

Southfield Public Library

Mr. Pip by Lloyd Jones

Discussion questions used at SPL -- May 2010

1. Was this a part of the world and its history you were familiar with? Did it make you go look for more background information?
2. Why do you think we as Americans are so unaware of what is happening beyond our borders?
3. Have you read *Great Expectations*? Do you think if you haven't that it hampered your understanding of this book?
4. What did you think of Mr. Pip when we first met him, pulling his wife in a cart, wearing a red nose? What did the children and the other villagers think of him? Was the color of his skin more intriguing than his oddness to the children?
5. This story is told through Matilda's voice. What did you think of her? How did she change through the story? How much influence did Mr. Pip have on her at the beginning of their involvement? How much throughout her life?
6. Why was Mr. Pip there on the island in the first place? Why didn't he leave with all the others when the war started up? (On p. 69, there is talk of things lost and gained . . . what do you think he lost by living on the island? What did he gain?
7. Why do you think he began teaching the children? What did he gain from it?
8. What did his stepping in as the teacher mean to the children? To their parents?
9. What sort of things do you think the children learned by his reading them *Great Expectations*?
10. Why did he invite the parents to come speak in his classroom? What did the kids think of their parents being there? Did the kids learn from them? Did Mr. Pip?
11. What did it mean to the parents to come and "teach" at the school? Which lesson meant the most to you?
12. What did you think of Matilda's mum, Dolores? Was she a happy person? Angry? Scared?

13. What do you think of the relationship between Matilda and her mother? How did the father's absence affect them?
14. Was Matilda in the middle of a tug of war between the mom and the teacher? What was Matilda's mom afraid of?
15. Matilda's mom was very religious, Mr. Pip, not so much. How did that affect their relationship?
16. What do you think happened to Sam (p. 82)?
17. Why do you think Great Expectations touched Matilda and the others as much as it did? What kinship did Matilda have with Pip?
18. Why didn't they talk to each other about how much the book meant to them?
19. When the Redskins first came, what did you think was going to happen? (p. 100)? Why didn't Mr. Pip clear up the confusion about him not being Mr. Dickens?
20. Why did Dolores take that book? Why didn't she speak up when she saw what the Redskins were going to do?
21. Why didn't Matilda let her mother know that she knew about the book?
22. What was your reaction to the villagers taking Mr. Pip's things and burning them? Again, why didn't Matilda or her mother speak up?
23. What did Grace's death do to the villagers? What did it do to Mr. Pip?
24. How important is imagination? How did it help the kids on the island?
25. When the Rambos came, how did Mr. Pip control them? Why did he claim Mr. Pip was his name? What difference did that make to the villagers?
26. Was the story he told true? (p. 167) Why was it important for Grace to write her ancestors' names on the wall? Why was it important for the villagers to know that she had?
27. What did you think of the lists that Grace had made – the ones that Matilda remembered?
28. When the plan to leave the island came about, do you think Mr. Pip was really going to tell Dolores? Was he just asking Matilda? What do you think her choice would have been?
29. Was Mr. Pip's death shocking to you? Why do you think it had to happen?

30. Why finally did Dolores speak up and testify to the killing?
31. When Dolores gave up her life for Matilda, should Matilda have said something? What could she have said?
32. What gave Matilda the strength to fight to live when she was caught up in the river?
33. How did Matilda feel when she found out that Mr. Pip had not read the entire book to them?
34. When she went to Mr. Pip's house in New Zealand, was she disappointed with what she found? Were you?
35. Was Matilda disappointed in what she learned about Charles Dickens? What made her change from writing about him to writing about Mr. Pip?
36. Do you think she will go home?

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Mr. Pip

Questions from Reading Group Guides

http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides_m/mister_pip1.asp

- 1.** Is it important that Mr. Watts is the last white man on the island? Why?
- 2.** Why does Matilda write Pip's name in the sand alongside the names of her relatives? Why does this upset her mother? How does this contribute to Dolores's feelings about Mr. Watts's instruction of her daughter? Are these feelings understandable?
- 3.** Why do you think Mr. Watts pulled his wife in the cart? Why did he wear the red clown nose? What meaning did that have for them?
- 4.** What is the message Matilda's mother is trying to express to the children with the story of her mother's braids? How is this related to the issue of Mr. Watts's faith in God?
- 5.** What did you think of the lessons that the mothers of the children bring to the classroom? If you were the parent of a child in Matilda's class, what lesson would you teach the children? What might your mother have taught the class?
- 6.** Who is Dolores warning the children about when she tells them the story about the devil lady and the church money? How does this story justify her actions regarding the book and the redskins? Do you agree with Dolores's refusal to bring forth the book? With Matilda's?
- 7.** Where do you think Gilbert's father takes Sam? How do you know? In your opinion, was it necessary that he do so?
- 8.** Why does the corned beef in Mr. Watts's house "represent a broad hope" for Matilda? Discuss Mr. Watts's reaction to Matilda's fragment. Do you believe that Grace was alive when Matilda arrived?
- 9.** Discuss how the characters in this story struggle to reconcile the concepts of race and identity. Does it seem to dictate their interaction with each other? How does it influence their concepts of self? What moments, especially, helped reveal this to you?
- 10.** What is the meaning of the story of the Queen of Sheba? Why does Mr. Watts bring it up? Why is it significant that Dolores is familiar with that story?
- 11.** Why does Dolores step forward to declare herself "God's witness" to the murder of Mr. Watts? Were you surprised that she did? Why does she insist that Matilda remain silent?
- 12.** Do you think Matilda was able to return home? How would that outcome affect your reading of both novels?

13. Discuss your memorable experiences of being read to as a child. What book made the greatest impact on your life? Did any book come to you at precisely the right time, the way **Great Expectations** was brought to Matilda?

14. On **Great Expectations** and **Mister Pip**: Are both Mister Pip and Great Expectations universal coming-of-age tales? How did you react to the blending of these two distinctly different settings and time periods?

15. The initial lines of **Great Expectations** are reflected several times in this novel. Compare them to the opening lines of **Mister Pip**. What connections do these first sentences draw between the themes of both novels?

16. In what way are the narrative voices of **Mister Pip** and **Great Expectations** the same? How are they different? What shifts do you notice in the storytelling after Matilda leaves the island? How did this impact your reading?

17. How is Dolores's treatment of Matilda similar to Estella's treatment of Pip in **Great Expectations**? How does this relationship help Matilda understand Pip's attachment to Estella? Is it necessary that this attachment be severed before Pip/Matilda can grow individually?

18. Why do you think Mr. Watts omitted the characters of Orlick and Compeyson from his telling of **Great Expectations**? What additional meaning might the children have gleaned from the story if these characters and their storylines, such as Compeyson's jilting of Miss Havisham, had been included?

19. What is signified by the changing of one's name, both in **Great Expectations** and **Mister Pip**? Why does Matilda not change her name?

20. In what ways does **Great Expectations** help Matilda cope with her reality and prepare her for the future? How does it help Mr. Watts deal with his past? What makes **Great Expectations** the ideal Dickens choice for this purpose?

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General Discussion Questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author's writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author's use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?