

# LEARNING CHALLENGE LESSONS

## Secondary English Language Arts

20 Lessons to Guide Students  
Through the Learning Pit

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LESSON

# 1

## Who Was Responsible for the Death of William in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*?

**KEY CONCEPT:** Responsibility

**KEY SKILLS:** Crafting an argument  
Citing textual evidence

Demonstrating understanding of figurative language and nuance



# Who Was Responsible for the Death of William in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*?

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## OVERVIEW:

The lesson will enhance your students' knowledge and understanding of the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, with focuses on characterisation, responsibility and developments in science. It is important for your students to be familiar with the novel prior to this activity.

## KEY CONCEPT:

Responsibility

## KEY WORDS:

Responsibility, duty, blame, crime, nature, science, morality, justice, obligation, loyalty, punishment, guilt, culpability, accountability, innocence, child, guardian, control, fear, family, deceit, revenge, pain, isolation and rejection.

## LEARNING INTENTION:

To understand how responsibility is embodied in the characters in the novel *Frankenstein*.

## SUCCESS CRITERIA:

We can do the following:

- Discuss and explore our understanding of responsibility.
- Examine the thoughts and behaviour of characters to discuss their role in the death of William.
- Determine the responsibility held by Victor Frankenstein and the creature.
- Reflect on and explain the significance of historical, cultural and societal context and its influence when deciding upon the allocation of responsibility.

## STRATEGIES USED:

Opinion Line

Mystery

## 1. IDENTIFY IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

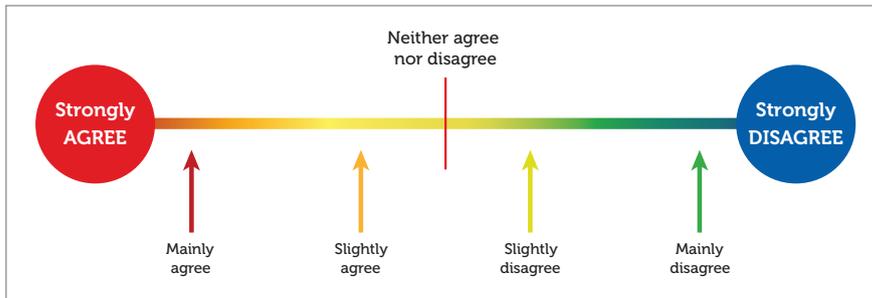
Some of the key areas to investigate within and around the concept of 'responsibility' are the following:

- Guilt
- Morality
- Family
- Society
- Science
- Blame
- Regret
- Justice
- Equality

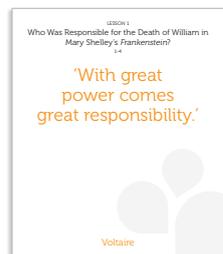
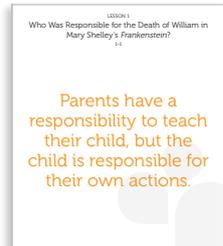
### Activity 1: Provoke the Discussion Using an Opinion Line

Encourage your students to think carefully about the statements on the **Activity 1 resource cards** (listed below) and discuss their ideas in pairs/groups.

- Parents have a responsibility to teach their child, but the child is responsible for their own actions.
- Children cannot be held responsible for their actions as they are still learning and growing.
- Rich people should have more responsibility than poor people.
- 'With great power comes great responsibility.' Voltaire
- 'The price of greatness is responsibility.' Winston Churchill
- 'You become responsible forever for what you've tamed.' Antoine de Saint-Exupery
- 'We are all members of one body. We are responsible for each other.' J.B. Priestley
- 'No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible.' Stanislaw Jerzy Lec
- 'Winners take responsibility. Losers blame others.' Brit Hume
- 'An idea isn't responsible for the people who believe in it.' Don Marquis
- 'In dreams begin responsibility.' W.B. Yeats



Download the activity cards at  
[http://resources.corwin.com/  
learningchallengelessons](http://resources.corwin.com/learningchallengelessons)



After some consideration time, read out each quotation in turn, asking your students to position themselves on the line. The students should be encouraged to justify their place with reasons and there should be a whole group dialogue around each statement before moving on to another.

