

AP ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
SUMMER ASSIGNMENTS – 2009
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AP English Literature and Composition trains students to read carefully, think critically and write clearly. According to the College Board, “The AP English Literature and Composition course is designed to engage students in the careful reading and critical analysis of imaginative literature. Through the close reading of selected texts, students can deepen their understanding of the ways writers use language to provide both meaning and pleasure for their readers. As they read, students should consider a work's structure, style, and themes, as well as such smaller-scale elements as the use of figurative language, imagery, symbolism, and tone.

They should read deliberately and thoroughly, taking time to understand a work's complexity, to absorb its richness of meaning, and to analyze how that meaning is embodied in literary form. In addition to considering a work's literary artistry, students should consider the social and historical values it reflects and embodies. Careful attention to both textual detail and historical context should provide a foundation for interpretation, whatever critical perspectives are brought to bear on the literary works studied.”

Assignment 1

Read *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Answer the attached study guide questions and bring them to class the first day of school. Your answers should reflect a careful reading and critical analysis of the novel. **Use MLA format and specific evidence from the novel, including page numbers, quotations and specific details.** Also, true scholarship begins with research, and students should read and cite criticism and commentaries. **Include a works cited page.**

Assignment 2 (two parts)

I encourage you to purchase the text that you select so that you can annotate as you read. If you prefer not to purchase the novel, your local library should have copies.

A. Select and read one of the following four novels and choose ONE question to develop in a two-page typed essay.

1. The most important themes in literature are sometimes developed in scenes in which a death or deaths take place. Choose a novel or play and write a well-organized essay in which you show how a specific death scene helps to illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

2. Critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.” Choose a novel or play and, considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers any answers. Explain how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

B. Write ten discussion questions for the novel, five specific to chapters or scenes in the novel, and five overall questions.

Four choices

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter is the debut 1940 novel by American author Carson McCullers. It is about a deaf man named John Singer and the people he encounters in a 1930s mill town in the U.S. state of Georgia. It created a literary sensation on publication, enjoying a meteoric rise to the top of the bestseller lists in 1940 and was the first in a string of works by McCullers to give voice to the rejected, forgotten, mistreated and oppressed.

The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver

The Poisonwood Bible is a story told by the wife and four daughters of Nathan Price, a fierce, evangelical Baptist who takes his family and mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959. They carry with them everything they believe they will need from home, but soon find that all of it--from garden seeds to Scripture--is calamitously transformed on African soil. What follows is a suspenseful epic of one family's tragic undoing and remarkable reconstruction over the course of three decades in postcolonial Africa.

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad

Conrad's masterpiece is a profound exploration of the human subconscious with a terrifying portrayal of the dangers of imperialism. A work of immense significance, it has been hailed as the first novel of the 20th century. In this searing tale, Seaman Marlow recounts his journey to the dark heart of the Belgian Congo in search of the elusive Mr. Kurtz. Far from civilization as he knows it, he comes to reassess not only his own values, but also those of nature and society. For in this heart of darkness, it is the fearsome face of human savagery that becomes most visible.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker

The Color Purple is a 1982 American novel written by Alice Walker. The book describes the struggles a young African-American girl had to face while growing up in rural Georgia during the 1930s. An epistolary novel, *The Color Purple* is told through various letters and diary entries written by 14-year-old Celie, the story's protagonist. A victim of abuse from both her stepfather and husband, Celie writes of regaining her sense of self-worth, and later the discovery of her sexuality.



Frankenstein by Mary Shelley

Introduction

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* when she was just 18 years old. It has been in print continuously since its first appearance. She published a second edition in 1831: it included substantial revisions, an introduction that Mary Shelley claimed was written entirely by Percy Shelley, and a Preface written by Mary Shelley herself. The revisions seem to have been made or suggested by Percy, for the most part. Most try to

"elevate" Mary's prose by substituting polysyllabic words for monosyllabic words and Latinate phrases for colloquial phrases. More significantly, Percy changed the final paragraph: Mary's original paragraph suggested that Walton merely lost sight of the monster, thus leaving the door open for a sequel in which the monster returned. Percy's ending kills off the monster.

Frankenstein is often read by literary critics as, in part, a critique of Romanticism. Victor Frankenstein's obsession with his creation and the destruction wrought by his behavior can be read to criticize the gap between idealism and materialism articulated so insistently by the poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Coleridge. Victor's sole concern is his quest: he is unable to function normally with other people. His quest destroys his family and his marriage: he tries to abandon the world of domesticity, compromise, and adult experience and live instead only for his quest. By abandoning the material world of the everyday in favor of an imagined (and unrealizable) quest, Victor illustrates the self-centered tendency of Romantic poetry. The poetic figures of Wordsworth's and Shelley's poetry define the material world as everything that the poet must leave behind in pursuit of imaginative vision. As a result, *Frankenstein* suggests, they have profound difficulty functioning in the everyday world because they live only for moments in which they can imaginatively transcend it. This difficulty can be tremendously destructive, as it is in *Frankenstein*. The novel also underlines the gendering of Romanticism: if Romantic experience is defined by its distance from the everyday world, then it is a realm of experience open only to men. Women, of course, have responsibilities that keep them in the everyday world: children and a household to run. Somebody, in other words, has to cook dinner for the visionary on Mont Blanc when he finally leaves the mountain and goes home. Although Wordsworth's and Percy Shelley's poetry and essays claim that they are interested in universal imaginative capabilities, *Frankenstein* points to the ways in which the experiences that they celebrate are open only to men, and, furthermore, are in fact defined in opposition to the world of domestic responsibilities.

