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Queen of the Sea

DYLAN MECONIS

About the Book

When her sister seizes the throne, Queen Eleanor of Albion is banished to a tiny island off the coast of her kingdom, where the nuns of the convent spend their days praying, sewing, and gardening. But the Island is also home to Margaret, a mysterious young orphan whose life is upturned when the cold, regal stranger arrives. As Margaret grows closer to Eleanor, she grapples with the revelation of the Island's sinister purpose as well as the truth of her own past. When Eleanor's life is threatened, Margaret faces a choice between helping Eleanor or protecting herself. Based loosely on the youth of Queen Elizabeth I, this hybrid novel transports readers to a windswept island at the heart of a treasonous royal plot.

About Dylan Meconis



Photo by Chris Higgins

Dylan Meconis is a cartoonist, writer, and illustrator who has been writing and illustrating her own stories since first grade and her own comic books since middle school. She created the graphic novels *Family Man*, *Bite Me!*, and *Outfoxed*, which was nominated for a Will Eisner Comic Industry Award. She lives with her wife in Portland, Oregon.



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Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



1. What is life like for Margaret growing up on the Island before Eleanor arrives? What kinds of tasks fill her days? Who does she spend time with? What does she learn to do? What aspects of life on the Island help make the nuns self-sufficient? In what ways do they rely on the visits of the *Regina Maris*?
2. The nuns are a big part of Margaret's life. What does she learn about their pasts? Why are they on the Island? What are some conflicts she has with Sister Agnes? How does she feel about Sister Agnes at the end of the story? Explain the mission of the Elysian order and how the nuns fulfill it.
3. Who is William, and why do he and his mother end up on the Island? Describe the friendship between William and Margaret. What does the friendship show about Margaret? What does she make Eleanor promise about William and his family at the end of the story?
4. What does Margaret learn about herself from the nuns and others living on the Island before Eleanor's stay? What else would she like to know about herself? When Margaret realizes that she cannot leave the Island, the knowledge changes the Island "from a wonderful place—the *only* place—to a grim one" (page 126). Why does she feel this way?
5. Summarize what Margaret finds out about her parents. How does she learn it, and what is her reaction? Why do you think Sister Agnes lets her hear the information? The motto of Eleanor's mother's family is *Je sais qui je suis* (page 319). How could that motto be applied to Margaret's life?
6. Why does Eleanor come to the Island? Explain her heritage, history, and rivalry with Catherine. Why does Eleanor want to be queen again? What are the obstacles in her way? From what you see of Eleanor in the story, discuss whether you think she would be a good queen.
7. Who is Francis? Why does he come to the Island? Why is Eleanor initially angry at him? Describe their relationship. What are some ways that Margaret helps Eleanor and Francis? Why does she help them? What are Francis and Eleanor planning to do at the end of the story?
8. Eleanor teaches Margaret how to play chess. How does the game relate to Eleanor's life and her political struggles? Explain why Eleanor says that the queen is "the most valuable piece on the chessboard" (page 317). How is Margaret like a pawn that can sneak across the board and become "a new queen" (page 318)?
9. Eleanor tells Margaret that she will tell her what she knows about William when Margaret can beat her at chess. Why does Eleanor lie about this? What are other examples of how she treats Margaret early on in their relationship? In what way is Margaret a threat to her? Describe how Eleanor's attitude toward Margaret varies and what it is at the end of the book.
10. What characteristics of Mother Mary Clemence make Margaret dislike her? How does Mother Mary Clemence treat Eleanor? How does she treat those who were already on the Island? Why do you think she is so hostile? Explain why she is worried near the end of the story when Eleanor and Francis disappear.
11. When Margaret is thinking about who would be a better queen, Eleanor or Catherine, she compares Francis and Mother Mary Clemence, who she describes as "the opposite of Francis in every way" (page 284). How are they opposites? What does Margaret conclude about which queen would be better? Do you agree?
12. Francis explains to Margaret, "Our Queen Eleanor can feel great joy, Margaret. But I do not know that she could ever be happy" (page 377). Why does he think that? Do you agree? Discuss his statement that "a wise leader cannot force her people to be wise, but a courageous leader can convince her people to be brave" (page 376).

13. What do you think will happen to Margaret, Eleanor, and Francis after they swim to the ship? How has Margaret changed during the story, and what do the changes suggest about the kind of adult she'll be? What do you think will happen in Eleanor's relationship with Francis in the future?
14. When Eleanor describes jumping in a puddle as a child, Francis points out that Eleanor's nurse was almost sent to prison for not stopping her. What are some of the other unreasonable punishments in the story from the past, in the present, and threatened for the future? What did King Edmund do to his enemies, real and perceived? How about Catherine? Why do you think there was so much harshness and violence in politics then?
15. Early in the story, Margaret and William read about forgiveness. When William vows to avenge his family, Margaret says, "Seeking revenge is a sin. You're supposed to forgive your enemies" (page 101). Why does she think that? Do you agree? Who does Margaret forgive, and who forgives her? When else is forgiveness important in the story?
16. What role do secrets and betrayal play in the plot? Name some secrets that Margaret keeps or are kept from her and how they affect her. How are secrets and betrayal important in Eleanor's life? Who else feels betrayed or deceived at various points in the story, and why?
17. Why do you think the book is titled *Queen of the Sea*? Recount the story of the Queen of the Sea (page 262) and talk about how it ties in to the rest of the book. What is the legend about selkies, and when does it come up? Discuss ways in which the sea is central to Margaret's life.
18. Captain Marley talks about the importance of sons and tells Margaret that when a queen marries, her husband will become the ruler. Why are males considered more important than females in the time period in which this book is set? Describe some of the strong women portrayed in the book, including those in legends and saints' stories. What kind of power or strength do they have?
19. Discuss the interaction between text and illustrations in the book. Find places where the pictures reflect the words and others where they portray things not in the text. What information do you learn from the art about the time and place and how people lived?

These questions were prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years who chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and now presents professional development workshops for educators on new books for young people.

