

An Island

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Karen Jennings

1. *An Island* is told from Samuel's perspective. How did this affect the story?
2. How do you think the novel's events would have been different if the two men on the island spoke the same language?
3. What message do you think this book was trying to convey about the plight of refugees? Did it make you think about any current political situations differently? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. How did the story of Roland, Samuel's friend in prison, influence Samuel's behavior during the rest of his sentence?
5. What do the No Shoes Boys represent for Samuel when he's young? How does this change over time, especially with characters like Dog who get seduced by the promise of military power?
6. Did the General—later the Dictator—remind you of any political figures in the present day, or throughout history? If so, who?
7. The island referenced in the title is never named. How did this affect your reading experience?
8. Samuel's failure to kill the soldier at the march seems to haunt him later. Why is this? What does this scene cause him to believe about himself?
9. "This is what capture brought to him. It did not come with a sense of honor as he had been told it would, it did not come with pride," Jennings writes of Samuel's prison experience. "It brought only memories of humiliations, and a feeling that it would all continue as it had." How do these feelings continue to present themselves in Samuel's life, even once he's "free"?
10. Were you surprised to learn Samuel gave up Meria's name during an interrogation? Why or why not?
11. How did themes of violence—both political and personal—play out in the novel?
12. What did you make of Samuel's sister's attitude toward him after his release? Was her treatment of Samuel justified?
13. How would you characterize the stranger on the island? What do you think his motivations were? Do you think he was ever truly a threat to Samuel?
14. How did you feel about the book's ending? Was it inevitable, or could it have gone another way? If so, how?