

LITERATURE

INTERACT
WITH
LITERATURE

We know
books

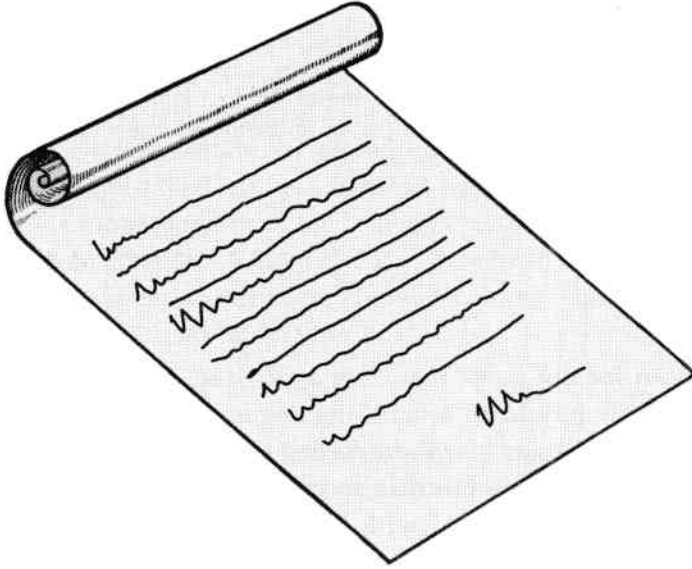
Mary Shelley • Robert Louis Stevenson • Emily Brontë • Oscar Wilde •
Joseph Conrad • James Joyce • Virginia Woolf • George Orwell

VOICES FROM INSIDE

Accessing the Literary Text: A Skills-Based Approach

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- 1 a Read the following definition of the word **letter** taken from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*:

letter: a written message addressed to a person or an organization, usually put in an envelope and sent by post.

- b Do you think this is a good definition or would you add something to it?
- c Do you use the same type of language (register) when you write to a friend or to a relative?

Discuss your answers with your classmates.

- 2 Novels written in the form of a series of letters (**epistolary novels**) were particularly popular in the 18th century. Mary Shelley starts her novel, *Frankenstein*, with four letters.

To what purpose do you think the author used this device? Look at the suggestions below and tick the one/s you think most appropriate, then compare your choices with your classmates.

- to achieve a distancing effect
- to create a feeling of expectation in the reader
- to make her novel seem as if it were based on a true story
- to create a sense of intimacy between narrator and reader

- 3 a The following extract is taken from one of the four letters with which the novel starts. The letter contains references to an unknown guest. Scan the text and answer the questions that follow it.

.....

August 13th, 17— .

My affection for my guest increases every day. He excites at once my admiration and my pity to an astonishing degree. How can I see so noble a creature destroyed by misery, without feeling the most poignant ¹ grief? He is
5 so gentle, yet so wise; his mind is so cultivated; and when he speaks, although his words are culled ² with the choicest art, yet they flow with rapidity and unparalleled eloquence.

.....

- b
- What is the "unknown guest" like?
 - What is the narrator's attitude towards him?
 - What suggests that the "unknown guest" is an educated person?

EXTRACT TWO



- 4 a Listen to a later part of the letter and say...
- whether the expression on the guest's face changed;
 - why the guest covered his eyes;
 - whether the guest started to cry;
 - what the guest is about to do.
- b Now check your answers while reading the text.

1 poignant ['pɔɪnjənt] : intense, sharp.
2 culled [kʌld] : selected, chosen.

[...] One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought;¹ for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race. As I spoke, a dark gloom² spread over my listener's countenance.³ At first I perceived that he tried to suppress his emotion; he placed his hands before his eyes; and my voice quivered and failed me, as I beheld⁴ tears trickle⁵ fast from between his fingers, – a groan burst from his heaving breast.⁶ I paused; – at length he spoke, in broken accents: – 'Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me, – let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup⁷ from your lips!' 5 10

.....

- c What is the dictionary definition of "intoxicating draught"? In this extract it takes on additional meaning. Read the text again and try to guess what it is.
- d What tells us that the narrator and the guest share something?



- 1 **sought** [sɔ:t] : (fml) looked for (seek, sought, sought).
- 2 **gloom** : look of depression and sadness.
- 3 **countenance** : (fml) face.
- 4 **beheld** : (arch.) saw (behold, beheld, beheld).
- 5 **trickle** : flow.
- 6 **heaving** ['hi:vɪŋ] **breast** : chest which was rising and falling regularly (as a result of great emotion).
- 7 **dash the cup** : throw the cup violently.

These extracts are taken from one of the letters that Captain Robert Walton writes to his sister, Mrs Margaret Saville, at the beginning of the novel. In them he tells her about his life on board ship in the Arctic Ocean. Walton has set off from Russia to search for a beautiful undiscovered country, which he believes is to be found at the North Pole.

One day, while his ship is stuck in ice, he and the crew see a gigantic figure on a sledge pulled by dogs. The following day the crew bring a man on board the ship. The man tells Walton he is Victor Frankenstein and that he has been chasing the gigantic figure (which Frankenstein calls a "daemon"), that Walton and the crew had seen a few days before. The story is now narrated by Victor Frankenstein. He tells Walton about his family background in Geneva and of his deep interest in science which took him to the University of Ingolstadt in Bavaria. There he discovered the secrets of the reanimation of dead tissue. He begins to prepare obsessively for the culmination of his research "to renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption."

EXTRACT THREE

- 5 a Read Victor Frankenstein's account of the night of the experiment and fill in the table below.

setting	
time of day	
month	
season	
weather	

.....

