

FRANKENSTEIN: PART I

TEACHER GUIDE

BACKGROUND

Science is defined as the systematic study of nature or the physical world, but should science tamper with nature? Some of this tampering is unquestionably good. Medicine that cures diseases is a blessing to humanity. But what if the same tampering goes too far—producing a curse instead of a blessing? What if scientists use their power to “play God” and change what should not be changed? These questions are at the center of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, first published over 200 years ago—questions perhaps even more relevant in our own age where the knowledge of the genetic code is at our fingertips. Just because science *can* do something, does that mean that it *should*?

It may seem strange that *Frankenstein* does not begin with Victor Frankenstein’s story, but with the voyage of an explorer named Robert Walton, a young man who has literally travelled to the “ends of the earth” in the name of discovery. For readers of the time, the North Pole represented a fantastical goal—far further than any explorer had before traveled. Upon the icy seas, Walton meets Victor Frankenstein, a scientist desperately pursuing a creature he has gone against nature to create—his goal to undo the abomination he has created. Their meeting forms a juxtaposition. Both Frankenstein and Walton have dreamed of surpassing the limits of human knowledge. One has not yet reached his goal, and the other has achieved it—only to bring about the destruction of all he once loved.

SUMMARY

A young man named Robert Walton visits his sister Margaret before he sets sail for the North Pole—a destination farther than any other explorer has ever gone. He wants to undertake this journey to satisfy his curiosity and possibly make some new discovery. Walton’s sister tries to discourage his ambitions, but the young man persists.

Walton travels to the city of Archangel, where he uses his inheritance to hire a ship and sailors. Walton is disappointed that none of his crew are a match for both his romantic heart and educated mind. After some days sailing north, the ship becomes trapped in ice. Although they are hundreds of miles away from any known settlement, Walton and his crew spy a gigantic man driving a dog sled across the frozen plain. The next day when the ice finally breaks, the crew discovers another man stranded on a piece of ice with his own dog sled. They take aboard the mysterious, nearly-dead man, who is Victor Frankenstein.

After some days of restoring Victor to health, Walton questions him as to why he has come so far northward. As they converse, Walton feels a comradeship with Victor, who seems to share his spirit and intellect. Walton tells Victor of his quest and desire to achieve it at all costs—even if it means his death. Victor becomes emotional at the sight of Walton’s unrelenting ambition and pledges to tell Walton his story in hopes that it will dissuade him from continuing his mission of folly.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- Should knowledge be pursued at all costs?

CHARACTER ANALYSIS: ROBERT WALTON

Robert Walton is intensely dedicated to the idea of making a new discovery—either a paradise at the North Pole, a previously undiscovered sea passage, or the secret of the earth’s magnetism. He is willing to risk his inheritance, the life of his crew, and even his own life in order to make this discovery. His pursuit of knowledge—no matter what the cost—will parallel the story of Victor Frankenstein.

ANTICIPATORY QUESTIONS

- What are “the ends of the earth”?
- Is the pursuit of knowledge the most important thing in life?
- Would you be willing to risk your life in order to make a great discovery?
- In the pursuit of your goals, what should you *not* be willing to sacrifice?