## 2. CHALLENGE STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT

Here are some examples of cognitive conflict we expect your students to experience:

Opinion	Conflicting Opinion
I am responsible for my own behaviour and the consequences of my behaviour.	My parents are responsible for me until I am 18 years old.
We are all responsible for our own actions.	Sometimes we act because we are following orders or instructions from others.
We must all be responsible for each other to help make the world a fairer place for everyone.	I can't be held responsible for the lives of others. I must focus on my own needs and the needs of my family.
Having responsibility makes me feel important.	Having responsibility makes me feel stressed.
Children cannot be trusted to be responsible.	When I was younger, I cared for and fed my guinea pigs every day to make sure they were healthy and happy.
Responsibility always falls to the eldest.	Everyone should take responsibility.

### Questions for Challenge

- What is responsibility?
- How do we know what responsibility is?
- What makes someone responsible?
- Who decides if we are responsible or not?
- Is it possible for responsibility to be given to someone?
- How can responsibility be earned?
- Does being responsible always mean we are in control?
- How can we demonstrate responsibility?
- When is responsibility a choice?
- Is it irresponsible to refuse responsibility given to us?
- Can we stop being responsible for something or someone if we choose to?
- To what degree do we have to learn how to be responsible?
- Who decides what responsibility is?
- Should we always be held responsible for our actions?
- Can we ever be held responsible for something we didn't do?

- When might you be guilty of a crime but not be responsible?
- Should parents always be held responsible for the actions of their children?
- Are adults always more responsible than children?
- When is it irresponsible to take responsibility?
- What is the difference between taking responsibility and taking the blame?
- Should blame always fall on those who are responsible?
- When is responsibility the same as taking control of your actions?
- How responsible are we if someone else is controlling our actions?
- Can responsibility be taken away from you?
- Why did Winston Churchill say, 'The price of greatness is responsibility'?
- Why do some people have more responsibility?
- Should people with more knowledge and talent have more responsibility than others? Is this fair?
- Do you need to be human to be responsible?
- An experiment is a scientific procedure undertaken to make a discovery. Can we hold scientists responsible if these experiments go wrong?

### 3. CONSTRUCT UNDERSTANDING

#### Activity 2: Mystery

In groups of 3 or 4, students are presented with the **Activity 2 resource cards** and are encouraged to use the information on the cards to answer the following key question:

#### Who was responsible for the death of William?

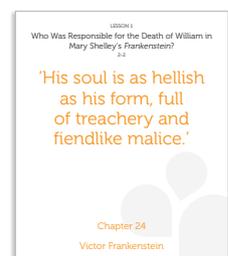
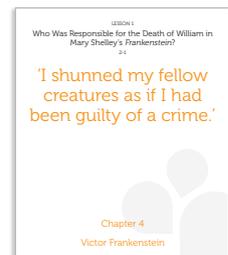
Encourage your students to explore what the language/devices reveal about the author's view.

It is often useful to support your students when they are sorting through the information in front of them. This can help them to interpret and handle the information more easily and reconstruct their thinking to reach an understanding. In the table below, students can record their ideas on who they believe is responsible for the death of William.

Evidence to show Victor Frankenstein is responsible.	Evidence to show the creature is responsible.	Evidence that is not relevant.
Our conclusion is . . .		
The key reasons for this are . . .		

online resources

Download the activity cards at <http://resources.corwin.com/learningchallengelessons>



### Questions to Promote Further Dialogue

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- Who was responsible for William?
- Who was responsible for the creature?
- Can we be responsible for something we cannot control?
- Can we judge the creature by the same rules as we judge humans?
- Does the creature understand the concept of 'responsibility'?
- Do you need to understand the concept of 'responsibility' to be held responsible for your actions?
- How did the creature learn about rules and morality in society?
- If the creature is a scientific experiment, can it be held responsible for its own actions?
- Does the creature's appearance affect our view of its responsibility?
- If we create something, are we always responsible for it?
- Should Victor Frankenstein be held responsible for the creation and behaviour of the creature?
- Was Victor Frankenstein legally and/or morally responsible for the creature? How do you know this?
- Who made Victor Frankenstein responsible for the creature?
- Did Victor Frankenstein choose to take responsibility for the creature?
- Can you be wholly responsible for the actions of another?
- Was Victor Frankenstein irresponsible rather than responsible for the death of his brother?
- If we blame Victor Frankenstein for the actions of the creature, is this the same as saying he is responsible?
- Can you be held responsible for something you are afraid of?
- To what degree is society's rejection of the creature responsible for the events that followed?
- What is your interpretation of Mary Shelley's views on responsibility?
- At the end of the text, the creature states, 'Polluted by crimes and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?' What does this reveal about the creature's feelings of responsibility?
- Does the creature's regret suggest his responsibility?
- Did Victor Frankenstein know that the creature would kill William? Does this matter?
- Did the creature plan to kill William?
- Has Victor Frankenstein influenced the morals and behaviour of the creature?
- Who was responsible for the death of Justine?
- Why did Victor Frankenstein conduct his experiments in secret?
- Can we blame Victor Frankenstein for the results of his scientific experiment? Could he have predicted later events?
- In the 19th century, scientists were challenging and testing the boundaries between life and death, discovering new and improved methods of diagnosis and

treatments. Can scientists be wholly responsible for the consequences of their experiments?

