

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns

The following questions MIGHT appear during class discussion. If you would like to further prepare for class, you are welcome to look over the question list. But, this question list may change – We will start class with student-written questions and I could write different questions based off of our class interest, knowledge, or prior class discussions.

Issue 1

1. How does the art style, coloring, and panel transitions help to mirror the plot and tone of the story? Cite specific pages and panels to justify your claims.
2. Frank Miller and Klaus Janson depicts Bruce Wayne's literal nightmare against the discussion of Harvey Dent's figurative nightmare. What does this stylistic writing choice indicate about Batman and Two Face? (16-9)
3. What does Miller's juxtaposition of Bruce Wayne's memory of his parents' deaths with listening to the news? Hint: think about how this traumatic event impact Mr. Wayne's life. (24)
4. Determine which type of paneling shift is used on page 24 when Bruce Wayne is listening to the news. Several panels involve the news report, but then the panel shifts to a string of pearls. What does this paneling choice reveal to the audience?
5. The cab driver says to not hurt the girl in his car – what does this interaction with the gang member reveal about this society? (26)
6. Describe the symbolism of light on pages 30-1.
7. How does the color change on page 32? What does this shift represent?
8. Explain how the full page panel of Batman on page 34 mirrors people's feelings of this man/creature?
9. Describe Batman's personality and moral code – provide a specific action or phrase to support your claim.
10. On page 43, the reader sees that another Batman villain is considering working with Harvey Dent, Two Face – who is this villain?
11. What is Batman referring to when he tells Harvey Dent that he sees a reflection? What does this statement say about himself?

Issue 2

12. Describe at least 4 changes in text boxes. What does each change indicate?
13. What do you notice about the coloring of the mutant gang and Batman? What do these changes mean?
14. On page 66, two news reporters – one of whom is Lana Lang – is arguing about Batman's moral code. Is Batman justified in his actions? How do his actions impact society?

15. The reader hears a brief story of a woman on a train – what does the reader learn about her life? What does she have in her purse? Why is this item so important to her? What happens to her? How does this story impact the reader’s understanding of this society and Batman’s actions in this society? (69)
16. On page 73, the leader of the mutant gang gives a speech to his gang. Based off of his speech, why are the mutant gang attacking the city?
17. On page 84, who is the president talking to? What does this interaction tell us about this character? What does the progression of panels of the America flag into another symbol tell us about this character and the country?
18. Short character stories are interspersed throughout issue 2 (89-90). How do these mini-stories fit within the context of the larger plot? How do they impact the reader’s understanding of the text?
19. When asked how Commissioner Gordon can support a vigilante, he responds by telling a story about Pearl Harbor. What does this story mean? Why does Gordon support Batman? (96)
20. Describe the meaning of the panel transitions on page 103.

Issue 3

21. In every issue, Frank Miller and Klaus Janson show the news through TV shaped panels – what impact does this writing and penciling choice have on the audience?
22. On pages 112-3, another superhero is referenced through iconic actions – who is this superhero and why doesn’t Batman want to talk to him or get help from him?
23. Why does Batman take responsibility for the lives lost in Joker’s explosion on page 117? Is Batman responsible for these deaths? Explain your reasoning.
24. What type of panel transitioning do Miller and Janson use with the television broadcast on page 115? What tone does this artistic choice create?
25. Superman gives Batman the following advice: “we must not remind them that giants walk the earth.” What is Superman saying? (130)
26. Based off his dialogue, how does Superman feel about Batman? (135 & 139)
27. What do you notice about the formatting of the dialogue on page 146? How does this formatting impact the reader’s understanding of the text?
28. On page 148, Lana Lang claims that “Batman hasn’t killed anyone” – in this moment, who does she symbolize?
29. What happens to the Joker’s dialogue and what does this shift mean? Hint: compare the boxes at the beginning of the issue and the end of the issue.

Issue 4

30. Why is Batman on the run? (156-8)
31. How does the coloring on page 158 impact the reader's understanding of the text? (158-9)
32. What type of panel transition is used between the news report panel and Robin's thought panel? What are the similarities between these two panels? What does this juxtaposition mean? (161)
33. Describe the symbolic panel on page 162 – what does this panel mean and is it an effective art style for this panel?
34. The mutant gang disbanded when Batman defeated their leader. Who do each of the factions now follow? How do the groups' methods and moral stands reflect that of their new "leaders"? (162)
35. How do Miller and Jansen depict the president? Hint: focus on dialogue and image(163)
36. On page 164, a kid in the crowd is dressed in a Miracle Man costume – who is this character and why is this allusion important within the context of the events happening in the text?
37. What does Superman's involvement with diverting the bomb imply about his relationship with the United States government? How does Bruce Wayne respond to Superman's action? (167)On page
38. Bruce Wayne dresses up like Batman when he learns of the detonation and realizes that Russia moved ahead in the arms race. What do his dialogue and action imply about his view of morality? (168)
39. Batman has a full page panel on page 172 – describe how Batman looks and how this paneling choice helps to reinforce how the Batman gang and reader views him in this moment.
40. What do you notice about the coloring and its changes between pages 174-7? What do these changes tell the reader?
41. What happens to Superman's dialogue and thought boxes from pages 176-9? How does this reflect his stance on the world and his vitality?
42. How do citizens respond during the power outage? What do their actions reveal about society and survival? (180-3)
43. On page 185, the news report reveals how society has impacted the environment. What impact has the explosion had on society? What does the news reporter's response to this environmental change indicate about social fears and priorities?
44. A clearer, full-body image of the president is shown on page 185 – how is he portrayed and what does this image imply about his personality and capability as a leader?
45. Miller and Jansen include a text-box flashback of Bruce as a boy. What is the focus of this flashback and how does it relate to the current plot events? (188-9)
46. How is the tone of the ending different from the rest of the story? Why do you think Miller and Jansen end the story this way?