

CBLDF Discussion Guide



Watchmen

by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons

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

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* is an alternate history in which a group of retired crimefighters investigates the murder of one of their own during an era in which costumed vigilantes have been outlawed. The graphic novel incorporates Cold War-era anxieties and non-linear storytelling to function as commentary on both the superhero genre and American society. It received a Hugo Award in 1988 and was instrumental in garnering more respect and shelf space for comics and graphic novels in libraries and mainstream bookstores.

Themes

Fascism, free will, moral relativism, ends justifying the means, superheroes, defining justice, questioning authority, taking responsibility

Reasons Challenged

Unsuited to age group, nudity

Suggested Age Range

High school and above

Discussion Questions

Remembering

1. How does *Watchmen* reflect the era during which it was written and in which it is set?

Understanding

2. Are there any true heroes in *Watchmen*? Are there any true villains? Explain your reasoning.
3. How does Moore use multimodal text — news articles, comics, traditional text, static images, etc. — to build the world of *Watchmen*?

Applying

4. One of the most compelling features of *Watchmen* is how it deconstructs the superhero genre. What were some pre-conceived notions you had about superheroes before reading *Watchmen*? How did they change as you read the book?
5. Many panels of *Watchmen* create a sense of ironic tension between what the reader sees visually and what the reader is told is happening. How does this influence the story? Are the narrators reliable? Why or why not?

Analyzing

6. *Watchmen* was intended to be read and absorbed over multiple readings. How does the graphic novel format encourage this? Does it make it prohibitive in any way? Explain your reasoning.
7. At the end of *Watchmen*, we see a conversation between Dr. Manhattan and Adrian Ozymandias, questioning if the latter's actions during the book were justified. Were they? Explain your reasoning.
8. Would it have been possible for Moore to tell the story in *Watchmen* using another medium? Why or why not?

Evaluating

9. Throughout the book, we see the graffiti tag, “Who watches The Watchmen?” Who would you say are The Watchmen in our society? What role might censorship play for these Watchmen?
10. *Watchmen* has been widely considered to be Alan Moore’s commentary on the death of the superhero genre in comics. Conversely, in this and his other works, Moore routinely introduces the idea of flawed, multifaceted characters who have superpowers, creating an entirely new genre of gritty superhero stories. Apply each point of view to your favorite character from *Watchmen*. Did Moore destroy the idea of superheroes or did he create an even more compelling superhero archetype?

Creating

11. *Watchmen* is considered one of the most influential graphic novels of all time. How do you think it has impacted other comics and media?

Activities

Using Media

Imagine that you are a journalist who is tasked with covering the events described in *Watchmen*. Is there information that you would not share with the public? Why or why not? Create a fictional blog, microblog, news website, print publication, or videotaped report to share the story.

Illustration

Alan Moore used archetypes of popular superheroes as a platform for his characters in *Watchmen*. Pick one of your personal heroes, living or dead, and turn him or her into a superhero. Find a photo or drawing of your hero, and using any medium you like, create a costume. What does your hero’s costume say about him or her? Against what is your hero fighting? Does he or she have a nemesis? How do the qualities that made this person your hero translate into his or her super self?

Digital Presentation

Alan Moore had originally planned to use existing comic book characters in *Watchmen*, but he was asked to create new characters instead. Research and identify the characters that Moore originally wanted to use. Then, create a digital slideshow that compares these characters to the new characters that Moore developed for the series. Describe how the characters Moore used in *Watchmen* differ from and are similar to the characters he originally wanted to use. Include citations of your sources in your presentation.

For more about attempts to censor *Watchmen*, visit <http://cblddf.org/banned-comic/banned-challenged-comics/case-study-watchmen/>

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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