

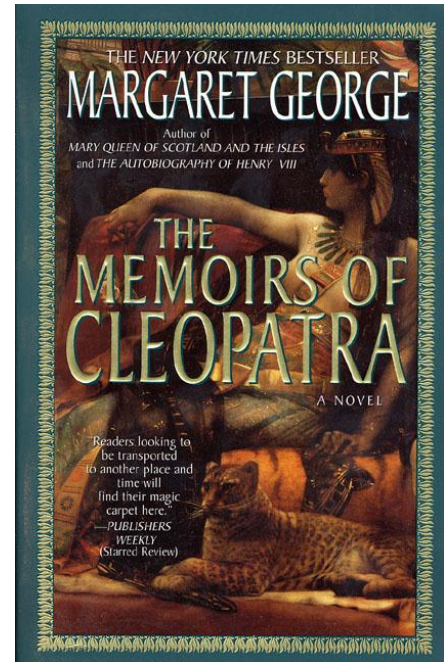
READING GROUP GUIDE

The Memoirs of Cleopatra

By Margaret George

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Memoirs of Cleopatra* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Memoirs of Cleopatra*.

About the Book

Bestselling novelist Margaret George brings to life the glittering kingdom of Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile, in this lush, sweeping, and richly detailed saga. Told in Cleopatra's own voice, this is a mesmerizing tale of ambition, passion, and betrayal, which begins when the twenty-year-old queen seeks out the most powerful man in the world, Julius Caesar, and does not end until, having survived the assassination of Caesar and the defeat of the second man she loves, Marc Antony, she plots her own death rather than be paraded in triumph through the streets of Rome.

Most of all, in its richness and authenticity, it is an irresistible story that reveals why Margaret George's work has been widely acclaimed as "the best kind of historical novel, one the reader can't wait to get lost in." (*San Francisco Chronicle*).



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About the Author

Margaret George is the author of *The Autobiography of Henry VIII*, *Mary Queen of Scotland and the Isles*, and *Elizabeth I*, among other novels. Margaret first got the idea to write historical fiction when, after reading numerous books that viewed Henry VIII through the eyes of his enemies and victims, she found herself wondering if there might be another side to the story. She became determined to let Henry speak for himself, and it took fifteen years, about three hundred books of background reading, three visits to England to see every extant building associated with Henry, and five handwritten drafts for her to answer the question: What was Henry really like? Margaret was born in Nashville, Tennessee, and has traveled extensively. She and her husband live in Madison, Wisconsin.

Discussion Questions

1. Alexander the Great was a role model for Cleopatra and Mardian. How important is having a role model for children struggling with unhappy lives? Whom would you select as a role model for yourself, or for your children?
2. Caesar seemed to have few human weaknesses beyond his epilepsy: He was always calm in a crisis, never lost a battle, and seemed to need no one. Do you find such qualities in a person attractive or otherwise?
3. Caesar may have been a man ahead of his time——open to new ideas, customs, and people. Do you think his idea for a multinational empire was feasible in his era? Was resistance to his plans one of the factors in his assassination?
4. After Caesar's death, Octavian's future looked bleak, while Antony had enormous power. Why do you think it was Octavian who ultimately triumphed?
5. Cleopatra's reputation as an extravagant voluptuary owes much to stories like the time she met Antony in Tarsus, in a ship with perfumed sails, and drank the pearl dissolved in wine. Do you view such gestures as expressions of her personality, or as business investments designed to promote an image?
6. In her heart, had Cleopatra already decided to seduce Antony when she set out for Tarsus? Was it passion or politics that drew her to him? Is there anything to the accusation that she was attracted only to married Romans with power?



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7. In Cleopatra's relationship with Caesar, he was the dominant one, while with Antony, she had more power. What qualities did each man bring out in her, and, in your opinion, which relationship suited her better?
8. Antony exalted his lack of moderation as part of the Dionysian ideal. Shakespeare stressed the noble aspects of that trait, including great generosity of spirit, whereas Antony's enemies in Rome said he was debauched and weak. What do you think? Was it his character—or his bad luck—that condemned him to failure?
9. Octavian declared war on Cleopatra, rather than on Antony, ridiculing her foreign ways and declaring, "We must allow no woman to make herself the equal of a man." In our day, many women applaud her for "making herself equal to a man," and her exoticism appeals to us. At the time, were Octavian's charges grounded in facts, or just politically expedient propaganda?
10. After the defeat at the battle of Actium, Cleopatra hid the truth from her people, to gain herself time. Was this a wise move, or does it prove that the Romans were right to condemn her as duplicitous and scheming?
11. "He must die as a Roman, I as an Egyptian," Cleopatra says. How did the deaths they chose reflect their different cultures? Why do you think Antony's was soon forgotten, while Cleopatra's has become legendary?
12. "I had tried so many plans, staked myself so many times, gambling on this action or that." What do you think of Cleopatra's willingness to take risks? Do her risks remind you of any chances you have taken, even if entire kingdoms were not at stake?

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