

Prester John A (Chs.1-5): Discussion Questions

1. *Settings* The story begins in eastern Scotland and soon moves to southern Africa – why these two general settings? What specific settings are described here? How are they described?
2. *Narrator* Who is telling the story? What do we learn about his background, appearance, character, qualities, attitudes and beliefs? Is he likely to be the hero of the story?
3. *Characters* How many other characters are mentioned by name during these chapters? Which are likely to prove of greatest importance in the story? What are their roles?
4. *Events* How many journeys are described during these chapters? How many important discoveries are made? How many coincidences occur? What is the significance of each?
5. *Style/Tone* What genre(s) does the story seem to belong to? What stories are you familiar with that belong to the same genre? What is distinctive about *Prester John*?
6. *Context/Theme* What do you know about the career and writings of the author John Buchan? When was this story written and published? How does it relate to his other works?

Prester John B (Chs.6-11): Discussion Questions

1. *Settings* Two key settings in these chapters are the Store at Umvelos', and the Cave of the Rooirand. How is each described? What significance does each have in the story?
2. *Narrator* What is the attitude of the narrator towards his main enemies, Laputa and Henriques? Why is it so different? How important is the sense of race to his judgements?
3. *Characters* Who exactly is Arcoll? How does he first appear in the story? How is he presented? What role is he likely to play in the ensuing events?
4. *Events* How many times does the narrator act as a spy during these chapters? Who does he spy on, where, and on what occasion? What is the result?
5. *Style/Tone* In the chapters that you have read so far, how many direct or indirect references to other texts and stories? Why those texts?
6. *Context/Theme* What do you know about the history of southern Africa at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century? How does Buchan's narrative relate to these events?

Prester John C (Chs.12-17): Discussion Questions

1. *Settings* In the course of these chapters, there is a good deal of description of the landscape. Find a couple of examples and discuss them. Can things like hills and valleys have a symbolic meaning?
2. *Narrator* The narrator carries out a number of amazing feats during these chapters but also makes a number of surprising decisions. Why does he act in the way that he does?
3. *Characters* How are the African people in general presented in the story? How many individually named African characters appear? How are they presented?
4. *Events* How times is the crossing of a river or the crossing of a road described in these chapters? When and where? What significance do these events have?
5. *Style/Tone* Look at the conversations between the narrator and Laputa in chapters 16 and 17? Is there any significant difference between the way the two talk? Which tends to win the argument?
6. *Context/Theme* How important are Christian beliefs and practices to the narrative? What different kinds of Christianity are mentioned?

Prester John D (Chs.18-23): Discussion Questions

1. *Settings* Discuss the events taking place in the Cave of the Rooirand. How does Laputa die? How does the narrator survive? How important is the setting?
2. *Narrator* At a number of points in the story the narrator and Laputa are explicitly compared. When and why?
3. *Characters* What animals play a major part in the story? What general attitude does the narrator take towards those animals? Why?
4. *Events* At the end of the story, the narrator is a rich man. Discuss the way treasure is treated in the closing stages of the story.
5. *Style/Tone* What is the main tone and mood at the ending of the story? What is the future shown to hold? Would you describe the story as a comedy or a tragedy or . . . ?
6. *Context/Theme* What attitude towards imperialism and colonialism is taken by the narrator in the closing chapters of the novel? What is your opinion of this?