

From the Author's Desk:

Hello Parents and Teachers! Thank you for sharing "Eleanor: Crown Jewel of Aquitaine, France 1136" with your readers. I hope this discussion guide will help them reflect on the novel and enjoy it on a deeper level. I've added a recipe and some activities that might be fun for them; also tidbits about my research in France.

Cheers,
Kristi

Eleanor: Crown Jewel of Aquitaine, France 1136:

About this book: The fictional diary of Eleanor, first daughter of the duke of Aquitaine, from 1136 until 1137, when at age fifteen she becomes queen of France. Includes historical notes on her later life. Originally published in The Royal Diaries series for Scholastic.

For readers 8 to 12.

ISBN 9781533664532

Discussion ideas:

<> Part I

1. What is a ducal progress?
2. Describe the animals and people who must accompany the baggage train between castles.
3. Name some of the subjects Eleanor and Petronilla studied with their tutor.
4. Explain the meaning of fealty.

<> Part II

1. Describe a time when you may have made a bad decision because you were angry.
2. Tell about the work of a blacksmith during the Middle Ages.
3. Eleanor did not like rules. What school or family rules are hard for you to obey, and why?
4. Why do you think dwarves were 'employed' as royal entertainment?

Activity suggestions:

<> **Write** -- These can be a brief paragraph or several pages:

1. "If I could practice a joyous art it would be ..."
2. A poem about a castle
3. A song about a good friend

<> Draw

1. A knight in armor
2. A castle by the sea
3. A royal garden

<> **Make**

1. Diorama of a castle
2. A flag to represent your family

<> **Read** -- Catherine: The Great Journey, Russia 1743. Drama and intrigue explode in the story of 14-year-old Princess Catherine's incredible journey to greatness.
ISBN 9781533664228

<> **Cook**

Eleanor's Favorite Honey Cake: Petronilla and Eleanor loved honey cake, which may have resembled modern gingerbread. Try it! This recipe makes 8-10 servings.

Ingredients:

- 1 3/4 cups self-raising flour
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 1/2 sticks of butter (approximately 10 tablespoons)
- 3 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1/2 cup honey
- 3/4 cup sour cream (or Greek honey yogurt)

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Preheat oven to 375F

Stir flour, sugar, and spices into a bowl.

In another bowl mix butter, eggs, honey and sour cream/yogurt.

Add butter mixture to dry ingredients and stir until just combined.

Spoon mix into a greased 9x13 pan and bake 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean.

**Behind the scenes of this story:**

When researching Eleanor I traveled to France a few times, once with my eldest son's high school French class. I love teenagers and I love medieval history. It was a lot of fun imagining a fourteen-year-old girl living during the Middle Ages as we toured Aquitaine country.

On a subsequent trip to Paris, I explored the Louvre Museum with my youngest son, in search of what is believed to be the only surviving artifact owned by Eleanor. After some interesting conversations in fractured French and several wrong turns, we finally found the exhibit: a crystal vase about sixteen-inches tall, encrusted with jewels. It was beautiful. Most of the gems were each about the size of my thumbnail, in an array of blues and violets, set in silver.

It is said that Eleanor was fifteen and newly married to King Louis VII when she gave the vase to him. The Latin inscription on its base states that after she presented it to Louis, he gave it to Abbot Suger, who then donated it to the Abbey of Saint-Denis in Paris. We took a photo, which appears on Page 3 of the paperback.

**A secret about the author:**

During childhood my family did a lot of camping in New Mexico and California forests. My brother, sister, and I loved to find a large flat rock near a stream -- out of sight from our parents -- where we could plan an adventure. Our name for this tradition was Rocky Hot Plan. So when writing about Eleanor and her younger sister I gave them a similar rock where they were safe to hide and whisper secrets.

I'm convinced many of the concerns and interests kids have today are similar to those of eight centuries ago: friendship, parental love, curiosity about their future, yearnings for adventure and, of course, whispering secrets.

**Contact:** I would love to hear about your discussion. Just click the Contact button on my website, [kristianagregory.com](http://kristianagregory.com), and I'll answer you!