



Graphic Novel Study Group
Study Guides

A Contract With God

By Will Eisner

Study guide by Bryan Stone

1. In the introduction to *A Contract With God* Eisner says "In telling these stories, I set aside two basic working constrictions that so often inhibit this medium- space and format."
In many cases Eisner chose to not use panels and instead used other techniques to lead the reader through the page. Pick an example and discuss briefly.
2. Eisner uses many melodramatic devices in his storytelling, such as the rain at the beginning of the title story as well as the over-the-top poses in which he draws his characters. How does this affect your reading of the material, if at all?
3. Eisner's cartooning in *A Contract With God*, and in his other work, ranges from realistic to very cartoony. How does he use this range of style as a storytelling device?
4. Eisner's work is very well known for its lettering and title splashes. Pick an example. Does it add to or detract from your reading of the story?
5. Pick a character from one of the four stories. How does he or she change over the course of the story?
6. Eisner said "To me comics is somewhat like typeset: it's a language and it's always been a language. It's sequential art, which consists of pictures arranged in a sequence to tell a story. That's the core of the medium."

What are some examples of Eisner's own visual vocabulary? How do these work, or not work?

7. Eisner said that word balloons were a "desperation device" and one of the reasons adults wouldn't consider comics a valid medium. But instead of discarding the word balloon he tried using it as a more coherent part of the page's composition or to help convey the message it contained. Pick an example and discuss why it does or doesn't work.
8. Eisner was one of the first comic artists to compose his panels as if he were using a movie camera. This, of course, was a radical departure from the way comics were traditionally drawn, usually from very limited points of view. Which method do you prefer? Why?
9. In the book *Eisner/Miller* Will Eisner describes the process of inking with a brush as "sexy" and said that it was most likely his favorite part of the process of making comics. Consider his use of line. How would you describe it? How does he use it for narrative purposes?
10. In 1942 Eisner said "The comic strip is no longer a comic strip but in reality an illustrated novel. It is new and raw just now, but material for a limitless, intelligent development. And eventually, and inevitably, it will be a legitimate medium for the best of writers and artists."
Having read *A Contract With God*, which is often credited as the first graphic novel, and given Eisner's belief in comics as a medium, do you feel it is worthy of the praise it has generated over the years? Why or why not?