses hope of being accepted by humans. The poignant statement 'I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me' expresses understanding of the cause of his misery and a certainty that it is permanent. The use of the verb 'will' expresses this certainty as well as a feeling of resignation. His realisation paves the way for the request for a mate who will accept him.

Topic sentence refers to alienation

Quotation is fluently embedded

Explains quotation and comments on language

Moves on the argument

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about theme linking to structure. Use one of the quotations from the list.

The significant theme of knowledge is developed in Chapter 13 when.....

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Chapters 17-20

Five key things about Chapters 17-20

1. Victor takes over the narrative and **recounts** an extended **discussion with the monster**.
2. The **monster's desire** for a **mate** parallels **Victor's desire to marry**.
3. Victor's **narrative digression** gives Walton (and the reader) **foreknowledge of Clerval's death**, long before he describes its actual circumstances.
4. Two narrative elements are **motifs**; **Victor's creative isolation** and **the monster's appearance** with a 'grin'.
5. **Victor's destruction** of the **female mate**, in full view of the monster, is an important **narrative turning point**. The monster's threats **foreshadow future narrative events**.

What happens in Chapters 17 and 18?

- Victor is with the monster in the mountains.
- The monster commands Victor to make him a mate. Victor initially refuses. He eventually agrees, but only if the monster and his mate go into exile.
- Victor reassures Alphonse of his intention to marry Elizabeth. He needs to create the monster's female mate first, so asks for some time to visit England, keeping the reason for his journey secret. Clerval accompanies Victor.

What happens in Chapters 19 and 20?

- Victor and Clerval arrive in Britain. The anxious Victor suggests they part company in Scotland and he travels alone to the isolated Orkneys.
- Victor imagines the mate refusing to agree to exile or the monsters' offspring breeding 'a race of devils' that curse the earth.
- The monster appears and Victor, sensing '**malice and treachery**', brutally destroys his mate. The monster leaves in anguish.
- The monster returns and, after making a series of threats, escapes before Victor can seize him.
- Victor gets rid of his tools and the body at sea, drifts off course and is arrested in Ireland for the murder of Clerval.



Five key quotations

1. The monster's persuasive power: **'If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion'** (Chapter 17)
2. Clerval as protector: **'Henry might stand between me and the intrusion of my foe.'** (Chapter 18)
3. Victor's spiritual death: **'But I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul'** (Chapter 19)
4. The monster's final threat: **'I shall be with you on your wedding-night.'** (Chapter 20)
5. After destroying the mate, Victor feels almost as if he had: **'mangled the living flesh of a human being'** (Chapter 20)

Note it!

Victor worries that the female mate might have opinions and thoughts conflicting with the monster's; murderous and **'more malignant'** intentions; feelings of sexual disgust and hatred, and a reproductive capacity that could become a curse to humans.

Exam focus

How can I write about the monster's power?

AO1

AO2

You can write about the monster's skills of persuasion over Victor.

Shelley shows the monster's power when persuading Victor to make him a mate. His reasoning: 'If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion' reveals an understanding that lack of love and friendship lead to alienation and immorality. The repetition of 'no' emphasises the negativity of this state of mind and 'must' expresses its inevitability. It is the monster's rhetorical power that moves Victor here.

Topic sentence refers to monster's power

Quotation is fluently embedded

Explains quotation and comments on language

Point on power is summarised

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about structure. Use one of the quotations from the list. After the destruction of his mate, the monster's final threat foreshadows Elizabeth's death with.....

My progress

Needs more work

Getting there

Sorted!

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Chapters 21-24

Five key things about Chapters 21-24

1. The **discovery** of the **murder victim's identity** (Clerval) heightens the **dramatic tension**.
2. **Victor's** arrest, imprisonment and trial **parallel** that of **Justine's**.
3. **Tension rises** with the approach of Victor and Elizabeth's wedding and the narrative **foreshadowing** of **tragedy**.
4. **Victor's** hunt for the monster generates the **final piece of narrative action**, which takes the reader and Walton to the **narrative present** on the ship.
5. **Paired themes** are developed: justice and freedom; dream/nightmare and reality; life and death.

What happens in Chapters 21 and 22?

