

# The graveyard book



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

A happy childhood is often described as one characterized by love, family, and a sense of security. Many adults are wont to complain that some disruptive behavior is due to some distant unfortunate event in their childhood which may have affected their coping mechanisms as they matured, a commonplace, yet unpleasant, statement widely accepted by psychiatrists. A certain question now arises in my medically inclined mind: what would psychiatrists predict for the little boy Nobody Owens? Nobody, or Bod, is the main character of Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, the strange yet enlightening tale of a boy who was orphaned early in life and was then adopted by a charming couple, Mr. and Mrs. Owens, who turn out to be ghosts.

The story is set in the fictional village of Old Town, a sleepy little village with a dreamlike quality about it. Within this quiet stretch of land is a graveyard, now unused and abandoned. It has been turned into a nature reserve and it is in this precise location that Bod finds himself as he escapes the murderer of his family. Raised by the graveyard's phantasmal inhabitants and his mysterious guardian Silas, Bod grows up into a curious and pleasant boy. He encounters ghouls, werewolves, and a monstrous slithering creature hiding beneath the hill of the graveyard. He also manages to make friends with a girl, who visits the graveyard from time to time. While he is growing up, he is taught to read, to fade through walls and slip through shadows, and other uncanny abilities.

Surprisingly entertaining despite the occasional macabre and hair-raising plights, Edinger (2009) calls Gaiman's creation a "novel of wonder...weaving a tale of unforgettable enchantment." Common themes of familial closeness

and zest for life are cleverly incorporated into this masterpiece. The subtleties with which these cherished values are imparted to readers are completely endearing. While I read the book, I was entranced to the point that I could not help but nervously look over my shoulder to see if there was a ghoulish gate opening its jaws to swallow me into the dark city of Ghulheim, leading me to doubt if this truly was a children's book. Although I generally do not favor the style which Howard (2009) describes as "the episodic nature of the book," I found it completely appropriate for this tale. Since it is a children's book, one would expect a story that can be told in chapters, thus making it easier for parents to read a portion of the story every night before bedtime. Finally, admitting that the book was influenced by Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* by no means diminishes Gaiman's skill in delivering this tale. For this reason, he was awarded the Newbery Medal which honors outstanding contribution to American children's literature.

Going back to my original question, I continue to wonder what conclusions psychiatrists would draw up regarding Bod. After all, his family was murdered, he was raised in a graveyard by specters, and he has been in so many frightening situations enough to terrify a full-grown man. Would they say that he would grow up to be a disturbed young man because of his experiences? Or would those same experiences have molded him to become stronger than the rest of us? Personally, I believe the love and warmth with which Bod's ghost family accepted him has already made up for the loss of his real one. Whichever the case, I only make this point to show how curious I am about what Bod will ultimately become. As Gaiman's daughter Maddy so

nonchalantly asked after her father read her the first chapter he wrote, I, too, can only ask, “ What happens next?”

One thing is certain though, with Bod’s enthusiasm to live his life to the fullest, his life outside the safety of the graveyard would be peppered with new adventures and characters as elaborate and lively as those resting in his home.

### **REFERENCES:**

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