The Graveyard Book
With illustrations by Dave McKean
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Book Summary
Nobody Owens, known to his friends as Bod, is a normal boy.

He would be completely normal if he didn't live in a sprawling graveyard, being raised and educated by ghosts, with a solitary guardian who belongs to neither the world of the living nor of the dead.

There are dangers and adventures in the graveyard for a boy - an ancient Indigo Man beneath the hill, a gateway to a desert leading to an abandoned city of ghouls, the strange and terrible menace of the Sleer.

But if Bod leaves the graveyard, then he will come under attack from the man Jack—who has already killed Bod's family. . . .


Winner of the 2009 Newbery Medal and the 2009 Hugo Award.

Biography
Neil Gaiman grew up in England and, although Jewish, attended Church of England schools, including Ardingly College, a boarding school in West Sussex (South of England). During the early 1980s he worked as a journalist and book reviewer. His first book was a biography of the band Duran Duran. He moved from England to his wife's hometown in the American midwest several years ago. He and his family now live in a renovated Victorian farmhouse where (he says) his hobbies are writing things down, hiding, and talking about himself in the third person. More about him and his books below.

A professional writer for more than twenty years, Neil Gaiman has been one of the top writers in modern comics, and is now a bestselling novelist. His work has appeared in translation in more than nineteen countries, and nearly all of his novels, graphic and otherwise, have been optioned for films. He is listed in the Dictionary of Literary Biography as one of the top ten living post-modern writers.

Gaiman was the creator/writer of the monthly cult DC Comics series, "Sandman," which won him nine Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards, including the award for best writer four times, and three Harvey Awards. "Sandman #19" took the 1991 World Fantasy Award for best short story, making it the first comic ever to be awarded a literary award.
His six-part fantastical TV series for the BBC, "Neverwhere," was broadcast in 1996. His novel, also called "Neverwhere," and set in the same strange underground world as the television series, was released in 1997; it appeared on a number of bestseller lists, including those of the Los Angeles Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, and Locus.

Stardust, an illustrated prose novel in four parts, began to appear from DC Comics in 1997. In 1999 Avon released the all-prose unillustrated version, which appeared on a number of bestseller lists, was selected by Publishers Weekly as one of the best books of the year, and was awarded the prestigious Mythopoeic Award as best novel for adults.

American Gods, a novel for adults, was published in 2001 and appeared on many best-of-the-year lists, was a New York Times bestseller in both hardcover and paperback, and won the Hugo, Nebula, SFX, Bram Stoker, and Locus Awards.

Coraline (2002), his first novel for children, was a New York Times and international bestseller, was nominated for the Prix Tam Tam, and won the Elizabeth Burr/Worzalla Award, the BSFA Award, the HUGo, the Nebula and the Bram Stoker Award.

2003 saw the publication of bestseller The Wolves in the Walls, a children’s picture book, illustrated by Gaiman's longtime collaborator Dave McKean, which the New York Times named as one of the best illustrated books of the year; and the first Sandman graphic novel in seven years, Endless Nights, the first graphic novel to make the New York Times bestseller list.

In 2004, Gaiman published the a new graphic novel for Marvel called 1602, which was the best-selling comic of 2004, and 2005 saw the Sundance Film Festival premiere of "MirrorMask," a Jim Henson Company Production written by Gaiman and directed by McKean. A lavishly designed book containing the complete script, black and white storyboards, and full-color art from the film will be published by William Morrow in early 2005; a picture book for younger readers, also written by Gaiman and illustrated with art from the movie, will be published by HarperCollins Children's Books at a later date.

In Fall 2005, Anansi Boys, the follow-up to American Gods, was published. This was followed by Interworld (2007) written with Michael Reaves; and The Graveyard Book and Odd and the Frost Giants, both published in 2008.

Interview

'Where do you get your Ideas?'
An Essay by Neil Gaiman

Every profession has its pitfalls. Doctors, for example, are always being asked for free medical advice, lawyers are asked for legal information, morticians are told how interesting a profession that must be and then people change the subject fast. And writers
are asked where we get our ideas from.

