

The Graveyard Book *is about a young boy named Bod who is raised by ghosts after his parents die. He lives in an English graveyard with the Owensses, the family of ghosts who adopt him, and Silas, the ghost who is his guardian. In this excerpt, Bod meets Scarlett, a little girl whose parents let her play in the area. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.*

from The Graveyard Book

by Neil Gaiman

1 The next night, Silas appeared at the front of the Owensses' cozy tomb carrying three large books—two of them brightly colored alphabet books (A is for Apple, B is for Ball) and a copy of *The Cat in the Hat*. He also had paper and a packet of wax crayons. Then he walked Bod around the graveyard, placing the boy's small fingers on the newest and clearest of the headstones and the plaques, and taught Bod how to find the letters of the alphabet when they appeared, beginning with the sharp steeple of the capital *A*.

2 Silas gave Bod a quest—to find each of the twenty-six letters in the graveyard—and Bod finished it, proudly, with the discovery of Ezekiel Ulmsley's stone, built into the side of the wall in the old chapel. His guardian was pleased with him.

3 Every day Bod would take his paper and crayons into the graveyard and he would copy names and words and numbers as best he could, and each night, before Silas would go off into the world, Bod would make Silas explain to him what he had written, and make him translate the snatches of Latin which had, for the most part, baffled the Owensses.

4 A sunny day: bumblebees explored the wildflowers that grew in the corner of the graveyard, dangling from the gorse and the bluebells, droning their deep lazy buzz, while Bod lay in the spring sunlight watching a bronze-colored beetle wandering across the stone of G^{eo}. Reeder, his wife, Dorcas, and their son Sebastian (*Fidelis ad Mortem*).¹ Bod had copied down their inscription and now he was only thinking about the beetle when somebody said,

5 “Boy? What're you doing?”

6 Bod looked up. There was someone on the other side of the gorse bush, watching him.

7 “Nuffing,” said Bod. He stuck out his tongue.

8 The face on the other side of the gorse bush crumpled into a gargoyle, tongue sticking out, eyes popping, then returned to girl.

9 “That was good,” said Bod, impressed.

¹ *Fidelis ad Mortem* — Faithful until Death

10 "I can make really good faces," said the girl. "Look at this one." She pushed her nose up with one finger, creased her mouth into a huge, satisfied smile, squinted her eyes, puffed out her cheeks. "Do you know what that was?"

11 "No."

12 "It was a pig, silly."

13 "Oh." Bod thought. "You mean, like *P* is for Pig?"

14 "Of course like that. Hang on."

15 She came around the gorse bush and stood next to Bod, who got to his feet. She was a little older than he was, a little taller, and was dressed in bright colors, yellow and pink and orange. Bod, in his grey winding sheet, felt dowdy and drab.

16 "How old are you?" said the girl. "What are you doing here? Do you live here? What's your name?"

17 "I don't know," said Bod.

18 "You don't know your name?" said the girl. "'Course you do. Everybody knows their own name. Fibber."

19 "I know my name," said Bod. "And I know what I'm doing here. But I don't know the other thing you said."

20 "How old you are?"

21 Bod nodded.

22 "Well," said the girl, "what was you when you was last birthday?"

23 "I didn't," said Bod. "I never was."

24 "Everybody gets birthdays. You mean you never had cake or candles or stuff?"

25 Bod shook his head. The girl looked sympathetic. "Poor thing. I'm five. I bet you're five too."

26 Bod nodded enthusiastically. He was not going to argue with his new friend. She made him happy.

27 Her name was Scarlett Amber Perkins, she told him, and she lived in a flat² with no garden. Her mother was sitting on a bench by the chapel at the bottom of the hill, reading a magazine, and she had told Scarlett to be back in half an hour, and to get some exercise, and not to get into trouble or talk to strangers.

28 "I'm a stranger," pointed out Bod.

29 "You're not," she said, definitely. "You're a little boy." And then she said, "And you're my friend. So you can't be a stranger."

30 Bod smiled rarely, but he smiled then, hugely and with delight. "I'm your friend," he said.

31 "What's your name?"

32 "Bod. It's short for Nobody."

33 She laughed then. "Funny sort of a name," she said. "What are you doing now?"

34 "ABCs," said Bod. "From the stones. I have to write them down."

35 "Can I do it with you?"

² flat — apartment

36 For a moment Bod felt protective—the gravestones were *his*, weren't they?—and then he realized how foolish he was being, and he thought that there were things that might be more fun done in the sunlight with a friend. He said, "Yes."

37 They copied down names from tombstones, Scarlett helping Bod pronounce unfamiliar names and words, Bod telling Scarlett what the Latin meant, if he already knew, and it seemed much too soon when they heard a voice further down the hill shouting, "Scarlett!"

38 The girl thrust the crayons and paper back at Bod. "I got to go," she said.

39 "I'll see you next time," said Bod. "Won't I?"

40 "Where do you live?" she asked.

41 "Here," he said. And he stood and watched her as she ran down the hill.

42 On the way home Scarlett told her mother about the boy called Nobody who lived in the graveyard and had played with her, and that night Scarlett's mother mentioned it to Scarlett's father, who said that he believed that imaginary friends were a common phenomenon at that age, and nothing at all to be concerned about, and that they were fortunate to have a nature reserve so near.