

# CBLDF Discussion Guide

## **Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes**

by Neil Gaiman with art by Sam Keith, Mike Dringenberg, & Malcolm Jones III



*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**

In the first volume of *Sandman*, readers are introduced to the series' central character, Dream. After 70 years imprisonment by an occultist and his son, Dream must undertake a journey to recover three objects of power: a pouch of sand, a helm, and a ruby. In doing so, Dream battles a drug addict, demon, and madman and incurs the wrath of Lucifer. The volume collects the first eight issues of the series and also introduces readers to Dream's older sister, Death.

### **Themes**

Hero's journey, revenge, picking up the pieces, taking responsibility for one's actions

### **Reasons Challenged**

Unsuited to age group

### **Suggested Age Range**

High school and up

### **Discussion Questions**

#### **Remembering**

1. What are some of the other names used to refer to Dream used throughout *Preludes and Nocturnes*?
2. What are some ways in which Dream's appearance changes based on who is interacting with him?

#### **Understanding**

3. What are some visual and verbal cues in "Dream a Little Dream if Me" that foreshadow the events that will take place before the issue concludes?

#### **Applying**

4. What is the importance of names in *Preludes and Nocturnes*?
5. How are lettering styles and word balloon styles employed to differentiate characters and events in the story?

#### **Analyzing**

6. In "24 Hours," how do Bette's story versions of the customers in the cafe contrast with the actual behavior and thoughts of the characters?
7. How do the artists use visual elements to differentiate between the battle between Doctor Destiny and Dream and the parallel story relating the impact of Doctor Destiny's actions on people around the world?
8. The fonts and word balloon style used for Death's speech is very similar to that used for other mortal human characters in the story. How does this reflect Death's relationship with humans?

## Evaluating

9. Dream's face isn't revealed until more than 20 pages of the story have passed. Why do you think the creators chose to wait to reveal his appearance?
10. After his escape, Dream expresses his anger over his imprisonment. What is he most angry about: that he was captured in the first place, that he was captured by a mortal human, or that he was imprisoned for 70 years? Explain your reasoning.
11. How does Gaiman's depiction of Death differ from classic depictions of the character, such as the Grim Reaper?

## Creating

12. What impact do you think Dream's imprisonment will have on his actions in future volumes of the series?

## Activities

### Poster Project

Several characters from the DC Comics universe make an appearance in *Preludes and Nocturnes*. John Constantine, Martian Manhunter, Mister Miracle, Scarecrow, Wesley Dodds, and Doctor Destiny are just a few of the characters that Gaiman included in the volume. Choose one of these characters and investigate his or her origin. Use what you learn to make a poster that compares previous incarnations of the character to Gaiman's version of the character.

### Writing

In "24 Hours," the character Bette writes short stories about the people who visit her cafe. Pretend you are Bette, and write a short story about Doctor Destiny or Dream. Give the character you chose the "happy ending" that Bette usually gives the subjects of her short stories.

### Digital Presentation

The Hecateae are given several different names during *Preludes and Nocturnes*. Research these names and identify the origin of each. Then, investigate the Mother-Maiden-Crone mythos on which the character is based. Use what you learn to make a digital presentation that defines each name and the mythological history of the character.

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

**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.**  
[www.cblddf.org](http://www.cblddf.org)