Mary Shelley (1797-1851)

Mary Shelley's fame as a writer rests on a single gothic novel: Frankenstein. Millions of people who have never heard of Mary Shelley know her story through the films and other media inspired by the novel. The word "Frankenstein" has become a synonym for monster and Shelley's tragic tale about a well intentioned student of science and his human-like creation has been given myth-like status

Born in 1797, Shelley was the daughter of two of England's leading intellectual radicals Her father, William Godwin, was an influential political philosopher and novelist Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, was a pioneer in promoting women's rights and education. Shelley never knew her mother, who died ten days after giving birth, but she was influenced throughout her life by her mother's writings and reputation

When Mary was four, her father remarried. Mary received no formal education, but Mr Godwin encouraged his daughter to read from his well-stocked library. Many writers visited Mr. Godwin to talk about philosophy, politics, science, and literature.

Mary's future husband, the widely admired poet Percy Shelley, was one of her father's frequent visitors. When Mary was sixteen she and Percy eloped to France. They married in 1816 and lived together for eight years, until Percy's early death. They spent their time traveling in Switzerland, Germany, and Italy, visiting with friends, studying literature, languages, music and art, and writing. In her journal, Shelley described her years with Percy as romantic beyond romance. Her life during this period was also filled with personal tragedy. She gave birth to four children in five years, three of whom died as infants. Many critics have pointed out that thoughts of birth and death were much on Shelley's mind at the time she wrote Frankenstein.

In the summer of 1816, she and Percy were living with a poet and his doctor-friend. One day she listened to them discussing about the possibility of using electricity to create life artificially, according to the theory of galvanism. The next day she began to write Frankenstein. Mary Shelley did not put her name on the novel when it was published in 1818. Many reviewers and readers assumed it was written by Percy Shelley because he had written the preface. Mary Shelley's name was first attached to the novel in the 1831 edition for which she wrote the introduction. After Percy's death in 1822 in a boating accident, Mary Shelley returned to England and supported herself, her son, and her father with her writings. She wrote four novels, short stories and essays. She died in 1851.

When was she born?

What was special about her family? (their profession)

How old was she when she wrote Frankenstein?

Was she happily married?

Why was her life full of tragedy?

Who inspired her to write her most famous novel?