

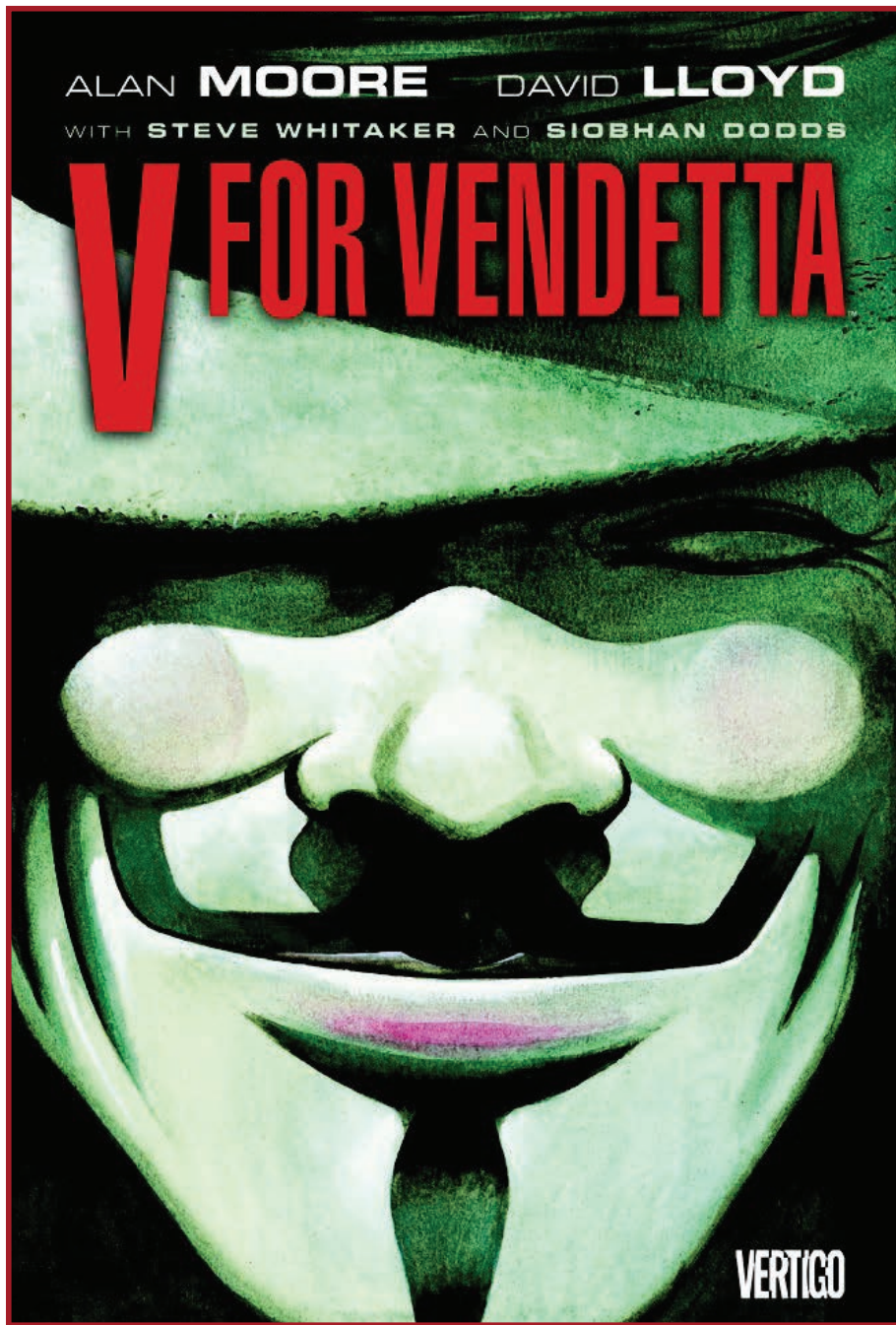
V FOR VENDETTA

ACADEMIC READING GUIDE

Alan Moore | David Lloyd | 9781401208417 | TP
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OVERVIEW



The graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, created by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, is a harrowing and cautionary vision of a postwar future where tyranny is law. Featuring a rich tapestry of settings, characters, allusions, themes, and symbols, this genre-defining graphic novel offers readers a powerful, enduring story of the power of the human spirit in the face of overwhelming odds, no matter the costs.

