

FOR THE READER

Welcome to The Fiction Laboratory. This is a companion to the novel, not a replacement for it, and no substitute for actually reading the book. Its whole job is to make the reading richer: to show you the world *Frankenstein* came out of, the argument hiding under the horror story, and the real science the novel is built on and, in a few places, breaks.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Read the companion alongside the novel, in whatever order suits you. Four short sections come with it:

- **The Author.** Who Mary Shelley was, and how a girl whose birth killed her mother, and who buried a baby at eleven days, came to write the first story about making life and running from it.
- **The Moment.** What was happening in 1816 that made this book possible: corpses twitching under electrodes in front of paying audiences, a public fight among surgeons over what life actually is, and a volcano that cancelled the summer.
- **The Real Subject.** What the story is actually about, once you stop assuming it is a warning about science.
- **The Science.** The medicine and biology inside the novel: what holds up, what could never work, and what the book went on to set loose in the real world.

One thing to check before you start. There are two versions of this novel. Mary Shelley published it in 1818 and rewrote parts of it in 1831, and the changes matter enough that some details differ between them. This packet uses the 1818 text, which is free and complete at Project Gutenberg. If the copy in your hand says 1831, you are not reading the wrong book, but a few things will not match. Ask your teacher.

And one warning. You already know this story, or you think you do. Almost everything most people picture, the flat head, the bolts in the neck, the laboratory full of sparking equipment, the mob with torches, is from films made a century after the book.

None of it is in the novel. Part of the fun here is finding out how different the real thing is.

One rule, and it is the whole point: **do not take our word for any of it.** Every claim in here is built on real scholarship, and most of the sources are free. If something surprises you, or you think we have it wrong, every source is listed in Sources and Additional Resources, which came with this packet. Go check.

When you finish the novel, there is a short quiz. It draws on both the story and this companion, so read both.