

# FRANKENSTEIN AMONG THE DEAD

*Adapted from the novel by  
Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*

A DRAMA IN TWO ACTS BY  
*Laramie Dean*



**CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE**

## Introduction

Thunder and lightning tear apart the night sky while two young women explore the story of Frankenstein. Who is the real monster, and can a story, once told, ever be changed?

## Background

*Frankenstein Among the Dead* is a bold and theatrical adaptation that honors the original's gothic horror while weaving in new layers. The story of Victor Frankenstein and his creation unfolds within a fascinating frame: The novelist Mary Shelley herself is a character, crafting her tale, while a mysterious woman from the 1930s, haunted by the famous monster movie, tries to rewrite the ending.

## Adapter's Bio

Laramie Dean is a playwright, director, and high school theatre teacher. His experience in the classroom gives him a unique insight into creating plays that are both challenging for young actors and engaging for modern audiences. He often works with classic literature, finding new and theatrical ways to bring epic stories to the stage with flexible casting and dynamic staging.

## Synopsis

The play moves between three worlds. In 1816, a young Mary Shelley is struck by inspiration during a terrifying nightmare and begins to write her famous ghost story. Her tale comes to life on stage: The brilliant but reckless scientist, Victor Frankenstein, succeeds in his godlike experiment to create life, but is so horrified by the grotesque result that he abandons his creation to the cruelties of the world. The lonely and intelligent Monster, shunned by all of humanity, seeks revenge on his creator by destroying everyone Victor loves.

This tragic story is watched and commented on by Elsa, a mysterious woman in the 1930s who has just seen the movie *Bride of Frankenstein*. She is deeply moved by the Monster's plight and believes he deserves a second chance. As Mary Shelley writes her story, Elsa tries to intervene, to change the narrative and save the characters from

their grim fate. The result is a haunting exploration of storytelling itself, blending the original novel, the classic horror film, and a meta-narrative about the power of fiction.

## **Characters**

**MARY SHELLEY:** The young, brilliant novelist who is writing the story of Frankenstein.

**ELSA:** A mysterious woman from the 1930s, obsessed with the Frankenstein story and its cinematic adaptations.

**VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN:** A passionate and ambitious young scientist who becomes consumed by his desire to create life, only to be horrified by the consequences.

**THE MONSTER:** Victor's creation. He is intelligent, emotional, and articulate, but his grotesque appearance causes everyone to treat him as a monster.

**ELIZABETH:** Victor's beloved fiancée, a beacon of goodness and beauty.

**HENRY CLERVAL:** Victor's cheerful and loyal best friend.

**ALPHONSE:** Victor's kind and concerned father.

**VICTOR'S MOTHER**

**WILLIAM:** Victor's innocent younger brother.

**JUSTINE:** A servant in the Frankenstein household who is wrongly accused of a crime.

**WALDMAN & KREMPE:** Victor's professors

**BODY SNATCHER:** Employed by Victor

**THE DELACEY FAMILY (DELACEY, AGATHA, FELIX):** A family of cottagers whom the Monster observes in secret, learning about love, family, and human society.

**COLIN & MAE:** Recently saw Bride of Frankenstein

**BORIS:** An actor, a voice over

**GHOULS:** An ensemble that helps change scenery and interacts with the characters.

## Themes

- ★ Creation and responsibility
- ★ Prejudice and othering
- ★ The nature of humanity (and monstrosity)
- ★ Ambition and its dangers
- ★ Betrayal and revenge
- ★ The power of storytelling
- ★ Women's Issues
- ★ Mortality
- ★ Personal Responsibility

## Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What do you picture when you hear the name "Frankenstein"? Where does that image come from (books, movies, Halloween costumes)?
- ★ What do you know about the Frankenstein story?
- ★ Who is more of a monster: the person who creates a dangerous thing or the dangerous thing itself?
- ★ Have you ever been judged unfairly based on your appearance?
- ★ What is the difference between being "alone" and being "lonely"?
- ★ Is there any story (book, movie, play) that you want to rewrite the ending to? Why?
- ★ If you could rewrite the ending of a sad story, would you? Why or why not?

## Pre-Read Activities

### Building a Monster

- ★ In small groups, give students a collection of scraps (e.g., random words cut from magazines, assorted art supplies, a bag of miscellaneous objects, fabric, cardboard, boxes, etc.).
- ★ The challenge is to create a “creature” from the scraps. It must be as three-dimensional as possible.
- ★ Once created, groups must give their creation a name and a one-sentence backstory explaining what it wants more than anything else in the world.
- ★ Have each group present their creature to the class.
- ★ **Discussion:** This activity mimics Victor’s process of creation from disparate parts. Ask students about what it means to create something new and whether the creator has a responsibility to it.
  - » Creation and responsibility: Once a creator brings something new into the world, like your creature, what responsibilities, if any, do they have toward it? Does it matter if it’s “alive” or just imagined?
  - » Imagination and meaning: How do the choices you made in assembling your creature (materials, shapes, colors) reflect its personality or desires? Can something seemingly random still hold intention or meaning?
  - » Ethics and consequences: When creating something entirely new, how should a creator anticipate or consider the impact their creation might have on others or the world?