The events of *V for Vendetta* take place in a fictional 1990s England, in the years after a mysterious war destroys much of the outside world and a fascist government controls almost every aspect of human life. But even as personal identity and freedom are eroded away, and as citizens deemed undesirable are removed from society and taken to “resettlement” camps under the guise of protection, a few still fight. This includes the enigmatic “V,” the novel’s masked protagonist, who sparks a revolution that serves as the centerpiece of the novel’s intricately crafted plot. Soon V recruits a young female companion, Evey, and together they embark on an at-times morally dubious quest to dismantle England’s fascist government. As their journey takes them deeper into a world of lies,

corruption, greed, and unchecked power at the heart of the political system, they expose the rotting core underlying the country’s seemingly ordered veneer.

First published over 25 years ago, *V for Vendetta* continues to resonate with readers due to its connection to contemporary themes and issues across politics, religion, education, literature, medicine, and much more. The graphic novel reminds today’s readers of the power of self-expression and resilience, and shows the extreme lengths and sacrifices required of one’s self, and of society as a whole, to effect true change.

|||||▶ KEY CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)



V is the protagonist and central character of the graphic novel. Scarred by a failed government-run medical experiment that destroyed his life but also gave him pseudo-supernatural abilities and intellect, V sets out on a five-year quest to seek vengeance on the government that betrayed him. With his true identity concealed behind a Guy Fawkes mask, V sparks a revolution that leads him to increasingly dark and dangerous places, both physically and mentally, and in the end he must sacrifice everything to free his country.



EVEY HAMMOND is a 16-year-old girl rescued by V after corrupt police officers try to kill her. V takes Evey to his home in the Shadow Gallery, where despite her initial caution, she eventually joins V as a protégé on his quest for redemption and revolution. Along the way, Evey undergoes a startling transformation from traumatized teenager to hardened revolutionary.



ADAM JAMES SUSAN is known only as “Leader” and controls all aspects of the Norsefire totalitarian government from “the Head.” A reclusive despot who watches the world while perched high above London, Susan is obsessed with the computer program called “Fate” that controls the government’s far-reaching operations across England.



ERIC FINCH is a veteran detective and leader of “the Nose,” the Norsefire government’s public police force. An open critic of the government’s fascist tactics, Finch is a dutiful investigator who is charged with investigating V’s terrorist activities. But the more he learns about V’s past and the government’s role in it, the more conflicted he becomes.



DOMINIC STONE is Eric Finch’s partner and a fellow detective at “the Nose.”



DEREK ALMOND is the initial leader of “the Finger,” the government’s secret police force. Almond is one of the first characters to meet his untimely demise at V’s hands in the graphic novel.



ROSEMARY ALMOND is Derek Almond’s wife. After the death of her husband, Rose gradually loses the respect and support of her friends and colleagues, and she is forced to take on a job as a burlesque dancer. As her life spirals out of control, she directs her hatred at the Norsefire government that humiliated her and hatches a plan to assassinate Adam Susan.



LEWIS PROTHERO is a media personality and host of the “Voice of Fate,” a nightly broadcast that serves as the primary source of propaganda dissemination for the Norsefire fascist government to the citizens of England. Prothero served as the Camp Commander of the Larkhill Resettlement Camp, where V was tortured and endured horrific experiments. As retribution, V attacks and kidnaps Prothero and drives him to madness.



ROGER DASCOMBE is the initial leader of “the Mouth,” the headquarters of Norsefire’s propaganda department and where the “Voice of Fate” broadcasts are recorded. After Derek Almond’s death, Dascombe begins a relationship with his widow, Rosemary Almond, before he, too, is killed by V.



BISHOP ANTHONY LILLIMAN is a well-known religious leader in the Norsefire government who served as a priest at the Larkhill Resettlement Camp. Using Evey as a decoy, V breaks into Lilliman’s house and forces him to commit suicide with a poisoned communion wafer.



