

CBLDF Discussion Guide



Blankets

by Craig Thompson

Given their visual nature, comics are easy targets for would-be censors. CBLDF's Discussion Guides are tools that can be used to lead conversations about challenged graphic novels and to help allay misconceptions about comics.

Synopsis

Blankets tells the story of Craig, a painfully shy Christian teenager who lives in a very small town in Wisconsin. He is awkward and has few close friendships outside of his relationship with his brother Pete. The two were close when they were growing up, but drifted apart in Craig's teenage years. During Bible camp, Craig meets and shares an almost immediate bond with Raina, a girl from Michigan. As the two correspond after camp, their friendship deepens. Craig convinces his parents to let him stay at Raina's house for two weeks, during which time Craig wrestles with his faith, his desire for Raina, and the knowledge that his time with her short.

Themes

First love, coming-of-age, teenage sexuality, religious faith, family relationships, child abuse

Reasons Challenged

Sexuality, nudity

Suggested Age Range

High school and up

Discussion Questions

Remembering

1. What kind of a person is Craig? How would you describe his relationships with his family and friends?
2. How does Craig's faith in Christianity shape his life? What are some moments in the story in which we see his faith play a significant role in his life?

Understanding

3. The book is called *Blankets*. What blankets do we see in the story, and what do they represent?
4. How does Craig's relationship with religion change over the course of the story? Consider the sequence on pages 197–224, the image of Jesus smiling on page 431, and the Ecclesiastes story that Craig reads in the last chapter. What do each of these moments indicate about how Craig understands his faith?

Applying

5. Why do Craig and Raina stop speaking with each other after he returns home from his visit?
6. In the book, Craig shares a bed with two different people: Pete and Raina. How are these experiences similar? How do they differ?

Analyzing

7. Craig and Raina are very different people. What do you think they see in each other? Given the differences in their personalities and the difficulties they experience during their time together, do you think either sees the other for who he or she actually is? Explain your reasoning.

8. Consider the stories that Craig and Raina share with each other starting on page 406. How do their childhood experiences relate to the characters' budding sexuality?
9. How did Thompson's artistic style affect you as a reader? In what ways was reading this book different from biographical prose that you have read?

Evaluating

10. At the beginning of the story, Craig burns his drawings because he believes that his art gets in the way of his Bible studies. At the end of the book, Craig burns all of his letters, pictures, and remembrances of Raina. How are these two acts related?
11. Though the story focuses on everyday events, the book is filled with beautiful, surrealistic sequences and fantastic asides. What are ways in which Thompson plays with the form of the story, the layout of pages, the sequence of time, and reality itself to convey his tale?

Creating

12. *Blankets* was challenged at a library in Missouri because a patron thought that the images in the book were pornographic. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, pornography is defined as "printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic or emotional feelings." Based on the Oxford definition, was the patron correct in her assumptions? Explain your reasoning.

Activities

Writing

Choose a prose novel that also deals with sexuality, first love, or religious faith. After reading the novel, write an essay in which you compare the book to *Blankets*. Examine how Thompson's art affects the storytelling, and make predictions about the ways in which artwork might change the storytelling in the prose novel.

Illustration

Thompson uses the visual medium of graphic novels to create a personal connection with readers, using images to help them understand what he was thinking, seeing, and feeling. Create your own mini-comic about a life experience. You may either illustrate it yourself or use found photos and pictures to tell your story.

Poster Project

Visit your local library or use the internet to examine the work of various artists, including comic book artists. Identify artists who you think might have influenced Thompson's artwork. Make a poster that shows the work of these artists and compares it to pages from *Blankets*. Be sure to include citations for your sources. Discuss your conclusions with peers who have also read the book.

For more about attempts to censor *Blankets*, visit <http://cbldf.org/banned-comic/banned-challenged-comics/case-study-blankets/>

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the First Amendment rights of the comics art form and its community of retailers, creators, publishers, librarians, and readers. CBLDF provides legal referrals, representation, advice, assistance, and education in furtherance of these goals.
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