

If You Were Me and Lived in... Elizabethan England

Carole P. Roman

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An ambitious book, If You Were Me and Lived In... Elizabethan England, inundates children with a wealth of information that will leave them wanting to know more.

If You Were Me and Lived In... Elizabethan England by Carole P. Roman is a history-oriented addition to the series that introduces children to everyday life in different cultures.

The book begins with a spread contrasting present-day London with the Elizabethan era, immediately inviting children to engage with the book and make observations. Then the book sets the context of the era, coming on the heels of the Middle Ages, of social change and growth in the arts. The story that follows this introduction focuses on a young girl in a family of tradespeople, but does still give some insight into the lives of the poor and the wealthy as well.

As in previous books from the series, one of the biggest strengths of this title is the attention it pays to familiar items that young children can relate to, such as names, homes, toys, and religion. Today's young people may be most surprised to learn how limited education was, and how soon a person's working life began, for children of poor and middle class families. Befitting the Elizabethan era, the book has a significant focus on theater, linked to the main character's older brother's choice to leave school to join an acting troupe.

While the book has a wealth of new information for children, it also has some likely unknown tidbits for adults—who are most likely to be the ones reading aloud from the text-heavy pages—such as the origin of the phrase “raining cats and dogs.”

The book also includes a glossary with simple terms that are helpful to the story, and complex ideas that are likely too much for children to understand and absorb without images or a story. There are also biographical paragraphs about important people to know; they're information-filled and most are not addressed in the book, so significance won't always be clear to the young audience.

Like the text, the images are packed with information and detail, mixing in some bright, eye-catching colors with the drab grays and browns that characterize the era.

Previous editions in the series focus on present-day nations such as Norway and India; this is one of the first to delve into a historical era (joining Ancient Greece). Tackling history and culture at once is a more complex task; Roman's writing and research is up to the task, but the book still feels a little less clear than the culture-focused books—especially for a young age group who may be encountering Elizabethan England for the first time.

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MELISSA WUSKE (April 29, 2016)

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