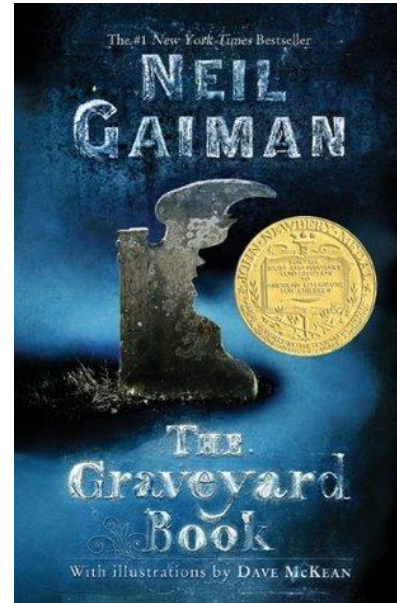


The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman. Illus. by Dave Mckean. Harper, 2008

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. It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. But here it is a graveyard that comes together to raise a child?
Why do you think the Owens’ adopted Bod?
The one character who is neither in the land of the living or the dead is Silas—who is he and why does he take Bod under his care? (Vampire—can get Bod food, Protects Bod—Hunts down the Jack Frosts)
What about Miss Lupescu - what is she and how does she help Bod?
2. Gravestone Epitaphs. Various characters are introduced through their epitaphs. (An epitaph is the inscription found on a tombstone that summarizes and memorializes the deceased. An epitaph poem therefore is very short, and often witty, poem about the deceased.)
Sample epitaphs: Bod’s grammar and composition teacher—Miss Letitia Borrows, Spinster of this Parish “Who did no harm to no man all the days of her life. Reader, can you say likewise?”
Nehemiah Trot—“Swans Sing before they die”
Miss Liberty Roach “What she spent is lost, what she gave remains with her always. Reader, be charitable.”
Why do you think the author used epitaphs to describe the graveyards inhabitants?
3. The Graveyard is populated with characters we typically think of as evil - Vampires, witches, ghouls, werewolves—how are these characters portrayed in the novel?
Usually it is the ghosts that scare us, but the author turns things upside down in this book—here it is the people on the outside who are threatening. What do these characterizations suggest about human nature?

4. Boundaries—between the livings 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?
Bod’s Human interactions are limited to a short-lived friendship with the Scarlett and a brief stint at school. Discuss how these experiences change Bod
5. In the chapter called the Witches grave, why Bod does feels the need to obtain a gravestone for Liza Hempstock, the witch?
What other time does Bod stand up for what he believes in? (Scares the bullies Mo and Nick)
6. Silius tells him he has to leave school, he is becoming too obvious. When Bod defies him and gets Sialas almost killed rescuing him, Bod says “I was selfish.” Do you think Bod was selfish? (p.209)
7. Bod learns how to read and write, but he also needs to learn supernatural or otherworldly skills such as dream walking, fading, and “the fear”. How do these skills help him in the graveyard adventures? Why towards the end of the novel does he begin to loose these skills?
8. In the chapter titled *Dance Macabre*, Bod is surprised to discover that the graveyard folks and the town folks dance together, but no one remembers or wants to talk about it the next day. Why do you think this is so?
9. “A graveyard is not normally a democracy, and yet death is the great democracy” (p.29). How is death the great democracy?
10. 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)?
11. The Sleer lives at the bottom of the steps of the mausoleum guarding the treasure, and Bod has a number of encounters with him over the years. Why do you think the Sleer wanted Bod as his master? Why do you think Bod knew what would happen to Jack Frost?
12. At the close of the novel, Mrs. Owens sings about embracing the human experience: “Face your life it’s pain, its pleasure, / Leave no path untaken” (p.306). What do you think she means by this?
13. This book has illustrations at the beginning of each chapter, and a spot art throughout the book. How does the art contribute to the story?

Several of the questions above were based on material from *The Graveyard Book*,
Reading Group Guide. www.mousecircus.com, www.harpercollinschildrens.com