

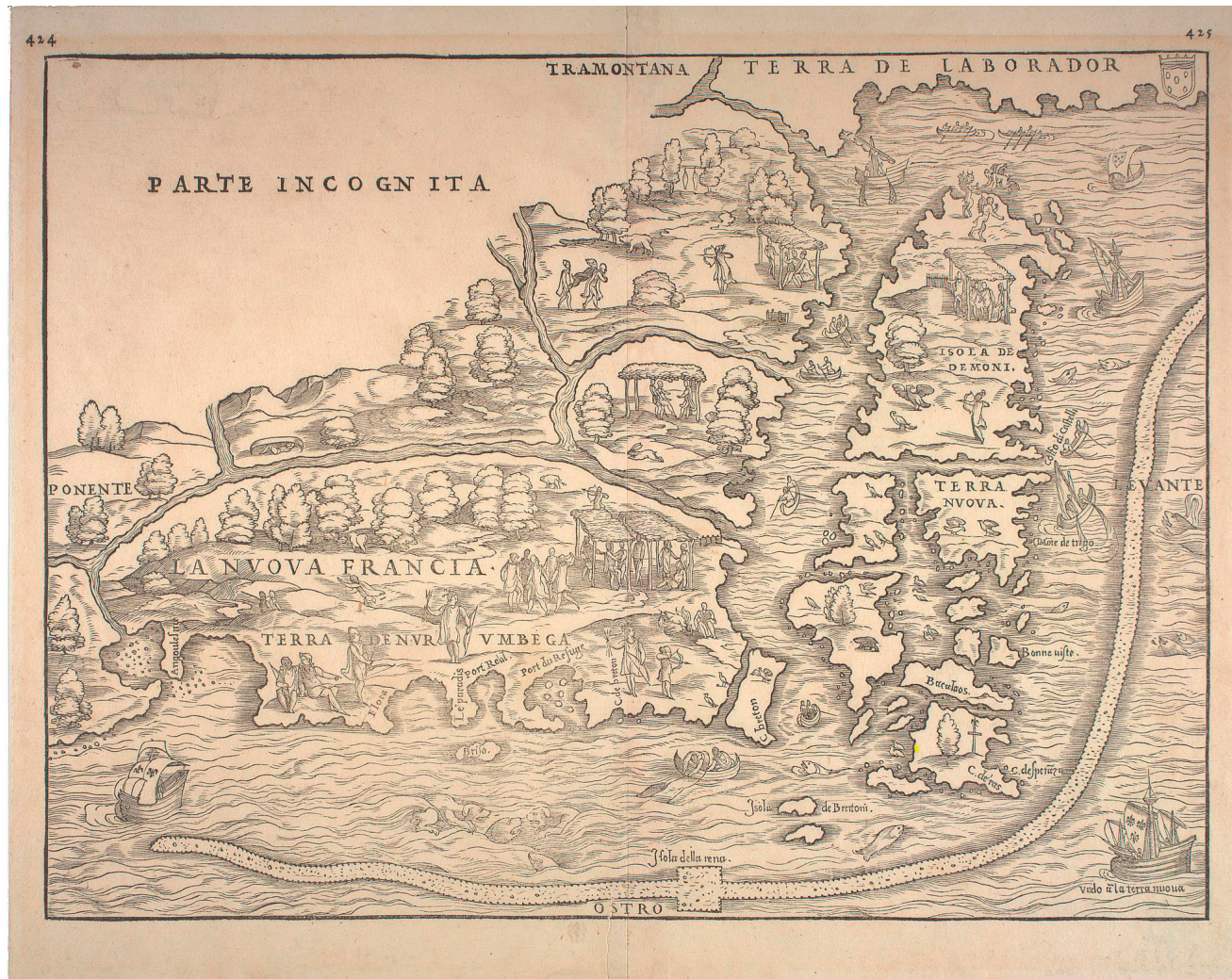
BOOK CLUB KIT

A woman in a dark, flowing dress stands on the edge of a dark, craggy cliff. She is looking out over a vast, choppy ocean under a hazy, golden sky. The scene is dramatic and evocative, suggesting themes of isolation and contemplation.

I S O L A

ALLEGRA
GOODMAN

MARGUERITE'S JOURNEY



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Isola is inspired by the real life of a sixteenth-century heroine. If you could ask the real Marguerite one question, what would you ask?
2. “Everything we treasure has a price. And everything we have will slip away.” Reflect on how this quote encapsulates the themes of loss and resilience in Marguerite’s story. How does she cope with the continuous loss of her possessions and loved ones?
3. How does Marguerite’s relationship with her guardian shape her journey and her perception of power and control? How does it affect her sense of identity and autonomy?
4. Where do different characters draw the line between loyalty and self-preservation?
5. “I cannot fly. I cannot swim. I cannot escape my island.” How does Marguerite’s sense of entrapment evolve throughout the novel? Discuss the physical and emotional aspects of her isolation.
6. What does *The Book of the City of Ladies* teach Marguerite—and the other female characters? In what ways does Marguerite embody the qualities of these historical and mythical figures?
7. In what ways is Marguerite a product of her era? In what ways did she strike you as more modern?
8. How does Marguerite’s faith evolve over time?
9. What scenes from the book will stay with you the longest?
10. What other themes did you notice in the novel?
11. Marguerite’s bear claw is her “proof” that she survived on the island. What else does this totem symbolize for her?
12. Isola celebrates the power of the natural world. Share a personal experience where you felt the immense power or beauty of nature. How did it affect you?
13. Before her time on the island, Marguerite is constantly depending on others—their knowledge, their patronage, their kindness—for her survival. How does her situation compare to your own life, and the lives of the modern era?
14. “My own life was what I hoped he’d grant me,” Marguerite thinks. Discuss the significance of this quote in the context of Marguerite’s struggle for independence. How does her desire for control over her own life drive her actions and decisions?
15. Do you think Roberval was brought to any sort of justice? Why or why not?
16. Imagine you were marooned on an island like Marguerite. What three items would you want to have with you for survival, and why?

