

SAILOR TWAIN – READING GROUP GUIDE



About the Book:

19th century steamboat captain Elijah Twain finds a wounded mermaid named South in the Hudson River and nurses her back to health. Her existence seems to hold the key to the strange behavior of some of Twain's shipmates, most notably Dieudonné de Lafayette and his vanished brother, Jacques-Henri. Twain seeks to discover exactly why. A controversial best-selling book about mermaids—shockingly penned by a woman—provides some answers but raises questions of its own.

For Discussion:

This graphic novel is multimedia, meaning that many materials were used to create it—for example, each part has a series of newspaper clippings, and there are maps at the beginning of each chapter. Did these details enhance the story? And if so, how?

Sailor Twain is fiction, but much of the setting is very realistic. What did you learn about New York in the late 1800s by reading this book?

When it is revealed that the mysterious author, C. G. Beaverton, is a woman, there is a huge public reaction, much of which is negative. Did this surprise you? Why or why not?

Singing is a recurring motif throughout the story, whether it is Pearl, Ella, or South herself. What are the different roles that song plays?

Twain suffers from writers block until he meets South—after they kiss, he is flooded with some of the best writing he has produced. Have you ever been struck by inspiration? What triggered it?

Sailor Twain takes place shortly after the end of the civil war, and tense but changing race relations are depicted or hinted at throughout the story. How do race relations in the book's events compare to those of the years before? To the present?

C. G. Beaverton describes possible symbolism of mermaids: “The lure of the drink, the fatal attraction of mad lovers, the perennial lust for war or... the magnetic pull of fame.” There are other things that draw people the way the mermaid draws the men in the book. What are some other symbolic legends?

The mermaid traps spirits by tearing them in two, so half of their self remains below the water with her. What do you think it feels like to literally be in two places at once?

How did you feel about South by the end of the story? Her back story is a sad one, but she herself has also causes a lot of unhappiness. What kind of “person” is she?

Sailor Twain was originally published online in single-page installments. How would the experience of the book be different if you only read a little bit at a time?