

Reading Guide for *The Spanish Pearl* by Catherine Friend

If you've read *The Spanish Pearl*, skip below to the reading guide questions. If you haven't read the book, bear with me and keep reading.

When I'd finished the manuscript for *The Spanish Pearl*, I asked various writing friends to read and critique it for me. My dear friend Phyllis had come to visit, so I'd handed her the fat three-ring binder containing the novel, and she said she was looking forward to taking it home and reading it. I left the room to look for something else, and when I came back five minutes later, Phyllis was sitting in the green velvet rocker, her nose buried in the *last* chapter of the book.

"PHYLLIS!" I yelled.

"WHAT?" she said, jumping a bit.

"Please tell me you aren't reading the end of the book first."

She looked down at the heavy binder in her lap, then up at me. "I'm reading the end of the book first."

And thus I was introduced to a curious breed of readers known as RTEFers (Read The Ending First readers.) As I careened around the room, sputtering indignantly, Phyllis tried to explain. Apparently some people are unable to relax and enjoy a book if they don't know how it ends first. "I just can't concentrate until I know that the person survives, or the romance works, or the mystery is solved satisfactorily. I won't even buy a book unless I know I like the ending."

Falling into the other camp are readers, such as myself, who don't want to know *anything* about what happens until we read it on the page. We are LMITDers, or Leave Me In The Dark readers. Sometimes book reviews (and reading guides) can provide so much detail, and explain so many of a novel's twists and turns, that LMITDers want nothing to do with the book itself once they've read the review, even if it's a positive review. That would be me.

Websites offer interesting challenges for authors who provide reading guides for their novels. What if a RFETer surfs by, reads the reading guide, and doesn't learn enough about the ending? What if a LMITDer surfs by, inadvertently reads the reading guide, and suddenly knows too much?

I mean, really. What would have happened if Emily Brontë had set up a website from the parsonage at Haworth <http://www.wutheringheights.com>, and included a reading guide? If you'd learned before buying *Wuthering Heights* that Catherine and Heathcliff never end up together, but both die tragic deaths, are you going to race right out and buy the book? Or what if Margaret Mitchell had included a reading guide for *Gone With the Wind*, and one of the questions had been: "What happened to Scarlett and Rhett's

relationship after their little daughter died?”

Accckk! They had a baby? She died?

The Spanish Pearl isn't a classic, and isn't sad, but you get my meaning. So while I'm including a reading guide, it's a *carefully* worded guide, hopefully providing enough for RTEFers to be interested, yet not so much that LMITDers are turned off. We writers walk a dangerous path.

Questions:

1. In *The Spanish Pearl*, Kate falls back in time to 11th century Spain. In Diane Gabaldon's *Outlander*, Claire falls back in time to 18th century Scotland. If a time machine suddenly appeared before you, to what time and place would you set the dial?
2. Kate's skills as a modern woman do not help her much in the 11th century. What would it feel like if you suddenly had no idea how to function in a society? On what resources would you draw to survive? Have you ever been in a situation where you've been a 'fish out of water'?
3. Kate is torn between two loves. How do we know what person to choose, if we're in that position? How do people decide or recognize they're in love with the 'right' person?
4. Luis Navarro's best friend, Nuño Suarez, carries around a secret for over ten years. How do you think this secret has affected his life, and his relationship with Luis?
5. Do you think Kate Vincent has changed by the end of the book? I'm not sure she has, which is actually okay with me. Do you need a main character to undergo a major emotional transformation to keep you engaged in a novel?
6. Kate doesn't always make the best choices. Is this okay, or do you wish she was smarter and wiser and braver than the rest of us?
7. If you were suddenly ripped from your life, what would you miss most? *Who* would you miss most? What would be appealing about living in a different time?
8. Would you have made the same choice Kate made? Why or why not?
9. What do you hope/expect will happen in the sequel, *The Crown of Valencia*?