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Book Club in a Box

CORALINE

About the Book

Coraline lives with her preoccupied parents in part of a huge old house--a house so huge that other people live in it, too... round, old former actresses Miss Spink and Miss Forcible and their aging Highland terriers and the mustachioed old man under the roof. Coraline contents herself for weeks with exploring the vast garden and grounds. But with a little rain she becomes bored--so bored that she begins to count everything blue, the windows, and the doors. And it is the 14th door that--sometimes blocked with a wall of bricks--opens up for Coraline into an entirely alternate universe. Now, if you're thinking fondly of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* or *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, you're on the wrong track. Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* is far darker, far stranger, playing on our deepest fears. And, like Roald Dahl's work, it is delicious.

What's on the other side of the door? A distorted-mirror world, containing presumably everything Coraline has ever dreamed of... people who pronounce her name correctly (not "Caroline"), delicious meals (not like her father's overblown "recipes"), an unusually pink and green bedroom (not like her dull one), and plenty of horrible (very un-boring) marvels, like a man made out of live rats. The creepiest part, however, is her mirrored parents, her "other mother" and her "other father"--people who look just like her own parents, but with big, shiny, black button eyes, paper-white skin... and a keen desire to keep her on *their* side of the door.



Source: Amazon.com

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About the Author

A professional writer for more than twenty years, Neil Gaiman has been one of the top writers in modern comics, and is now a bestselling novelist. His work has appeared in translation in more than nineteen countries, and nearly all of his novels, graphic and otherwise, have been optioned for films. He is listed in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* as one of the top ten living post-modern writers.

Gaiman was the creator/writer of the monthly cult DC Comics series, *Sandman*, which won Neil nine Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards, including the award for best writer four times, and three Harvey Awards. *Sandman #19* took the 1991 World Fantasy Award for best short story, making it the first comic ever to be awarded a literary award.

Coraline (2002), his first novel for children, was a *New York Times* and international bestseller, was nominated for the Prix Tam Tam, and won the Elizabeth Burr/Worzalla Award, the BSFA Award, the HUGO, the Nebula and the Bram Stoker Award.

Gaiman's official website, www.neilgaiman.com, has 400,000 unique visitors per month in 2004; close to 600,000 per month are expected in 2005. His online journal is syndicated to thousands of blog readers every day. Currently, more than 2,500 websites link to www.neilgaiman.com.

Born and raised in England, Neil Gaiman now lives near Minneapolis.

Source: neilgaiman.com

Q & A with Neil Gaiman

http://www.mousecircus.com/mousecircus/flash/mc_flash.html

Q. Why did you choose the name Coraline, not Caroline?

A. It started out as a spelling mistake when I was writing a letter to a Caroline. I thought ‘What an interesting name’, and I liked the feeling it had of hardness and beauty and of things going on under the surface, like coral.

Q. Why did you choose beetles for the ‘OTHER’ mother to eat? Do beetles freak you out the most?

A. Well, they seemed the right sort of thing to eat from a paper bag. Spiders would run away, and ants would just crawl out. Beetles are slow enough that I could imagine someone picking them from a bag and eating them, with a crunch. They don’t freak me out the most—there are things I could have put in the bag that would have been worse, but they were just the right amount of unpleasant.

Q. Do you know someone who reminds you of the other mother?

A. No, thank heavens. I don’t think I’d want to meet her in reality—it was bad enough on paper.

Q. Do the rats have any plans for World domination?

A. Yes.

Q. Which kind of animal would you NEVER touch? Not for anything on earth.

A. Like Coraline, spiders make me intensely uncomfortable. Well, the really big ones do.

Q. I just finished your book and I loved it! Do you think you will make a sequel?

A. I don’t think so. It wouldn’t make Coraline a better book for me to write CORALINE GOES TO AFRICA or something, and it might make it worse.

Q. How do you feel about the comparison to Alice in Wonderland?

A. Well, I suppose people have to compare it to something, and both Coraline and Alice are about girls in strange places. I don’t think the comparison goes much further than that, really. (One critic compared it to a story by a Victorian writer named Lucy Clifford, which was very wise, but Lucy Clifford has been out of print for a long time, whereas everyone knows Alice.

Q. Are you ever worried that you will introduce a world to children that is too horrific for them to handle?

A. No.

Q. What was your favorite place to explore as a child? And now?

A. As a child I liked to explore the gardens and grounds of old, empty house in the town I lived in. Now I like exploring stories the best.

Q. What is the difference between a flat and an apartment?

The biggest difference is that flats are apartments in England. If you go to a dictionary it will say things like ‘5. A floor, loft, or story in a building; especially a floor of a house, which forms a complete residence in itself.’ or ‘7. a suite of rooms usually on one floor of an apartment house.’

Q. I think Dave McKean’s artwork really complements your stories. Will you continue to work with him (please)?

A. As long as he’ll let me.

Q. The illustrations seem very different from most of the Dave McKean pictures I’ve seen; was that your idea, or did Mr. McKean mutate upon reading the manuscript?

