



Reading Between The Lions

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Discussion Guide

The Country of the Pointed Firs

Sarah Orne Jewett

1. How do Jewett's landscapes serve as metaphors of her characters?

Do you see any similarities in the way Homer uses landscapes to set the tone of a painting?

2. How does Jewett explore the theme of community, and how do the location and time period influence the characters' relationships?

- a. How does isolation influence the nature of community?
- b. What roles do habits and traditions play?

3. Who is the narrator and what do we know about her? What do the narrator and Homer, both well-traveled individuals who settle in small communities, reveal about themselves through, respectively, their stories and paintings?

4. How are women portrayed in Jewett's novel?

*How does this compare to Homer's portrayal of women?
See: *The Watcher*, *Tynemouth* and *Flamborough Head, England*.*

5. Note the passage in Chapter 18:

“...there was a thick growth of dark pines and firs with an occasional maple or oak that gave a gleam of color like a bright window in the great roof. On three sides we could see the water, shining behind the tree-trunks, and feel the cool salt breeze that began to come up with the tide just as the day reached its highest point of heat. We could see the green sunlit field we had just crossed as if we looked out at it from a dark room, and the old house and its lilacs standing placidly in the sun.”

Here, Jewett paints a vivid picture. Are there other scenes in the book that you feel you can “see?”

Likewise, do Homer's paintings ever give you a sense of narrative?
*See: *For to Be a Farmer's Boy*; *After the Hurricane, Bahamas*; and *The Gulf Stream*.*

6. To the narrator, Dunnet seems to be more than just a physical place. What do you think Dunnet represents for her? Is there a place or time that means something similar to you?

7. Throughout the novel the narrator describes a host of colorful characters. What role do these people play in the life of the narrator?

What relationships do you sense between Homer and his figures?

See: *Campfire, Adirondacks; Apple Picking; and Flamborough Head, England.*

Also, in the exhibition, see *Woman Sewing and The New Novel.*

8. The book hints at sorrow in Mrs. Todd's past love life. What do you suspect may have happened to her?

Additional Recommended Reading

- For another perspective on fishing village life in rural Maine, try Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island*.
- Of Jewett's contemporaries, we recommend Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, particularly Thoreau's *Walden*, which also deals with themes of rural simplicity.
- To learn more about Homer and the exhibition, consider the exhibition catalogue,