

Daughter of Fortune by Isabel Allende

Suggested classroom activities in conjunction with the College Book Program

General:

Eliza stowed away on a ship going from Chile to California, and the space in which she lived was two meters by two meters. Using chairs, create a space this big and climb inside.

(from Ch. 1) "Everyone is born with some special talent, and Eliza Sommers discovered early that she had two: a good sense of smell and a good memory." Write a paragraph describing your special talents.

What is your earliest visual memory? What is your earliest memory of a scent? Write a short paragraph on either.

(p.5) "...What matters is what you do in this world, not how you come into it..." (according to Eliza.) "...It was impossible for [Tao Chi'en] to imagine his own life apart from the long chain of his ancestors...His fate...had been determined by the acts of his family before him..." What acts or attributes of your ancestors have most influenced or shaped your life?

(p.28) "...hospitality (in Chile) was manifested by forcing one's guests to drink and eat beyond the bounds of human endurance..." Is that true in the U.S. today? What about on holidays, like Thanksgiving?

(from Contemporary Authors) Isabel Allende says, "...my grandfather thought people died only when you forgot them..." What are some ways we can pass on to our children information about their ancestors?

(p.25) "...the one bath of the week...which could be canceled on the least pretext since it was considered dangerous for the health..." See an encyclopedia to get a general understanding of the views of bathing through the centuries.

For Eliza and Joaquin, it was love at first sight. Has this ever happened to you? Do you believe in love at first sight?

Anthropology:

On page 83, the Mapuche Indian woman is described as a "white magic witch". Write a short paper about witchcraft and its "white" side.

Discuss the role of shamans in two or more societies, either contemporary or historical.

What is I Ching (see page 318)?

Research Chinese burial customs, both now and in the mid-nineteenth century.

Art:

(p.31) Monvoisin is mentioned as a painter who will do a portrait of Miss Rose. Is this a fictional character or a real-life artist? Where would you find this information? Write a short paragraph about him, if in fact he did exist. (*Instructors: Raymond Monvoisin did exist and information can be found on web sites, accessible through a search engine, and in the Dictionary of Art*).

Write an essay on some aspect of Chilean art for the time period of the novel.

Visit the web site for the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Santiago de Chile and write a paragraph on something you learned there.

Paint or sketch Karl Bretzner, the Viennese tenor, who is described on pages 86-87.

Draw a sampan, the kind of boat which carried Tao Chi'en to Hong Kong.

Art:

Draw Eliza as she must have looked when she disembarked in San Francisco (page 220).

Draw Eliza as she and her horse left Sacramento to find Joaquin (page 245).

On one page draw or sketch Eliza as she might have looked in various stages of the novel: the day she left Chile, as a deaf-mute Chinese boy, as the Chilean boy Elias, as Chile Boy the piano player.

Draw Tao as he looked when Americanized (see page 334).

Communication:

Find a library book on Chilean cuisine (hint: the subject is Cookery, Chilean) and explain how to make any one dish.

(p.76) Explain the language of flowers (what different flowers mean). If you were to make up a bouquet for someone else, which flowers would you include and why?

Lasquet (page 227) is said to be a game from Mexico. Explain how to play it.

Explain how to make empanadas, one of Eliza's special dishes.

Explain I Ching sticks (see page 318).

Give a brief presentation on the life of Lola Montez.

English:

(Quote from page 109) "...A woman without virtue is nothing, she can never become a wife and mother, better she tie a stone around her neck and jump into the sea..." Compare this with The French Lieutenant's Woman or any character from literature.

Compare abortion methods of the mid-nineteenth century (see page 129) with present day.

Write an entry from Eliza's diary for one of the days at sea.

Write the letter Eliza left for her family. See page 151 for the details.

"...for enlightened Chinese the most important event in life was one's funeral..." What would be important for your funeral?

Where did the term *shanghaied* (see page 191) come from and what does it mean?

What does the word *placers* mean? (see page 216)

Define the following: *flim-flam men* (page 139), *argonauts* (see page 243), *pettifoggers* (page 243), *prestidigitator* (page 296).

Imagine that Eliza has opened a restaurant. Design a menu for it (see page 364).

Geography:

Write a short essay on Tierra del Fuego.

Can you find Cerro Alegre (street) on a map of Valparaiso?

To travel from Europe to Valparaiso took three months, Valparaiso to San Francisco (less than 7000 miles) took two months. Figure the total distance and trace the route on a world map. Go to www.chileweb.net/valparaiso/puerto.html and learn more about Eliza's home city.

What was life like in China in 1849?

Geography:

What was life like in San Francisco in 1849?

On a map find Golfo de Penas (Gulf of Sorrows).

Find Tao Chi'en's birthplace, the village of Kwangtung. If you cannot, try to figure out where it might have been. (It was 1 ½ day's walk from Canton.)

Trace Eliza's journey from San Francisco to Sacramento (see page 232).

Where were the Sandwich Islands (see page 261), and what are they called today? How did they get the name Sandwich Islands?

History:

How many Chileans have come to America, at what times, and for what reasons? (Hint: consult The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups)

Compare and contrast one of the local Indian tribes found in Chile during the period of the novel with any North American Indian tribe.

Find a primary source article about Salvador Allende, the author's uncle, who was president of Chile in 1973.

Write a paper on some aspect of the conquest of Chile by the Spaniards.

What are the rules of dueling (referred to on page 96 in the novel)?

What was life like in China in 1849?

What was life like in San Francisco in 1849?

Why and when was the Panama Canal built?

