

CBLDF Discussion Guide



Batman: The Killing Joke **by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland**

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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

Batman: The Killing Joke is a touchstone in the Batman universe. It begins with Batman discovering that his long-time nemesis, the Joker, has escaped from Arkham Asylum. Joker, on a mission to prove that “one bad day” could lead to insanity, shoots and paralyzes Barbara “Batgirl” Gordon and kidnaps her father, Gotham City’s Police Commissioner James Gordon. The Joker then humiliates and terrorizes Commissioner Gordon in an debilitated former amusement park, hoping to drive him mad. Batman ultimately faces off with the Joker, and flashbacks of the Joker’s past are woven throughout the story.

Themes

Loss, crime, moral relativism, defining justice

Reasons Challenged

Violence, nudity

Suggested Age Range

High school and up

Discussion Questions

Remembering

1. What happens in the Joker’s life to make him turn to crime?
2. Why does the Joker target Barbara Gordon?

Understanding

3. Why is this story entitled *The Killing Joke*?

Applying

4. What did you know about the Joker before reading this story? Did revelations about his past change your perception of the character?
5. How do Bolland’s coloring techniques and use of reds between the present and past shape the story?

Analyzing

6. What would have happened to the Joker if he had decided not to go through with the crimes he committed in his past? Would he have become the villain he is today? Explain your reasoning.
7. Considering the Joker’s “one bad day” theory, do you think Batman could have become a villain like the Joker? Why or why not?

8. Critics argue that Batman and the Joker are mirror images of each other in terms of their tragic pasts. Do you agree? How are they similar? How do they differ?

Evaluating

9. What are the roles of women in *The Killing Joke*, and how do they shape your understanding of the story?
10. *The Killing Joke* is considered by many to be one of the best Batman stories ever told. Why do you think this is, and what impact has the book had on comics and other characters in the Batman universe?

Creating

11. The ending of *The Killing Joke* has been a major point of controversy and debate. What do you think happened between Batman and the Joker?

Activities

Illustration

With the ending of *The Killing Joke* presumably left to the reader's interpretation, create a storyboard for the next three panels. Consider Commissioner's Gordon stance on justice "by the book" when drawing your story.

Writing

Research different types of mental illnesses and the definition of insanity. Apply what you learn to the Joker, Batman, and Barbara Gordon. Write a scholarly paper that predicts the illnesses each character could be suffering from now or in the future.

Digital Presentation

Several classic Batman villains were presented in *The Killing Joke*: the Joker, Two-Face, Penguin, and the Red Hood. Research the backgrounds of these characters and how they became villains. Then, compare their different iterations in other Batman graphic novels, television, and movies. Create a digital slideshow that incorporates your research and identifies each character's "one bad day." Include citations of your sources in your presentation.

For more about attempts to censor *Batman: The Killing Joke*, visit <http://cblddf.org/banned-comic/banned-challenged-comics/case-study-batman-the-killing-joke/>

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