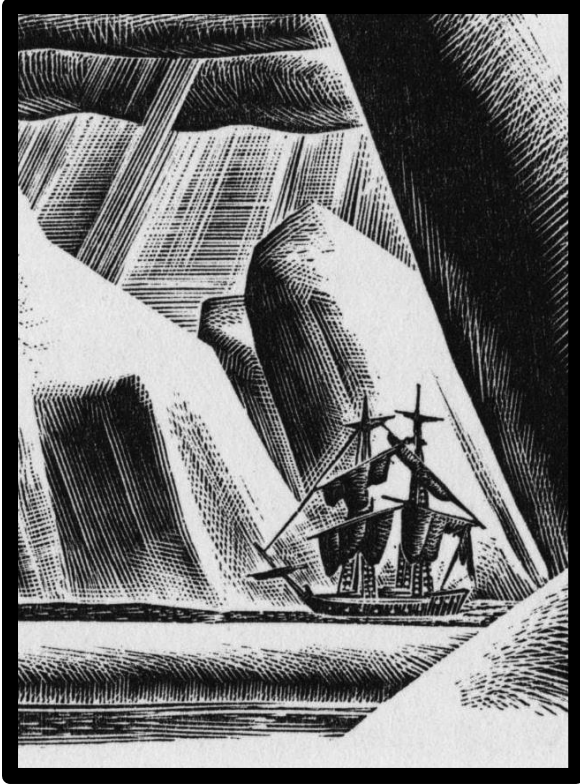
TEACHABLE TERMS

- **Epistolary Novel** In the original novel, this portion of the story is told through Robert Walton’s letters sent home to his sister, Margaret. This storytelling style was popular at the time of *Frankenstein’s* publication.
- **Symbol** On pg. 11 Robert Walton’s goal of reaching the North Pole symbolizes a desire to go beyond the limits of human knowledge—a goal he shares with Victor Frankenstein.
- **Juxtaposition** On pg. 17 Walton speaks of the brotherly affection growing up between him and Victor. The two characters have many similarities, and their similar goals will prove important to the story.

- **Symbol** On pg. 17 Walton speaks of the North Pole, which symbolizes his ambitions. At the time of *Frankenstein* some scientists theorized that the North Pole was not a frozen wasteland at all, but a green, vibrant land of eternal sunlight.
- **Foreshadowing** On pg. 13 Margaret tells her brother that she has a foreboding about his voyage and tries to discourage him.
- **Gothic Literature** *Frankenstein* is a prime example of Gothic Literature, which often features examples of overwrought emotion. On pg. 18 Victor’s emotions nearly overcome him as he begins to speak of his past.
- **The Power of Nature** On pgs. 18-19 Walton speaks of the healing powers of nature. According to him, no matter what misery or disappointment we experience in life, nature has the power to overcome it. Like many Romantic writers, Shelley put an emphasis on the restorative powers of nature.

RECALL QUESTIONS

1. Why does Robert Walton travel so far from civilization?
2. What strange sight does the ship’s crew see moving across the icy landscape?
3. Whom or what does the ship’s crew find on a floating piece of ice?
4. Why has the stranger traveled so far north?
5. What connection do Walton and the stranger have?



FRANKENSTEIN: PART I

CAST

NARRATOR	<i>Robert Narrating</i>
ROBERT	<i>Young Explorer</i>
MARGARET	<i>Robert's Sister</i>
SHIPMAN	<i>Master of a Ship</i>
LIEUTENANT	<i>Officer of a Ship</i>
SAILOR ONE	<i>Crewman of a Ship</i>
SAILOR TWO	<i>Crewman of a Ship</i>
STRANGER	<i>Mysterious Traveler</i>

NARRATOR: I am one Robert Walton by name, a seafarer by trade and a dreamer by inclination. I had just returned to England from a whaling voyage to the North Sea, and I went at once to visit my dear sister, Margaret. I found her at her home that she made with her husband, Mr. Saville. In my youth, after the death of my father, she had acted as my caregiver and nurturer.

ROBERT: Dear sister! Had you given up on your seafaring brother?

MARGARET: *(overjoyed)* Robert! It is so good to see you! From your letters I knew you were back in England, but I did not expect to see you so soon.

NARRATOR: After many preliminaries, she ushered me into her parlor, where our conversation continued for hours and finally came to a crescendo.

ROBERT: Margaret, I must confess, I have come with an additional purpose. I seek your blessing.

MARGARET: Oh, Robert! Are you to be married? You have met the woman of your dreams!

ROBERT: Oh, nothing like that! I have decided to...sail far to the north.

MARGARET: Robert, you call this news? You travel so far north it makes me shiver just hearing about it.

ROBERT: I want to sail even farther north—to the North Pole.

MARGARET: *(incredulous laugh)* You are surely jesting now! No explorer has ever journeyed so far!

ROBERT: Exactly! It is undiscovered country!

MARGARET: You are serious, aren't you?

ROBERT: If only you knew how serious. The thought of it pulls at my soul like a compass needle. Did you not know that this

passion has existed inside me since I was young?

MARGARET: Well, yes. You always spoke of it, but I thought it was just a boy's fancy.

ROBERT: (*laughs*) A boy's fancy? I still remember the day I discovered books on northern exploration in Uncle Thomas's library. I know he tried to keep us ignorant by neglecting our education. But I could read, and that laid the whole world out before me.

MARGARET: Uncle did what he could—after Father died...

