Deathnote Volumes 1 & 2
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Study guide by Christine Williamson

1. Deathnote is a powerful psychological thriller/murder mystery story, yet it has very little graphic violence. What stylistic and artistic techniques does the artist use to evoke feelings of horror and suspense in the reader?

2. One of the most popular ways to portray Death characters in manga is in the form of a beautiful male, a bishounen, but Takeshi Obata chose to do just the opposite with the shinigami Ryuk. Why do you think he made this choice, and how does it support the theme/feel of the manga?

3. The main character of Deathnote is Light Yagami, a mass murderer with megalomaniacal tendencies and a "bad personality." Yet, he is the protagonist and the reader sympathizes with him. How did the writer and artist go about making this possible? Give examples.

4. The shinigami Ryuk performs several functions in the story beyond being a companion to the main character. What do you think some of these functions are, and how does he perform them?

5. Eyes, and the way that they are drawn, play a large role in Deathnote, especially when characters are interacting with each other. How does the way Light Yagami's eyes are drawn effect the reader and help express the Kira personality?

6. The character of L is not fully revealed to the reader until mid-way through Volume 2, but his presence is strongly felt throughout many of the preceding chapters. How do story choices and Takeshi Obata's framing make L such a powerful presence without diminishing the air of mystery about him?

7. When L is finally introduced, the reader is ushered into his presence with the policemen. How does Takeshi Obata show L to the reader, and how does the reader learn how it would feel to physically be in his presence?

8. In that same scene, Takeshi Obata switches from showing L to the reader, to having the reader empathize with him. At this point he basically becomes a second protagonist. When do you think this occurs, and how do you think it was done?

9. Takeshi Obata chooses to draw L with eyes like the shinigami, Ryuk. Why do you think he made this choice, and how does it affect the atmosphere of the story? Can you see any other similarities between the two characters?

10. Psychological profiling exercise: In later volumes the reader finds out that Light Yagami, as he was before he found the Deathnote, could not even conceive of becoming a mass murderer. In fact, he was almost Kira's exact opposite, and was very much like L in his sense of justice and dedication to law enforcement. Given what you know of the beginning of the story, what do you think caused the massive psychological shift in Light's personality that allowed the Kira persona to be born? Can you come up with a theory that explains the transformation?