FACTS ABOUT MARGUERITE DE LA ROCQUE DE ROBerval

- Marguerite de La Rocque de Roberval was a **French noblewoman** known for being **marooned on the Île des Démon**s on her way to New France (Quebec) around 1542.[1]
- Marguerite's story was notable enough to be **recounted in *The Heptaméron* by Queen Marguerite of Navarre**. [1] Read a [translated excerpt here](#)!
- She was **abandoned on the island by a family member***, Jean-Francois de Roberval, who was the leader of the expedition to Canada. Some accounts suggest that her abandonment was due to her "scandalous" behavior, which could imply a romantic liaison that displeased Roberval.[2]
- Marguerite was not alone when she began her time on the island; **she was left there along with her lover and a servant**, making her survival story not just a solo endeavor but a group struggle for survival.[3]
- **The Isle of Demons, where Marguerite was marooned, is shrouded in mystery and legend:** Its precise location (and the truthfulness of the stories surrounding it) are a subject of debate among historians and cartographers.[5]
- **Read more from The Library of Congress:** "During the mid-17th century the Isle of Demons was removed from official cartographic records. Many theories exist about its present location. Some believe that Quirpon Island is the present-day location of the Isle of Demons. Another theory is that Marguerite de La Rocque, the sailor, and Damienne were left at Harrington Harbour, an island located in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. According to a local legend, Marguerite found shelter in a small rocky cave at Harrington Harbour. Today the cave is known as Marguerite's Cave."
- Despite the romantic and dramatic aspects of her story, **concrete details about Marguerite's life, including her birth and death dates, remain largely unknown**, adding to the mythic quality of her narrative.[3]
- After her rescue and return to France, **Marguerite de La Rocque's ordeal became a symbol of human endurance** and the ability to overcome insurmountable odds, themes that continue to inspire tales of survival and adventure.[4]
- The legacy of Marguerite's survival story extends beyond literature and history **into the realm of folklore and national identity, where she is seen as a figure embodying the rugged wilderness** of early Canadian and French encounters with the New World.[3]

*The exact familial relationship between Marguerite and Roberval is unknown. Some accounts say he was her cousin, others say an uncle or even a brother.

Sources

1. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marguerite_de_La_Rocque
2. ancient-origins.net/history-famous-people/marguerite-de-la-rocque-16th-century-noblewoman-isle-demons-020216
3. thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/marguerite-de-la-rocque
4. historycourses.com/marguerite-de-la-rocque/
5. blogs.loc.gov/maps/2022/10/the-elusive-isle-of-demons/

FURTHER READING LIST

Anne of France, *Lessons for My Daughter*, translated and edited by Sharon L. Jansen (D. S. Brewer, 2004). This volume consists of short lessons that Anne of France (1461– 1522) wrote for her daughter, Suzanne of Bourbon, on how to be a lady.

Anne of France, *Les Enseignements d'Anne de France, à sa fille Susanne de Bourbon* (Hachette Livre, 2012). This is the French text I translated for my epigraphs.

Elizabeth Boyer, *A Colony of One: The History of a Brave Woman* (Veritie Press, 1983). Amateur historian Elizabeth Boyer researched Marguerite's story and studied the records of her life. Her book reprints and translates French documents, including André Thevet's account of Marguerite's marooning in his *Cosmographie Universelle*, which is also available in French online from Google Books.

Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards (Persea, 1998). Christine de Pizan finished her book around 1405. During her lifetime, Christine (1364– c. 1430) oversaw the copying and circulation of her work in manuscript. After the invention of the printing press, this book was published in several editions. *The Book of the City of Ladies* contains the stories of women both virtuous and brilliant, and, in true Renaissance fashion, the author presents biblical women and classical heroines side by side. These are the tales Marguerite and Claire read together.

Margaret of Navarre, *The Heptameron by Margaret of Navarre*, translated by Paul Chilton (Penguin, 2004). The Queen of Navarre wrote a collection of stories framed by a dialogue between courtiers who take turns telling and discussing brief tales. The collection is modeled on Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in which stories are told over ten days, but the Queen died before finishing, so her courtiers tell their tales in seven. The book was published after her death. The tale of Marguerite's marooning is the sixty- seventh story in this edition.

Margaret of Navarre, Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre, edited by Simone de Reyff (Flammarion, 1982). I used this French text as a source for the passages the Queen reads aloud.

Clément Marot, *Psalms*. The website clementmarot.com contains French texts of Clément Marot's *Psalms*. Where Marguerite reads and recites, I try to convey a sense of Marot's rhyming verse.