ROBERT: Father was no better than Uncle Thomas. His dying injunction was that Uncle Thomas do all in his power to keep me from the sea. But still it found me.

MARGARET: Father only had the same fears that I have for you! Why do you insist on these sea voyages? You do not need the money. You inherited our cousin's fortune.

ROBERT: Did you think a fortune would destroy all my dreams? I prefer glory to every enticement that wealth has put into my path!

MARGARET: But to risk your life in such a dangerous business?

ROBERT: On my voyages, by day I worked harder than any whalerman aboard that ship, and by night I studied.

MARGARET: Studied what? The business of whaling?

ROBERT: Mathematics, medicine, and physical science! If I am to set foot where no man has ever trod before, I must have both my mind and body at their peak.

MARGARET: All for a land of snow and ice?

ROBERT: (*laugh*) Oh, simple Margaret! The North Pole is a region of beauty and delight. The sun is always visible there, so snow and frost are banished. It will be a world that we cannot even imagine! A country of eternal light!

MARGARET: (*gently*) But what if it is not...

NARRATOR: She spoke her words gently, for she knew the pain they would cause.

ROBERT: Then I will benefit mankind by perhaps finding a passageway from the Arctic to the North Pacific or discovering why the magnet is drawn to the North Pole. Don't you understand? I must satisfy my curiosity!

MARGARET: Even if you lose everything in the process?

ROBERT: Even so. My desire for knowledge drowns out all fear of danger and death.

MARGARET: You are twenty-eight now. These are the best years of your life.

ROBERT: You cannot persuade me, Margaret. It would be far worse if I stayed here and lived a mundane life. My heart and my mind would be miles away. Nothing tranquillizes the mind like a steady

purpose—a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye.

NARRATOR: My sister turned away, her eyes full of tears.

ROBERT: I came here hoping to hear an encouraging voice. My hopes fluctuate, and my spirits are often depressed. It may be many months, maybe years, before we see each other again.

NARRATOR: She took my hand.

MARGARET: I will always love you, Robert, but I cannot encourage you in this. It does not feel right. Call it an evil foreboding if you will.

ROBERT: Then I will leave you. The last thing I wish to do is cause you pain.

MARGARET: Wait! Let us not part on such a sorrowful note. Promise you will write to me as often as you can.

ROBERT: I will...dear sister.

NARRATOR: After leaving the home of my sister, whose blessing I had not received, the task became to travel northward and secure a ship willing to undertake such a perilous voyage. I journeyed to Russia, where a cold breeze seems to be ever-blowing from the north.

ROBERT: *(to himself)* This frigid breeze travels from the place where I must travel—a foretaste of those icy climes.

NARRATOR: In the city of Archangel, I used my inheritance to secure a vessel and recruit men of dauntless courage to sail

with me. I hired a ship's lieutenant, a dutiful man from England like myself.

LIEUTENANT: Never fear, Captain Walton! We will soon whip these swabs into shape.

NARRATOR: The lieutenant was intelligent, but he was no romantic. He did not share my thirst for knowledge. I also took aboard a common shipmaster, a man I had met in my previous whaling voyages. He was noble and true and a great teller of stories.

ROBERT: The lieutenant is a bit too serious for my liking. Are you a romantic, shipman?

SHIPMAN: You bet I am. The most romantic ever born.

ROBERT: *(laughing)* How so?

SHIPMAN: Oh, when I was much younger—along about your age—I was in love with a girl. I had won a fortune sailing on the sea, so I went to her father, and I showed him my money. "I have bought a farm," I said. "It shall be good enough for both of us." Her father agreed to the marriage, but the girl came to me, sobbing her heart out. You see, she didn't love me. She had some poor fellow she loved instead.

ROBERT: What did you do then?

SHIPMAN: Well, I thought about it. What good is money if it don't bring happiness? So I gave what I had to that fellow that she loved.

ROBERT: The farm and all?

SHIPMAN: The whole mess of it. They got married. Good for them.

ROBERT: I stand corrected, shipmaster. You *are* a romantic.

NARRATOR: Although the shipmaster had a great heart, his education was wanting. So I embarked upon the voyage of a lifetime without a comrade who shared my mind and heart.

That winter was especially severe, but when it finally broke, we sailed north into the land of mist and snow. I could barely contain my excitement, and I wondered if the crew considered their young captain mad.

