

Frankenstein (2025) – Screenwriter’s Breakdown for Educators

Screenplay By: Guillermo del Toro

ADAPTED SCREENPLAY based on Mary Shelly’s “Frankenstein; or: The Modern Prometheus”

Final/Shooting Script: September 2024; 135 pages.

Drama / Fantasy / Horror / Monsters / Creature Feature

LESSON PLAN

MENTOR: Nick Runyeard | 8FLiX Institute (for Emerging Screenwriters)

PROFICIENCY: NOVICE | **ADVANCED BEGINNER** | COMPETENT | PROFICIENT | EXPERT

REQUIRED READING: Frankenstein (2025) Screenplay (8FLiX.com [free account required for downloads]).

OPTIONAL READING: The Devil’s Backbone (2001 - Guillermo del Toro), There Will Be Blood (2007 – Paul Thomas Anderson), Oppenheimer (2023- Christopher Nolan).

Logline

Dr. Victor Frankenstein, a brilliant but egotistical scientist, brings a creature to life in a monstrous experiment that ultimately leads to the undoing of both the creator and his tragic creation.

What This Screenplay Teaches

Guillermo del Toro’s Frankenstein reframes Mary Shelley’s myth as a story of inheritance, obsession, and moral trespass, rather than mere gothic horror. The screenplay foregrounds Victor Frankenstein not as a mad scientist cliché, but as a deeply wounded intellect shaped by paternal cruelty, emotional deprivation, and a warped theology of mastery.

Structurally, the script is bold and operatic. It opens at the Arctic edge of the world, stages Victor’s confession as a reckoning, and then descends into an extended psychological autopsy of how genius curdles into hubris. The Creature is not born from lightning alone, but from Victor’s lifelong refusal to accept human limits.

For students, this screenplay is a case study in how theme can dominate structure, and how horror emerges from character, not shocks.

Discussion Topics

- Framing devices and moral judgment
- Science as faith replacement
- Parental legacy and emotional inheritance
- Sympathy vs accountability in tragic protagonists
- The Creature as consequence, not villain
- Gothic aesthetics in modern screenwriting
- Why restraint matters more than scale

Tone Breakdown

Primary Tone: Gothic Tragedy

Lush, mournful, and inevitable. Fate presses in from every side.

Secondary Tone: Existential Horror

The terror lies not in the Creature's body, but in Victor's certainty.

Tertiary Tone: Baroque Moral Inquiry

Science, faith, and ego collide without a safety net.

Undercurrent: Inherited Violence

Victor does not invent monstrosity -- he inherits and amplifies it.

In short:

Operatic, intimate, relentless. A sermon disguised as a horror epic.

Screenwriting Takeaways

- **Begin with consequence, not origin**

The Arctic framing places judgment before explanation, shaping audience expectation.

- **Character psychology drives spectacle**

Every set-piece emerges from Victor's interior state, not plot necessity.

- **Backstory as moral architecture**

Victor's childhood trauma is not flavor -- it is causal.

- **Mythic pacing requires discipline**

The script earns its length through thematic density, not incident count.

- **The antagonist can be a worldview**

Victor's ideology is more dangerous than the Creature itself.

- **Horror deepens when empathy is denied**

The refusal to sentimentalize Victor sharpens the tragedy.

Legacy & Context

This adaptation sits alongside del Toro's thematic lineage (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Devil's Backbone*, *Crimson Peak*), where monsters externalize human cruelty rather than replace it. Unlike many *Frankenstein* adaptations, this script restores Shelley's philosophical core, emphasizing responsibility over spectacle.

It also converses with works like *There Will Be Blood*, *Oppenheimer*, and *The Master* -- narratives where brilliance and moral blindness coexist disastrously.

For writers, **Frankenstein** (2025) demonstrates how classic literature can be adapted without flattening its moral complexity.

Critical Lens: What Works vs Where It Challenges Students

What Works

Thematic cohesion

- Every narrative choice reinforces the cost of defying natural limits.

Psychological rigor

- Victor's actions are rooted in believable emotional damage.

Mythic confidence

- The script embraces scale without apologizing for seriousness.

Re-centering Shelley's intent

- Responsibility replaces novelty as the core question.

Visual storytelling baked into prose

- The writing anticipates cinematic translation without over-directing.

Where it Challenges Students

Demanding pacing

- The deliberate structure may alienate viewers seeking conventional horror beats.

Limited accessibility

- The script assumes philosophical engagement from its audience.

Emotional austerity

- Victor is intentionally difficult to love -- a strength, but also a barrier.

Minimal catharsis

- Resolution is moral, not comforting.

Why This Screenplay Matters in Film Studies

This screenplay teaches that ambition must be matched by discipline. It shows how to adapt revered material without dilution, and how horror can function as moral inquiry rather than genre exercise.

It demonstrates:

- How worldview shapes plot
- When spectacle serves theme
- How restraint sharpens tragedy

Writing Exercise

Adapt a myth or classic text by answering one question only:

- 1) What moral failure drives this story -- and how does the plot punish it?

Outline without adding modern irony or spectacle.

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