- Victor is with a magistrate and hears the statements of those who either witnessed seeing a man in a boat or discovered the corpse.
- Victor collapses when he realises that the corpse is Clerval, overcome by horror and guilt. He is subsequently imprisoned for Clerval's murder.
- Alphonse visits Victor, who is set free once his innocence is proved. They travel back home via Paris, where Victor receives a letter from Elizabeth, declaring her love but expressing concern that Victor might love another.
- Victor writes to reassure her, also informing her of a secret he has to reveal once they are married.
- Victor returns home, expresses his guilt, tries to bury his anxiety and puts his energies into protecting his family. Victor and Elizabeth marry.

What happens in Chapters 23 and 24?

- The monster murders Elizabeth on their wedding night. Alphonse dies of grief.
- Victor tells a local magistrate about the monster. The man is sympathetic but pragmatic and Victor decides he must act alone, outside the law.
- Victor visits the family graves, calls to the spirits, hears the monster laughing and pursues him to the Arctic. He is rescued by Walton's crew and asks Walton to kill the monster on his behalf.



Five key quotations

1. Victor on the blurring of dream and reality: **'The whole series of my life appeared to me as a dream'** (Chapter 21)
2. Victor's guilt: **'William, Justine, and Henry – they all died by my hands.'** (Chapter 22)
3. Victor's loss of hope: **'but the apple was already eaten'** (Chapter 22)
4. Nightmarish **imagery** of Elizabeth: **'her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier'** (Chapter 23)
5. Victor addresses the spirits: **'Let the cursed and hellish monster drink deep of agony'** (Chapter 24)

Note it!

Elizabeth is murdered on the night of her wedding. The union is never consummated and the marital bed becomes a **'bier'**, a frame to support a corpse or coffin. Victor's decision to go back on his promise to create a female mate results in a calculated payback.

Exam focus

How can I write about Victor's guilt? AO1

You can write about how Victor's guilt is expressed in these chapters.

Victor's guilt becomes more intense as the narrative tension rises. His statement 'William, Justine and Henry - they all died by my hands' expresses a deep sense of guilt even if not literally true. The word 'all' is emphatic and the phrase 'by my hands' provides an image of the means of death, by strangling, as well as a more abstract meaning of responsibility. Victor's confession is metaphorically true as he believes he is guilty.

Topic sentence refers to Victor's guilt

Quotation is fluently embedded

Explains quotation and comments on language

Summarises point

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about structure. Use one of the quotations from the list. It is at this point in the narrative that Shelley shows Victor's loss of hope of leading a meaningful life, when

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Walton, in continuation

Five key things about Walton's continuation in letters

1. Walton continues the narrative in **epistolary** form. The reader realises his **role** in the **preservation and construction of Victor's narrative**.
2. Walton insists on the **truth of Victor's narrative**, alluding to the **evidence** of Felix and Safie's **letters** and his **sighting of the monster**.
3. **Victor participates** in some **narrative action**. The **crew question Walton's judgement** and **Victor supports him**. **Walton's agreement** to the crew's request **echoes Victor's agreement** to the monster's request for a mate.
4. The story reaches its **climax** when **Walton enters Victor's cabin**, to find the **grief-stricken monster** at the dead Victor's side. The monster **challenges the narrative bias** in Victor's story by telling of his own agonies.
5. The **narrative action ends** with the **monster's plan** to take his life.

What happens in Letters 1 and 2?

- On board ship, Walton gets to know Victor and listens to and records his story in his letters.
- Walton admires Victor, desiring his friendship, but Victor's mind is fixed on death, that of the monster and his own.
- Walton describes the dangers, his duty to the crew and his fears of mutiny.

What happens in Letters 3-5?

- The crew ask Walton to abort the expedition. Victor intervenes, trying to dissuade them.
- Walton reluctantly agrees to the crew's request. The ice cracks and the crew's delight wakes Victor. Walton hears Victor's last words.
- Later, Walton returns to Victor's cabin to find the monster, distressed, at Victor's bedside. Walton wants to destroy the monster on Victor's behalf but **'curiosity and compassion'** prevent him.
- The monster gives his version of events and reveals his wish to take his life. He leaves the cabin via the window, takes to his 'ice-raft' and is soon **'lost in darkness and distance'**.



