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To the Discussion Leader

Kristiana Gregory, the author of *Cleopatra: Daughter of the Nile*, says, "As a kid studying world history in fifth grade, my image of Cleopatra was that she wore beautiful clothes and jewels and probably spent her days floating down the river on a fancy boat. I had no idea she was so intelligent and could speak several languages."

This Royal Diary introduces young readers to the early years of Cleopatra's life. The diary is filled with intrigue and royal power plays. A deadly poisonous serpent is placed in the bed of Cleopatra's father. Skulls and death threats arrive to terrify the young princess. Cleopatra's sisters are strangled or beheaded as they try to wrestle royal position from their weak father. While this all plays out, Cleopatra observes, studies, aids her father, and plans for the day she will be queen. Through her fictional diary walk Marc Antony and Cicero. Julius Caesar, Spartacus, and ancient royal leaders from Nefertiti to Sheba all help to vividly recreate a time Gregory calls "a pivotal period in history." Readers of *Cleopatra: Daughter of the Nile* will meet a bright, determined, young lady who would never be content to just wear beautiful clothes and jewels and spend her days floating down the river on a fancy boat.

Summary

Father has departed, secretly fleeing and revealing his cowardly temperament. Ptolemy Auletes — King Flute Player — the world mocks his drunken music. Pharaoh — ha! I would make a better ruler of Egypt even though I am only a child. No one knows Egypt like I do. No one else cares about the people or even speaks their language.

Tryphaena, my oldest sister, has a personality that truly reflects the meaning of her name — Pleasure Seeker. I am careful what I say to this sister. She is ten years older than I, and because I am just twelve, she rules over me by that fact alone. I am sure she commanded her loyal followers to place the deadly poisonous puff adder in Father's bed and the eto plant's juice in his wine. What kind of leader is she — soaking in perfumed baths and sleeping on silk?

Berenice is my favorite sister, although she too is older. She is empty-headed and fearful: more concerned with hairstyles and jewels — and her silly pets — than Egypt and its future. She is frightened to leave the palace, afraid to mingle with the people. My younger sister, Arsinoë, and my two baby brothers are too young to know what needs to be done. They still sleep in the nursery and play with toys.

My favorite pastime is discussing history, politics, the economy, and religion with Olympus and Theophilus, my best and only friends. Olympus and I speak and correspond in Latin and Greek, while Theophilus teaches me Hebrew. I am the only member of the royal family who speaks the language of the people. Knowing languages gives me power over people.

How I love our hours together in the Library and Temple courtyard. But our wonderful, carefree days are haunted by murderous plots. Yesterday, in hushed tones, Olympus whispered what he heard in the stables: There is a plot to kill father and me. I don't believe him — I guess I don't want to believe him. That is why my favorite slave, Neva, and I have disguised ourselves so we can wander undetected through the

marketplace. Two boys are singing — a wicked song that makes my blood chill, wicked because it is about King Ptolemy and his daughter Cleopatra — me!

*A poisoned cup
a serpent's bite
a sword to the neck
would be just right.*

Olympus is correct. Father's life is in danger. And so is mine.

Cleopatra's future, along with her father's, becomes embroiled with Rome and its leaders when father and daughter flee Egypt to beseech Julius Caesar's help in rescuing their nation from Tryphaena's grasp. Cleopatra surprises the Romans with her knowledge of languages and politics. She becomes an ambassador among the Roman nobility, initiating life-long relationships. She amazes Marc Antony by accompanying him in his open chariot, at breakneck speeds, to inspect the troops. Cleopatra's exiled years in Rome prepare her for the danger, intrigue, and conspiracy that haunt her entire life.

In ten days I will set sail aboard the royal barge for a trip up the Nile. I want to see the Great Pyramids, the Sphinx, and all the villages along the way. Father has given his blessing. He believes this adventure is merely the frolic of a fourteen-year-old girl. I'm sad that I fear him so much. But on the royal barge I know I will not be afraid of what lies ahead. Compared to the Roman arena, the Nile is as safe as heaven.

Thinking About the Book

1. If twelve-year-old Cleopatra showed up as a new student in your class, would you want her as a friend? Why or why not?
2. Throughout her diary, Cleopatra beseeches Isis as in the following, "O Isis, protect my father. Protect me. I sense there is more danger than I can see." Who is Isis and why does Cleopatra speak to her?
3. Cleopatra had the gift of being able to learn languages. How did that gift help her in the story?
4. Who are more brutal and murderous, the Romans or the Egyptians? Defend your response with examples from the Cleopatra's diary.
5. Cleopatra reflects on Nefertiti, Esther of Persia, the Queen of Sheba and contemplates their brave accomplishments. Why does Cleopatra think she should study royal figures from the past?
6. Rome was not one of Cleopatra's favorite places. In fact, at one point she writes, "May Rome burn. I want to go home." What are some of her reasons for disliking Rome?
7. Cleopatra lived during a time when people were put to death for what we consider to be our rights. Why were Spartacus and his followers crucified? What did Cleopatra fear would happen to Neva and Puzo, Cleopatra's servants, if her father sees them together? Discuss the differences between human rights during Cleopatra's lifetime and your lifetime. When would you rather live?

Student Activities

1. Cleopatra writes this about Neva, "A skilled listener makes a good friend, and this perfectly describes Neva." Is Cleopatra right? Does a skilled listener make a good friend? In your discussion group, decide what you think are the three best qualities that make a good friend.
2. Shortly after she arrives in Italy, Cleopatra begins comparing the rivers and cities to Egypt. Make a graphic organizer to compare and contrast Rome to Alexandria. Where would you rather live? Why? Egypt is a land with many magnificent man-made wonders. Working in small groups, prepare a

report on the Great Pyramids, the Sphinx, or on Alexandria and its library. Share your reports with the class. Which do you think is the greatest accomplishment of the Egyptians?

3. Atticus sponsored a grand banquet in honor of Ptolemy and Cleopatra on their third night in Rome. Make a diorama showing how the guests gathered around the tables. Be sure to include the plates of food that Cleopatra describes, the Romans' manners, and the overall sanitary conditions she discovered. In the author interview included in this guide, Kristiana Gregory says that the one word she would use to describe Cleopatra is "focused." Ask each member of your discussion group to select one or two words that best describe Cleopatra. Vote on what one word your group thinks best captures Cleopatra.
4. It is fun to see and travel through the lands that Cleopatra mentions in her diary. Find out more about these ancient places: Rome, Egypt, Greece. Share what you learned with your class.

Discussion Guide written by Richard F. Abrahamson, Ph.D., Professor of Literature for Children and Young Adults, University of Houston, Houston, Texas and Linda M. Pavonetti, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Oakland University, Department of Reading and Language Arts, Rochester, Michigan.

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