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Just a Girl

by Jane Caro



Teachers' Notes

Written by a Practising Secondary Teacher

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ABOUT THE BOOK

A true tale about one of history's greatest women. Determined, passionate and headstrong, Elizabeth the First shaped the destiny of a kingdom, all before she was 25.

When Elizabeth was two years and eight months old, she lost her mother to an executioner. Declared illegitimate, she was brought up parentless while her father acquired new wives and ignored his female children. At 14, she was banished from court and sent to live in the country. When she was 16, her beloved nine-year-old brother became King of England and removed her right to inherit the throne. When she was 21, she was imprisoned in the Tower of London, by her sister Mary, awaiting the same fate of so many who had died before her. At 25, she became Queen of England.

How do she find the courage to become queen even though she was just a girl?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Caro wears many hats including author, lecturer, mentor, social commentator, columnist, workshop facilitator, speaker, broadcaster and award-winning advertising writer. The common thread running through her career is a delight in words and a talent for using them to connect with people.

Today, Jane runs her own communications consultancy and lectures in Advertising Creative at The School of Communication Arts at UWS. She has published two books: *The Stupid Country: How Australia is dismantling public education* co-authored with Chris Bonnor (New South, 2007), and *The F Word: How we learned to swear by feminism* co-authored with Catherine Fox (New South, 2008). She is sought after as a speaker, MC and workshop facilitator by a wide range of organisations, in both the public and private sectors. She has also appeared on Channel 7's *Sunrise*, ABC's *Q&A*, *Richard Glover's Political Forum* on Radio 702, Radio National's *Life Matters* (as host), *Mornings with Kerri-Anne* and *The Gruen Transfer*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wrote *Just a Girl* because I have long wondered what it must have felt like to be Elizabeth – she is almost always viewed from the outside – and feel young adults would also find her story very engaging and, quite frankly, a rip-snorting yarn. It is also historically accurate, although a novel, and I have on occasions used her own words. Obviously I have invented conversations, but otherwise nothing else. Where I had a variety of stories or legends to choose from about events I chose the one that most suited my purpose.

SUGGESTED STUDY OF *JUST A GIRL*

From the first page *Just a Girl* will engage high school students of all ages. The book provides an excellent subject for a pure novel study and also offers opportunities for reading of excerpts across the curriculum to complement other content in learning areas such as the Arts and History. The writing style of *Just a Girl* would also make an engaging choice for read-aloud literacy and language programs in the high school context.

THEMES**Duty and Responsibility versus Freedom**

Elizabeth never has the opportunity to live the life of a young person. Throughout the book she rarely complains about this and in fact seems at times resigned to her fate and exhilarated by the world in which she exists.

Power and Politics

From a very early age, being able to manipulate her political situation is a key to Elizabeth's survival. Throughout the book we see her develop her political skills. We see her political fortunes rise and fall and we see the important role her advisers play in steering her toward particular paths. We also see the power held by others due to their position in society or their gender.

Family and Sibling Relationships

Elizabeth grapples with her relationship with her siblings/half siblings throughout the book. Questions of legitimacy are constantly raised and it is clear that in her world there is no place for a regular sibling relationship. In her world, siblings are rivals and are not to be trusted. Elizabeth's father and her siblings often pose the greatest risk to her safety. Elizabeth demonstrates great resilience in the face of having lost her mother at a young age under extreme circumstances and the way that she must continue to manipulate her family relationships in order to survive.

Role of Women in Society

The key characters in this book are women and the book offers an excellent opportunity to explore the role of women in society. The book contains clear examples of how the role of women differs depending on their wealth and position. Certain people in Elizabeth's life are quite obsessed with the idea of her marrying and producing an heir. Elizabeth steadfastly refuses to give into these demands throughout the book. Opportunities also exist to consider the role that men have in advising and sponsoring and, at times, detaining Elizabeth and denying her her freedom.

Integrity

Elizabeth remains true to herself, her religion and what she believes is the right thing to do. When accused of treachery and questioned incessantly, she refuses to take the easy way out and demands that the truth be told and heard. On a number of occasions Elizabeth puts her life at risk for the sake of being able to speak her mind and live life in the best way she knows how.

Betrayal

Elizabeth is both betrayed and accused of betrayal. Readers will be called upon to evaluate the desperate circumstances that can cause people betray the trust of another. This highlights questions of morality that readers may have to face in everyday life.

Religion

Religion features prominently in *Just a Girl* and is discussed in relation to society and the individual faith that the characters hold. At this time in history religion was used both to control and to provoke fear. The modern religions we see today can find some of their origins in the Elizabethan Era.

