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Dr. Warner

English 112B

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The Princess Diaries

By Meg Cabot

(Vol. 1)





Image Source from megcabot.com

Author's Website: megcabot.com

About the Author:

Meg Cabot is an American author with over 50 published children's and young adult books. Cabot holds a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Indiana University. Cabot has published several series and mini-series with strong, unique female protagonists, but her most famous is *The Princess Diaries* series. Disney has made three movie adaptations from Cabot's books, including 2 Princess Diaries Movies and Avalon High. She is best known for writing Chick-lit, Romance, and Mystery books. Cabot currently lives in Florida with her husband and cats.

- Fun Fact about this novel: The American Library Association said this book by Meg Cabot is "Like reading a note from your best friend." (megcabot.com)

- Cabot also got the idea for this book in high school when she found out her mom was dating one of her teachers.

Summary of the Novel:

Mia Thermopolis is a 14-year-old teen and an only child, living with her not-so-single mother in New York. As a high school freshman struggling to keep up with her grades, Mia also feels like an outcast and is not noticed by any of her classmates besides her best friend, Lilly and Michael Moscovitz; yet, she desperately wants her crush, Josh, to notice her. On one fateful day, Mia's life becomes more complicated when her absent father and grandmother visit and drop life-changing news: she is a princess and the only heir of a small European country named Genovia. This news complicates Mia's life because she's now expected to behave and act like royalty. Her new royal status and recognition bring identity and challenges to her social presence and personal life desires. Is she fit to be a princess? How much of herself will she give up until it is enough for her family?

Significant Quotes

Quote 1 Context: Mia is still processing the fact that she is a princess and still coming to terms with her identity. Her biggest concern right now is that her classmates will find out she is a princess. Mia's grandmother invites her over to make it seem like they will spend time together. However, her father and grandmother have a plan to give Mia "princess" lessons and transform her by giving her a makeover. Mia declines, but her father insists that he will pay her \$100 for each princess lesson.

Quote 1:

"I don't even know who I am anymore. It certainly isn't Mia Thermopolis. She's turning me into someone else. So I stood in front of my father, looking like a human Q-tip in my new hair, and I let him have it. 'First she makes me do homework. Then she rips the homework up. Then she gives me sitting lessons. Then she has all my hair dyed a different color and most of it hacked off, makes someone glue tiny surfboards to my fingernails, buys me shoes that cost as much as small animal surgery, and clothes that make me look like Vicki, the captain's daughter in that old seventies series *The Love Boat*. Well, Dad, I'm sorry, but I'm not Vicki, and I never will be, no matter how much Grandmère dresses me up like her.'" (113)

Quote Explanation and Significance:

Up to this point, Mia has always compared herself to the other girls at school and wished she looked more like them. However, now that she has changed her look, she feels uncomfortable with all the accessories and this new persona. In fact, Mia does not even recognize herself. This passage of the novel is important because it is also Mia's first time disagreeing with her father and admitting how she's really been feeling. Her father insists on paying her more money to keep up with the lessons, and Mia agrees. But this passage also adds

to the pressure Mia continues to experience learning how to present herself at home, school, the press, and her royal family. In her journal, she starts making lists of what to do, what not to do, how to act, and how not to act. Too much is happening to her all at once, especially when her new identity as a princess is something she has to keep from her best friend, Lilly. Without Mia's intention, this makeover also causes Lilly to become upset because she now thinks Mia will ditch her for the popular kids. Lilly is also upset because she thinks Mia is completely changing because of her "new hair," and it is the hair that she mostly mocks. On the contrary, Lilly begins to avoid Mia and does not speak to her for weeks. This quote shows Mia's identity crisis and the duality of her friendship with Lilly. (More on this later)

Quote 2 Context: At this point in the novel, Mia has gained a lot of attention from the public, the press, and her high school classmates. Many people who failed to acknowledge Mia's existence in the beginning now find it fascinating that there is a legit princess among them, and they all want to be her friend. Because this new attention is still very new to Mia, she is oblivious to people's real intentions towards her. She is also distracted by the fact that her long-term crush, Josh Richter, has just asked her out! However, Mia discovers that Josh only asked her out because she is a princess.

Quote 2:

"And like a big idiot, I fell for it. Great. Just great. Lilly says I'm not assertive enough. Her parents say I have a tendency to internalize everything and fear confrontation. My mom says the same thing. That's why she gave me this book, in the hopes that what I won't tell her, I'll at least get out into the open somehow. If it hadn't turned out that I'm a princess, maybe I might still be

all that stuff. You know, unassertive, fearful of confrontation, an internalizer. I probably wouldn't have done what I did next."

"Josh looked confused. "You mean you didn't like it?"