CONRAD HEYER is leader of “the Eye,” which oversees Norsefire’s massive video surveillance operations. Heyer is subservient to his wife, Helen Heyer, who has plans to use V’s revolution as an opportunity for a coup.



HELEN HEYER is Conrad Heyer’s wife. A power-hungry and domineering woman, she plots with Conrad and other nefarious elements of the government, such as Peter Creedy and Ally Harper, to replace Adam Susan with Conrad as the “Leader” of the Norsefire government.



PETER CREEDY replaces Derek Almond as the head of “the Finger” after Almond’s death. He quickly makes a deal with local street gangs to suppress the revolting citizens. At the same time, he works to discredit Adam Susan and makes plans to overthrow the Norsefire government with the help of Ally Harper and Helen Heyer. For a brief moment he succeeds—only to be betrayed by his own allies.



ALAISTER “ALLY” HARPER is a Scottish thief and murderer who has shady deals with various characters in the graphic novel, including one with Peter Creedy and Helen Heyer to support their overthrow of the Norsefire government. A notorious double-crosser, Harper betrays Creedy at the behest of Heyer, with whom he is having an affair, but soon after meets his death at Conrad Heyer’s hands thanks in part to V’s meddling.



BRIAN ETHERIDGE is leader of “the Ear,” the audio surveillance department of the Norsefire government. He is killed when V blows up Jordan Tower, where the Ear is located.

KEY SETTINGS

LONDON serves as the centerpiece for much of the graphic novel, and many of its major events happen at well-known historical landmarks throughout the city.

THE SHADOW GALLERY is V's mysterious headquarters and the home of his vast collection of cultural and historical artifacts, most of which have been outlawed by the Norsefire government to suppress free thought and creativity. Formerly an underground train station, the Shadow Gallery is a five-story monument to V's unique understanding of the world and serves as our only insight into his past life before becoming "V."



LARKHILL RESETTLEMENT CAMP is the camp where V is taken against his will just as the Norsefire government is assuming power. The Norsefire government uses resettlement camps to imprison, torture, experiment on, and exterminate what they call "undesirables." As one of these undesirables, V is subjected to terrible experiments, isolation, incarceration, and eventually a complete mental and physical breakdown. Larkhill is destroyed, and all records of it deleted, after V uses toxic chemicals and explosives to escape his cell, beginning the "vendetta" that will eventually bring the Norsefire government to its knees.



WESTMINSTER ABBEY, THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, AND THE OLD BAILEY are interconnected settings that V targets as the locations for his anarchist plots throughout the graphic novel. As each location is destroyed, it serves as a symbolic gesture to the citizens of England that their government is losing its grip on power.

KITTY KAT KELLER CLUB is where many characters in *V for Vendetta*—criminals, politicians, and the elite of England—come together to drink and watch lurid burlesque shows. This club offers a look at the seedy underbelly of England. It also serves as a pointed reminder of the double standards maintained by the Norsefire government, where everyday citizens endure a police state and forced curfews, while criminals and the so-called "elite" are allowed to conduct clandestine criminal operations freely.



JORDAN TOWER is home to the Mouth, the government's propaganda department. The tower is based off of BT tower in real-life London.

"NEW" SCOTLAND YARD is home to the Nose, the government's public police force.

THEMES

MEDIA LITERACY – Throughout *V for Vendetta*, Moore and Lloyd illustrate how media can be used for the purposes of control and propaganda by allowing the reader to see behind the scenes of its creation. The reader is exposed to the inner workings of the propaganda machine and sees how “the Mouth” operates, planning the broadcasts of the “Voice of Fate” to spread the government’s message. This depiction illustrates how easily media can be manipulated to distort the truth for the purposes of spreading an agenda.

ALTERNATE HISTORY/PROPAGANDA – *V for Vendetta* takes place in an alternate timeline in the decade after it was written. In this alternate timeline, fascism has taken hold of England, and propaganda is widely used to control its citizens. The alternate timeline, as described in Alan Moore’s introduction, is a reaction to the conservative political climate at the time (and its assumed defeat), as well as the global political happenings. In many stories featuring alternate history, the creator draws upon previous historical events to influence their new historical landscape. *V for Vendetta* is no exception, as Moore draws upon fascist movements of the past to illustrate his startling vision of the future.

