



The Executioner's Daughter

Teacher's Notes

Written by Jane Hardstaff
Published by Egmont, 2014

Background

Tudor Times

The Tudors were a family that ruled England and Wales for 118 years from 1485 to 1603. Six different monarchs reigned during that time:

Henry VII 1485 - 1509
Henry VIII 1509 - 1547
Edward VI 1547 - 1553
Jane Grey 1553 - 1553
Mary I 1553 - 1558
Elizabeth I 1558 - 1603

The Executioner's Daughter is set during Henry VIII's reign.

King Henry VIII

Henry VIII was born in June, 1491 in Greenwich, London. He became king at the age of 18 and was known for his love of hunting and dancing. Many were afraid of Henry: he was ruthless with those who didn't agree with him or got in his way. Henry VIII is most famous for marrying six times:

1. Catherine of Aragon
From Spain
Married to Henry for 14 years (1509 - 1533)
They had a daughter who went on to become Queen Mary I
Henry divorced Catherine because she failed to produce a male heir.
2. Anne Boleyn
From England
Married to Henry for 3 years (1533-1536)
They had a daughter who went on to become Queen Elizabeth I
Anne was beheaded for adultery



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3. Jane Seymour
From England
Married to Henry for 1 year (1536-1537)
They had a son who went on to become King Edward VI
Jane died 12 days after giving birth to their son
4. Anne of Cleves
From Germany
Married to Henry for 6 months (January – July 1540)
They had no children
Henry had married Anne for political reasons but when he found that this political alliance was no longer to his advantage, he divorced her.
5. Catherine Howard
From England
Married to Henry for two years (1540 – 1542)
They had no children
Catherine was beheaded for adultery
6. Catherine Parr
From England
Married to Henry for four years (1543-1547)
They had no children
Henry VIII died in 1547

The Executioner's Daughter is set in 1536 when Henry VIII was married to his second wife, Anne Boleyn.

Anne Boleyn

Anne was born in Norfolk between 1500 and 1502 and grew up in Hever Castle in Kent. She was charismatic and quick-witted with a lively personality. As the daughter of an English nobleman, she was sent to France at the age of 13 where she worked in the French court for Henry VIII's sister Mary who had married the King of France. Anne returned to England at the age of 21 where she worked as a lady-in-waiting for Katherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, which is when she caught Henry's eye. Henry fell in love with Anne and divorced Katherine so that he could marry Anne. They married



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in 1533 and that same year, Anne gave birth to their first child, a girl who later became Queen Elizabeth I. Three years later in 1536, Anne miscarried a male child. It was important for Henry to secure a male heir during his reign and so after Anne's miscarriage, Henry and Anne fell out which led to Anne's beheading later in 1536 at the age of 36-38.

Tudor London

London was a dirty and potentially dangerous place in Tudor times. There wasn't a police force to ensure your safety. Life was hard for the poor as little was done to help them. Streets were narrow and crowded and the perfect place for thieves to pick your pockets if you were a wealthy person. The rich preferred to travel on the River Thames as it was safer and quicker. Like today, Tudor London was a place full of entertainment – there were many of alehouses and inns (like bars and pubs). People also enjoyed going to the theatre and to watch bear baiting.

The River Thames

London was the most important trading city in England. Ships lined the banks of the River Thames – some of these ships were laden with goods to take to other countries in Europe and some were ships from other countries bringing foreign goods to sell in England. There were also many smaller boats owned by watermen who ferried passengers up and down the Thames. In the winter months, it sometimes got so cold that the River Thames froze over. When this happened, a Frost Fair would take place on the ice. Traders set up food and entertainment stalls on the frozen ice.

Further reading

TES – Tudor Teaching Resources

http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resources/primary-42198/ks2-history-43279/the-tudors-43573/?SFBC_FilterOption=2¶metrics=60004

Primary Homework Help – Tudors

<http://www.primaryhomeworkhelp.co.uk/Tudors.html>

Super Brainy Beans – Tudors (this website contains links to a number of really useful websites about the Tudors)

<http://www.superbrainybeans.co.uk/history/tudors.html>



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An interview with Jane Hardstaff – author of *The Executioner's Daughter*

How did you think of the initial idea for *The Executioner's Daughter*?

Ideas sometimes come from strange places. The idea for *The Executioner's Daughter* began with a random daydream, walking by the Tower of London and the river Thames, about what it would be like if your dad was an executioner? What if this gruesome job was something you had to help out with? How might that affect a father-daughter relationship? And I wondered how the father had become an executioner in the first place? And then I thought, what if he felt he had no choice? What if he had a secret reason? Something that would lead to a huge misunderstanding, and the girl rebelling against her father. And that was the beginning of *The Executioner's Daughter*.

