



MINI STUDY GUIDE

THE SECRET OF JEANNE BARET



<https://readlearnpress.com>

P.O. Box
Boston, Massachusetts 02130
Copyright © 2021. Helen Stranhinich

Read/Learn Press
All rights reserved.

FOREWORD

This study guide offers a variety of questions and activities to support the teaching of *The Secret of Jeanne Baret*. Teachers and parents may choose to use all of the materials in this booklet or to select specific questions and activities.

Cross-curricular activities follow up on topics developed in the novel. They provide an engaging introduction to world history, geography, and botany. Middle-school and the beginning of high school mark an optimal time to lay a foundation for advanced learning—and, more important, to awaken students' interest in those areas.

The author, a former teacher, has written books and texts for most of the major American publishers during her thirty-year career in education publishing. She received a B.A. from Brandeis University in English and American Literature and a M.Ed from Harvard University, where she studied under Jeanne Chall at the Harvard Reading Laboratory.

WARM UP FOR READING

To orient readers to the setting and significance of Jeanne Baret's story, a brief video tour of the Bougainville Expedition is available at <https://vimeo.com/512753288>

The video also includes photographs and historical illustrations of people, places and events that figure in *The Secret of Jeanne Baret*.

ReadLearnPress.com offers two maps of Bougainville's circumnavigation. Teachers and parents can run off the maps and use them to familiarize readers with the ships' route and to facilitate tracking the ships' progress during this novel. <https://readlearnpress.com/book/secret-of-jeanne-baret/>

CHAPTER QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

(Possible answers to Assessment questions are in parentheses.)

CHAPTER 1

Assessment

Why does Jeanne Baret make her rash decision? What does her situation show about the general position of women in eighteenth-century Europe?

(She was a poor, unmarried woman with few choices for making a living, other than housekeeping or a life on the street. Her situation reflects the fact that eighteenth century women were dependent on men for survival and had few personal options.)

Identify at least three details that establish the historical setting.

(smallpox that ruined the skin of survivors; carriages on the street; girls limited choices; Louis XV, frigates, pirates.)

Activity

WRITING Jeanne Baret left a letter in her trunk. What might her letter say? Write the letter in her words.

CHAPTER 2

Assessment

An important book theme is: "With cleverness and determination, a person can achieve unexpected results." Identify at least three examples from chapters 1 and 2 that support this theme.

(Jeanne Baret's determination to go on the ship and her clever disguise; the way she lowered her voice and copied how sailors walk; kept her cool; took advantage of the Botanist's changing situation; presented a convincing story)

Activity

ART Draw a picture or blueprint of the Botanist's cabin. Use chapter descriptions to help you.

CHAPTER 3

Assessment

During the course of Chapter 3, Jeanne Baret's feelings about her new undertaking swing between doubt and determination. What might account for these fluctuations?

(Jeanne made an impulsive decision to disguise herself, lie to the Botanist, and join the crew of the *Étoile*. The enormity of her decision eventually hits her, causing doubt. At the same time, she is thrilled about the adventure that lies ahead.)

CHAPTER 4

Assessment

What does the reader learn about the novel's setting in Chapters 2–4?

(These opening chapters give a visual overview of most of the *Étoile*, the novel's main setting: the top deck, the gun deck, officer's quarters and dining hall, and the Botanist's cabin.)

Activity

CHARACTER BIO Create a back story for one of the chapter's minor characters, such as Lieutenant Caro, Michel, or even Bandit.

CHAPTER 5

Assessment

What conflict is established in Chapter 5? What do readers learn about Jeanne from this conflict?

(Jeanne faces a conflict with two sailors. Readers learn that she can keep her cool and think on her feet.)

Activity

BULLYING Why do you think Rat and Giant pick on Jeanne? How is their treatment of Jeanne similar to bullying you have witnessed?

CHAPTER 6

Assessment

One theme of this book is: "Good people may encounter evil." Give two examples from Chapters 5 and 6 that support this theme.

(Examples that support this theme: Jeanne's encounter with Rat and Giant; Gerard's repeated episodes of bullying, including a beating.)

CHAPTER 7

Assessment

What does the reader learn about Commerson in this chapter?

(Commerson is curious and probing; he is a workaholic; he is private and has a sense of humor.)