IDENTITY – For each character in *V for Vendetta*, their identity, whether hidden or known, drives their actions throughout the story. Moore adds a unique layer to this story by choosing to keep the main protagonist’s identity mostly unknown, never revealing it to the reader or the surrounding characters. We know a few essential facts about V, but the rest is left behind the mask, or in the torn-out pages of a notebook. Some characters’ senses of identity endure significant changes throughout the book, which directly influence their choices and impact the world around them. Other characters, such as those belonging to the different branches of the government, act based on the identity that is assigned to them.

GENDER DISPARITY – Whether due to being a product of its time, or to being a commentary on the potential fascist landscape, there is a great difference in the portrayal of male and female characters in *V for Vendetta*. In addition to there being a much greater number of male characters than female characters, the characterization of each is significantly disparate. In most cases, the male characters seek to control their environment, whereas the female characters are reactive to their male counterparts. They live in the world that the male characters have created, and often have little to no agency of their own. Their actions are based off of those of the men, and not their own drives or desires.

FASCISM AND ANARCHY – The alternate timeline presented in *V for Vendetta* features an England that is being ruled by a fascist government similar to the fascist states established in Europe during the early 20th century. However, the main protagonist, V, seeks to disrupt the fascist state by introducing anarchy. V’s desire for anarchy is mirrored in his home, which he calls the Shadow Gallery, or the Land of Do as You Please. He seeks to make the public aware of the confines placed upon them in order to free them to take control of their own lives.

ARTS AND SCIENCES – In seeking to control their constituents, the fascist government ruling Moore and Lloyd’s vision of England has eradicated many of the arts from society. The extent of this artistic suppression is evidenced in V’s Shadow Gallery, where he seeks to preserve much of the art that has been removed from society.





Similarly, we see how the government has also taken control of science and experimentation, using it to further control their constituents. Much of the science in *V for Vendetta* is eerily similar to that of the Nazis during World War II, using members of “resettlement camps” as subjects for inhumane experiments.

MEANS OF REVOLUTION – In *V for Vendetta*, V seeks to inspire the people to move toward revolution through drastic and violent acts. Many parallels can be drawn to historical events involving revolution and the often-dramatic actions that lead to them. Revolutions are never painless, and almost always involve bloodshed from the revolting party, as well as those who are in control. Yet the revolting party generally sees these acts as necessary in the pursuit of better living conditions. In *V for Vendetta*, V’s morally ambiguous actions bring to light the messy, painful lengths that some will go to in order to create a better life for all.

JUSTICE AND FATE – Justice and fate are obsessions of V’s, and thus are often referenced throughout the book. Alan Moore goes so far as to personify both ideas, presenting them as dueling mistresses of both V and Adam Susan. Fate is presented as the all-knowing computer that Susan uses to gather intelligence in order to control his fascist state. Justice is seen in Book 1, Chapter 5, as the real-life statue at the Old Bailey, and the reader experiences two “versions” of its relevance, by both Susan and V. V is constantly seeking to achieve justice through his own means of theatrics, deception, and control, and yet even he cannot escape the clutches of fate.

VIGILANTISM AND TERRORISM – V presents himself as a unique protagonist by trying to better the world through morally ambiguous means. His actions consistently toe the line between vigilantism and terrorism, imposing his own brand of justice on those he deems deserving, and thoughtlessly removing those who might stand in his way. In addition, V seeks reform through large-scale acts of destruction, similar to those of his inspiration, Guy Fawkes. Even after gaining a full understanding of his motives, V’s pursuer, Mr. Finch, cannot see V as anything other than a terrorist.

TRANSFORMATION – While character growth and transformation are present in many stories, Alan Moore brings moments of intense, bombastic transformation to the forefront. Specifically, characters such as V, Evey, Eric Finch, and Rosemary Almond endure moments of quick and painful transformation through different means, often only spanning the course of one chapter. Transformation is also referenced via the idea of transubstantiation, and the many religious allusions present throughout the book could lead to the idea that transformation leads to salvation.