As we sailed further north, enormous floating sheets of ice indicated the danger of our destination.

SHIPMAN: We will take care to avoid those chunks of ice, or this voyage of ours won't last long!

NARRATOR: We had passed far more north than any vessels dare sail, and the ice continued to grow thicker.

LIEUTENANT: If it freezes completely, we will be forced to stop, captain.

NARRATOR: One day a thick mist enveloped us completely.

SHIPMAN: It's too dangerous to keep sailing, captain. The mist is so thick, we can't see where we're bound.

NARRATOR: It was fortunate that we stopped. Ice had closed the ship in on all sides.

ROBERT: What shall we do now?

LIEUTENANT: We will wait for the ice to break. Until it does, we are trapped.

NARRATOR: Finally, the mists cleared, and we beheld plains of ice, stretching in all directions. Some of my comrades groaned.

SAILOR ONE: We're doomed!

SAILOR TWO: That crazy, young captain's brought us here to die.

LIEUTENANT: Belay that jabber!

NARRATOR: But our attention was soon arrested by a new wonder.

SAILOR ONE: What's that? Something's moving!

SAILOR TWO: I see it! There! There!

(murmuring of the sailors)

NARRATOR: At the distance of half a mile, a sledge pulled by dogs was passing along the plain of ice toward the north.

ROBERT: Impossible! We're hundreds of miles away from any settlement! This is bare, uninhabited land.

NARRATOR: I grabbed up my eyeglass to get a better look.

SHIPMAN: Saints preserve us! That ain't no ordinary man!

ROBERT: What do you mean? Surely, you don't mean a ghost!

SHIPMAN: No! Look at his size! If he's a man, he's a giant.

(shouts of fright from the sailors)

NARRATOR: He was right. The figure was of gigantic stature—far taller than a normal man.

SAILOR ONE: A race of giants lives here!

SAILOR TWO: We're truly doomed!

LIEUTENANT: Silence!

NARRATOR: We watched the man with our telescopes until he was lost upon the icy plains. The presence of this strange traveler unnerved me. Had we not traveled as far as we thought? Or did an undiscovered race live in these northern climes?

Before nightfall, the ice broke and freed our ship. *(ice cracking)* But we delayed departure until the morning.

When morning arrived, a new puzzle presented itself. As I exited my cabin into the frigid air, I saw two sailors calling over the side of the ship.

SAILOR ONE: Hail! Hail!

ROBERT: What is the meaning of this?

SAILOR TWO: There's another one of those strange men! Only this one's here by the ship!

NARRATOR: They were right. Beside our ship on a floating fragment of ice was another man with a dog-sledge. I saw that

only one of his dogs remained alive. He was not a giant like the other man we had spied.

SAILOR ONE: Here is our captain, sir! He will not allow you to perish on the open sea.

SAILOR TWO: He might get *us* killed, but he won't let *you* die.

STRANGER: *(weakly)* I am grateful to you.

NARRATOR: The man spoke in English although with a foreign accent.

ROBERT: I will have the men lower down and help you aboard our vessel.

STRANGER: Wait. Before I come on board, would you have the kindness to inform me where you are bound?

ROBERT: *(in shock)* Sir, you are stranded on a fragment of ice in a wasteland! Would you refuse our rescue?

STRANGER: I would, sir. I am on a mission, and I must complete it at all costs.

ROBERT: We are on a voyage of discovery to the North Pole.

STRANGER: Then I will accompany you.

NARRATOR: We lifted him aboard. As we did, we observed his limbs were nearly frozen, and his body dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and suffering. He took a few halting steps and fell upon the deck.

ROBERT: Help carry this man!

STRANGER: *(quietly)* Wait. Do not let me hinder our departure. We must continue.

NARRATOR: We attempted to carry him into the cabin, but as soon as he had quitted the fresh air, he fainted. We accordingly brought him back to the deck and restored him to animation by rubbing him with brandy and forcing him to swallow a small quantity. As soon as he showed signs of life, we wrapped him up in blankets and placed him near the chimney of the kitchen stove. By slow degrees, he recovered and ate a little soup, which restored him wonderfully.

STRANGER: (*hoarse attempts to talk*)

NARRATOR: The man grabbed his head between his hands and gnashed his teeth as some unknown woe oppressed him.

