

“The Graveyard Book” Provides Reading Fun for Range of Students

by Laura Whitehead

Neil Richard Gaiman was born November 10, 1960, in Hampshire, UK. In 1992 he moved to the United States and currently is a professor at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, where he teaches in the Theater and Performance and Written Arts departments. He writes short stories, comics, poetry, song lyrics, and novels for all ages and across many genres. He also writes and directs for both television and movies.

Neil Gaiman began his writing career in the early 1980's as a journalist. He conducted interviews and wrote book reviews. In 1984 his first short story, “Featherquest”, was published as well as his first book, a biography of Duran Duran. He is a prolific writer and has published an extremely long list of varied titles since those first works. He is also listed in the “Dictionary of Literary Biography” as one of the top ten living post-modern writers.

However, it was almost 25 years after his first works were published that I read my first Neil Gaiman book. I had been intrigued by his work, but with so many authors and so many books he seemed to be perpetually on my list of “Authors Whose Works I Intend to Read Someday”.

In the fall of 2008 he published “The Graveyard Book”. The target audience was children in grades five through eight. The book received exceptional reviews and made Gaiman the first author to win both the Newbery Medal and the UK CILIP Carnegie Medal for the same book. Among other awards, the book also won the UK's Booktrust Prize for Teenage Fiction, the Locus Young Adult Award, and the Hugo Best Novel Prize.

Therefore, when I began my new job as a school librarian in the fall of 2009, “The Graveyard Book” was one of the first books that I ordered for the school library. After it arrived I could not wait to read it. I was not disappointed; the book was very well-written and engaging with just the right amount of scary.

The book opens as a toddler escapes his home after the rest of his family is brutally killed by someone he calls “the man Jack”. The toddler makes his way into a graveyard where the spirits decide to adopt and protect him. They name him Nobody Owens, giving him the nickname, Bod. The book is similar in some ways to “The Jungle Book”, but with a graveyard being the setting instead of a jungle and spirits taking care of the child instead of animals.

As Bod's various graveyard adventures are chronicled in the book, the underlying tension becomes who is the man Jack and why did he kill Bod's family. When Bod finally meets the man Jack, he must use all of the graveyard tricks he has learned to survive.

A film adaptation of “The Graveyard Book” has been in the works for nearly 9 years. Although there is still no definite time line for the production of the film, currently Ron Howard is the probable director.

The library has copies of “The Graveyard Book” in print, digital, and audio formats, as well as many of Neil Gaiman's other works for children, young adults, and adults.