After you had the initial idea, how long did it take to write the book?

Having had the idea for *The Executioner's Daughter*, I thought about it for around six months before I started writing. Then it took two years to write (fitting it around my normal work) and after that, with my agent and my editor, a further two years of rewrites.

Can you tell us a bit more about the publishing process – what happened after you sent your book to your editor?

Let me tell you, editing is an interesting process. You find out all sorts of things about yourself and your book that you never knew! My editor is Stella Paskins at Egmont. Like a kind-of benign heat-seeking missile, Stella homed in on the parts of the book that needed work. Things that didn't quite make sense. Or made no sense at all! And it can be really hard to go back time-and-again over a story you've written. But this editing stage is so crucial. And unsurprisingly it makes for a much better book.

The cover of the book is beautiful – how did it come about and how much say did you have in what it looked like?

The cover is brilliant and compelling. There's so much going on in those eyes – they just draw you in. I love the sinister, playful 'necklace' that hints at some of the themes in the book. How did it come about? It was created by the very talented design team at Egmont. It was all their idea and I loved it from the moment I saw it. I think if there had been something I felt strongly about, then we could have talked. But there was nothing I would have wished to be different.



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All your characters are brilliantly written. Are they based on anybody you know and how do you make them so real?

Thank you! None of my characters are based on specific people, I think there's a bit of myself – hasty, impetuous and quick to judge – in the character of Moss. And I think Moss has my daughter's fearless spirit and her strong sense of right and wrong. I wanted to write the book from Moss' perspective, so it was important to be able to get under her skin – to feel her feelings, to 'be' her, as much as I could. How do I try to make my characters real? By empathizing with them, by imagining myself in their shoes. And by listening to the way people talk to each other, so that when I write dialogue, hopefully it feels natural.

Why did you choose the Tudor period to set your story in?

It was quite an obvious choice for me, to set my story in Tudor times. Having decided to write about an executioner's daughter living in the Tower of London, I went straight for one of the most fascinating periods in the Tower's history – beginning with the execution of Sir Thomas More (a very famous man of his time) and ending with the beheading of Anne Boleyn (the first English queen to be executed). With the Tudors we have death, glamour, celebrity and larger-than-life characters. Anne Boleyn was an extraordinary woman – defiant, intelligent and unconventional. Her relationship with the powerful, charismatic King Henry VIII began with love, but ended in disaster. I wondered whether it would be possible to thread the stories of these captivating people into the lives of my fictional characters.

You weave a fictional story so well into a real era. Was this easy to do?

Actually, it was a nightmare! However, I tried very hard to stick to the chronology of real events, while staying true to the story I wanted to write for my fictional characters. Inevitably, for me, there is a point where history stops and story starts – where I imagine what a real character would have said or felt. What was easier was writing about the brooding atmosphere of the Tower and the river Thames. I was very sure that I wanted my story to have a supernatural undercurrent and the more I learned about these places during this era, the more it felt absolutely right that river spirits, hauntings and superstition should permeate the book.

Some authors say that their characters and plot wrote themselves and that the characters took on lives of their own. Was this the case for you?

That's such an interesting question. It took me by surprise, but yes, my characters often did unplanned things, said things I hadn't anticipated and sometimes they took the plot in a different direction to the one I had in mind. But I wouldn't say the characters and plot wrote themselves. It took lots of work and re-drafting to get my plot working, even on a basic level!



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You have a full time job as a TV producer. How and when did you write this book?

Most of my writing has to take place around my work – evenings and weekends and the odd week or so in between projects. I'm a morning person, so my favourite time and place to write is at the kitchen table, just after breakfast, with a cup of tea and a slice of toast by my side.

How did you come up with the Tudor curses and slang which the characters (especially Salter!) use?

I had loads of fun making up swear words for Salter and the other characters. He's so earthy and irreverent that it seemed natural that he should be cussing his head off at every opportunity. I made a list of words that were in use in Tudor times, not swear words, but ordinary things – like coloppe (a piece of bacon) or pikestaff or body parts that might have been on people's minds (ulcers for example) – and messed around with them until they sounded like swearing. So you have '*Holy coloppes!*' or '*Son of a pikestaff!*' or '*Great Harry's pussin' ulcers!*' Some words were just completely made up, just because I liked the sound of them. So don't go thinking Tudor people were saying any of this stuff!

What are your top tips for budding authors?

I once heard an author say that the most important quality for a writer to have is empathy. I really do believe that is true. Try to get inside the heads of your characters in whatever way you can. Listen to people, to the way they talk. Read a lot. Daydream. But not in your lessons, obviously.