ROBERT: Do not trouble yourself, stranger. You are safe, and all is well. Save your strength.

NARRATOR: Two days passed in this manner before the stranger was able to speak again. His eyes were filled with wildness or perhaps madness. I often feared that his sufferings had deprived him of understanding.

When he had in some measure recovered, I removed him to my own cabin and attended to him as much as my duty would permit.

ROBERT: I hope you will find it more comfortable here.

STRANGER: Thank you.

ROBERT: My men are quite curious to know your story.

STRANGER: Allow them to enter. Their presence will not trouble me.

NARRATOR: I allowed several of the crewmen to come into my cabin and stare at the emaciated stranger. It did not take them long to ask the question on every man's mind.

LIEUTENANT: May I ask, sir, why did you come so far north in nothing but a sledge?

NARRATOR: The stranger's countenance instantly assumed an aspect of the deepest gloom.

STRANGER: To seek one who fled from me.

LIEUTENANT: And did the man whom you pursued travel in the same fashion?

STRANGER: Yes.

LIEUTENANT: Then I fancy we have seen him, for the day before we picked you up, we saw some dogs drawing a sledge, with a man in it, across the ice.

STRANGER: (*frantically*) You saw that demon? What route did he take? Which way did he go?

LIEUTENANT: We cannot say for certain. The mist was so thick.

NARRATOR: This had aroused the stranger's attention, and he asked a multitude of questions concerning the route of "the demon" as he called him. Finally, the crewmen, expecting their own questions to be answered instead of receiving so many of his, departed. Then the stranger and I were alone.

STRANGER: No doubt I have excited your curiosity, as well as that of these good people. But you are too considerate to make inquiries.

ROBERT: Certainly. It would indeed be very impertinent and inhuman of me to trouble you with any inquisitiveness of mine.

STRANGER: And yet you rescued me from a strange and perilous situation. And you have restored me to life.

NARRATOR: He paused with the same strange light in his eyes.

STRANGER: The other sledge you saw—do you think the breaking up of the ice destroyed it?

ROBERT: I cannot say with any certainty. The ice broke up during the night, and the traveler might have been at a place of safety by then.

STRANGER: Hmmm. You are right. He is most likely safe.

NARRATOR: With this news, a fresh spirit of life seemed to animate the decaying frame of the stranger. He arose with fiery purpose.

STRANGER: (*strongly*) Then I must join your men upon the deck of the ship.

ROBERT: Impossible, sir. You are too weak to be in the frigid air. That raw atmosphere would mean the death of you.

STRANGER: (*intensely*) You don't understand! I must!

ROBERT: What if I set a watch for the other traveler? Would that set your mind at ease? He will give you instant notice if any new object should appear in sight.

STRANGER: It must be instant.

ROBERT: It will, friend. Now rest.

NARRATOR: The stranger gradually improved in health but was very silent and appeared uneasy when anyone except myself entered his cabin. His deep grief filled me with sympathy and compassion. As we continued to sail northward, a brotherly affection grew up within me for the stranger.

ROBERT: (*to himself*) He must have been a noble creature in his better days. Even now in such a wrecked form, he is gentile and amiable.

NARRATOR: Days passed, and soon the stranger was much recovered. He stood continually on the deck, apparently watching for the sledge that preceded his own. Although he was unhappy, he was not so utterly occupied by his own misery that he did not interest himself in my voyage, which I communicated to him without disguise.

STRANGER: So you intend to complete your voyage to the North Pole?

ROBERT: Above all else!

STRANGER: Even if it costs you all that you hold dear?

ROBERT: I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope.

STRANGER: I assume that includes your very life.

ROBERT: What is one man's life or death? To me, it's a small price to pay for the knowledge I seek. My discovery might give me dominion over the foes of our race...

NARRATOR: As I spoke, a dark gloom spread over my listener's countenance. At first I perceived that he tried to suppress his emotion and placed his hands before his eyes.

ROBERT: Friend, did I upset you?

NARRATOR: I beheld tears trickle fast from between his fingers, and a groan burst from his heaving breast.

STRANGER: Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draught?

ROBERT: What do you mean?

STRANGER: Hear me! Let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!

NARRATOR: Such words, you may imagine, strongly excited my curiosity, but the paroxysm of grief that had seized the stranger overcame his weakened powers.