In the beginning, I used to tell people the not very funny answers, the flip ones: 'From the Idea-of-the-Month Club,' I'd say, or 'From a little ideas shop in Bognor Regis,' 'From a dusty old book full of ideas in my basement,' or even 'From Pete Atkins.' (The last is slightly esoteric, and may need a little explanation. Pete Atkins is a screenwriter and novelist friend of mine, and we decided a while ago that when asked, I would say that I got them from him, and he'd say he got them from me. It seemed to make sense at the time.)

Then I got tired of the not very funny answers, and these days I tell people the truth:

'I make them up,' I tell them. 'Out of my head.'

People don't like this answer. I don't know why not. They look unhappy, as if I'm trying to slip a fast one past them. As if there's a huge secret, and, for reasons of my own, I'm not telling them how it's done.

And of course I'm not. Firstly, I don't know myself where the ideas really come from, what makes them come, or whether one day they'll stop. Secondly, I doubt anyone who asks really wants a three hour lecture on the creative process. And thirdly, the ideas aren't that important. Really they aren't. Everyone's got an idea for a book, a movie, a story, a TV series.

Every published writer has had it - the people who come up to you and tell you that they've Got An Idea. And boy, is it a Doozy. It's such a Doozy that they want to Cut You In On It. The proposal is always the same - they'll tell you the Idea (the hard bit), you write it down and turn it into a novel (the easy bit), the two of you can split the money fifty-fifty.

I'm reasonably gracious with these people. I tell them, truly, that I have far too many ideas for things as it is, and far too little time. And I wish them the best of luck.

The Ideas aren't the hard bit. They're a small component of the whole. Creating believable people who do more or less what you tell them to is much harder. And hardest by far is the process of simply sitting down and putting one word after another to construct whatever it is you're trying to build: making it interesting, making it new.

But still, it's the question people want to know. In my case, they also want to know if I get them from my dreams. (Answer: no. Dream logic isn't story logic. Transcribe a dream, and you'll see. Or better yet, tell someone an important dream - 'Well, I was in this house that was also my old school, and there was this nurse and she was really an old witch and then she went away but there was a leaf and I couldn't look at it and I knew if I touched it then something dreadful would happen...' - and watch their eyes glaze over.) And I don't give straight answers. Until recently.
My daughter Holly, who is seven years of age, persuaded me to come in to give a talk to her class. Her teacher was really enthusiastic ('The children have all been making their own books recently, so perhaps you could come along and tell them about being a professional writer. And lots of little stories. They like the stories.') and in I came.

They sat on the floor, I had a chair, fifty seven-year-old-eyes gazed up at me. 'When I was your age, people told me not to make things up,' I told them. 'These days, they give me money for it.' For twenty minutes I talked, then they asked questions.

And eventually one of them asked it.

'Where do you get your ideas?'

And I realized I owed them an answer. They weren't old enough to know any better. And it's a perfectly reasonable question, if you aren't asked it weekly.

This is what I told them:

You get ideas from daydreaming. You get ideas from being bored. You get ideas all the time. The only difference between writers and other people is we notice when we're doing it.

You get ideas when you ask yourself simple questions. The most important of the questions is just, What if...?

(What if you woke up with wings? What if your sister turned into a mouse? What if you all found out that your teacher was planning to eat one of you at the end of term - but you didn't know who?)

Another important question is, If only...

(If only real life was like it is in Hollywood musicals. it only I could shrink myself small as a button. If only a ghost would do my homework.)

And then there are the others: I wonder... ('I wonder what she does when she's alone...') and If This Goes On... ('If this goes on telephones are going to start talking to each other, and cut out the middleman...') and Wouldn't it be interesting if... ('Wouldn't it be interesting if the world used to be ruled by cats?')...