THEATRICALS AND DECEPTION – Theatrics are used in order to convince a subject that something is true when often it may only be partially true, or not true at all. Throughout the book, V uses theatrics to deceive everyone around him, including those he trusts, in order to achieve his end. Similarly, the theme is explored in relation to the fascist government’s rule of the people through the use of propaganda. *V for Vendetta* constantly asks the reader to consider if the deception, and the elaborate methods of achieving it, are necessary to control one’s surroundings and achieve a goal.

PRE-READING TEACHING IDEAS



- Ask students to conduct some initial research on the following thematic, key terms that are core to understanding *V for Vendetta*: “freedom,” “control,” and “free will.” Using a three-column table, ask students to write down what they learn about each term. Next, ask a couple of students to share their findings for each term. Finally, read the back cover of *V for Vendetta* aloud with your students and ask them to predict the various ways in which these particular three key terms may impact the storyline. If there is extra time, ask students to read both Lloyd’s and Moore’s introductions to *V for Vendetta* and reflect on whether what they now know about these three terms is further influenced by these introductions.
- Tell students to read the following article about the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, the inspiration for V’s symbolism and actions throughout *V for Vendetta*: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/archaeology-and-history/magazine/2017/11-12/history-the-explosive-truth-about-guy-fawkes/>. While reading the article, ask students to take thoughtful notes on index cards about key points regarding the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.
- In order to help with comprehension while reading, inform students that they can place their index cards in the book on the exact pages they find linked evidence between the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and the *V for Vendetta* storyline and characters.
- Ask students to spend 15-30 minutes researching one of the two following questions: “What makes someone a revolutionary?” and “What constitutes a revolution?” After researching one of the two questions and discussing some examples with the class, educators can next ask students to discuss the pros and cons of being involved in a revolution.
- In his Introduction to *V for Vendetta* Alan Moore writes: “Naiveté can also be detected in my supposition that it would take something as melodramatic as a near-miss nuclear conflict to nudge England towards fascism. Although in fairness to myself and David, there were no better or more accurate predictions of our country’s future available in comic form at that time. The simple fact that much of the historical background of the story proceeds from a predicted Conservative defeat in the 1982 General Election should tell you how reliable we were in our role as Cassandras.” Ask students to reflect on Moore’s quotation and think about how it may impact his telling of the story in *V for Vendetta*.

Note: If there is extra time after reading, ask students to read and reflect again on Moore’s quotation. What does it mean to readers after reading the story? Can students think of any current political events that may also align with Moore’s thoughts and/or the story in *V for Vendetta*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. The colors within *V for Vendetta* are often muted pastels of greens, yellows, blues, and reds. How does this art style further the story, and why did Lloyd decide to draw it this way? What does it say about creators' intentions in representing the many characters, settings, and/or events of the graphic novel?
2. The names of the different government agencies are the Eye, the Nose, the Ear, and so on. Why is this an important feature of the graphic novel? And what does it say about the way the Norsefire government views itself, as well as how citizens view the government and vice versa?
3. In Book 1, pages are missing from the diary of Delia Surridge about her time at Larkhill Resettlement Camp (p. 82-85). What do you think were in these pages? And why do you think V tore them out and, presumably, destroyed them?
4. Does V and Evey's relationship seem believable or problematic to you? Why or why not?
5. Why is it important that England's citizens believe that the "Voice of Fate" is actually Fate? Why did the government decide to use propaganda in this way? And if the citizens in *V for Vendetta* did have a chance to speak, what do you think they would say about the "Voice of Fate"?
6. The perception and opinions of everyday citizens is mostly left out of *V for Vendetta*. Do you feel this was an intentional decision by the creators? If so, why? If not, why not?
7. Many of the male characters look similar throughout the graphic novel. Do you feel this is an intentional decision by the creators? Why or why not?
8. Is "V" a hero? Why or why not?
9. Is Evey a hero? Why or why not?
10. Who is the central villain, or antagonist, of *V for Vendetta*? How do you know this is the case?
11. Technology is conveyed as both a tool for oppression and a tool for inspiration in *V for Vendetta*, depending on who is wielding it. What are some examples of the negative and positive aspects of technology in the novel? And if the creators could have foreseen the technology available to us today, do you think they'd feel optimistic or pessimistic about our future?
12. What role does surveillance and voyeurism play in this graphic novel? How does a sense of feeling constantly "observed" change the behavior of the characters, and what effect(s) are there when the government can no longer use these tools to surveil their citizens?
13. Symbols are vitally important to the plot and characters in *V for Vendetta*. What are the most important symbols to each character, particularly V and Evey, and why?

