

Book Group Questions for *Romantic Outlaws*

1. *Romantic Outlaws* tells the story of a famous mother and daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley. Did you admire one more than the other? Was one woman more “likable” or more important?
2. Both Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley braved society to write works that took on the most volatile issues of the day. They also lived lives that broke all of the rules. As a result, they faced severe attacks from their critics. They were called immoral, dangerous, and “whores.” Wollstonecraft was even called “a hyena in petticoats.” Were you surprised by the severity of the attacks they faced? Why do you think they elicited such hatred?
3. Many readers are surprised to discover how repressive the laws against women were during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Wives were not allowed to own property. They could not initiate divorce. Men were encouraged to “discipline” women through any means necessary, from beatings to torture. And yet, despite this oppression, Wollstonecraft and Shelley found the strength to fight the injustices women faced and to write books that revolutionized history. Where do you think they found the courage? What strategies did they use to persevere?
4. *Romantic Outlaws* alternates between the lives of Wollstonecraft and Shelley to illuminate the many overlapping themes in their lives. Did you find this structure helpful? Was it confusing?
5. Mary Shelley is a household name, as most people have heard of *Frankenstein*. But many people had never heard of Wollstonecraft before reading *Romantic Outlaws*. Were you familiar with these women before reading the book? Did you study them in school? Do you think their works should be read by students today, or are they no longer relevant?
6. Wollstonecraft and Shelley had very different personalities, but they shared many ideals. How were they different from one another? How were they similar?
7. Both mother and daughter had complicated relationships with the men in their lives. They struggled with their fathers. Their love affairs were difficult. They had children out of wedlock. What role do you think these relationships played in their lives and their work?
8. Both Wollstonecraft and Shelley struggled with depression. Wollstonecraft tried to kill herself twice. Shelley often felt overwhelmed by despair and

futility. They sustained terrible losses. What gave them the strength to persevere in the face of the tragedies they faced?

9. One of the underlying themes of *Romantic Outlaws* is Wollstonecraft's profound influence on her daughter Mary Shelley, although she died ten days after giving birth. Do you think this is true? Do you see evidence of Wollstonecraft's influence on Shelley?
10. What do you think are the most important ideas of Wollstonecraft, of Shelley? Why? What are the ones that are most relevant today?