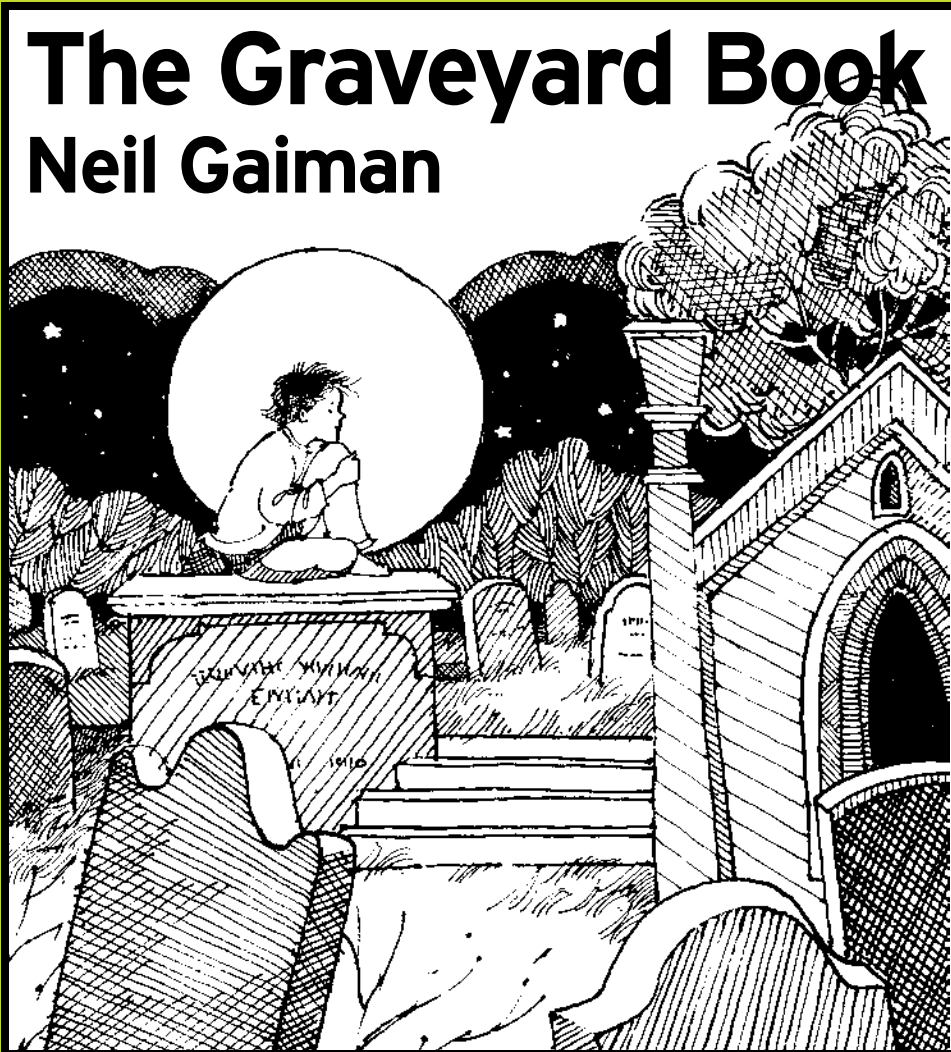


Novel·Ties

# The Graveyard Book

Neil Gaiman



## A Study Guide

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**LEARNING LINKS**

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## For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide to use in conjunction with the novel *The Graveyard Book* consists of lessons for guided reading. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel at its own reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for reading development by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits, formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques, will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

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## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Preview the book by reading the title and author's name and by looking at the cover illustration. Based on the title, what predictions can you make about this novel's setting? Now browse through the book looking at some of the illustrations. How would you describe some of the characters? What do you think the book will be about? Will it tell a realistic or a fantastic story? Have you read any other books by this author or seen movies based on his work?
2. The central character in this novel is a young boy who is orphaned. What other novels have you read that involved orphaned characters? What unique challenges did these characters face at different stages in their childhood? To whom did these characters turn to help them meet their physical, social, and emotional needs?
3. In 2009, *The Graveyard Book* was presented with the top prize for children's literature, the John Newbery Award. Think about other award-winning books you have read. What qualities do these books have in common? As you read this novel, decide why it was selected to receive this prestigious award. If you have read any other recent Newbery medal recipients, consider how this novel differs in terms of its language, its themes, and its appeal.
4. In an interview with National Public Radio soon after *The Graveyard Book* won the Newbery award, the author revealed that he had been working on this novel off and on for over twenty years. Think of a long-term project that you have completed. What special challenges did this project present? How did you maintain your interest and commitment over time? How did you know when the project was finished? In the end, did it meet your expectations? How did you feel when it was completed and you finally shared it with others?
5. *The Graveyard Book* is classified as a gothic fantasy. Typically, gothic novels are characterized by a gloomy setting, grotesque characters, mysterious or violent events, and an atmosphere of decay. As you read, determine what specific details make this book a gothic novel.
6. Nobody—Bod for short—the central character in the book, receives his name because he looks like Nobody but himself. What other meaning might this name have for a child who is the only living inhabitant of a graveyard? What might it reveal about his personality? Think about your name. Does it have a special meaning or origin? In your opinion, does your name reflect or suit your personality?
7. A novel's theme is its central idea or message. Boundaries between life and death and between the graveyard and the world beyond, as well as the physical and emotional boundaries adults place on young people are important themes in this novel. In a small group, discuss the concept of boundaries and whether they are necessary. Speculate what might happen if a young person was raised in an environment without boundaries or limits.

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## Chapter 1: How Nobody Came to the Graveyard (cont.)

Read to find out how Nobody ended up in the graveyard.

### Questions:

1. Why did the man Jack visit the tall house on the side of the hill? How did he track his prey?
2. How did the baby manage to escape the fate of his family?
3. Why did Mistress Owens feel an obligation to protect the baby? How did she and the mysterious stranger named Silas save him?
4. How did the baby get his name? How did Mr. and Mrs. Owens and Silas propose to raise him?
5. Who was the Lady on the Grey? How did she help settle the dispute in the graveyard?
6. Why did Silas pay a visit to the tall house on the side of the hill? How did he react to his discovery?

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think the author omitted a detailed description of the triple murder? Do you think this decision adds to or subtracts from the horror of this act?
2. Silas is described as a solitary stranger who belongs neither to the world of the living nor to the world of the dead. What peculiar habits and attributes does he seem to possess? What predictions can you make about him at this point in the story?
3. Suppose you were a member of the graveyard community. How would you vote on allowing Nobody the Freedom of the Graveyard?
4. Why do you think the man Jack murdered the family members and was hunting for the baby?
5. What do you think the author meant when he stated that “death is the great democracy”? Do you agree with this statement?
6. Usually a graveyard at night is depicted as a scary place. How did the author create a graveyard scene that was comfortable enough to house a living baby?