

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Country of the Pointed Firs by Sarah Orne Jewett

- Why does the narrator come to Dunnet Landing? What is her function in the novel?
- How would you characterize Almira Todd and her place in the town? How does she differ in her outlook from Captain Littlepage, Joanna Todd, and Elijah Tilley?
- Captain Littlepage comments upon how the community of Dunnet Landing has changed and he sees it as “a change for the worse.” Why does he see it this way (p.18)
- Captain Littlepage tells the narrator a story about Gaffett, a Scottish seaman who himself tells a story about a shipmate’s visit to a town which Gaffett describes as “a waiting place for people stuck between our world and the next.” How do you explain what Gaffett and his shipmates saw? How does this story affect the way Littlepage looks at life and death?
- What does the narrator learn on her trip to Green Island?
- How would you characterize Mrs. Blackett?
- Does his life on Green Island stunt William or does it make life possible for him?
- How does the narrator meet him? What in that circumstance allows him to approach her?
- What is Susan Fosdick’s importance to the community?
- Why does Miss Joanna refuse to leave her isolated life on Shell Heap Island?
- What is the significance of Joanna in the community? Why are community members drawn to Shell Heap Island and Joanna’s grave?
- What did you think about the description of the Bowden Reunion? What is the value of the reunion to the participants?
- What do you learn about Mr. Tilley’s relationship with his wife from his stories? How would you characterize Elijah’s relationship with his wife as seen through the narrator’s eyes? How does the “best room” strike the narrator?
- What is the significance of the title?
- The author illustrates strong bonds between mothers and children in her novel. How would you describe the relationships between Mrs. Blackett and Mrs. Todd and William, between Esther and her paralyzed mother, Mrs. Hight?
- Jewett’s depiction of women was considered unusual for the time she wrote. Why do you think that was so?
- How do the female characters view the men? Does the narrator’s viewpoint differ? Do you agree with one critic who states that Jewett’s knowledge of men is limited and that her male characters are not realistic?
- Does the book have a theme or themes? What are they?



Skokie Public Library

5215 Oakton Street
Skokie, Illinois 60077
847.673.7774 / 847.673.7797 fax
www.skokielibrary.info

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