"Yes," I said. "That's exactly what I mean. I didn't like it. I didn't like it at all. Because I know you didn't kiss me because you like me. You just kissed me because I'm the princess of Genovia." (222-223)

Quote 2 Explanation:

First, there are two things to unpack from this passage: Josh's bad intentions of using Mia, including kissing her without her consent, for media attention, and Mia finally stepping out of her comfort zone to defend herself. The kiss and Josh's actions infuriate Mia because the attention and affection she always anticipated from Josh turned out to be fake and one of her worst experiences in high school. For instance, Josh also ignores that Mia is vegetarian and orders meat on their date, and then he does not protect or hide her from the photographers who interrupt their dinner. Instead, Josh sees it as an opportunity to gain attention from the media and be on the cover of a magazine cover. Without her consent, he pulls her in and kisses her while people take photos of them. It doesn't take Mia long to realize that what he did, no matter who he was or pretended to be, was not okay. And while her princess identity has been hard to navigate, she does feel more confident in herself and her self-worth. Mia says if she hadn't discovered her new courage, she "probably wouldn't have done what I did next." (223), Which was to confront Josh even if it meant doing something she would not have ever done before.

This quote also captures how Mia is becoming more assertive and setting boundaries for herself. Right after she leaves Josh, she admits to herself, "But the thing is, I would rather not have a boyfriend at all than have one who is only using me for my money or the fact that my

father is a prince or for any reason, really, except that he likes me for me, and nothing else. Of course, now that everyone knows I'm a princess, it's going to be kind of hard to tell which guys like me for me and which guys like me for my tiara. But at least I realized the truth about Josh before things went on too long.” (226) I especially like that instead of only writing about it, Mia does something about it, too. In real life, I know it takes a lot of courage and trust to open up to or confront people about certain things, so I thought Mia was really brave in doing this.

Quote 3 Context: This quote can be found in the second to last entry of the novel, and it is after Mia's confrontation with Josh. Something to note is that she and Lilly made up because Lilly felt bad for her after everything that went down with Josh. Mia proudly ditches Josh at the Cultural Diversity dance but is upset that she has no date to accompany her. Luckily for Mia, Michael is there, and the two sit and laugh together. Mia realizes that she and Michael have always gotten along so naturally. She writes that she can truly be herself around him. After the dance, Mia spends the night at Lilly and Michael's house, and the following day, she reflects and writes:

Quote 3:

“I had broken up with a boy [Josh] I had only been out on half a date with. That can be very emotionally wearing. Still, I woke up way early, like I always do when I spend the night at Lilly's. I lay there with Pavlov in my arms and listened to the sound of the morning traffic on Fifth Avenue, which isn't really very loud, since the Moscovitzes had their windows soundproofed. As I lay there, I thought I am a very lucky girl. Things had looked pretty bad there for a while. But isn't it funny how everything kind of works itself out in the end? I hear stirrings in the kitchen. Maya must be there, pouring out glasses of pulpless orange juice for breakfast.

I'm going to go see if she needs any help. I don't know why, but I AM SO HAPPY! I guess it doesn't take much, does it?" (P.232)

Quote 3 Explanation:

Given that this is the first book in *The Princess Diaries* series, we're able to see a lot of Mia's character development from this passage. Specifically, all that she's had to endure to come to the epiphany that her closest friends are the ones she can be herself around. Lilly and Michael are two of her closest friends, and Mia does not have to pretend to be anyone else around them. Though Mia and Lilly fought for a while and were both too prideful to reach out to the other first, Michael was there to make sure the two made up. I also think their friendship is important because Michael and Lilly liked Mia before discovering she was a princess. Toward the end of the novel, it turns out that Michael likes Mia more than a friend, which also excites her. I think this quote highlights the joy Mia feels because she feels the worst has slowly come to an end, and she is settling into what her life will start to look like. Sure, she'll still have to deal with the press, the media, and the attention, but she's discovered she can also find moments of peace and quiet and surround herself with her real friends.

Closing remark for this and all quotes: I also want to point out that students have the option and the right to find and form their friendships and comfort crowds. In other words, students should choose who they share information with and set boundaries to protect their peace and well-being. Just because one has authority or is an adult or supposed friend or crush does not always mean they are a trusted one or a safe space. I hope we can all encourage our students to think of writing as a therapeutic and wonderful thing in place of having to talk about or share things that they really don't want to.

Classroom Use

I would first introduce this book in a creative writing unit about first-person narratives and storytelling. I would show how creative fiction works like *The Princess Diaries*, *We Were Here*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *Twilight*, etc., show the impact of a compelling first-person speaker and how the speaker's point of view is vital to understanding the novel as a whole. *The Princess Diaries* especially exemplifies using a journal or diary to express one's thoughts and feelings as a way to express oneself and deal with overwhelming emotions and life changes. I would point out to my students that Mia also includes inner monologue and the words she wishes she'd said besides sharing dialogues with those around her. Her diary is sacred to her, and she makes excellent use of how writing helps her in her everyday life by finding a safe and comforting place to reflect. With this in mind, I would encourage my students to write in their class journals whenever they can or feel like they want to. I would give them time to write and provide optional writing prompts to guide them only if they want to respond to those prompts. As a class activity, I would ask my students to consider an alternative perspective (Lilly, Mia's best friend, Mia's grandmother, or Mia's mom) and write what they think about Mia's new behavior or if her changes are for the best.