Five key quotations

1. Victor's youthful ambition: **'I trod heaven in my thoughts'** (Letter 1)
2. Walton's sense of responsibility: **'If we are lost, my mad schemes are the cause.'** (Letter 2)
3. Victor's appeal to the crew: **'Oh! be men, or be more than men.'** (Letter 3)
4. The monster's lament: **'what does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me?'** (Letter 5)
5. The monster's plan for his suicide: **'I shall collect my funeral pile and consume to ashes this miserable frame'** (Letter 5)

Note it!

Shelley draws a parallel between Victor and the monster when both refer to death as an escape from life's agonies. Victor refers to it as **'happy'**, seeing the forms of his **'beloved dead'** and wanting to **'hasten to their arms'** (p.166). The monster refers to it as his **'only consolation'** (p. 170).

Exam focus

How can I write about the monster's intention to take his own life? AO1

You can explore the monster's agony and wish for death once he knows Victor has died.

The monster's desire to take his own life expresses his desire for autonomy. Shelley uses active language for this purpose: 'I shall collect my funeral pile and consume to ashes this miserable frame'. The pronoun 'I' expresses his agency – he is the one who is collecting and consuming. The phrase 'this miserable frame' suggests how his body identifies him in a negative way, almost as if it does not belong to him.

Topic sentence refers to his death wish

Quotation is fluently embedded

Explains and comments on language

Develops another comment on language

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about parallels between characters. Use one of the quotations from the list.

In the final letters, Shelley contrasts Victor and Walton when she demonstrates Walton's sense of responsibility

PLOT AND STRUCTURE

Form and structure

Three key things about form and structure

1. The novel is a **mix of genres**: the **Gothic**, **science fiction** and **cautionary tale**.
2. Three **first-person narrators** produce three different versions of the story.
3. The **novel's core** is the **monster's story**, framed by **Victor's story**, in turn **framed by Walton's story**. This **framed narration** structure is like a set of objects fitting inside each other, sometimes called a '**Chinese box**' or '**Russian doll**' structure.



How does Shelley use time in *Frankenstein*?

- The novel is **non-chronological** because events are not presented in time order. It begins near the end of the plot when Walton's crew see the monster and meet Victor.
- Victor's narration, starting with his past, continues chronologically until the monster appears, demanding that Victor listen to his story.
- The monster begins with an extended **flashback** and ends by demanding a mate. Victor then resumes his story until his death requires Walton's 'continuation'.

How does Shelley use stories within stories?

- Walton's framing letters generate feelings of uncertainty, danger and **realism** – a sense of Walton recording events that catch up with him.
- His story of Arctic discovery is displaced by the recording of Victor's life.
- Walton tells Victor's story who, in turn, tells the monster's story. Victor's references to Walton remind the reader of his presence.

How does Shelley use narrative patterns?

- Recurring **themes** generate narrative patterns. Journeys take place in the real world and in the narrators' minds.
- Walton's letters emphasise absence from home and family. Victor's home and family are all important. The monster yearns for both.
- **Foreshadowing** creates tension, e.g. when the monster states he will be there on Victor's wedding night and when Victor hints at Clerval's death.

Five key quotations

1. Victor's story to Walton begins: **'I am by birth a Genevese; and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic.'** (Chapter 1)
2. The monster's story to Victor begins: **'It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being'** (Chapter 11)
3. The monster's story to Victor ends: **'and fear not but that when you are ready I shall appear'** (Chapter 17)
4. Victor's story to Walton ends: **'thrust your sword into his heart. I will hover near and direct the steel aright.'** (Chapter 24)
5. Walton's final words about the monster: **'He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance.'** (Letter 5)

Note it!

The way Shelley mixes genres reflects diverse cultural interests. She explores developments in science and global discovery, as well as Gothic moments of misery and horror. The cautionary tale element derives from the dangers of Victor's limitless pursuit of knowledge.

Exam focus

How can I write about stories within stories? AO1 AO2

You can write about the three narratives that sit within each other.

The novel is a series of stories within stories, known as framed narration. The monster's story, embedded in Victor's story, itself framed by Walton's story, begins quietly: 'It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being'. The language is formal and the tone honest as the monster recollects. Its touching quality contrasts with Victor's proud reference to his birthright as he begins his story.

