

# CBLDF Discussion Guide

## **Sandman: Dream Country**

**by Neil Gaiman with art by Kelly Jones, Malcolm Jones III, Colleen Doran, & Charles Vess**



*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**

Dream Country is a collection of four independent stories: “Calliope,” which focuses on the imprisonment and abuse of the muse Calliope; “A Dream of a Thousand Cats,” in which cats seek to change the world through dreams; “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” during which William Shakespeare puts on a play for Faerie, and “Facade,” which portrays the despair of an immortal superhero.

### **Themes**

Entrapment, rebellion, escape, vulnerability, loss.

### **Reasons Challenged**

Unsuited to age group

### **Suggested Age Range**

High school and up

### **Discussion Questions**

#### **Remembering**

1. How do the font and word balloons for Madoc change as he is driven to madness in “Calliope”?

#### **Understanding**

2. Dream and Calliope clearly have a complicated past. How does this influence Dream’s decision to rescue Calliope and secure her release from captivity?
3. In “Facade,” Rainie is the physical embodiment of a superhero myth, struggling to find peace and die. How has her life been warped and shaped by myth?

#### **Applying**

4. In “A Dream of a Thousand Cats,” Gaiman writes that “dreams shape the world.” What do you think he means by such a statement?
5. “A Dream of a Thousand Cats” is clearly written as a fable with a moral. What is the moral of this fable?

#### **Analyzing**

6. How did both Madoc and Shakespeare’s ambition cloud their judgement? How did their decisions impact those around them? Was the price they paid for success worthwhile?
7. In “Facade,” Rainie uses a mask to hide her true appearance. Why is Rainie, a superhero, so frightened to reveal her reality?

## Evaluating

8. Each tale in *Dream Country* focuses on the power of myth and story. How does each story use both art and text to convey this?
9. Death visits Rainie rather than Dream. How and why is this significant?
10. The writers in “Calliope” go to great lengths to imprison her and overcome their writer’s block. What does this say about their obsessive need to not only create, but to become famous? To what extremes have other creators gone in order to maintain their craft?

## Creating

11. In “Calliope,” Madoc rapes his muse and holds her captive. Traditionally, writers would have wooed their muse and engaged in a mutual relationship. How does Madoc and Fry’s brutal treatment of Calliope, their creative inspiration, defile and disregard the creative process?

## Activities

### Illustration

Research the mythological origins of Calliope. Identify her relationships, offspring, and major events in her life. Use what you learn to make a comic book that depicts the Calliope myth.

### Further Reading

Poet T.S. Elliot wrote a short collection called *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*, which compiles several poems that explore the social relationships among cats, including their personal identity. Visit your local library to find a copy of the book. Select a poem and read it for your class. Discuss how the poems in the book might have influenced Gaiman or how it changes your perception of “A Dream of a Thousand Cats.”

### Digital Presentation

Research bezoars, both as scientific phenomena and mythological objects. Identify different kinds of bezoars, their causes, and their supposed functions. Create a digital presentation of your findings.

### Journaling

Imagine that you have gained superpowers but that your appearance is changed drastically because of the superpowers, as happened to Rainie. Write a journal that explores how you think you would use your superpowers and how you would respond to the change in appearance.

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

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