

## **Watchmen Study Guide**

**INTRODUCTION:** As you read *Watchmen*, be aware of how the graphic images enhance the meaning and complexity of the story and its characters. To analyze the images, we'll want to familiarize ourselves with a few terms:

### **Terms**

**Panel:** A distinct segment of the comic, containing a combination of image and text in endless variety. Panels offer a different experience than simply reading text:

- The spatial arrangement allows an immediate juxtaposition of the present and the past.
- Unlike other visual media, transitions are instantaneous and direct

**Frame:** The lines and borders that contain the panels.

**Gutter:** The space between framed panels.

**Bleed:** An image that extends to and/or beyond the edge of the page.

**Foreground:** The panel closest to the viewer.

**Midground:** Allows centering of image by using natural resting place for vision. The artist deliberately decides to place the image where a viewer would be most likely to look first. Placing an image off-center or near the top or bottom can be used to create visual tension but using the midground permits the artist to create a more readily accepted image.

**Background:** Provides additional, subtextual information for the reader.

**Graphic weight:** A term that describes the way some images draw the eye more than others, creating a definite focus using color and shading in various ways including:

- The use of light and dark shades; dark-toned images or high-contrast images draw the eye more than light or low-contrast images do
- A pattern or repeated series of marks
- Colors that are more brilliant or deeper than others on the page

### **Figures**

**Faces:** Faces can be portrayed in different ways. Some depict an actual person, like a portrait; others are iconic, which means they are representative of an idea or a group of people. Other points to observe about faces include:

- They can be dramatic when placed against a detailed backdrop; a bright white face stands out
- They can be drawn without much expression or detail; this is called an —open blank || and it invites the audience to imagine what the character is feeling without telling them.

**Hands/Feet:** The positioning of hands and feet can be used to express what is happening in the story. For example, hands that are raised with palms out suggest surprise. The wringing of hands suggests

obsequiousness or discomfort. Hands over the mouth depict fear, shame, or shyness. Turned in feet may denote embarrassment, while feet with motion strokes can create the sense of panic, urgency, or speed.

## **Text**

**Captions:** These are boxes containing a variety of text elements, including scene-setting, description, etc.

**Speech balloons:** These enclose dialogue and come from a specific speaker's mouth; they vary in size, shape, and layout and can alternate to depict a conversation. Types of speech balloons include those holding:

- External dialogue, which is speech between characters
- Internal dialogue, which is a thought enclosed by a balloon that has a series of dots or bubbles going up to it

**Special-effects lettering:** This is a method of drawing attention to text; it often highlights onomatopoeia and reinforces the impact of words such as *bang* or *wow*.

## **Concepts**

**Scale:** The size of an image, especially as compared to other images around it. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How big is the subject? How closely have we zoomed in to the subject?
- How does the close—up of face or even a body part (such as an eye) affect the viewer?

**Point of View:** The perspective the images seem to be seen from. Can be a specific person or character, or can be omniscient and distant.

**Juxtaposition:** The deliberate placement of images (or text) next to each other for effect. Consider the effect of placement of images and text with each other. Could it be critical? Humorous? Creepy?

Often, **juxtapositions** will explore contrasts or tension. Specifically,

- Phony v. real, war v. peace, man v. woman, man-made v. natural, adult v. child, self v. society.

**Negative Space:** While you consider what is in the image, also consider what is *not* in the image. How does the artist use negative space to create a mood?

## **Tone/Mood:**

**MOOD:** Emotional landscape of the work. The haunted house felt spooky to me. The school felt friendly, etc.

**TONE:** The writer's attitude about the subject matter. For example, the protesters were wrong because they were indoctrinated.