As you read the novel, pay attention to Victor's attitude towards his friends and family, and the consequences that his attitude has. Consider his attitudes towards his creation and his attitude towards his family. Pay attention to decisions that he makes that seem illogical and counterproductive: what are Victor's real priorities?

Study questions for Mary Shelley's *FRANKENSTEIN*

1. Who is Prometheus? Why is the novel subtitled "the Modern Prometheus?"
2. Why is the novel initially set aboard a ship? Can you think of any other famous works which are set aboard ships? Why did Mary Shelley choose to use that particular setting here? Does it mean anything beyond the immediately apparent *physical* setting?
3. Note the various narrative "frames" Mary Shelley employs in her novel. What is the purpose of these various frames? What, specifically, does she wish to accomplish by employing these multiple frames?
4. What sort of man is Walton? Does he serve any *thematic* function in the novel, or is he included largely as a "storyteller"--that is, is he included simply as a mechanical narrative device?
5. In what ways do Walton's letters prepare us for the tale he tells? What difference (if any) do these letters make in the way we react to the rest of the novel? Note that in the 1818 edition the letters appear before the headline announcing "Chapter 1." What is the effect of thus bracketing the letters?
6. Work out a character sketch of Victor Frankenstein, concentrating on his values and psychological makeup. What does he value? What motivates him? What appear to be his "moral standards"?
7. The first three chapters tell us about Victor Frankenstein's childhood and youth; the fourth, about his "discovery" of the principle of life. For movie fans these chapters may seem irrelevant: after all, we want to see the Creature being created and--amid bursts of smoke and flashes of lightning--"born." Why, then, does Mary Shelley devote so much space to Victor's childhood environment and his education?
8. Volume I, Chapter iv (Chapter 5): the Creature is created. Where is the focus in this section? On the process of creation? On the Creature? Somewhere else?
9. Why does Victor work so diligently to bring the Creature to life and then become so abhorrent when he succeeds? Is Mary Shelley working with any "prototype" or "pattern" here? Has this sort of experience or behavior occurred anywhere else that you can think of, in literature, art, or elsewhere?
10. Beginning in Chapter 10 the Creature tells his story. Notice and comment on the place Victor Frankenstein meets his Creature. Why is this setting particularly appropriate? The novel now begins to zero in on its major themes. Of what does the Creature accuse Victor?
11. What do Chapters 11-15 reveal about the Creature's "natural instincts?" What gives him pleasure? What does he value? (Consider, for instance, how he describes the DeLaceys and their cottage.) Of what does the Creature's education consist?
12. In Chapter 16 what does the Creature finally decide he must do, and why?

13. In Chapter 17 what argument does the Creature offer in support of his demand? Why? Is it a reasonable argument?

14. In Chapter 20 why does Victor Frankenstein decide to discontinue his efforts to create a "bride" for the Creature?

15. We begin to see most clearly in Frankenstein's *isolation* from his fellow creatures a parallel to the Creature's own situation. In what other ways are Victor and the Creature beginning to be strikingly similar? Have you encountered this sort of "parallel-making" anywhere else in literature or the arts? If so, where? Does the device have a formal name?

16. Note the surrealistic environment of the "chase" scenes in Chapter 24. Are we getting into a different sort of novel than we were originally led to expect? If so, what is the nature of the difference?

17. Victor Frankenstein's final words--any significance? What about the Creature's final words?

Overall questions:

18. Who is the novel's protagonist? Antagonist? Hero?

19. In an influential essay, the Romantic scholar and critic Harold Bloom wrote that the reader's sympathy lies with the Creature, but in his book The Romantic Conflict (1963) Allan Rodway says the reader's sympathy lies with Victor Frankenstein. Who is right?

20. Most modern editions change Mary Shelley's spelling of an important word. "'And do you dream?" said the **daemon**." In many other editions (especially editions aimed at the "mass market" audience), the end of the line reads: "said the **demon**." What is the difference between **daemon** and **demon**, and can you see any reason why Mary Shelley used the former word in her own text, rather than the latter?

21. What is a "monster"? **What qualities make us human? Which of these qualities does the creature possess? What qualities does he not have?**

23. Scholars sometimes use Frankenstein as an argument against scientific technology that creates life forms; others argue that it is not technology itself but the use to which it is put that presents an ethical problem. What is Shelley's position? What is your position?

24. Explain the novel's popularity. What makes the novel a classic? How is the story appropriate for today and our society?

25. In this novel, as in many Romantic texts, unspoiled nature provides the major uplifting counterpart to the troubled world of humanity. Currently, though, the scientific question about altering life forms through genetic engineering is focused on nature more than on humans: though cloning and related technologies are being debated, large percentages of agricultural crops are already genetically engineered. How does this novel enable or encourage us to think about these issues?