- In a court of law, would the creature have been found guilty/responsible for the murder of William?
- Can Victor be responsible for and be a victim of the same crime?
- Are we shocked by the actions of the creature when it kills William?
- Does Mary Shelley present the creature as dangerous?
- Victor Frankenstein never gave his creation a name; does this change our view of its culpability?
- Did Victor Frankenstein have a moral and social responsibility to inform people about his creation? Would this have kept William alive?
- Did Victor Frankenstein have a responsibility to the world of science to experiment and advance the knowledge of man?
- Are there any sections in the novel where Victor Frankenstein does behave responsibly? Does this matter?
- If Felix had shown compassion and care towards the creature, would this have prevented the murder of William?
- Could responsibility for William's death lie elsewhere?

### Adaptation

You could select a smaller range of cards for your students to consider in the Mystery activity or offer them more adult support.

### Extension

Ask students to find their own evidence to determine who is responsible for the death of William.

Ask your students to consider how science may be responsible for the death of William. They could conduct detailed research into the developments of science during this time, and the unrestricted and illegal practices in medical research. Your students could structure their findings using a Thought Map. Once your students have conducted their research, ask them to search for evidence in the novel that would help them ascertain if science was responsible for the death of William. A Venn Diagram could be used to sort and classify their ideas and research.

Mary Shelley uses the subtitle 'The Modern Prometheus' for Frankenstein. Your students could discuss and explore the meanings and motivation behind this subtitle.

Challenge students to create a Fortune Line with the x-axis being time and the y-axis 'level of responsibility' (zero responsibility to absolute responsibility). Ask your students to look through the cards from the Mystery activity and position these on the graph, annotating the graph with their ideas at each stage.

Transform the Mystery activity into a drama performance of the trial for William's murder. Students could use the Mystery cards as evidence *for* and *against* the prosecution of the creature/Victor Frankenstein. Challenge the students to find more evidence from the book and from other areas such as religion and the developments in science during this period. This activity could be used to create a newspaper article and/or an essay.

## 4. CONSIDER THE LEARNING JOURNEY

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At the end of the activity it is usual to encourage your students to review their learning journey and the thinking process they have engaged in throughout the session.

This can include reflection on the thinking that has taken place to this point, and a summary and conclusion of the new understanding reached.

Explicit reference to Learning Intentions and Success Criteria is a good starting point for this reflection.

To encourage the students to review their learning journey and their thinking progress, students should provide an argument and reasoning in response to the key question:

### **Who was responsible for the death of William?**

In pairs/groups, students decide on who they believe is responsible for the death of William. They must provide three key reasons using evidence from the text.

Activities from the extension section could be useful for this stage such as the newspaper front page and/or the criminal trial for Victor Frankenstein/creature. The students could act as jurors and decide who they would convict, resulting in a short speech to the class. If your students have identified other agents who should be held responsible, then adapt the activity accordingly.

Possible questions to review the learning journey are as follows:

- Has anyone changed their mind about what it means to be responsible or to have responsibility?
- What do you know now that you didn't know before?
- Which idea really made you think?
- What skills have you used throughout the lesson?
- Is it important to agree on definitions together?
- What questions are you still thinking about?

### **Ideas for Transfer**

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Students consider who has responsibility for key historical events such as the outbreak of the First World War and the Second World War. They could examine and evaluate primary and secondary resources.

Your students could produce an article for their school magazine that explores the importance of taking responsibility for your actions.

Ask your students to create a podcast that challenges different individuals and authorities on their responsibility for climate change, poverty or knife crime.

# WWW•EBI

WWW – What Worked Well . . .

Empty space for writing 'WWW – What Worked Well'.

EBI – Even Better If . . .

Empty space for writing 'EBI – Even Better If'.



LESSON

# 2

## Do We Feel Sympathy for Scrooge in Stave 1 of *A Christmas Carol*?

**KEY CONCEPT:** Sympathy

**KEY SKILLS:** Drawing inferences

Citing textual evidence

Analysing character development

Analysing author's word choice