Activity

DRAMA Chapter 7 contains several scenes. Create a skit based on one scene from this chapter.

CHAPTER 8

Assessment

Why do you think crossing the Equator was considered a significant event and worthy of a ceremony aboard ships?

(Crossing the Equator means reaching a significant geographic point; those who have crossed the Equator have experienced an event that separates them from others; the ceremony celebrates this feat.)

Activity

GEOGRAPHY Draw a large circle and show the following terms: *Equator*; *lines of longitude*; *lines of latitude*. Then write a definition for each term.

CHAPTER 9

Assessment

Why was everybody thrilled about sighting land?

(They were nearly out of food, having already been at sea for 12 weeks.)

Activity

SUPERSTITIONS Sailors are famous for holding many superstitions. Make a list of superstitions described in this book.

CHAPTER 10

Assessment

One idea that runs through this book is: "A ship mirrors society." If this idea is true, what can you infer about French society?

(People in French society are religious, especially when facing danger; the boundaries between upper and lower classes are rigid; people in lower classes do the hardest, most dangerous jobs.)

Activity

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER Create a graphic organizer that illustrates the conflicts that have erupted in the book.

CHAPTER 11

Assessment

Why was "taking a sounding" important on a ship?

(To know the depth of water and to identify rocks and objects in an area was important for the general safety of the ship and for a safe landing.)

How was Jeanne's reaction to reaching land similar and different from what her crewmates experienced?

(Everyone was thrilled and relieved to reach land; Jeanne shared this reaction but was also ecstatic about reaching an important milestone in her quest to come the first woman ever to circle the Earth.)

Activity

WRITING Jeanne reports that she wrote two letters, one to her aunt and one to her cousin. Write one of these letters.

CHAPTER 12

Assessment

What was the importance to Europe of New World plants? What light does this chapter shed on Commerson's role as the expedition's Royal Botanist?

(New World plants offered great commercial potential. Commerson's role was important because of the hope that he might find valuable new plants to bring back to Europe.)

Activity

RESEARCH Find out about Buenos Aires today. Create a chart showing basic information, such as size, population, ethnic makeup, and per capita income.

CHAPTER 13

Assessment

Reread the punishments, on page 108, for deserting ship. Did "the punishment fit the crime"? What does this information suggest about the state of "justice" in 1767?

(Justice was harsh in 1767. Desertion is/was a serious crime, but ducking is a cruel and unusual form of corporal punishment that now seems excessively severe.)

Activity

ART Using information from Chapters 12 and 13, create a booklet for children showing plant parts and types of plants.

CHAPTER 14

Assessment

How did Martin react to seeing Jeanne reading a book? What does his reaction show about the state of education in 1767?

(Martin was shocked to see Jeanne reading a book. His surprise suggests that poor men like Martin and Jeanne tended to be uneducated and unable to read.)

CHAPTER 15

Assessment

On page 125, paragraph 6, Jeanne notes, "The survival of the *Étoile* and *Boudeuse* might depend on Véron's success [at tracking longitude]." Explain.

(The ability of officers to determine a ship's exact location was problematic. Scientists had not yet invented a method to accurately figure out longitude [distance east and west]. Determining a ship's true location could ensure the safety and survival of the ship and crew.)

Activity

ART/SCIENCE Find a picture of the *Bougainvillea* plant and make a drawing or painting of it. Put information about the plant below your picture.

CHAPTER 16

Assessment

Based on the Viceroy's comments, what position did Paris hold in the world?

(Paris was a great city admired across the globe for its beauty, art, food, sculpture, architecture, and sophistication.)

Based on information in this chapter, what was the "expulsion of the Jesuits"? What was its significance?

(The King of Spain banished the Jesuits from Spanish lands in the New World, where they had long-established monasteries. The Jesuits wielded power and had extensive holdings in the New World, coveted by the nobility and wealthy landowners of New Spain. It was bad news for the Native Americans who would now be at the mercy of settlers who were sure to treat them worse than the Jesuits.)

Activity

MAP Based on descriptions in this chapter, make a simple map of Montevideo in 1767.

CHAPTER 17

Assessment

In what ways has Jeanne changed since the start of her journey.

(Physically and mentally, Jeanne is different. Her body is stronger and has filled out; she has developed confidence.)