Those questions, and others like them, and the questions they, in their turn, pose ('Well, if cats used to rule the world, why don't they any more? And how do they feel about that?') are one of the places ideas come from.

An idea doesn't have to be a plot notion, just a place to begin creating. Plots often generate themselves when one begins to ask oneself questions about whatever the starting paint is.
Sometimes an idea is a person (There's a boy who wants to know about magic'). Sometimes it's a place (There's a castle at the end of time, which is the only place there is...'). Sometimes it's an image ('A woman, sifting in a dark room filled with empty faces.').

Often ideas come from two things coming together that haven't come together before. ('If a person bitten by a werewolf turns into a wolf what would happen if a goldfish was bitten a werewolf? What would happen if a chair was bitten by a werewolf?')

All fiction is a process of imagining: whatever you write, in whatever genre or medium, your task is to make things up convincingly and interestingly, and new.

And when you've an idea - which is, after all, merely something to hold onto as you begin - what then?

Well, then you write. You put one word after another until its finished - whatever it is.

Sometimes it won't work, or not in the way you first imagined. Sometimes it doesn't work at all. Sometimes you throw it out and start again.

I remember, some years ago, coming up with a perfect idea for a Sandman story. It was about a succubus, who gave writers and artists and songwriters ideas, in exchange for some of their lives. I called it Sex and Violets.

It seemed a straightforward story, and it was only when I came to write it I discovered it was like trying to hold fine sand: every time I thought I'd got hold of it, it would trickle through my fingers and vanish.

I wrote at the time:

I've started this story twice, now, and got about half-way through it each time, only to watch it die on the screen.

Sandman is, occasionally a horror comic. But nothing I've written for it has ever gotten under my skin like this story I'm now going to have to wind up abandoning (with the deadline already a thing of the past). Probably because it cuts so close to home. It's the ideas - and the ability to put them down on paper, and turn them into stories, - that make me a writer. That mean I don't have to get up early in the morning and sit on a train with people I don't know, going to a job I despise.

My idea of hell is a blank sheet of paper. Or a blank screen. And me, staring at it, unable to think of a single thing worth saying, a single character that people could believe in, a single story that hasn't been told before.

Staring at a blank sheet of paper.
Forever.

I wrote my way out of it, though. I got desperate (that's another flip and true answer I give to the where-do-you-get-your-ideas question. 'Desperation.' It's up there with 'Boredom' and 'Deadlines'. All these answers are true to a point,) and took my own terror, and the core idea, and crafted a story called Calliope, which explains, I think pretty definitively, where writers get their ideas from. It's in a book called *Dream Country*. You can read it if you like. And, somewhere in the writing of that story, I stopped being scared of the ideas going away.

Where do I get my ideas from?

I make them up.

Out of my head.

**Reading Guide Questions**

**Please be aware that this discussion guide may contain spoilers!**

**About the Book**

When his family is murdered one night by the man Jack, an infant boy toddles unnoticed up the street to the graveyard, where he is taken in and raised by its denizens—ghosts, ghouls, vampires, and werewolves. Such an unusual upbringing affords young Nobody Owens (Bod, for short) just about everything he could wish for, but he still longs for human companionship, news of his family's murderer, and life beyond the graveyard. Bod's pursuit of these things increasingly places him in danger, because the man Jack is still looking for him . . . waiting to finish the job he started.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean are frequent collaborators. How do McKean's illustrations contribute to your reading of the story?
2. There is a rich tradition of orphans in children's literature, as well as a tradition of child-of-destiny themes in fantasy literature. Discuss how Bod fits squarely into both categories.
3. The graveyard is populated with characters we typically think of as evil. How does Gaiman play with this idea, particularly in the characters of Silas, Miss Lupescu, and Eliza Hempstock? What do these characterizations suggest about human nature?
4. From the opening lines, Gaiman is able to hook readers with a distinct narrative voice and a vivid setting. Discuss how both of these elements serve the story.
5. If you are familiar with Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, discuss how *The Graveyard Book* is reminiscent of Kipling's classic tale. How does a familiarity with *The Jungle Book* enhance the reading of Gaiman's story?

