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Literature Teaching Unit

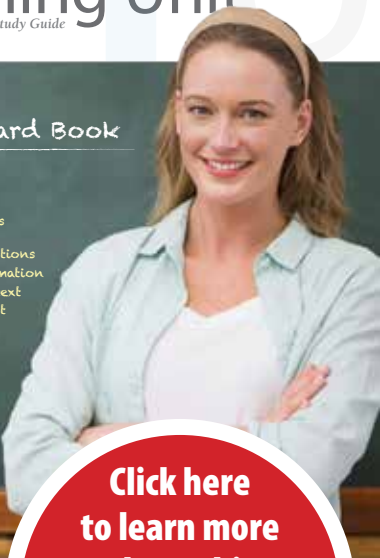
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Graveyard Book

by Neil Gaiman

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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The Graveyard Book

Note to the Teacher

The Graveyard Book chronicles episodes in the life of Nobody “Bod” Owens, a boy who lives in a graveyard and is raised by ghosts and a guardian who is neither living nor dead. Taken in as a baby after his family is murdered, Bod embarks on a number of adventures in the graveyard and encounters fantastic and horrifying creatures including ghouls and the frightening Sleer. Gaiman’s novel details a boy trying to find his identity and place in the world.

Neil Gaiman was born in Hampshire, UK, in 1960. Gaiman’s love of reading began in early childhood with works by C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Lewis Carroll. He began writing as a journalist and has since become a prolific author. His works cross genres and age groups and include the graphic novel series *Sandman*, *Coraline*, and *American Gods*. *The Graveyard Book*, first published in the UK in 2008, is Gaiman’s most awarded novel; it has received the Newbery Medal, Locus Young Adult Award, Hugo Best Novel Prize, and Carnegie Medal. Gaiman states that *The Graveyard Book*, inspired in part by Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* and by his own son’s playing in a graveyard, has been over twenty years in the making.

All references come from the Harper edition of *The Graveyard Book*, copyright 2008.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. write an essay that explains and supports how *The Graveyard Book* is a coming-of-age story.
2. analyze how the major episodes in the work come together to form a cohesive novel.
3. infer meanings about plot and characters when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
4. describe how the author uses archaic language and dialect to emphasize that characters, such as Mrs. Owens, Liza Hempstock, and Nehemiah Trot, lived during different ages.
5. consider the illustrations and discuss whether the graphic novel elements contribute to or detract from the work.
6. define the term “perspective” and identify when the author changes perspective. Describe how these changes in perspective provide insights into characters or events.
7. explain the significance of names and identity, and cite comments and incidents in which names are given, withdrawn, or discovered.
8. define the term “foreshadowing,” identify where it occurs in the novel, and explain for what purpose it is used.
9. explain the concept of boundaries and how it applies to this novel.
10. define first- and third-person narration. Identify the primary type of narration of the novel and the shifts in narration and discuss how these shifts affect the story.
11. define the term “epigraph” and discuss the meaning or significance of the epigraph in the beginning of the novel.
12. discuss the importance of literacy within this story and explain how the graveyard symbolizes a library.
13. define the following literary terms and identify examples of them within the text:
 - allusion
 - digression
 - irony
 - personification
 - simile
14. identify, discuss, and support how the novel explores the following motifs:
 - community
 - good versus evil
 - fate versus free will
 - friendship
 - identity

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Gaiman gradually introduces characters, often withholding their names or other aspects of their identities. Identify examples of this withholding of information and discuss how it affects the plot and readers' perceptions of the characters.
2. Throughout the book, Gaiman includes digressions, often to mention epitaphs, the words on characters' gravestones. Discuss how these digressions impact the pacing of the story and whether they add to or detract from the content.
3. The names of the Jacks of All Trades (Jack Frost, Dandy, Ketch, Nimble, and Tar) are allusions to characters or terms that represent certain types of people. Research these allusions and discuss the significance of the names of every man Jack.
4. Over the course of the novel, Bod matures from a baby to a young man. Cite specific incidents that show Bod's development and maturation.
5. Gaiman uses specific words and dialects when writing dialogue for different characters. Explain how the choice of diction and dialect demonstrates the eras in which characters lived, their educational backgrounds, or their character traits. Cite quotations from the text to support your explanation.
6. By being granted Freedom of the Graveyard, Bod gains special abilities. Using textual support, argue whether these abilities make Bod seem more like a ghost than a boy.
7. This novel contains many similes. Identify examples of similes from the text and analyze how this literary device is used and the effect it has on the audience.
8. Although the actions of the Honour Guard and the Convocation are important, they are rarely spoken of or depicted. Why do you think Gaiman decided to keep these events in the background and focus almost solely on Bod's adventures?
9. How does Bod assist characters who are ignored by or excluded from society? Analyze how these actions relate to his name and the novel's epigraph.
10. In the novel, Bod gets to know people who would typically be regarded as monsters. Determine how the representation of these characters differs from traditional portrayals and consider whether their representation is colored by Bod's perspective as a child raised by ghosts.

The Graveyard Book

Chapter 1 – How Nobody Came to the Graveyard

VOCABULARY

amphitheater – an arena

Augur – a soothsayer; a prophet; an ancient Roman official who interprets omens

casement – a window that is attached with hinges

discarnate – lacking a physical body

dubiously – doubtfully

expostulated – protested against someone's actions or plans to act

gorse – a spiny shrub

insubstantial – not solid or firm

luminescence – light

masticating – chewing

obduracy – the state of acting stubborn or not being persuaded

obelisk – a four-sided pillar with a pyramid on top

proconsul – a leader of an ancient Roman province

revenants – ghosts; spirits of the dead

1. The book is prefaced by a nursery rhyme. What is the literary term for the quotation before a larger work? Based on what you have read in the first chapter, explain how you think the rhyme relates to the rest of the story.

2. The opening of the book focuses on the knife before shifting to the perspective of the man Jack and then the baby. How do these different perspectives set the tone of the story and provide characterization?

3. Who asks Mr. and Mrs. Owens to act as the parents of the baby?

Interlude – The Convocation

VOCABULARY

convocation – a large meeting of people
dapper – stylish; well-groomed
sullen – gloomily reserved

1. Look at the illustration in this chapter and back at the illustration that begins the book. How are these different from the majority of the others so far?

2. What does the chapter reveal about the man Jack who murdered Bod's family?

3. How do the group's references to "San Francisco" relate to another incident in the book?
