



The Early Life Of Beautiful Joe

A DISCUSSION GUIDE

Beautiful Joe, a good dog, tells the story of his life. He spent his first year with a vicious owner who abused him. His second year begins his forever life: living with Miss Laura and her family and the menagerie of animals they love. Joe becomes a hero when he stops a hateful burglar.

❶ FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Let's talk about the word, *Beautiful*. What did you think when you first saw that word in the title? Did you think it was odd placed in front of a male name? What kind of story did you think it might be?

❷ A DOG TELLS THE STORY

This is an autobiography—of a dog. Is that silly? Research whether it's an accepted *genre*. [Kilner (mouse), Sewell (horse), Saunders (dog), Kafka (ape), Applegate (gorilla), Tawada (polar bears)]

❸ WHAT WE ACCEPT

The first sentence of the fourth paragraph in the Introduction tells us something that we would not normally believe could happen in real life. But we *willingly suspend disbelief* to have fun reading a story. Is that normal? Should we be more literal and logical and refuse to go along with that? Why?

❹ FAMILY

Joe has wonderful things to say about the Morris family. Why? Does this family seem realistic to you? Describe how a family of mostly boys treats their only sister. If she were younger than them instead of older, how differently might they treat each other?

❺ SENSES

Joe explains that dogs cannot see the colour red. It's actually more complicated than that. Investigate and report on the differences in sight and smell between humans and dogs. Should the author have written more about Joe's sense of smell?

❻ INHUMANITY

Joe downplays traumatic events by not dwelling on the pain and horror of them. If he did dwell on the bad stuff, with details, how differently would you react when reading the story?

❼ SITCOM MOMENTS

The humour or comedy in situations make a story more interesting. Describe one such situation in the story and explain why you smiled or laughed. What funny situation could be added to the story?

❽ A HIGH-PITCHED WHINE

When Joe first meets Miss Laura, he makes a high-pitched whine she cannot hear. Is this physically possible? [Consider a dog whistle.] How might this be important to the story in all three books?

❾ FACT IN FICTION

These stories are based on Margaret Saunder's (1861–1947) novels *Beautiful Joe* in 1893 and *Beautiful Joe's Paradise* in 1903. The first novel became a bestseller, partly because it was inspired by a real dog whose actual name was Beautiful Joe. Investigate and report on where this dog lived. Also investigate similarities between the fictional Morris family and the actual Saunders family of Halifax, Nova Scotia.