### Collaborative Ghost Story

- ★ Use this improv game to tell a collaborative ghost story, one sentence at a time.
- ★ Set the mood by playing storm sound effects.

- ★ In a circle, one person will start a spooky story with a single sentence. The next person must add a sentence, and so on, building a collaborative ghost story one line at a time.
- ★ You could also try this game by telling a ghost story one word at a time.
- ★ **Discussion:**
  - » What makes a story scary?
  - » How did the storm sound effects and group participation shape the mood of the story? Can setting and collaboration change the “feel” of something you create?
  - » When multiple people create together, how do shared decisions affect the outcome? Can creators (or groups of creators) control the impact of what they bring into the world?
  - » Were there moments when the story went in a direction you didn’t expect? How does unpredictability affect the creative process?

## First Impressions

- ★ Have students form two lines facing each other.
- ★ Students will walk past the person opposite them. In the few seconds they have, they must make a snap judgment or first impression based only on what they see. (Keep this light and focused on non-personal things like “they look like they’re good at math” or “they probably like dogs.”)
- ★ Have them share their (often wrong) first impressions.
- ★ **Discussion:**
  - » **Judgment and Accuracy:** How quickly do we judge people based on appearance? How often were your first impressions correct? What does this tell us about how quickly we form judgments based on limited information?
  - » **Creation of Identity:** In what ways are first impressions like creating a version of someone in your mind? Keep this in mind as you read the play.

Compare it to Victor creating his creature and forming an idea before fully knowing it.

- » **Responsibility and Consequences:** Once a judgment or impression is made, does it carry responsibility? How can snap judgments affect how we treat others, even if they're inaccurate?

### Research Project: Author

- ★ Divide students into groups and give them a limited amount of time to research the author of the original novel by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.
  - » Who was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley?
  - » What was her background?
  - » How many novels did she write?
  - » Was she a "successful" writer?
  - » Was there any criticism of her writings?
- ★ Decide how students will share their knowledge. Will they create a scene based on what they've learned? An oral presentation with a visual component? A quiz? Give students a way to demonstrate what they've learned.

### Adaptation Exercise

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a short story (think one of Grimms' Fairy Tales).
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
  - » Adaptation definition: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ The goal of the exercise is to have students adapt the story into a scene. They don't have to tell the whole story. Perhaps they pick what they consider to be the most important moment. They don't have to specifically use the words of the story, but the scene must be connected to the story.

- ★ Remind students that they are making something suitable for a new purpose. That means the scene must have characters and a conflict, and take place in a specific location.
  - » Who are the characters?
  - » What is the conflict?
  - » What location can the scene take place in, as indicated by the story?
- ★ The scene should be approximately one minute. The point is for students to work quickly. Again, students do not have to stage the whole story.
- ★ Give groups time to discuss, create, rehearse, and present.
- ★ **Discussion:**
  - » **Choices as a Creator:** What did you decide to keep or change in your scene? How did making those choices feel like creating something new?
  - » **Effect on Others:** How could your adaptation change the way people see the story? Do you think creators should think about how their work affects others?
  - » **Essence vs. Form:** What is essential to a story, and what can be altered? Keep this in mind when you read the play. How does this relate to Victor’s process of creating something new? Does the essence of the creature come from his choices, or from how it develops on its own?

## Close Reading Analysis Questions

### Read One: What is happening?

1. Who is Mary Shelley, and what is she doing at the beginning of the play?
2. Who is Elsa? What movie has she just seen?
3. What is the significance of the line: “She said it began with a dream”?
4. When Mary says, “I can hear you, you know,” who is she talking to?

5. Why does Elsa think Mary hasn't told the story correctly?
6. What does Elsa say she's going to do with the story?
7. What is Victor Frankenstein's scientific goal?
8. Who is Elizabeth?
9. How does Victor react immediately after he successfully brings his creation to life?
10. What is Elsa's reaction?
11. What does Elizabeth do to the Body Snatcher?
12. What happens to William?
13. Mary says, "This story is a tragedy...it will always end tragically." Why is this significant?
14. Who confesses to William's murder? Is it a true confession?
15. Who helped Mary write the original story and why?
16. How does the Monster learn to speak and read?
17. What happens when the Monster tries to introduce himself to the DeLacey family?
18. Who does the Monster call an Angel of Death?
19. What does the Monster demand from Victor? How does he threaten Victor?
20. What is Elizabeth's response to the demand?
21. What is Henry's response?
22. Who is Elsa revealed to be?
23. What does the Monster do to Victor?
24. What does Elsa do at the end of the play?

## Read Two: How does it happen?

1. **Structure:** This play operates on multiple timelines (1816, the 1930s, and the world of the novel). How does the playwright move between these different worlds? How do the stories of Mary, Elsa, and Victor comment on each other?
2. **Theatricality:** The Ghouls are used to change scenery and interact with the characters. What is the effect of having these ghostly figures constantly onstage? How do they contribute to the play's atmosphere?
3. **Point of View:** We see the story unfold through the eyes of both the creator (Victor) and the creation (the Monster). How does hearing the Monster's side of the story change the audience's perception of him?
4. **Adaptation:** The play incorporates elements from both Mary Shelley's novel and the classic 1930s horror movie. How does the character of Elsa, the movie-goer, allow the playwright to explore the differences between these two versions of the story?
5. **Language:** The play uses a mix of Mary Shelley's original prose and more modern dialogue. Find an example of each. How does this blend of language styles work on stage?

## Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. Victor repeatedly calls his creation a "demon" and a "monster," but the Monster is shown to be intelligent and capable of kindness. Who is the true monster in this story? Make an argument for either Victor or his creation.
2. What is the playwright trying to say about the responsibility of a creator to their creation? Does this apply to more than just scientists (e.g., parents, artists, storytellers)?
3. The Monster's main motivation is his profound loneliness. What is the play saying about the human need for companionship and acceptance?
4. Elsa wants to change the story's ending. Is this possible? What is the playwright suggesting about our relationship with classic stories and our desire to "fix" them?

5. Why do you think the Frankenstein story has remained so popular for over 200 years? What timeless human fears and questions does it tap into?

## Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character did you sympathize with the most: Mary, Elsa, Victor, or the Monster? Why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ What was the most frightening or disturbing moment in the play for you?
- ★ If you were Victor, what would you have done differently after the Monster came to life?
- ★ Do you think the Monster was justified in seeking revenge?
- ★ What was your biggest takeaway from the play?

## Post-Read Activities

### The Monster's Monologue

- ★ We hear a lot from the Monster, but much of it is directed at Victor.
- ★ Write a new monologue for the Monster. It should take place while he is secretly living in the hovel, observing the DeLacey family. What is he thinking and feeling as he watches them? What are his hopes and fears? Perform the monologue.

### The Trial of Victor Frankenstein

- ★ Stage a mock trial. Victor Frankenstein is on trial for crimes against humanity. One group of students will act as the prosecution, another as the defense. You will need lawyers, witnesses (like Elizabeth, Alphonse, and the Monster himself), and a jury.

- ★ The prosecution must argue that Victor is a reckless and negligent creator, while the defense must argue that he is a tragic figure who made a mistake. The jury will deliver the verdict.

### **A New Ending**

- ★ Elsa desperately wants to rewrite the story.
- ★ In small groups, write and perform a new final scene for the play. Does Elsa succeed in changing the ending? Does the Monster get a companion? Does Victor find redemption? Explore a different possibility for how this tragic story could conclude.

### **Poster Design**

- ★ Based on what you've read, design a poster for the play. How would you visualize the play in a single image that would attract an audience? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

### **Character Costume Design**

- ★ Design a costume for one of the characters in the play. What would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colors and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a color costume rendering.

### **Staged Scenes**

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward:
  - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?

- » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
- » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

## **Playwright Process**

*Playwright Laramie Dean talks about his process adapting Frankenstein Among the Dead. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.*

### **What was the originating idea for the play? Where did you start?**

I loved *The Bride of Frankenstein* when I was a kid. I received a copy of the film on VHS for Christmas when I was 8 or so, and thought it would be fun to mix up the Shelley story a bit, play around with the idea that there are all these adaptations, and how much they tend to stray from the original text.

### **What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?**

Figuring out what from the novel I should keep and how to stay in the world of the public domain. Also, I knew I wanted to keep Elizabeth alive for the climax of the story instead of seeing her be another sacrifice on the altar of Frankenstein's battle with his monster, and figuring that out narratively was challenging but satisfying.

### **What has it been like to see the play performed?**

It's always a great joy of mine to see my plays staged, designed, and acted without any input from me. I love to see the creativity theatre artists bring to the table, and when I've been fortunate enough to see one of my plays performed live, I giggle and cry and clap like a child at Christmas.

### **As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play?**

I love Elizabeth. She's ruthless. Normally, in most adaptations of the novel, she fulfills the "damsel in distress" role. I wanted to see her take charge, perhaps a bit reminiscent of Lady Macbeth (just a smidge). My favourite moment is when she faces off against the Monster at the climax of the play, when she gets to bare her fangs (figuratively speaking).

### **What is harder: coming up with ideas or rewrites?**

First drafts, definitely. You have to reach the finish line, which can be absolutely exhausting and, occasionally, dispiriting. But what an amazing feeling it is when you finally are able to write "End of Play"! Nothing like it in the world.

## **What is your writing process like?**

I have a regular, weekly routine that I stick to no matter what: 3 hours every Sunday morning during the school year (I'm a high school teacher as well), and 9 to 12 every weekday morning during the summer. When school is in session, I try to find spare moments to write during the week whenever I can. I'm what's referred to as a "pants-er". Most of the time, I don't outline. I just sit down and write and allow the characters to guide the way. With adaptation, which I enjoy, there may be plot signposts from the original story that I'll follow. With *Frankenstein Among the Dead*, I diverged fairly widely—and wildly—from what Shelley originally composed. And since she's a character in the play, she was pretty irked about it.

## **What engages you about playwriting?**

The writing usually flows with more ease than with prose (but not always). I enjoy composing dialogue; when the characters begin talking, it's fun to let them go off.