

Lord Jim
by
Joseph Conrad

Book Information

Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim
Quiz Number: 5989
Signet, 1961
ISBN 0-451-52234-6; LCCN
317 Pages
Book Level: 9.1
Interest Level: UG

A haunted sailor, driven from port to port, from island to island, Lord Jim is a man in search of identity.

Topics: Adventure, Discovery/Exploration; Family Life, Running Away; Popular Groupings, College Bound

Main Characters

Brierly a seaman who acts as a judge at Jim's trial and commits suicide shortly after the trial

Brown a pirate who comes to Patusan to raid it, and ultimately causes Jim's death when he reneges on his agreement to leave peaceably

Cornelius the former operator of the trading post in Patusan

Dain Waris Doramin's son and Jim's friend

Doramin a native chieftain of Patusan, who ultimately kills Jim

Jewel Cornelius's stepdaughter, who loves Jim

Jim a young seaman who abandons ship in an emergency and spends the rest of his life attempting to regain his self-respect

Marlow the narrator of most of the story, an older seaman who sympathizes with and attempts to help Jim

Rajah Allang a man who has intimidated the Patusan natives in the past; Jim helps control him

Sherif Ali the leader of a guerilla band that raids the village until Jim destroys his stronghold

Skipper of the "Patna" the captain who abandons the "Patna"

Stein a friend of Marlow's who gives Jim a position with his trading company in Patusan

Tamb' Itam Jim's loyal servant

felicity the quality of being happy

gharry horse-drawn cab; used especially in India

misanthropic marked by a hatred or contempt for mankind

obsequious compliant

punkah fan suspended from a ceiling and operated by a cord; used especially in India

spurious outwardly similar to something, but without its genuine qualities

Synopsis

Jim, the son of an English parson, chooses sailing as a career. As first mate of the "Patna," Jim refuses to help other crew members lower a lifeboat for themselves when the "Patna," which is carrying hundreds of Moslem pilgrims and inadequate life boats, appears ready to sink. At the last moment, however, he jumps into their boat.

The "Patna" does not sink after all, and the crew faces an inquiry. Jim is seen at the trial by Marlow, who becomes the narrator of the rest of the story. When Jim overhears a reference to a "wretched cur," he thinks Marlow is referring to him. After the misunderstanding is resolved, Jim has dinner with Marlow. Marlow tries to understand why Jim abandoned the ship and the feelings about himself that Jim is now experiencing.

Jim loses his naval certificate over the incident. Marlow helps Jim find various jobs, but Jim leaves them any time reference is made to the "Patna" affair. Finally, through his friend Herr Stein, Marlow helps Jim secure a job as the director of an obscure trading post in Patusan, one of the Malay Islands.

In Patusan, Jim appears to redeem himself and regain his self-respect. He ends the vandalism of Sherif Ali, a renegade who preys on the natives, and also brings Rajah Allang, who has controlled the natives through force, under control. He is loved by the natives and called "Lord Jim." He also gains a good friend and falls in love with a girl, Jewel. Jewel is worried that Jim will leave her for the outside world.

Vocabulary

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Lord Jim

by

Joseph Conrad

A group of pirating seamen led by "Gentleman Brown" arrive in Patusan with plans to steal supplies. Jim, who sees in Brown's failings his own, convinces the natives to allow Brown's men to leave peaceably. Before he leaves, Brown, with the help of Cornelius, whose place in the trading post Jim had taken, slays numerous natives, including Jim's closest friend.

Jim believes he has failed for a second time. His life is in ruins. He refuses to fight or flee. Instead, he presents himself to his deceased friend's father, who shoots him. He gives the crowd a proud and unflinching glance before he falls.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why does Jim like the idea of taking over the trading post at Patusan?

The outside world would leave him alone there. He would have a chance to start over and redeem himself in his own eyes.

Literary Analysis

Discuss the symbolism of Herr Stein's hobbies of collecting butterflies and beetles.

The butterflies represent romance, while beetles represent cold reality. Stein says Jim is a romantic and claims that is both bad and good. Instead of suggesting ways for Jim to reject his romanticism, he suggests Jim be given a chance to live with it successfully by going to the far-off Patusan.

Inferential Comprehension

Why does Jim say after he jumps off the "Patna," "It was as if I had jumped into a well--into an everlasting deep hole...."

Jim shows cowardice when he jumps. He lost his self-respect and the respect of the world. Trying to regain what he had lost is like trying to climb out of a very deep hole. It isn't until he makes a new life for himself in Patusan that Jim is able to climb out of the hole only in the sense that life is "temporary."

Constructing Meaning

When Jim tries to convince Tamb' Itam to assemble a fleet of boats to pursue Brown, Tamb' Itam refuses. Why? What does Jim realize at that moment?

Tamb' Itam refuses because he feels it is not safe for him to go among the people; they would turn against Jim and his servant. Then Jim realizes he has lost the trust of the people of Patusan. He has failed twice.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features Instruct the students to write an essay describing their understanding of the themes Conrad presents in *Lord Jim*. Ask them to choose three characters and discuss how they help illustrate the novel's themes.

Understanding Literary Features Ask for a show of hands whether any students think Jim should have fought or fled rather than present himself to Doramin after Dain Waris was killed. Use this as a lead-in to a class discussion about why Jim behaved as he did and what the consequences would have been for him had he taken any other action.

Understanding Literary Features Conrad's use of Marlow to tell Jim's story enables Conrad to explore the story from several different points of view. Marlow's existence also affects the theme of the book by showing Jim's dilemmas to be universal. Initiate a classroom discussion about

Lord Jim
by
Joseph Conrad

the various purposes Marlow serves. Ask the students to discuss how the story would have been different without Marlow's presence. Point out that Conrad uses Marlow to narrate others of his stories and novels as well.

Responding to Literature While Marlow is sitting with the Frenchman who had been one of those to board the "Patna" after the incident, Marlow writes, "It's extraordinary how we go through life with eyes half shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts. Perhaps it's just as well; and it may be that it is this very dullness that makes life to the incalculable majority so supportable and so welcome. Nevertheless, there can be but few of us who had never known one of these rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand every so much--everything--in a flash--before we fall back again into our agreeable somnolence." Offer the students two choices for responding to Marlow's words. 1) Think of a moment in their lives that was one of the "rare moments of awakening," and write a journal entry about that moment, or 2) write a short commentary on these thoughts of Marlow's.