Neil Gaiman loves Halloween but that doesn't mean he loves horror — he'll write horror, he says, but only in moderation. Book club member Sarah Matthews, 14, wrote in to ask Gaiman how he made such a dark and creepy subject feel so approachable.

"I'll tend to use horror as a condiment," he explains, "in the way that you might add salt or ketchup to a meal. You just want to add a little to make it taste a little bit better, but you definitely don't want a meal that's all salt or all ketchup."

*The Graveyard Book* opens with a dash of horror: *There was a hand in the darkness, and it held a knife...*

It's a murderous knife — one that has just killed the family of the protagonist the readers are about to meet. Gaiman was convinced this was not too much for kids, and that they would keep reading. "[I] wanted to make it very, very scary upfront, because it's never that scary again," Gaiman says.

When we asked young listeners to send us their questions about *The Graveyard Book*, many wrote in to ask how Gaiman dreamt up this imaginative story.

It began 25 years ago, Gaiman explains, when he and his family lived in "a very tall, spindly building." His son was 2 years old at the time and loved to ride his tricycle — but the building didn't have a yard or garden where he could play. So Gaiman used to take his son across the lane to a country churchyard — where there were gravestones that went back 800 years.

"He would just pedal his tricycle happily and run around in the little country graveyard," Gaiman recalls. "I remember just one day thinking: He looks so comfortable here. And it was as if a little door opened in my head."

Gaiman suddenly had the idea to write a book about a child raised in a graveyard. It would be sort of like Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, in which an abandoned boy is raised by wild animals and taught all the things the animals know. *The Graveyard Book,* Gaiman decided, would be about a child "raised by dead people and taught all the things that dead people know."

Book club member Amelia Herron, was curious how Gaiman might describe *The Graveyard Book* to someone who had never heard of it before.

Gaiman says he'd describe the book as eight short stories — each story taking place two years after the story before it. It follows the first 16 years of the life of young Nobody Owens — his friends call him Bod — who takes refuge in a graveyard after his family is killed. And though he's raised by dead people, Bod learns the value of life.

"In many ways, for me, *The Graveyard Book* was a book about life," Gaiman says. "Because you can talk about life and community and family in ways you might not have seen them described before."

Anna Jaffe, is reading the book along with her friend Sadie. They wrote in to say that their favorite character in the book so far is Silas — and wanted to know which character Gaiman liked best. Turns out, Silas is Gaiman's favorite, too.

"Writing Silas — who's not really alive and isn't really part of the Graveyard — was enormously fun for me," Gaiman says.

Many book club members said that they felt a strong connection to Bod and were curious to know what happens to him at the end. But that's not a question that Gaiman wants to answer for his young readers.

Q&A WITH NEIL

**Q: Did you know all along what kind of creature Silas was, or did it come to you as you were writing? Miss Lepescu?**

A: I knew them, and what they were, pretty much before I knew anything else. Originally I thought that Miss Lupescu would be there from the start, but when I wrote the book she didn’t turn up until Chapter Three.

**Q: Besides the ghoul gate, are there other special passageways to be found in a graveyard?**

A: I think every graveyard, and every grave, will take you somewhere.

**Q: I always cry when I read the end of *The Graveyard Book*. Do you ever cry when you read your own books? Is there any other book that makes you cry?**

A: I got pretty sniffly on the last few pages of *The Graveyard Book*, when I wrote the first draft in longhand, late at night down at the bottom of the garden in the February cold. I used to get angry when books made my eyes sting, as if the author or the book had somehow taken advantage of me. Now I think it’s wonderful that I can be made to care.

Directions: After reading the article about Neil Gaiman answer the questions below using complex or complex-compound sentences. Pay attention to which subordinating conjunctions you use because they show different types of relationships between ideas. Underline the subordinating conjunction in your sentence.

**Example** QUESTION: Why did we read an article about Neil Gaiman?

ANSWER: Ms. Norr had us read this article because Neil Gaiman wrote our class novel *The Graveyard Book.*

|  |
| --- |
| **Subordinating conjunctions show these relationships:** |
| **Time:** | after, as soon as, before, once, when, whenever, while |
| **Reason:** | as, because, since, so that, whereas |
| **Condition:** | as, as though, if, provided that, unless, whether |
| **Contrast or surprise:** | although, even though, than, though |
| **Place:** | everywhere, where, wherever |

**1. Why did Neil make the beginning of this book so scary?**

**2. How did Neil come up with the idea for this book?**

**3. Why did Neil say this book is about Life?**

**4. Who is his favorite character and why?**

**5. Why was Miss Lupescu not in the book until Chapter 3?**

**6. How does Neil feel about books that make him cry?**

**7. Why do you like, or dislike this this book?**