Why might Jeanne have kept her dress during the voyage?

(Her dress was a reminder of who she was; it represented a connection to her father.)

Activity

WRITING Suppose the servant girl who prepared Jeanne's bath could write. Write an entry in her journal for July 20, 1767.

CHAPTER 18

Assessment

In what ways did the crew's work differ from the work of officers and gentlemen on the ship?

(The crew carried out all forms of manual labor, from preparing meals and cleaning decks to maneuvering and maintaining sails and ropes. Officers were in charge of the crew, of keeping the ship on course, and of making any decisions of importance.)

CHAPTER 19

Assessment

In 1767, sailing through the Strait was considered a dangerous adventure. To what modern undertaking do you think it was comparable?

(Similar adventures today might include climbing the world's highest peaks, chasing the tallest waves, sailing solo around the world, exploring space.)

CHAPTER 20

Assessment

Why were French officers eager to trade trinkets for furs?

(Furs had great value in France, while trinkets were essentially worthless.)

CHAPTER 21

Assessment

What new information does the chapter reveal about De Bougainville?

(De Bougainville is determined, hardworking, and brave; his connections and bravery helped to finance the expedition to the Pacific.)

What role did pets play on the ship?

(Pets provided a diversion from the dangers of the voyage and a distraction from the harsh reality of ship life; they offered some normalcy, kindness, and humanity in the brutal environment at sea.)

Activity

ART Jeanne dispensed gifts to her closest allies on ship. Recreate a picture or a few pages from her booklet to Martin, based on the chapter description.

CHAPTER 22

Assessment

How did the relationship between the Frenchmen and the Fuegians change during the chapter?

(The interaction started out with mutual excitement and cheer but quickly devolved to distrust and tragedy after the young Fuegian ingested glass beads, grew sick, and died.)

Activity

PHILOSOPHY Who was Voltaire? Write a short biography of the philosopher.

CHAPTER 23

Assessment

In the opening paragraph of the chapter, Jeanne says, "If this was summer in the Strait of Magellan, what did winter hold here?" How would you answer her?

(Summer in the Strait holds some warmer days, but winter gets colder and colder near the end of the world.)

Activity

GEOLOGY The strange rock formation described in Chapter 23 may have been a hoodoo. Research and write a brief report on hoodoos.

CHAPTER 24

Assessment

What does this chapter show about the developing relationship between Jeanne and Commerson?

(Jeanne's feelings have deepened into love, though she understands that there is no chance of reciprocation. For his part, Commerson appreciates Jeanne and her contribution, but his feelings are not romantic.)

CHAPTER 25

Assessment

Write a brief summary of Chapter 25. Remember to include only the most important information. (CCSS: RL.5.2 through RL.10.2)

(The crew faces starvation and thirst as they sail through the South Pacific. The little food and water left is contaminated with insects and slime. The ships pass promising islands, but they all present problems: small size, rocky coasts, or ferocious waves that prevent landing.)

Activity

SCIENCE Scurvy was a dreaded disease among sailors. Create a medical-journal entry for scurvy. Identify the causes and effects of this disease. Explain why sailors were at risk to get scurvy during the Age of Exploration.

CHAPTER 26

Assessment

How was Jeanne's reaction to reaching Tahiti similar and different from what the rest of the crew experienced?

(All crew members were ecstatic to be about to land at a large, beautiful island, with plenty of food and drink. The men were also thrilled at the sight of beautiful, uninhibited, scantily clad women. Jeanne felt no such attraction.)

Activity

JOURNAL Write an entry in Commerson's journal for April 3, 1768.

CHAPTER 27

Assessment

Why was Jeanne feeling fear rather than glee at Michel's story?

(Jeanne identified with Henri, and worried about her interaction with the islanders. She felt deep concern that her secret might be discovered.)

CHAPTER 28

Assessment

In what way was Jeanne's misadventure with the Tahitians a turning point in the book?

(For the first time, Jeanne's secret has been exposed, with the islanders calling her "girl, girl, girl." It is unclear how much Martin knows or whether anyone else has seen her misadventure.)

On page 221, Jeanne observed "Misery seemed to follow our ship, hurting innocent people at every landing." What does this personification suggest about the impact of Europeans on indigenous people?

