



The Afterlife Of Beautiful Joe

A DISCUSSION GUIDE

Beautiful Joe has passed on. He lives on a special island for animals, where he happens to be President! He hopes to be reunited with Miss Laura. A sad human boy visits with his own dog who has passed on. He then tells the story of what it is like to befriend Joe on this heavenly island.

❶ FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The watercolor on the cover is simple—a tropical island, with no people or animals or buildings. Why were they not shown? [hint: What do authors want readers to do?]

❷ CHARACTERS

The narrator Sam is not perfect. Which character flaws made you frown and which made you smile? Why do you think the Madam Heka character is in this story? [one answer: her magic came in handy]

❸ A FUNNY LITERARY TECHNIQUE

This story often talks about death, which is sad. Authors often use *comic relief* to give us a break. Identify two examples in this story. [poetic goat, selfish parrot, grammarian rat, militant mice]

❹ THE PRESIDENCY

Beautiful Joe could have been just another dog in this animal heaven. Why do you think the author made him the president? How do you think his experiences while alive prepared him to be a good president? He seems wise, yet he approved the kidnapping of the widow. Did that make sense?

❺ DETENTION

Consider how an Isle of Probation sounds like a jail that attempts to really be a correctional facility. Discuss how it could be both a horrible place and a useful place for an angry animal.

❻ BALLOON TRANSPORT

This story took place when the only possible air travel was with balloons. Identify other authors from the late 1800s who used balloons in their stories. [Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, L. Frank Baum]

❼ THE OTHER HUMAN

The apologetic goat and the ornery widow made for an entertaining story. Why do you think Sam was so confident he could solve that poor goat's problem? Many animals on the island paid close attention to the widow. Why were they so mesmerized by her presence?

❽ A HIGH-PITCHED WHINE

When Joe is reunited with Miss Laura, she finally hears his whine of joylove. Were you expecting that? When it happened, what did you want to do? [cry, cheer, jump up and down? yawn?]

❾ FACT IN FICTION

This story is based on Margaret Saunder's (1861–1947) novel *Beautiful Joe's Paradise* in 1903. There are no facts in this fiction. It is *speculative fiction*, with fanciful notions about the afterlife. Research what different religions say about animals having souls, how those souls are different from human souls, and what happens to those souls after death. Does it make you feel differently about the story?