PROJECT IDEAS



WRITING STYLES – In Book 2, Chapter 4, V speaks to the TV audience as if they are employees in an office receiving a performance review. Write a passage in a similar fashion, but as yourself, speaking to a modern audience. Similar to V, cite worldly evidence to back up your claims.

MUSIC LITERACY – Select three different chapters from the book. Pair a different musical selection with each chosen chapter, so that a reader might listen to the song while reading. One musical selection must be considered classical music, another selection must have originated during the 1980s, and the final selection must be contemporary. For each selection, write a paragraph that justifies your musical choice.

TRANSFORMATION – Throughout the book, multiple characters endure significant and rapid transformation. Write an essay comparing and contrasting the transformations of V, Evey Hammond, Eric Finch, and Rosemary Almond.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS – In the story, V dresses up to look like Guy Fawkes. For historical context, research and study the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Next, consider the following question: If someone were to stage actions in the United States comparable to V's actions in England, whom do you think that person might model themselves after? Why do you think that? Create a unique visual representation of your vigilante, and write a passage describing your character and justifying their appearance.

FATE VS. CONTROL – Fate, and V's relationship with it, is a running theme throughout the book. V even references sleeping with fate and using the Fate computer, even though he often tries to control his surroundings through theatrics in order to achieve justice. Make a chart of moments in the book where V is orchestrating the events, and those in which fate intervenes (either to benefit V or to hinder him). Use your chart to analyze and interpret Alan Moore's message to the reader about fate and its role in trying to control justice.

AUTHOR'S INTENT – Alan Moore is quoted as saying "I didn't want to tell people what to think, I just wanted to tell people to think" in reference to V's "morally ambiguous" actions¹. Students may write essays or hold a class discussion about what V's message is, as well as what Alan Moore's message to the reader is, and how those two perspectives might be similar or different.

FILM LITERACY – Watch the film version of *V for Vendetta*, and make a note of the plot differences between the two stories. Write a persuasive essay trying to convince the reader that the changes in the plot were either necessary or unnecessary to the film adaptation. Did those changes benefit the movie or hinder it?

STUDY OF FASCISM – Alan Moore and David Lloyd created what they felt was a realistic version of what London might look like under a fascist government. Research and study the origins of fascism and its popularity in Europe in the early 20th century. Then, students can get into small groups of no more than five. Each group should imagine what their country might look like under a fascist government and formulate a plan for how their government would operate (similar to the Eyes, Mouth, Nose, Ears, and Finger structure in *V for Vendetta*). Then, each group should create a piece of propaganda, similar to the Voice of Fate, meant to influence and control their population. This could be a podcast, YouTube video, news broadcast, etc. Finally, each group should present their government structure and propaganda sample to the class.

¹ Alan Moore (March 2006). "A for Alan, Part 1". The Beat (Interview). Interviewed by Heather MacDonald. Mile High Comics. Archived from the original on 4 April 2006. Retrieved 29 October 2018.



FURTHER PAIRING SUGGESTIONS



- *V for Vendetta* (Film)
- *Les Misérables* (Book, Musical)
- *1984* (Book)
- *Maus* (Graphic Novel)
- *The Faithful Spy* (Graphic Novel)
- *Batman: White Knight* (Graphic Novel)
- *Wolfenstein: The New Order* and *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* (Video Games)
- *Watchmen* (Graphic Novel)
- *Fahrenheit 451* (Novel)
- *The Handmaid's Tale* (Novel and/or Television Series)
- *Monstress* (Graphic Novel)
- *Gravity's Rainbow* (Novel)
- *Animal Farm* (Novel)

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