ROBERT: You are weak! Return to the cabin, and we will speak of this later.

NARRATOR: Many hours of repose and tranquil conversation were necessary to restore his composure.

STRANGER: Forgive me for the violence of my feelings. I am such a slave to my passions. Despair has such a dark tyranny about it. It consumes all else.

NARRATOR: Although I longed to hear him speak of his own life, he asked to hear of mine. The tale was quickly told, but it awakened various trains of reflection.

ROBERT: No one understands this desire within me. What man can boast of happiness if he has no friends?

STRANGER: I agree with you. We are unfashioned creatures—only half made up. We feel incomplete unless one who is wiser, better than ourselves—as a friend ought to be—does not lend his aid to perfect our weak and faulty natures.

ROBERT: Precisely! You speak the very words I feel.

NARRATOR: There was fresh pain in the stranger's eyes.

STRANGER: I had a friend once—the most noble of human creatures. Do not despair. You have hope, and the world is before you. But I—I have lost everything and cannot begin life anew.

NARRATOR: As he said this, his countenance became expressive of a calm, settled grief that touched me to the heart. But he was silent and presently retired to his cabin.

Even when broken in spirit, no man can feel more deeply than when he beholds the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea, and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions seem still to have the

power of elevating his soul. Such a man has a double existence: He may suffer misery and be overwhelmed by disappointments, yet when he retires into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures.

The next day the stranger seemed prepared to talk.

STRANGER: You may easily perceive, Captain Walton, that I have suffered great and unparalleled misfortunes. I had determined at one time that the memory of these evils should die with me, but you have convinced me to alter my determination. You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did. I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been.

NARRATOR: As his full-toned voice swelled in my ears and his thin hand rose in animation, the features of his face were irradiated by the soul within.

STRANGER: I do not know that the relation of my disasters will be useful to you. Yet, when I reflect that you are pursuing the same course, exposing yourself to the same dangers which have rendered me what I am, I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale—one that may direct you if you succeed in your undertaking and console you in case of failure.

NARRATOR: Hearing this, I could scarcely breathe.

STRANGER: Prepare to hear of occurrences, which are usually deemed marvelous. Were we among the tamer

scenes of nature I might fear to encounter your unbelief—perhaps even your ridicule. But many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions.

ROBERT: I do not wish to renew your grief. I am curious to hear your narrative. Not just for my own sake. I hope there is some way I can ameliorate your fate—if it is in my power.

STRANGER: I thank you for your sympathy, but it is useless. My fate is nearly fulfilled. I wait but for one event, and then I shall repose in peace.

ROBERT: Do not speak of such things!

STRANGER: Nothing can alter my destiny. Listen to my history, and you will perceive how irrevocably it is determined.

NARRATOR: I made ready to record carefully every scrap of his narrative. I knew his story must be strange and harrowing—a frightful storm indeed to have wrecked such a gallant vessel. It proved even more tempestuous than my wildest imaginings. Here begins the tale of the stranger: Victor Frankenstein.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In this time period very few people had formal education. Most people were self-taught with books and viewed travel as a form of educating themselves. Robert Walton employs both of these methods to enlighten himself. If you had a chance to take a learning expedition, where would you travel?

2. How can you tell Robert Walton believes that the pursuit of knowledge is the most important thing in life?
3. If given the chance, what mystery of the universe would you solve? Explain.
4. Robert Walton is literally at the end of the world when he meets the stranger, Victor Frankenstein. How does the setting add to the mystery and adventure of this meeting?
5. What do you think is the identity of the man whom Victor Frankenstein is pursuing?
6. Why does Walton feel a kinship with the stranger, Victor Frankenstein?
7. One of the elements of Gothic literature is overwrought emotion. How has overwhelming emotion played a part in the story so far?
8. In the original novel this portion of *Frankenstein* appears in three letters from Robert Walton to his sister, Margaret. Why do you think Mary Shelley chose to begin her fictional story through a series of letters?
9. Re-read this passage: “Even when broken in spirit, no man can feel more deeply than when he beholds the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea, and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions seem still to have the power of elevating his soul. Such a man has a double existence: He may suffer misery and be overwhelmed by disappointments, yet when he retires into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures.” What is it trying to say about nature?