Fear

Elizabeth experiences fear for herself, her siblings and friends, her country and her future. Readers are given an insight into a life lived under constant threat and are invited to imagine what such a life would be like.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The following suggested activities could relate to any part of the book or the book as a whole.

1. Orientation

- Use a Web 2.0 tool such as WallWisher (www.wallwisher.com) to find out students' prior knowledge about Elizabeth 1 and/or predictions of what types of events, characters or language will feature in the book.

2. Character and Plot Analysis

- Ask students to analyse a character or a situation from the novel. Get them to write their thoughts and reflections onto a real time collaborative think document (<http://titanpad.com>) and respond to each others' ideas and thoughts.
- Cut and paste the comments from the above document into wordle (<http://www.wordle.net>) or tag crowd (<http://tagcrowd.com>). Discuss the clear commonalities between different readers in the class or across the year level.
- Imagine you are Elizabeth on the night that she recalls her life story prior to being crowned the Queen of England. Choose one particular story from the novel or write one of your own and either write it as a blog or record it as a video diary.
- Go to the Wikipedia entry on Queen Elizabeth 1 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_I_of_England). Read the entry, and compare it against Elizabeth's story in *Just a Girl*. What is missing from the entry, and what is missing from the book? What does the author say in the notes to the book about the historical information and accuracy? Why do you think she left certain pieces of information out?

- Author Jane Caro states in her note that she has always been interested in the life of Elizabeth I. How do you think she has positioned the character? Has she influenced the way that you see Elizabeth? Write a reflection outlining how you feel about Elizabeth at the conclusion of the book.
- Choose a character that features in one of the stories recounted in the book. Write the event or story again but this time from the point of view or opinion of that character. Preparation for this task could include brainstorming in groups about the personality and possible reactions of that character. The teacher could place various sections of the book on poster paper on desks around the room and allocate a particular colour pen to each group to represent their character. Students then move from poster to poster adding their character's reactions graffiti style and may even respond to the reactions of other groups/characters.
- The cast of characters is outlined on page 257. Choose a character of particular interest to you and see if you can find out more about them. Begin with secondary sources such as Wikipedia.
- Throughout the book Elizabeth seeks an audience with her sister Mary to persuade her of a particular point of view. Discuss the tools of persuasion, and use these to write a letter to Mary from Elizabeth attempting to convince her that you are not working against her.
- Write an additional chapter or epilogue for the book. This could be at the end of the day Elizabeth is made Queen or at the end of her life.
- Write a news article capturing the events on the day of Elizabeth's coronation. Use the descriptions from the book to help create a picture of what spectators would have seen that day.

3. Related Activities

- How does a novel about someone's life differ from a biography? What are the key differences between a fictional account of a life and a factual biography?
- The Elizabethan Era is famous for many things, ranging from art and culture to fashion and changes to societal attitudes. Research the Elizabethan Era and some of the famous names and ideas that remain with us from that time.
- The history of a place spans much greater time than the history of a person. Researching the role of a place throughout history can tell us important things about society at different points in time. Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London are buildings famous throughout history. Search for some images of the Abbey and the Tower and find out some of the other momentous events or celebrations that have been held there.
- Elizabeth I is credited with establishing the Church of England. Research the religious history of England and how the monarch of the day influenced the religion of the people.
- When researching historical events we can use what are called primary and secondary sources. See if you can find some primary and secondary sources about the years described in *Just a Girl* online. How do you think an author could make use of these sources to write a novel such as this one?

- Life as part of a monarchy is very different today. Choose a member of the modern royal family of England and compare and contrast the life of that person with that of Elizabeth.
- Write a review of the book making recommendations regarding most appropriate audience and commenting on the parts of the book you liked or disliked.
- The book offers a feminist perspective by deeply examining the lives of some strong and enduring female historical figures. How are women represented in the book? What is the reader invited to think about women? Can you think of some strong and influential women in today's society? Choose a current female leader and consider the similarities and differences between that woman and Elizabeth.
- Allocate different parts of the book and Elizabeth's life (perhaps even beyond the end of the book) to groups in the class. Create a timeline of her life including major personal and historical events. This timeline can be set up along one wall of the classroom and can include pictures, quotes or other reflections. The timeline can be a living document of the learning and discussions of the class and can be added to throughout the reading and teaching of the unit.
- Find some stories and reflections from a section of the book where Elizabeth is the same age as you are now. Consider what challenges she faced and emotions she felt. What are the major challenges you face? How does your life at this age differ from that of Elizabeth? What qualities does Elizabeth have that would help her to survive as a high school student in the 21st century?
- Further resources and readings about Elizabeth can be found through search engines but www.lucidcafe.com/library/95sep/elizabeth.html offers a good starting point.