Borrowed Creation Stories

Tracing how Frankenstein reshapes Paradise Lost.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9a "Apply grades 9-10 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work [e.g...."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details about Paradise Lost, then number 1, 2, and 3 beside three ways Shelley changes Milton's ideas in Frankenstein. This will help you track both the source and the transformation.

Shelley's Changed Creation Story

1 Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, published in 1818, draws on John Milton's seventeenth-century epic Paradise Lost. Milton's poem tells of Satan's rebellion against God and of Adam and Eve's life after they disobey. In Paradise Lost, Adam is a created being who receives guidance from his maker, while Satan feels cast out and declares war on the authority above him. Shelley signals the connection when her creature reads Paradise Lost and compares himself to both Adam and Satan. This comparison invites readers to measure the creature's situation against Milton's figures.

2 Like Adam, Shelley's creature begins life newly made and looks to his creator, Victor Frankenstein, for care. Unlike Adam, however, he receives no instruction, companionship, or welcome. Victor flees immediately after bringing him to life. The creature expects Victor, his creator, to protect him, yet Victor refuses that role. Shelley also changes Satan's rebellion. Satan opposes a powerful divine ruler, but the creature turns violent after repeated rejection by Victor and by human communities. By making Victor fearful and irresponsible rather than all-powerful, Shelley shifts attention from rebellion against authority to a creator's duty toward what he creates.

3 These changes complicate the novel's moral question. Milton's Adam can appeal directly to God, but Shelley's creature must teach himself language and morality while hidden from people who fear his appearance. He asks Victor for a companion, hoping that shared affection will lessen his misery. Victor begins to make one, then destroys it because he fears the pair might harm humanity. The novel therefore uses Milton's creation story not to repeat a religious account of disobedience, but to examine isolation, prejudice, and the consequences of abandoning a dependent being.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which two figures from Paradise Lost does Shelley's creature compare himself to? What does each figure's position suggest about the creature?

2. How does Victor's treatment of the creature transform the relationship between creator and created found in Milton's account?

3. How does Shelley change the cause of Satan's rebellion when she develops the creature's violence?

4. According to the passage, what new moral focus does Shelley create by changing Milton's creation story? Name two issues the novel examines.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write exactly four sentences about a literary work you have studied that draws on an earlier source. Identify the source and later work, give one related detail from each, and explain how the later author changes the source's idea or effect.

ANSWER KEY

Borrowed Creation Stories

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details about Paradise Lost, then number 1, 2, and 3 beside three ways Shelley changes Milton's ideas in Frankenstein. This will help you track both the source and the transformation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which two figures from Paradise Lost does Shelley's creature compare himself to? What does each figure's position suggest about the creature?	**He compares himself to Adam, a created being who receives guidance, and Satan, a figure who feels cast out and rebels. The creature feels created and abandoned.**
2	How does Victor's treatment of the creature transform the relationship between creator and created found in Milton's account?	**Adam receives guidance from his maker, while Victor abandons the creature without instruction, companionship, or protection.**
3	How does Shelley change the cause of Satan's rebellion when she develops the creature's violence?	**Satan rebels against a powerful divine ruler, but the creature becomes violent after Victor and human communities repeatedly reject him.**
4	According to the passage, what new moral focus does Shelley create by changing Milton's creation story? Name two issues the novel examines.	**Shelley shifts the focus to a creator's responsibility and examines issues such as isolation, prejudice, and abandoning a dependent being.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Lion King draws on Shakespeare's Hamlet. In Hamlet, Claudius kills his brother, takes the throne, and faces a prince who must respond. In the film, Scar kills Mufasa, and Simba eventually returns to challenge him. By changing Denmark's troubled court into an animal kingdom and ending with Simba's public restoration, the film turns Hamlet's tragic revenge story into a family adventure about accepting responsibility.

Accept equivalent evidence-based explanations that accurately contrast Paradise Lost with Frankenstein. For Part 3, require exactly four sentences that identify both works, compare specific details, and explain a meaningful transformation.