

ENGLISH FORM VI SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT, 2026

TEXT: *FRANKENSTEIN* BY MARY SHELLEY

The fatal flaw in Victor Frankenstein is not madness; he is the antithesis of the “mad doctor” stereotype who so frequently bears his name in the movies. The flaw rather is simple pride, coupled with the distrust of technology that the romantics of all ages seem to feel....

The evil that is personified in Victor Frankenstein’s nameless and horrid creation has its genesis in the test tube; he is a creature spawned of knowledge ungoverned by morality. —*Stephen King*

Your summer reading is *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Please obtain the following edition, as it contains the original 1818 publication of the novel, which differs in significant ways from the altered, more widely read 1831 edition:

ISBN-10: 0143131842

ISBN-13: 978-0143131847

The Amazon link (for ease of ordering) is here: https://www.amazon.com/Frankenstein-1818-Text-Penguin-Classics/dp/0143131842/ref=sr_1_1?crid=7Y5ODC3EHU5J&dchild=1&keywords=9780143131847+penguin&qid=1591641076&srefix=9780143131847%2Caps%2C282&sr=8-1

I am asking you only to read the novel and annotate as you go (more on this later). There will be no written assignment over the summer. Instead, once we’re back in school, you’ll write a short informal in-class essay (or several shorter paragraphs) and then have a test on the novel after we’ve had a thorough discussion. For the summer, just read it and try to soak in the moral and intellectual issues Shelley raises.

This novel represents the key elements of the Romantic and Gothic movements in literature and clearly demonstrates the suffering aspect of the human condition. Shelley’s novel will allow you to practice close reading skills and the ability to annotate critically.

The number of annotations and the way in which one annotates is something unique and specific to each and every student. However, consistency is key. A general rule of thumb is to have at least one annotation per page, but depth is always preferable over breadth. Annotations are a practice to help read more closely, to help you to learn to analyse as you read. Also, please keep in mind your essay to come and be looking to find connections and reoccurring themes/motifs throughout the series.

Your annotations need to be a sort of dialogue between you, the text, and the author. Don’t merely underline or highlight something “important” and then be on your way. Immerse yourself in the work; engage with its ideas; question the story. Do not fret about the *number* of annotations. A good rule of thumb for an experienced annotator is a *minimum* of one comment per page, but for many of you, this may be a new thing, so just try to comment on or question those major ideas that jump out at you, or particularly interesting descriptions, or (should you enjoy a little research) elements that relate to Romanticism or the Gothic.

Either way, please feel free to contact me over the summer with any questions or concerns at slaurange@cistercian.org. I’m really looking forward to getting to know you next year!

Consider the following guidelines when annotating:

Be watching for:

- Recurring images
- Repeated words, phrases, types of examples, or illustrations
- Consistent ways of characterizing people, events, or issues
- Characters dealing with common struggles and conflicts— whether they be internal or external

Annotating: “Dialogue” with yourself, the author, and the issues and ideas at stake.

From start to finish, make your reading of any text thinking-intensive.

- First of all: throw away the highlighter in favour of a pen or pencil. Highlighting can actually distract from the business of learning and dilute your comprehension. It only seems like an active reading strategy; in actual fact, it can lull you into a dangerous passivity.
- Mark up the margins of your text with WORDS: ideas that occur to you, notes about things that seem important to you, reminders of how issues in a text may connect with class discussion or course themes. This kind of interaction keeps you conscious of the REASON you are reading and the PURPOSES your instructor has in mind. Later in the term, when you are reviewing for a test or project, your marginalia will be useful memory triggers.
- Develop your own symbol system: asterisk a key idea, for example, or use an exclamation point for the surprising, absurd, bizarre . . . Like your marginalia, your hieroglyphs can help you reconstruct the important observations that you made at an earlier time. And they will be indispensable when you return to a text later in the term, in search of a passage, an idea for a topic, or while preparing for an exam or project.
- Get in the habit of hearing yourself ask questions—“what does this mean?” “why is he or she drawing that conclusion?” “why is the class reading this text?” etc. Write the questions down (in your margins, at the beginning or end of the reading, in a notebook, or elsewhere. They are reminders of the unfinished business you still have with a text: something to ask during class discussion, or to come to terms with on your own, once you’ve had a chance to digest the material further, or have done further reading.

“Interrogating Texts: 6 Reading Habits to Develop in Your First Year at Harvard.” *Harvard College Library*.
<http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/lamont_handouts/interrogatingtexts.html#annotating>.