A. Dave mutated on reading the manuscript, and started growing extra hands and feet and noses....not really. Actually, Dave has lots and lots of styles (I don’t think there’s a style he can’t work in) and he just picked the one he felt was right for CORALINE. He uses about three different styles for THE WOLVES IN THE WALLS: the people are painted, the wolves are drawn, and the jam-pots are all photographed.

Q. Did you write the story from your imagination or from a dream you had?

A. I wrote it from my imagination, very slowly. None of it came directly from dreams, but I wanted it to have a dream-like quality to it.

Q. What is the best advice you have for aspiring writers?

A. WRITE. FINISH THINGS. KEEP WRITING.

Critical Praise

"Gaiman's tale is inventive, scary, thrilling and finally affirmative. Readers young and old will find something to startle them." -- Washington Post Book World

"As we used to say, it blew my mind...chilly, finely-wrought prose, a truly weird setting and a fable that taps into our most uncomfortable fears."

--Times Educational Supplement

"I think this book will nudge ALICE IN WONDERLAND out of its niche at last. It is the most splendidly original, weird, and frightening book I have read, and yet full of things children will love."

--Diana Wynne Jones

"A modern ghost story with all the creepy trimmings...Well done." --New York Times Book Review

"A deliciously scary book that we loved reading together as a family." --Orson Scott Card

"Beautifully spooky. Gaiman actually seems to understand the way children think." --Christian Science Monitor

"A truly creepy tale. Beware those button eyes!" --Family Fun Magazine

"It has the delicate horror of the finest fairy tales, and it is a masterpiece." --Terry Pratchett

"A magnificently creepy story...for stouthearted kids who love a brush with the sinister, Coraline is spot on."

--Kirkus Reviews, Starred Review

"Coraline may be Gaiman's most disciplined and fully controlled novel to date, and it may even end up as something of a classic."

--Locus

Further Reading

Other Works by Neil Gaiman:

Coraline

The Wolves in the Walls

The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish

Two Goldfish

If you liked *Coraline*, you might like:

Clockwork: or all wound up

by Philip Pullman

The Dollhouse Murders

by Betty Ren Wright

The Folk Keeper

by Franny Billingsley

Skellig by David Almond

The Thief Lord by Cornelia Funke

Discussion Questions

1. Describe Coraline. What kind of a person is she? How does she like to spend her time?
2. How is Coraline treated by her parents? Who are the other adults in Coraline's life and how do they treat her? What is the difference between how she is treated in the real world and the other world?
3. Before entering the other world, Coraline receives ominous warnings about her future. What are the warnings and from whom does she receive them? What do the messages mean?
4. When Coraline unlocks the door to the neighboring flat she knows she is doing something she is not supposed to (pp.26). But she does it anyway. Why? What are the consequences? Have you ever done something you knew you were not supposed to? How did this make you feel? What were the consequences of your actions?
5. When Coraline discovers her parents are missing, she calls the police (pp. 54-55). What does she tell the officer? How does he respond? Why? How would you respond if you were the officer? Why? What would you have done if you were in Coraline's situation?
6. How does Coraline define bravery (pp. 58-59)? In what ways does Coraline demonstrate bravery? What is your definition of bravery?
7. The other mother tells Coraline: "We're ready to love you and play with you and feed you and make your life more interesting." (pp. 60) How is Coraline's life with her other family different from life with her real family? What does Coraline find appealing about life in the other world? What family would you choose? Why?
8. Coraline's other mother tells her that if she wants to stay in the other world there is one thing she must do. What is it? What effect will it have on her?
9. Why does the other mother want Coraline? What does the cat think about this (pp. 65)? Why has she taken the other children and Coraline's parents?
10. Miss Spink and Miss Forcible give Coraline a special stone (p. 21). Why? What does the stone look like? What special power does the stone have? How does Coraline use it?
11. What challenge does Coraline present to her other mother (p. 91)? What will happen if she loses? What will happen if she wins? What makes her think winning is possible? Do you think this challenge is wise? Why or why not?
12. Do the mirrors Coraline encounters in the real world and the other world reflect reality or illusion? How do you know? What is the significance of mirrors in Coraline? When Coraline finds her other father in the basement he tells her to flee (p. 112). When she refuses he turns on her, and tries to harm her. How does Coraline respond? What happens as a result?
13. Coraline explains to the old man upstairs, "I don't want whatever I want. Nobody does. Not really. What kind of fun would it be if we just got everything we wanted? Just like that, and it didn't mean anything. What then?" (p. 120) Do you agree or disagree with Coraline? Explain your thinking. How would you respond to her question?
14. How does Coraline's life change when she returns to the real world with her parents?
15. What does Coraline learn from the experience of being in the other world? After Coraline returns to the real world she receives clues that the other mother's work is not done. What are they? How does Coraline foil the other mother once and for all?