


# Elizabeth I: Red Rose of the House of Tudor Discussion Guide

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## To the Discussion Leader

Commenting on what it was like researching and writing the Royal Diary of Elizabeth I, Newbery Honor winner Kathryn Lasky says, "I loved writing the diary of Elizabeth. I chose to cover the years when she was just about the age I was when I was learning English history. As always, the most fun for me was doing the research. I spend endless hours finding out how often, or not often enough, they took baths. But, of course, I loved the glitter and dazzle. After all the research was done, I would find myself wondering sometimes how confounding it must have been for a young girl, whether she was a princess or not, to sometimes be loved and then sometimes be sent away by one's father. How hard it must have been to know that your mother's head had actually been cut off by command of your father."

Through the diary entries of twelve-year-old Elizabeth I, readers are taken inside the palaces of King Henry VIII. Here is a life of intrigue. Everyone seems to be jockeying for power. Constant fear of offending the King and being executed are coupled with worry of being poisoned by an enemy within the court. An intelligent and hard-working Elizabeth describes her schooling, the royal tutors, and her relationships with siblings and friends. Hers is a tale of longing to be loved by her father; basking in the glow of that love when it is occasionally given; and being devastated when she is periodically banned from his palace.

Kathryn Lasky recreates the life of a little girl who grows up to be the Queen of England for forty-five years and was an important enough historical figure that an entire age of English history bears her name — the Elizabethan Age.

## Book Summary

"My mother, once Queen, is now dead." So begins the Royal Diary of *Elizabeth I, Red Rose of the House of Tudor*. Elizabeth, daughter of one of the most infamous of all British Kings, Henry VIII, is an enigmatic young woman. Her life to date has been complicated by a series of mothers and moves — occurrences not uncommon to many modern young people — but hers have left scars that few of us ever encounter.

Elizabeth continues describing her mother's death with a detached calm that comes from encountering violence much too frequently: "Almost eight years ago, when I was not yet three, Father chopped off [my mother's] head. He ordered it done. Indeed, he sent for a French swordsman, They are skilled in beheading, and it hurts less with a sword than with an ax. Or so they say. It is not as if anyone has come back to speak on the matter." In her Royal Diary, Elizabeth confesses her self-described treasonous thoughts, her playfulness, and even her spiteful opinions of Mary, her older sister. As a princess, Elizabeth has learned to hide her private side. No one else realizes how much she feels like a "forgotten princess," believing she is "nearly invisible" to her father and his retinue. That is why she must hide her diary as she moves from palace to palace. If it were ever discovered, Elizabeth would surely be banished or even worse, beheaded like her mother.

Elizabeth's governess, who has cared for her since her birth, fears that the young princess herself is the target of murderous plots. "Kat insists on many things when we first arrive at a new Palace. We must personally check for rats, and more importantly, we must check for poison." She scours the chambers,

washing fruit and checking for poison dust in the bedding.

The Royal Diary of *Elizabeth I, Red Rose of the House of Tudor*, provides us with an intimate look at the intrigue and machinations of King Henry VIII's reign from July of 1544 through his death in February of 1547. Together with Elizabeth, we watch her father and his troops vanquish the French army. We attend masked balls, study with tutors, hunt, and move from palace to palace, always aware of how fragile and tenuous our hold on life really is. Each pinch, each pat, each laugh and casual glance becomes for us, just as for Princess Elizabeth, an indication that her father, King Henry VIII, realizes he has a daughter. Maybe he even loves her.

## Thinking About the Book

1. In *Elizabeth I, Red Rose of the House of Tudor*, you find out about wig bugs, rats in the palace, and bathing habits of royalty. What did you learn about life in England during the 1540s that surprised you most?
2. What does Elizabeth mean when she refers to herself as "a slim shadow in a Palace window" (July 3, 1544) and "a forgotten Princess." How can a Princess, with so many people surrounding her, protecting her, and caring for her be "a forgotten Princess" or "nearly invisible"?
3. Elizabeth wonders what will happen to her if her father gets angry with her or thinks she is disloyal. What has her father done to cause her such worry?
4. Elizabeth frequently writes that she will never marry. Why do you think she feels this way? Were there any incidents or any people in Elizabeth's life that caused her to never want to get married?
5. What does Elizabeth mean when she writes: "I am a horder of my father's winks, a miser with his pinches. I would trade every single one of my royal jewels, and I do have a few, for a chest full of winks." (April 9, 1545)
6. The author of Elizabeth's diary, Kathryn Lasky, says she thinks the best word to describe Elizabeth is "insightful." What does "insightful" mean? What one word would you use to describe Elizabeth?
7. In her last diary entry, Elizabeth wonders about her life and compares it to the life of a newly hatched baby bird outside the palace. "Would I trade my title for a bird's life, a palace for a nest, a realm for the sky?" What are three good things about being Princess Elizabeth? What are three bad things about being Elizabeth?

## Student Activities

1. Mary, Edward, and Elizabeth are children of King Henry VIII, but they are very different in many ways: personality, academic abilities, physical health and physical appearance, athletic abilities, preferences (likes and dislikes), and religious beliefs. Create a visual graphic to illustrate how the three siblings were alike and how they were different.
2. Who are Elizabeth's friends? What does she consider to be fun? How do her entertainments differ from yours? What would you miss most if you were a Royal Princess or Prince?
3. Elizabeth uses some words in her diary that might not be familiar to readers today. See if you can find the meanings to the words below.
  - *reliquary* (p. 164)
  - *pomander* (p. 162)
  - *vellum* (p. 5)
  - *wraiths* (p. 39)

- *merlin* (p. 41)
- *kirtle* (p. 59)
- *treacle* (p. 79)
- *stave* (p. 62)
- *pennyroyal* (p. 23)

1. On July 22, 1544, Elizabeth begins composing a letter to Queen Catherine but she confides in her diary that "the voice must be mine, not of course my diary voice, but my respectful daughter-of-the-Court voice." How are these two voices different? Write a letter to the King, your father, first in your casual, diary voice, then in a more formal, courtly voice.
2. Medicine, doctoring, and even the names of sicknesses, such as ague, were quite different when Elizabeth was a child. Read about the medical treatment King Henry received for his legs on October 3, 1545. What other kinds of medical procedures or cures surprised you in Elizabeth's diary? Make a list of the problems and cures then compare those to today's medical solutions.
3. Elizabeth writes in her diary about all the good points of Hatfield on August 10, 1544. How does this royal residence differ from ideas you had formed based on movies, other books, and pictures of castles and princesses? Work in your small groups to list and discuss these differences. Then share your surprises with the rest of the 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, Mich.

- Subjects:

Cooperation and Teamwork, Family Life, Literature, Reading Comprehension, Literature Appreciation, Vocabulary, Letter Writing, Narrative Writing, Feelings and Emotions, Growing Up, European History, Disease and Illness, Monarchy and Royalty, Europe, Historic Figures, Women's History and Experience, Visual Arts

- Skills:

Reading Comprehension, Social Studies, Vocabulary, Narrative Writing