(It suggests the negative impact of European exploration, which brought disease and death as well as cultural destruction to indigenous people.)

Activity

ART Create a graphic short story of this chapter.

CHAPTER 29

Assessment

What characteristics might Autourou share with the Frenchmen,?

(He might share a love of adventure, a desire to learn about the unknown, and a wish to see the world.)

What understanding has De Bougainville reached with Autourou? What might he hope to gain from bringing Autourou back to France?

(De Bougainville expects Autourou to help him navigate the islands in the region, to give aid with his lexicon of the Tahitian language, and to provide general information about Tahiti. In exchange, De Bougainville promised to outfit a ship for Autourou's return to Tahiti at a later date, after Autourou has visited France.)

Activity

DEBATE De Bougainville's decision to bring Autourou back to France was later criticized by some Europeans. Do you agree or disagree with his decision? Hold a round-table discussion about this issue.

CHAPTER 30

Assessment

Write a brief summary of Chapter 30. Remember to include only the most important information.

(The Bougainville Expedition is leaving Tahiti, and Jeanne is relieved. Autourou is aboard the Boudeuse, but Rat is back on the Étoile. As Jeanne lays down for a nap, she hears men singing a chantey with lyrics about her secret life. She now realizes that she must tell Philibert the truth before he finds out from someone else. She returns to her cabin and throws herself into her work. When Philibert returns, he says he has something to tell her. She fears he knows the truth, but he asks her to consider returning to France as a tutor to his son. She is thrilled with the offer, but understands how precarious her position is.)

Activity

DECISION What should Jeanne do now that some crewmen seem to know her secret? Discuss the various options she considers. Vote on the best course of action.

CHAPTER 31

Assessment

Jeanne said that "something" between her and her crewmates had changed. Was her worry justified? Give your reasons.

(Jeanne's worry is justified. Her secret is out. Word travels fast on a ship, and Rat would be inclined to spread the rumor to Jeanne's mates, because of his hard feelings toward her and his general nastiness.)

Activity

MONOLOGUE What was Rat/Damien thinking when he tried to push Jeanne overboard? Write your ideas as a dramatic monologue delivered by Rat.

CHAPTER 32

Assessment

Which details show that the food situation has become desperate again?

(Details include hunting for rats to eat, empty larders, eating pets.)

Activity

RESEARCH What was *Terra Australis Incognita*? Use Chapter 32 and online research to write a brief report about this sought after continent.

CHAPTER 33

Assessment

Why was Jeanne Baret's head "pounding with worry" after she met Autourou at the encampment?

(Jeanne knows that Autourou is aware of her secret, and Autourou is on the *Boudeuse* and in contact with De Bougainville. As a result, her secret is in jeopardy.)

Activity

SUPERSTITIONS Add the superstitions described in this chapter to the list of sailors' superstitions covered in this book. (See Chapter 9 activity.)

CHAPTER 34

Assessment

What was the sailors' diet at this point in the voyage? What does Michel's action show?

(The larders were empty except for stale maggoty biscuits and cabbages with ants. Michel's action shows how hopeless their situation seemed to be.)

Why does Captain Giraudais describe the waves that knocked the *Étoile* as "babies"? Why do the men seem to disagree?

(The ship was roughed up but not badly damaged or destroyed. He knows that a big earthquake could have easily demolished the *Étoile*.)

Activity

DRAMA Create a short play based on the scene when Captain Giraudais assembles the men after the earthquake and Michel makes his announcement. Act it out for the class.

CHAPTER 35

Assessment

Write a brief summary of Chapter 35. Remember to include only the most important information.

(The Bougainville Expedition has reached the Indian Ocean. Jeanne learns that Denys, De Bougainville's first mate, has died of scurvy. Thinking of him, she heads for her next work shift, when Rat attacks her. A terrible fight ensues. As Rat gains the upper hand and begins strangling her, Martin comes to the rescue. Jeanne Passes out and Martin is blamed.)

Activity

BULLYING One idea that runs through this book is: "Bullying can turn dangerous." Hold a round-table discussion on this topic.

CHAPTER 36

Assessment

At the end of the chapter, Jeanne says, "finally, blessed relief washed over me." In what ways was her meeting with De Bougainville a relief? What other feelings did it evoke?

