

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Graveyard Book

by Neil Gaiman

written by Lisa Tetrault

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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.

Terms and Definitions

Allusion - a reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize; **Example:** In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom speaks of “Chamberlain’s umbrella,” a reference to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

Antagonist - the person or force that is in conflict with, or opposes, the protagonist; **Example:** Nurse Ratched opposes McMurphy throughout *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

Ballad Stanza - a stanza of four lines of poetry with a rhyme scheme of abcb; **Example:**

It is an ancient Mariner, [A]

And he stoppeth one of three. [B]

‘By thy long grey beard and glittering eye. [C]

Now wherefore stopp’st thou me?’ [B]

—*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Black Humor - Grotesque subjects like death, disease, war, insanity, etc. are presented humorously in order to point out their absurdity. **Example:** Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*.

Cliché - a familiar word or phrase that is used so often that it is no longer fresh or meaningful, but trite; **Example:** “All’s well that ends well.”

Coming of Age - a novel or other work of literature in which the main character or characters grow, mature, or understand the world in adult terms; **Examples:** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; *The Cay*

Dialect - a particular kind of speech used by members of one specific group because of its geographical location or class; **Example:** Jim, in *Huckleberry Finn* says, “Shet de do” (“Shut the door”).

Diction - the choice that the author makes about which words to use; diction can be formal, as in a textbook, informal, as in a book intended for the public, figurative, as in a poem, or it can fit into numerous other categories.

Digression - an interruption of the main action, accomplished by telling stories unrelated to the main plot; this technique serves to provide background information, explain character motivation, establish interest, build suspense, and/or inform the reader of the action to come. **Example:** The main story in *The Iliad* frequently is interrupted to supply background information about characters.

Epigraph - a short quotation that appears in front of a poem, a book, or a chapter, explaining something about what follows; **Example:** T. S. Eliot places a quotation from Dante's *Inferno* before the poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, which gives the reader an additional method of understanding that Eliot's poem deals with a person in Hell.

Episodic Novel - a novel made up of a succession of loosely connected incidents, rather than through an integrated, chronological plot; **Example:** *The House on Mango Street*

Epitaph - an inscription on a tombstone; **Example:** Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* is written as a series of verse memories from dead citizens based on their epitaphs.

Foil - a character whose qualities or actions usually serve to emphasize the actions or qualities of the main character, the protagonist, by providing a strong contrast; on occasion, the foil is used as a contrast to a character other than the main one. **Examples:** Hotspur contrasts Prince Hal in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*; the Roadrunner of cartoon fame uses Wile E. Coyote as his foil.

Foreshadowing - the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come; foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense. **Example:** Two small and seemingly inconsequential car accidents predict and hint at the upcoming, important wreck in *The Great Gatsby*.

Imagery - the use of words to evoke impressions and meanings that are more than just the basic, accepted definitions of the words themselves; **Example:** The quotation, "Get thee to a nunnery," from *Hamlet* implies that Ophelia must regain her purity and chastity and does not simply mean that she needs to go to a convent.

Inference - the act of drawing a conclusion that is not actually stated by the author; **Example:** In *The Pigman*, John and Lorraine are writing a "memorial epic" about Mr. Pignati. Therefore, the reader may logically assume that Mr. Pignati dies in the book.

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

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?

Chapter 4 – The Witch’s Headstone

VOCABULARY

abide – to accept, allow, or endure
affability – friendliness; approachability
avarice – greed
desiccated – dried up
evasive – not direct; avoiding
groat – an England silver coin from the late Middle Ages
guileless – sincere; honest; straightforward
hasten – to hurry
inquisitive – curious; wanting to learn more
lorry – a truck
lummox – a clumsy, stupid person
pearlescent – having shine like that of a pearl
pertly – boldly forward; sassily
promiscuous – haphazard
tentatively – uncertainly, hesitantly
unshriven – without penance or absolution
warren – a crowded district with many passages
wheedling – persuading with soft words or flattery
whirligig – something that whirls or spins

1. How does Bod’s curiosity about the far corner of the graveyard show that he is getting older?

2. With which of Mr. Pennyworth’s lessons is Bod having particular difficulty?

Chapter 6 – Nobody Owens’ School Days

VOCABULARY

abated – lessened; diminished
apoplexy – bleeding within internal organs; great anger
bollocking – [slang] a severe reprimand
bounders – scoundrels; people who misbehave
cutlass – a type of sword
gloaming – dusk
hilt – the handle of a sword
obstinately – stubbornly
pell-mell – recklessly hurried; disorderly
reprehensible – terrible, awful
rue – to regret
strobing – moving in an irregular or intermittent manner

1. What did Bod do that angered Thackeray Porringer?

2. When Silas tells Bod that the man who murdered his family still intends to kill him, how does Bod react?

3. Silas responds to Bod’s nonchalance about death by asserting that Bod has “infinite potential” as long as he is living. What does Silas mean by that? Is Bod able to fulfill that potential while he is living in the graveyard? Explain your answer.

4. Mrs. Owens sings the song to Bod that she sang when he was little. Describe how the song relates to Bod’s adventures and explain the added meaning of the last lines.

5. What does Bod leave the graveyard with?

6. Do you think Bod is prepared to face the world? Explain your answer.