As for teaching about first-person narratives and storytelling on another level, I would ask my students to pick any fiction book written in the first person and do a character analysis. I'd ask them to study the main character's personality, actions, inactions, character development, and relationships and then have them talk about whether the character changed by the end of the novel. I'd also ask them to bring in their personal experience or knowledge and if there's anything they would've done differently from the protagonist in their book.

Why I would give the book to teens

I would give this book to teens because I strongly believe *The Princess Diaries* explores these relevant themes and issues pertinent to adolescents. Middle and high school students are learning about their identities, dealing with their friendships, and societal and family pressures. Mia's experiences with these topics are not so different from what we all feel at a young and awkward stage in our lives. For instance, in this book, Mia is 14 and learning to navigate her adolescence, specifically puberty (body image), identity, and friendships. Her journal entries are easy to read and follow along, and students can closely examine Mia and how she feels in every entry. Mia keeps it real even during her moments of embarrassment, providing a sense of normality.

Although the novel has appealed more to female students in the past, I think it would also appeal to those who identify with Mia, especially in middle and high school, where students struggle most with self-confidence, family expectations, and friendship problems. Other reasons I would encourage this book to be read:

- Because students may be dealing with body image identity
- Because students may be struggling to make decisions based on what others expect from them
- Because it is a highly recommended coming-of-age story that provides young readers with comfort and a sense of belonging
- Because of Mia's transparency and humor which may resonate with students
- Because of the fundamental and natural themes portrayed by characters, such as how they have crushes and feel jealousy, desire, anger, etc.

How *The Princess Diaries* fits *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning* Chapters 4, 6, and 7

Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences

- Even as a work of fiction, Mia struggles with realistic body image issues, self-acceptance, and confidence.
 - ❖ Mia has always compared herself to the other girls, making her feel insecure and like she has to look or act a certain way.
- Mia deals with societal and familial pressures from her mother, father, and grandmother.
 - ❖ Many families, despite cultural backgrounds, tend to apply certain expectations and pressure on younger family members. In this case, Mia must keep a responsible attitude and mature and elegant behavior even when she is just 14.
- Mia and Lilly's friendship conveys a realistic friendship among teens.
 - ❖ For instance, they fight over the secrets they keep from each other. Lilly admits she is jealous of Mia.
 - ❖ The two fight the novel and then make up because their friendship is stronger than their reasons for fighting.

Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

- At the beginning of the novel, Mia is discriminated against by her classmates because she is not conventionally attractive to them, and they call her names because she is different.
- Because Mia has many new expectations, she has trouble deciding what is best for her or her family.
- Mia has a drastic change in her physical appearance and questions her new look, her personality, and herself.
 - ❖ She struggles to balance being Mia Thermopolis and Princess Mia

Chapter 7: Books about Courage and Survival

- As Mia gains self-confidence and becomes more confident, she empowers herself for the best to essentially survive high school and her role as a royal princess.
 - ❖ After confronting Josh, Mia gains the courage to stand up for herself more often.
- Though Mia's life is never in life-threatening danger, she faces the brutality of her bullies and the press, to which she learns to adapt.
 - ❖ Mia learns to avoid those who mean harm to her and her mental health. The overwhelming photography and publicity make Mia react in fight-or-flight responses.
 - ❖ She gains a new perspective that being herself is what makes her confident and resilient.

Text Complexity

Quantitative:

Lexile.com:

Page Count: 240 (Paperback, First Edition)

Word Count: 58,969

Book Lexile: 920L

Text Complexity Dale-Chall:

Grades 6-7

Reading Difficulty: Fairly Easy

Age Range: 10-11

I would recommend *The Princess Diaries* series (this and other volumes) to 9th-11th graders because of its mature content and sexual references at times.

Qualitative

Structure and Readability:

1. The novel is told in first-person POV by Mia Thermopolis.
2. It is easy to follow because of its fluidity and simple sentence structure.
3. It is told in chronological order by date. Mia titles her entries by the day and full date.
This order helps to understand Mia's growth and character development.
4. Language is straightforward, with few difficult vocabulary words. Sources say the text is fairly easy for recommended age groups to comprehend.

Genre Conventions:

1. Lexlie.com categorizes this novel under "General Literature" and "Real Life."

2. Also mentioned in family and home stories (Children's/ Teenage)
3. Common themes and topics include personal, social, and family issues.
4. Story elements include real-life settings: New York and Central Park.