Introduces point about form

Relevant evidence with embedded quotation

Analyses use of language and style

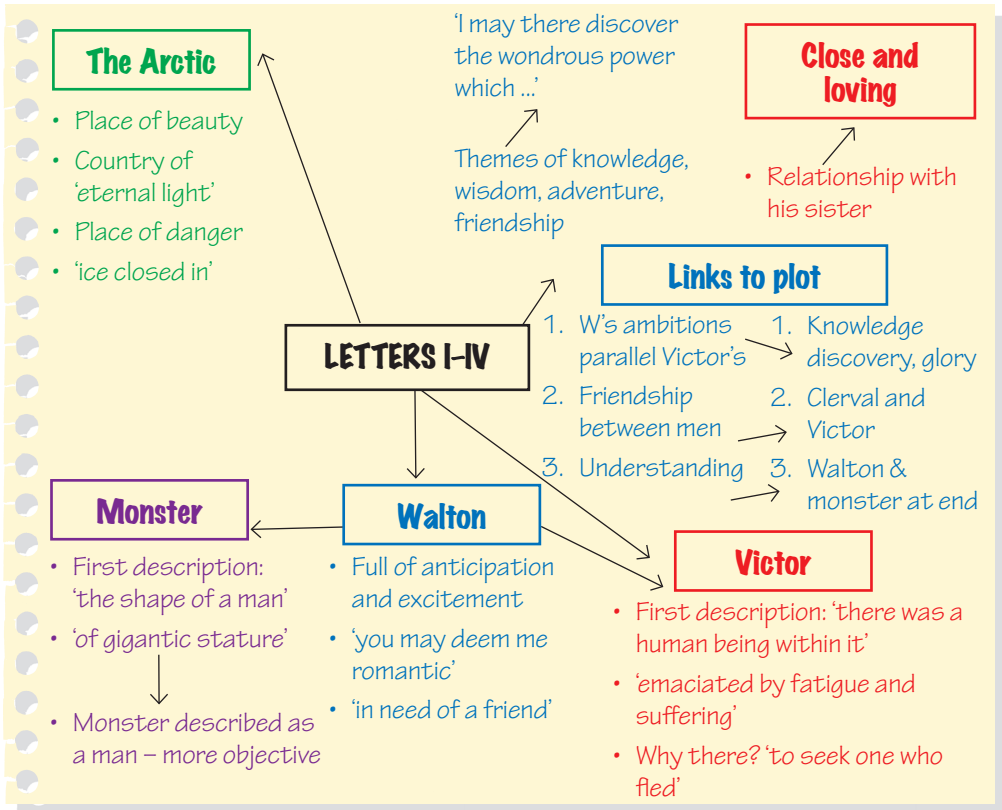
Develops point, with effect on reader

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about form. Use one of the quotations from the list. Foreshadowing is an aspect of narrative form used throughout to raise dramatic tension; for example, in the monster's warning

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Quick revision

1. Look at this ideas map representing Walton's letters I-IV. Is there anything else you could add?



2. Create your own ideas map for one of the other chapters.

Quick quiz

Answer these quick questions about plot and structure.

1. Why does Victor decide to tell Walton his story?
2. How does Alphonse meet his wife, Caroline?
3. How does Elizabeth become part of Victor's family?
4. What was the occupation of Clerval's father and why is it important to the plot?
5. What was Alphonse's occupation?

6. Which writer does Alphonse disapprove of Victor reading?
7. How does Caroline die?
8. Who arrives the morning after the monster's 'birth'?
9. What happens when Victor addresses the dead spirit of William on his way home?
10. Why does Elizabeth initially blame herself for William's death?
11. Why is Justine accused of William's murder and why does she 'confess'?
12. Why does Victor go to Chamonix?
13. What happens at the top of the Montanvert mountain?
14. Who is in love with Safie?
15. What does the monster discover about the De Lacey's' connection with Safie?
16. Why does the monster decide to visit old De Lacey?
17. What does the monster specify about the female mate and why?
18. Why does Victor suddenly destroy the female mate?
19. What are the monster's last words to Victor in Orkney?
20. What does the monster intend to do at the end of the novel?

Power paragraphs

Write a **paragraph** in response to **each of these questions**. For each, try to **use one quotation** you have learned from this section.

1. How does Shelley describe the Arctic in the first four letters?
2. What impression do you have of the relationship between Walton and his sister, Margaret, from the first four letters?

Exam practice

Re-read the section in Letter II from 'But I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy' to 'endeavour to regulate my mind'.

What does this extract tell the reader about how Walton sees himself?

Write **two paragraphs** explaining your ideas. You could write about:

- Walton's education and character
- Walton's desire for a close friend.