*The Princess Diaries* – Meg Cabot



<http://www.megcabot.com/princessdiaries/> / <http://www.megcabot.com/about-meg-cabot/>

**About the author:**

 Meg Cabot was born and raised in Bloomington, Indiana, and lived in France and California before settling in New York City, where she worked for a decade as an assistant residence hall director at New York University. Prior to 2000, when she published her first novel under her real name, *The Princess Diaries*, she had published historical romance books under the name Patricia Cabot, and since then has written over eighty titles for adults, young readers, and young adults. Her books have been sold in 38 countries and have been turned into three films (two *Princess Diaries* films) as well as a television series. Of her books, 10 are middle grade, 25 are for adults, and 48 are YA. She currently lives in Key West, Florida with her husband and cats.

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**Summary:**

 At 14 years old, Mia Thermopolis’ greatest problems are her big feet, algebra homework, and that she has to keep a diary of her feelings now that her mother is dating her teacher. Her life is further complicated when her mysterious father comes to town and reveals the truth: he is the crown prince of Genovia, and she is his sole heir. Overnight, she goes from being Mia Thermopolis, 9th grader, to Amelia Mignonette Grimaldi Thermopolis Renaldo, Princess. To make matters worse, her overbearing grandmother arrives to teach her proper royal behavior, Mia’s activist best friend Lilly can’t ever find out, and she *still* doesn’t have a date for the Cultural Diversity Dance.

**Significant quotes/passages:**

“Anyway, we’re sitting there drinking tea and he starts telling me in this very serious voice that he’s the prince of Genovia, and then this terrible thing happens … I knew what my dad was saying was superserious, but I couldn’t help it, I just kept hiccuping!” (28-29)

 Although it’s a book about a girl discovering she’s a princess, the moment of revelation – when Mia’s father sits her down and properly explains who she is and what it means and why she never knew until now – is not what is the important takeaway to Mia, at least not at the moment. What is important is that she is having tea at the Plaza Hotel, surrounded by luxury and awestruck tourists, having a discussion with her father who is a prince, and she is overwhelmed by an aggressive bout of the hiccups. Her first conscious moment as a member of the royal family, the revelation of her birth, is derailed by the fact that she is still just an awkward teenager.

“As Tina and I walked past the table where Lilly and I usually sat, I saw Lilly staring at me with her mouth open … I think self-actualization might be around the corner.” (130)

 One of Mia’s primary issues in the story is her passivity, or lack of assertiveness. She is frustrated by her grandmother’s micromanaging, the social structure at school, and her general lack of control over her own life – but despite her indignant complaints, she never makes any moves to change the situation, which is a point of contention with her best friend Lilly, who is nothing but proactive. In this moment, however, the main lesson/message of the story is made clear: Mia realizes that while she cannot change the fact that her future is out of her control, or that Lana can torment people without repercussions because she is popular, or that Mia’s best friend isn’t speaking to her and her mom is dating her algebra teacher, Mia *can* change her own outlook. Lana may choose to use her social power to bully the vulnerable, but that doesn’t mean Mia has to watch it happen. Mia’s future may be shaped by responsibilities she never expected, but that doesn’t mean she has to let it ruin it her life.

“Well, I’m sitting here in my new dress … So don’t be telling ME we can’t call out the Genovian national guard if I get stood up.” (201)

 This is the first time Mia truly accepts herself as “Princess Mia.” And in many ways, the the Cultural Diversity Dance doubles as her royal debut; her secret is out, and she has allowed her grandmother to dress and prepare her without protest, echoing the first makeover scene earlier in the novel. Mia is able to reconcile New York Mia with Princess Mia, no longer viewing them as two paradoxical beings in direct opposition to one another, but as different aspects of herself. She is dressed as a princess, escorted by a bodyguard on her very first date, but it has become natural. The fact that she is able to joke about sending Genovian troops after her date for standing her up is an important step towards self-acceptance.

**Why give to teens?**

* Many teenagers will sympathize with Mia’s struggles to fit in, her anxiety over academics, her low self-esteem, and other everyday growing pains.
* Its escapist themes and humorous, easy style make it an appealing and approachable read, while also tackling more complex issues such as social acceptance, bullying, peer pressure, and family conflicts.
* Teenagers may appreciate the message that fairy tales are not quite what they seem, that even a real-life Cinderella story comes with struggles and difficulties.

**Text complexity:**

*The Princess Diaries* has an ATOS book level of 5.7 and a Lexile score of 920L, placing the difficulty of the language itself in the grades 5-7 range. This means that middle grade readers, as young as 10 or 11, could read it without much difficulty. However, there are a lot of cultural references and discussions of dating/romance that make it better suited for readers 13 or older. Teenagers much older than 14 or 15 might find the writing a little too easy, but can still appreciate the value of Mia’s navigation through high school and newfound princess-hood.

**Further reading:**

*The Princess Diaries* is the first book in an 18-volume series, the first 17 of which were published between 2000 and 2005 and end with Mia graduating high school and beginning college. An 18th book, *Royal Wedding* was published in 2015 and revisits adult Mia as she plans her wedding. It is the only book in the series aimed for adults. Cabot is currently writing a companion series for preteens, *From the Notebooks of a Middle School Princess*, about Mia’s half-sister. The third book in the series was released in August 2017, seventeen years after the very first *Princess Diaries* novel debuted.

 In addition, many of Cabot’s other works employ a similar journal-style format. Her *The Boy* series (*The Boy Next Door*, *Boy Meets Girl*, *Every Boy’s Got One*, and *The Boy is Back*) takes it to the digital age by telling the story entirely through text messages, IMs, and short journal entries.

 Other diary-style works that would pair well with *The Princess Diaries* would be *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* by Louise Rennison and *P.S. Longer Letter Later* by Paula Danziger and Ann M. Martin.

 The Exeter qualities that *The Princess Diaries* demonstrates are number three: “characters who reflect experiences of teen readers” and number seven: “themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.” Its classification per *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning* would fall under “Books about Real-Life Experiences.”