It was on a dreary¹ night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils.² With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the

1 dreary [ˈdriəri] : dark and depressing.

2 toils [tɔɪlz] : (fml) hard work.

lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer¹ of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull² yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. 5

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured³ to form? 10 His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous⁴ black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriences only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the 15 dun white⁵ sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion⁶ and straight black lips.

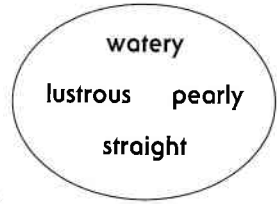
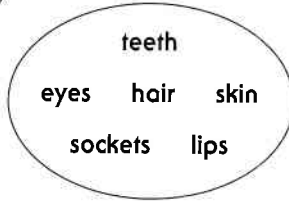
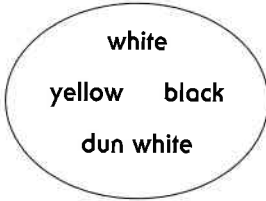
.....

- b Circle the words and phrases in the passage which help create a *Gothic* atmosphere.



- 1 **glimmer** : faint unsteady light.
- 2 **dull** : ≠ bright.
- 3 **endeavoured** [ɪn'devəd] : (fml) tried hard.
- 4 **lustrous** : shining.
- 5 **dun white** : dull greyish white.
- 6 **his shrivelled complexion** : the wrinkled skin on his face.

- 6 a Look at the way Frankenstein describes the monster. Using arrows to link the words in the bubbles, match the adjectives and nouns as they appear in the passage.



- b What effect does this combination of adjectives produce?
What impression do you get from this description of the monster?
- 7 How does Victor ...
- feel whilst he is preparing the experiment?
 - define the experiment which should have been a scientific triumph?
 - describe the monster?



Victor is horrified and flees from the monster. He goes to bed and has a strange dream about Elizabeth, an Italian girl his family adopted when he was a child, and whom he intends to marry.

8 Complete the table below as you read about Victor's dream.

Victor's feelings	
While dreaming	After waking up

.....

[...] I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health,¹ walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid² with the hue³ of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form,⁴ and I saw the grave-worms crawling⁵ in the folds of the flannel.⁶ I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew⁷ covered my forehead, my teeth chattered,⁸ and every limb became convulsed: when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch — the miserable monster whom I had created.

- 1 **in the ... health** : in perfect health.
- 2 **livid** : bluish-grey.
- 3 **hue** [hju:] : (fm) colour.
- 4 **shroud ... form** : cloth covered her dead body (as if ready for burial).
- 5 **crawling** ['krɔ:lɪŋ] : moving slowly.
- 6 **flannel** : woolen cloth.
- 7 **dew** [dju:] : (here) drops of sweat.
- 8 **chattered** : knocked together repeatedly (because of fear).

- 9 Select the most appropriate word to complete the following multiple-choice summary.

Victor saw Elizabeth **sleeping / walking / running** in the streets of **London / Bavaria / Ingolstadt**. He embraced her but **during / since / as** he imprinted a **footstep / kiss / figure** on her **limbs / ankle / lips**, they became **red / livid / white** with the colour of **life / emerald / death**.

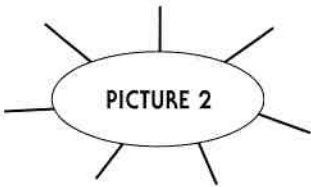
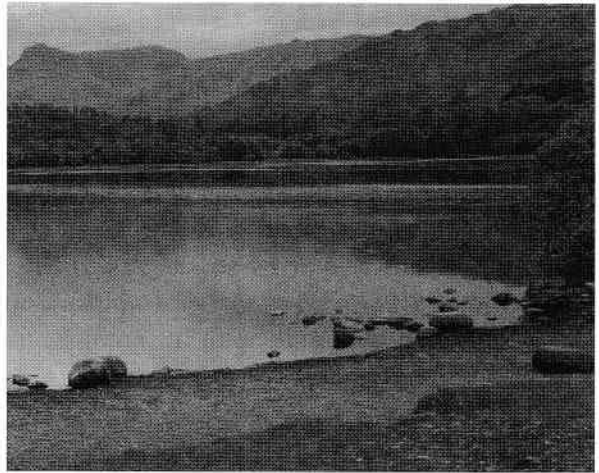
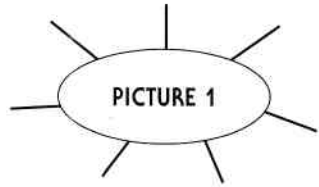
Elizabeth's features **changed / moved / appeared** and Victor thought he **held / had / saw** the corpse of his **aunt / mother / father** in his arms: he saw **ants / serpents / grave-worms** crawling in the cloth his mother's dead body was wrapped in.

- 10 a Some critics have suggested that Victor's dream can be said to contain incestuous elements. In the light of this, re-read the passage and then look at the suggestions below, and say what led them to suggest this.
- Because his parents had encouraged him to marry his "sister", Elizabeth.
 - Because in his dream Elizabeth turns into the corpse of his beloved dead mother.
 - Because in Victor's subconscious, sensuality and death seem to be intertwined

Do you agree with the critics' interpretation? Why/why not?

- b What is the connection between Frankenstein's dream and the creation of the monster? What natural laws has Frankenstein broken? Discuss your answers with your classmates.

- 11 a Look at the two pictures, then using the spidergrams below, write down the words or phrases which come into your mind as you look at them.



- b To what extent does a landscape influence our mood?
Discuss with your classmates, then write a few lines expressing your ideas.