

A Curriculum Guide for

Maid of Secrets

by Jennifer McGowan

This guide addresses the following standards from the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, grades 9–10: (RL.9–10.1, 2, 3, 4, 5) (SL.9–10.1, 1a, 1c, 1d). If you teach another grade, consider visiting the Common Core website to find a similar objective aligned to the ones listed here.

Prereading Activity

Have students mark their opinion of the following statements below. Then, place posters around the four corners of your room that correspond with the rankings

Statement:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Why I think this:
A person should do absolutely anything they can to serve their country.					
Everyone has a special gift that can be used for good or for evil.					
Women played a more important role in history than people realize.					
The most important element in a story is the plot.					

Discussion Guide

1. List the most important facts that you learn about Meg in her life in the Golden Rose Acting Troupe from Chapters One and Two. What characters are introduced in this exposition?
2. Why do you think the author decided to structure Chapter Two the way she did? What does it add to the story?
3. Summarize the events that led to Meg being captured by the crown. What will she be used for? Cite evidence from the text that reveals the Queen’s purpose in her capture.
4. List the three most important aspects of Meg’s new role at court. To whom must she answer? How are these characters’ motivations in conflict? Whom should Meg believe, and therefore, the reader?

5. Why is the detail about Marie Claire's death important to the plot? How does it add suspense and add to the rising action?
6. Describe the Count de Martine and Meg's task with him as her mark. What skills does she rely on to become invisible in her quest? Find a key quote that best represents Meg's unique skill set and summarize her actions at the ball.
7. Compare the characters of Cecil and Walsingham. Which do you find more disturbing? How does McGowan develop their characterization? What, exactly, makes an excellent villain?
8. Who are the other girls trained to do this work? What gifts do each of them bring to the table? In fact, make a table of the girls and their extraordinary talents.
9. What bargain does Meg make for her freedom? Is it a reasonable offer? Her life is far more luxurious inside the castle walls, and yet she dreams of her life with the acting troupe. Given her situation, which would you choose? Why?
10. Describe the setting of the novel. How do the descriptions and details of the palace add to the plot? How important is setting to this story? How would it be different set in another time period? Another location? How important is setting for you as a reader? Why?
11. Describe the romance between Rafe and Meg. In what ways does it serve as an interesting subplot to the mystery? What does the romantic element provide the reader?
12. Meg creates friendships with the other maids despite their differences. How are these minor characters developed over the course of the novel? Which one of the maids is your favorite? Why? Is that who you would most like to be friends with or not?
13. When Meg incurs the wrath of the queen does she deserve it? Have you ever felt so ashamed and disappointed in yourself? Is that harder than feeling badly toward someone else?
14. What does Meg learn about the queen that could compromise the queen's position as monarch? Would you be willing to forgo romance, marriage, and children to have the power of Queen Elizabeth?
15. While Anna is naïve about relationships (and men in particular), Beatrice is decidedly worldly and knows how to manipulate them. What point is the author trying to make by using these two characters as foils for each other? What do we learn about the main character through these characters and their interactions?
16. Meg was given two items from her grandfather but only understands their significance once she's fully embedded in the courtly world. How do they both serve her? How do they help her to identify who she truly is? How are these objects symbolic?
17. Meg loses practically everything, including her freedom. Describe her time in the dungeon. Why does she end up there, trying to save Lady Amelia? For you, what would be the worst part

of her time in the dungeon? How is she saved from this awful fate? What does this reveal about her friendships and the queen?

18. Summarize how Meg plans to catch the killer of Marie Claire during the play. What role must each of her friends do for it to work? Who interferes and why?

19. In the end, where is the relationship with Meg and Rafe headed? Do you think that despite their conflicting motivations they will be able to build a relationship and romance?

20. Predict what will happen to each of the five maids over the next year and why you believe this to be so. Use evidence from the novel to support your hypothesis, drawing key quotes as proof.

Project: Character Motivation

Fill out the following chart about the characters from the novel. Find a line or passage from the text that reveals that character’s prime motivation. In the final column, put a check mark in the box for characters whose motivations align with the narrator’s and an X in the box for those that conflict.

Character:	Description/Role/Talents:	Key quote that best represents this character:	Motivation
Meg Fellowes			
Beatrice Knowles			
Anna Burgher			
Sophia Dee			
Jane Morgan			
Sir William Cecil			

Queen Elizabeth Regnant			
Rafe Luis Medina			
Sir Francis Walsingham			

Vocabulary

Use the context clues to place the following vocabulary words within the sentence where they make sense.

indolent sycophant strictures hastened elocution
mollify caprice proximity utmost flummoxed

1. “And then there was endless instruction on _____, languages, and court behavior.” (Ch. 4)
2. “Knew the rise and fall of the words, the laughing, musical cadence, at once _____ and on edge.” (Ch. 9)
3. “I nodded tightly and _____ after the Queen, who was already several steps ahead.” (Ch. 5)
4. “The fact that Henry had gone on to behead Elizabeth’s mother, so he could marry his third wife, hadn’t seemed to _____ anyone.” (Ch. 5)
5. “She somehow clamped her lips closed, too _____ even to nod.” (Ch.4)
6. “Her eyes now merry, the Queen bowed slightly to him in return before turning to her next _____.” (Ch. 6)
7. “A foolish _____ I’m sure you would think.” (Ch. 10)

8. "Yet somehow, Beatrice always managed a way around the _____ . How she found cloth that shimmered with just a hint of color . . . " (Ch.13)

9. "So well that you will now have another assignment, of _____ secrecy, to be carried out within the fortnight." (Ch. 8)

10. "She is an unmarried girl who's going to find herself in close _____ to a knot of Spaniards too free with their time for their own good." (Ch. 15)

Author's Tone: Read this excerpt from Chapter Three of *Maid of Secrets* and circle the words that evoke a sense of time and place for the reader:

Not every inn welcomed actors into their midst. They thought us cutthroats and vagabonds, ruffians, villains, and curs. Incensed, our company had decided to teach the innkeeper at the Whitechurch Arms not to judge his customers prematurely, by stealing from his till. I was on my way to put our revenge in motion. My role would be to distract the innkeeper with my loud voice and boisterous antics, showing him outfit after outfit that I'd supposedly either washed, beaten, or brushed clean for his patrons, while other members of our troupe snuck in through the inn's back entrance. (McGowan, Ch.3)

Queen Elizabeth I

1. Read an article about Queen Elizabeth's penchant for fashion here at *Mental Floss* Magazine: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/23718/quick-10-fashions-queen-elizabeth-i>

2. Read the excerpt below from Chapter Five of the novel. Notice how the author offers a panoramic view of the gown, as well as zooming into specific, concrete details.

She was spectacular in the morning light—tall and fair and flame-haired, her strength and vitality positively glowing beneath the deep red satin gown she wore. The dress framed her graceful neck and shoulders in a square-cut collar edged in snowy lace, and its wide-set sleeves were strung with pearls and ended in narrow, bejeweled cuffs. The entire gown was embroidered with heavy golden thread against its crimson silk, and must have weighed four stones. It would have overpowered most women, but not our Elizabeth. (McGowan, Ch. 5)

Now use this text as inspiration when exploring the portraits (and magnificent gowns!) of Queen Elizabeth I via Google images. Then try your own hand at describing one of the dresses you found.

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