Compare Chinese burial customs of the period (see page 154) with the burial customs of any other country at that time.

A Chinese proverb states "Brilliance in youth does not guarantee worth in maturity". Can you think of some examples for whom this is true? (Any time period, any country)

What was the Opium War, when did it take place, and what were the results?

What and when was the Treaty of Nanking?

When was the Golden Gate Bridge built?

San Francisco was originally known as Yerba Buena. What does that mean?

"Property was much more valuable than life" (page 224). Find one example from history when this was true.

For how long and why was Canton sealed to foreigners?

Can you find any evidence that Quakers were involved in the Underground Railroad?

Journalism:

What is the name of the oldest newspaper in Spanish in South America, and in what year did it begin? (Hint: see www.chileweb.net/valparaiso/puerto.html)

In August 1848 news arrived in Chile that gold had been discovered in California. Write (in English) the story as it would have appeared in the Valparaiso newspaper.

Journalism:

Was Sam Brannan, the newspaper editor and Mormon preacher, a real person? (see page 120)

California became a state in September 1850. Write a news story about it for the New York Times.

On page 339 and 357, some of Jacob Freemont's sensational news stories were described. Pick any one and write two versions, one for the New York Times and one for the National Enquirer.

Music:

Was Karl Bretzner, the Viennese tenor described on pages 86-87, a real person? Where would you find that information?

Research the operas "Barber of Seville" and "The Marriage of Figaro": where and when they were written, when first performed, etc.

On page 86 it says that Rose Sommer's wish was to follow in Bretzner's footsteps in the "arduous but divine path of bel canto". What does this mean?

On page 91 it says that castration was used to preserve the cherubic voice. Has this in fact been practiced?

Nursing:

(p. 10) To prevent contagion of measles, every night a piece of raw meat was placed on the baby's navel and bound with red flannel. Is there any basis for this bizarre remedy? Find other examples of home remedies and evaluate them.

(p.26) Write a short essay on the uses of chloroform as anesthesia (when and where first used, etc.)

(p.29) Write a short essay on phlebotomy (blood letting), including when and why used.

Compare childbirth in two or more countries or time periods.

Why has there been a resurgence of tuberculosis in recent years?

What is laudanum, what was it used for, and is it still used today (if not, when did the use cease)?

From what is opium derived, how has it been used, is it still used today?

What are the symptoms, causes, and treatment of yellow fever? Is it still found in the world today? Where?

The Chinese "who by custom drank tea" were immune from cholera and dysentery. Why?

Discuss how menopause was viewed and treated at various times in history (see page 381).

Philosophy:

(p. 18) "...beliefs of others are labeled mere superstition...Ours we call religion..." Write an essay telling why you agree or disagree with that statement.

(p.33) Cristo de Mayo is called "the most miraculous image in the world". Is there such a statue? Can you find other examples of statues or images which have miraculous powers?

Joaquin resembles Saint Sebastian the martyr (see page 105). What information can you find about Saint Sebastian?

Joaquin was a fan of the theories of Lamennais. Who was Lamennais?

Philosophy:

What are yin and yang (see page 153)?

"Knowledge is of little use without wisdom, and there is no wisdom without spirituality" (page 365). Do you agree or disagree? Why?

What do the Quakers believe, and why were Esther and James involved with the Underground Railroad?

Political Science:

What is an oligarchy? Give two examples.

"Like all civilized Chinese, he had an immeasurable aversion to war and was, in contrast, inclined toward the arts of music, painting, and literature..." Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

A Chinese proverb states "Brilliance in youth does not guarantee worth in maturity". Can you think of anyone for whom this is true? (Any time period, any country)

Psychology:

(p.34) Eliza was lost in the crowd at the procession. Were you ever lost as a child? Have you, as a parent, ever lost a child? Describe the experience including your feelings.

Hysteria was treated by cauterizing certain points of the body with a hot iron (page 380). In what other ways has hysteria been treated throughout history?

Discuss how menopause has been viewed at various times in history.

What is your earliest visual memory? your earliest memory of a scent? Write a paragraph about either.

Sociology:

Thinking of the young girls who were sold into prostitution in the novel, discuss the value of children in a society other than our own, perhaps contrasting two or more societies.

Discuss Chinese tongs (brotherhoods, gangs.)

Spanish:

Find a recipe for a Chilean dish and explain orally in Spanish how to make it. (Hint: subject heading at the Library is Cookery, Chilean.)

Visit the web site (it's in Spanish!) for the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Santiago de Chile and write a paragraph about something you learned there.

In pairs, one as the interviewer and the other as interviewee, give a five-minute presentation for a Spanish-language radio program:

- Interview Isabel Allende on her relationship with her uncle Salvador Allende
- Interview Isabel Allende about how she created the characters in Daughter of Fortune
- Interview Jacob Todd in which he tries to explain away the charges of embezzlement
- Interview Eliza Sommers as she lands in California after a grueling sea voyage
- Interview by Jacob Freemont of Joaquin Murieta.
- Interview Lola Montez about her life.

In August 1848 news arrived in Chile that gold had been discovered in California. Write a news story in Spanish as it might have appeared in a Valparaiso newspaper.

Spanish:

In Spanish, write the letter Eliza left for her family. See page 151 for the details.

California became a state in September 1850. Write a news story for a Spanish-language newspaper of your choice.

What does *Murieta* mean? How did Murieta Hot Springs north of Temecula get its name?

Make posters in English and in Spanish advertising a reward of \$1000 for Joaquin Murieta (see page 385).