(Jeanne had been holding onto a painful secret, and her meeting with De Bougainville meant the truth was out, and she no longer needed to lie or hide the truth. In that way, the meeting was a relief, but it also brought feelings of loss, sadness, and hopelessness about her future and her relationship with Commerson.)

Activity

DRAMA Write a short play recreating Jeanne's meeting with Captain De Bougainville. Act it out for the class.

CHAPTER 37

Assessment

Jeanne says that Martin "understood what I needed and why without my saying a word." What did Martin do to prompt this observation?

(Martin arrived with water for cleaning and canvas for drawing. He understood her need for stimulation and an outlet for creativity, as well as a basic need to be clean.)

Activity

VIEWPOINT What do you think Jeanne's old workmates asked Martin about his meeting with Jeanne? Write 5 questions they might have asked and Martin's answer for each one.

CHAPTER 38

Assessment

What does Jeanne Baret's situation reflect about the position of women in eighteenth century France?

(Jeanne's powerlessness is a reflection of women's position in eighteenth century France. Now that everyone understood she was a woman, she would be stuck in the role of servant. Her desire for more interesting work had been thwarted by the expectations and demands of society.)

Activity

MAP Create a map illustrating Jeanne's trip with Martin through the port of Batavia.

CHAPTER 39

Assessment

What does this chapter show about how Jeanne has changed over the course of the book?

(Jeanne realizes that she has acquired an education and changed dramatically during the expedition. She understands that she has become an accomplished botanist with skills that may lead to new opportunities, despite the restrictions imposed on women of her day. Her hope that she may not have to work as a servant girl is still alive, after all.)

Activity

JAVA Research the isle of Java. Find out about its location, geography, climate, resources, and history. Write a brief report on your findings.

CHAPTER 40

Assessment

Jeanne Baret tells Lieutenant Caro, "I've felt all along like she [the *Étoile*] was a kind old friend who was always watching over me." What does Jeanne Baret mean by this metaphor?

(Despite her age, the *Étoile* held up through wind, waves, rain, snow, and ice during the long voyage. It is not surprising that Jeanne felt a closeness with the ship, a protective feminine entity.)

Activities

RESEARCH Learn about the "Golden Age of Botany." Find out about two other illustrious plant hunters from Commerson's era: an American named John Bartram and an Englishman, Sir Joseph Banks. Write a brief report.

DRAMA Have a dramatic reading of the last scene between Jeanne and Commerson.

END OF BOOK ACTIVITIES

Hold a "Jeanne Baret" Celebration to mark the 250th Anniversary of the Bougainville Expedition and the first circumnavigation of the Earth by a woman.

Produce music to accompany *The Ballad of Jeanne Baret* (at the end of this booklet). Or create a music video. Contact the author about uploading your music at ReadLearnPress.com

Create a mural of Jeanne Baret's voyage. It might be similar to the one she created on canvas (See chapter 40) or it could be very different. Contact the author about uploading a picture of your mural at ReadLearnPress.com

END OF BOOK WRITING OR DISCUSSION

Why has Jeanne Baret been mostly lost to history? Do you think she should be included in history books? Why or why not?

An important book theme is: "Life is a voyage of adventure and discovery." What does the novel suggest about this voyage?

How were early explorations, like The Bougainville Expedition, similar to and different from modern explorations of space?

The Ballad of Jeanne Baret

by Helen Strahinich

There was a fair young maiden,
Who craved a life so free,
She turned her back on home and hearth
To sail the seven seas.

And when the fair young maiden
Found her longed for chance,
She traded petticoats and frocks
For heavy boots and pants.

Once aboard the king's own ship,
She showed such modesty,
It led her mates to question
Why she never shaved at sea.

And lo, the fair young maiden
Kept such genteel company,
She never had to swab the head
Or scrub the pen at sea.

At length, upon the isle of love,
Her secret did unfold,
As island youths to the maiden,
Prepared to be so bold.

The captain now quite flustered,
Posed a question to the lass,
"How did this odd circumstance
Ever come to pass?"

The maiden to the captain
Told this very simple story:
"My dream was to sail the globe
For adventure and for glory."

At last, the fair young maiden
Bid the royal ship farewell.
As she joined her worthy master,
Her mates, they wished her well.