6. At the close of the novel, Mrs. Owens sings about embracing the human experience: "Face your life / Its pain, its pleasure, / Leave no path untaken" (p.306). How does this theme resonate throughout the novel?

7. "A graveyard is not normally a democracy, and yet death is the great democracy" (p. 29). How is death the great democracy? How does Gaiman explore the relationship between the dead and the living?

8. It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. How does the graveyard come together to raise this particular child? Describe the special mentoring relationships that Bod has with Silas and Miss Lupescu.

9. Boundaries—between the living and the dead, the graveyard and the world—are an important part of the novel. How does Bod test these boundaries? What are the consequences of Bod's actions?

10. Bod's human interactions are limited to a shortlived friendship with Scarlett and a brief stint at school. Discuss how these experiences change Bod. How do our friendships and associations with others affect us?

11. What do you think of the advice that Bod receives from Nehemiah Trot, the dead poet: "Do not take revenge in the heat of the moment. Instead, wait until the hour is propitious" (p. 233)?

12. How does *The Graveyard Book* compare to Gaiman's first novel for young readers, *Coraline*? Much of *Coraline*'s success can be attributed to its strong and diverse following. What are some of the characteristics of Gaiman's writing that allow for a crossover appeal?

13. Like much of Gaiman's work, *The Graveyard Book* manages to fuse elements of humor, horror, fantasy, and mystery into a single story. Identify examples of these elements and discuss how they work together. How might the story read differently if one or more of these elements were removed?
The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman

Discussion guide written by Andrea Milano.

Summary

Nobody Owens escaped death at a very young age, but it looms everpresent in his life. Everyman Jack is out to find him, and when he does, he'll kill him. Luckily for Nobody, he toddled into a graveyard full of friendly, for the most part, ghosts, who agree to raise, protect and educate him within the safe confines of their world. His Guardian, who travels between both worlds knows what lies in store for Bod out beyond the cemetary gates - but he can't keep Bod within and safe forever. Winner of the 2009 Newbery Award.

Booktalk

A baby, a bloody knife, a graveyard and a man named Jack.

There once was a man called Jack. His mission: to kill an entire family. He was successful. Well almost. One very important family member got away. The most important one, who had just learned to walk, the baby.

That baby toddled himself up the hill to a graveyard where he was taken in by a lovely ghost couple: the Owens. His guardian, Silas, could walk among the living and the dead and protect the baby from harm, but only if the baby remained within the walls of the graveyard. They named the child Nobody. He was raised in the graveyard and trained in many of the necessities: haunting and fading and dream walking. He learned to read and recite poetry and even made a friend among the living who would never remember him. There were, of course, some not-so-pleasant things to learn about as well, such as the Sleer and the Ghouls and the unearthly things that could be released from the ghoul-gates.

Nobody loved his graveyard, but as he got older he longed to go to school and to meet children who were alive, not long dead like his friends at home. Nothing prepared him for what lay outside the graveyard, things that his Guardian could not protect him from.

Jack is still out there, closer than anyone can imagine, and he will stop at nothing to complete his task – to kill Nobody Owens.
Discussion questions

Warning! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

1. Does this book remind you of *Coraline*? If so, what are some of the similar elements?
2. How do the various members of the graveyard contribute to Nobody's upbringing?
3. How do Nobody's relationships with people who are alive affect his outlook on life?
4. If you could learn to fade or to dreamwalk, which would you choose and why?
5. What does Gaiman mean by "...death is the great democracy?" (pg. 29)
6. If you are familiar with *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling, compare it to *The Graveyard Book*.
7. If you were Scarlett, would you rather remember your experiences with Bod, or forget them?
8. What is the importance of Liza Hempstock in Bod's upbringing?

If you liked this book, try

- *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman
- *The Jungle book* by Rudyard Kipling
- *The Last Apprentice* by Joseph Delaney