

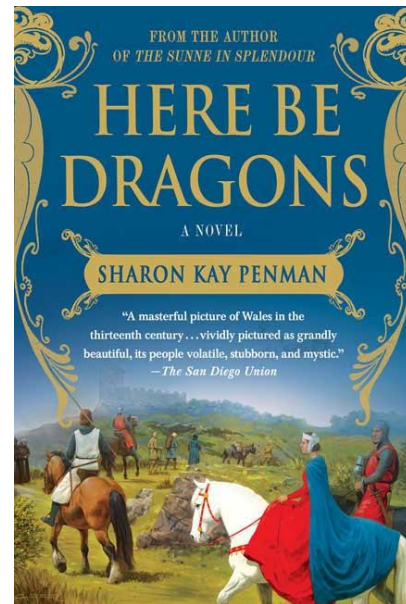
READING GROUP GUIDE

Here Be Dragons

By Sharon Kay Penman

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Here Be Dragons* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Here Be Dragons*.

About the Book

Thirteenth-century Wales is a divided country, ever at the mercy of England's ruthless, power-hungry King John. Llewelyn, Prince of North Wales, secures an uneasy truce by marrying the English king's beloved illegitimate daughter, Joanna, who slowly grows to love her charismatic and courageous husband. But as John's attentions turn again and again to subduing Wales---and Llewelyn---Joanna must decide where her love and loyalties truly lie.

The turbulent clashes of two disparate worlds and the destinies of the individuals caught between them spring to life in this magnificent novel of power and passion, loyalty and lies. The book that began the trilogy that includes *Falls the Shadow* and *The Reckoning*, *Here Be Dragons* brings thirteenth-century England, France, and Wales to tangled, tempestuous life.

About the Author

Sharon Kay Penman is the author of six critically acclaimed historical novels and four medieval mysteries, one of which was a finalist for an Edgar Award for Best First Mystery from the Mystery Writers of America.



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Discussion Questions

- 1) Medieval society was rigidly stratified and upward mobility was an alien concept. Can Americans identify with a world in which a man or woman's destiny was almost always determined by birth? Which modern day cultures still subscribe to this type of caste system?
- 2) Discuss the different status of women in a Celtic society like Wales as opposed to a feudal society like medieval England. Think particularly about the laws and rules governing marriage and the dissolution thereof. Would you rather have been a Welsh or English wife?
- 3) Do you think that humanity has changed much over the centuries?
- 4) Discuss the medieval custom of arranged marriages vs. free-choice marriages in our society. Which modern day cultures still arrange marriages?
- 5) Discuss the impact of a sexual double standard on the characters in this novel. Who benefits and who is punished for their sexual adventures and why? Why was male infidelity perceived as acceptable, and why was it not deemed acceptable for women?
- 6) How did you feel when you learned that not only did King John marry Isabella when she was only 12, but also bedded her immediately? While the author makes it clear that even in those times, bedding a girl that young was frowned upon, what modern day comparisons do we have to this practice?
- 7) Why is it that King John was utterly reviled for centuries due to the death of his nephew Arthur and various other dishonorable deeds, when his brother Richard killed even more freely, and suffered little or no consequence?
- 8) Women were expected to bear as many children as possible, as infant mortality rates at the time were high. Women of noble birth generally gave up their children to wet nurses and nannies almost immediately and contact with their children was limited. Would you be able to conform to this type of arrangement?
- 9) A constant theme in this novel is Joanna's relationship with her father King John, and the conflicts between John and Joanna's husband, Llewelyn. If you were in such a situation, how would you handle it? Would you take the part of your father or husband?
- 10) What did you think of Joanna's reasons for having an affair with Will de Broase? Considering the political implications for Llewelyn, did you think he would be able to forgive her? Were you surprised when he did?
- 11) What did you think of the Pope's willingness to use excommunication as a tool to compel kings to do his bidding? Was it an effective tool, or did it cause more harm than good?



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12) What did you think of Joanna's struggles with her step-son, Gruffydd? Do you think the relationship could have been handled better on Joanna's part?

13) Which characters did you find to be the most compelling and why?

14) What did you learn that most surprised or interested you about life in these times?

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