

# READING GROUP GUIDE

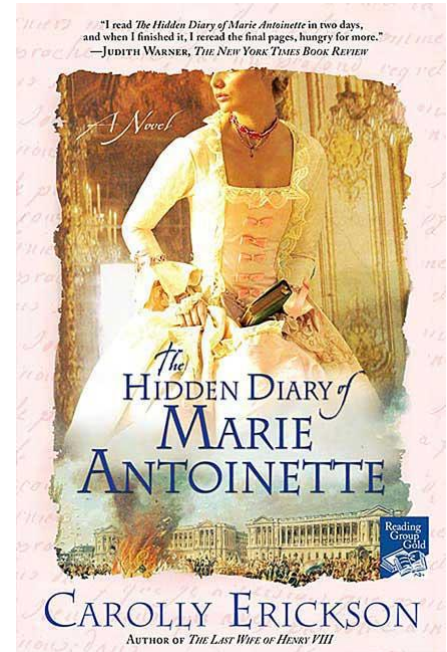
## *The Hidden Diary of Marie Antoinette*

*A Novel*

*By Carolly Erickson*

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Hidden Diary of Marie Antoinette* 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 Hidden Diary of Marie Antoinette*.

### About the Book

Imagine that, on the night before she is to die under the blade of the guillotine, Marie Antoinette leaves behind in her prison cell a diary telling the story of her life—from her privileged childhood as Austrian Archduchess to her years as glamorous mistress of Versailles to the heartbreak of imprisonment and humiliation during the French Revolution.

Carolly Erickson takes the reader deep into the psyche of France's doomed queen: her love affair with handsome Swedish diplomat Count Axel Fersen, who risked his life to save her; her fears on the terrifying night the Parisian mob broke into her palace bedroom intent on murdering her and her family; her harrowing attempted flight from France in disguise; her recapture and the grim months of harsh captivity; her agony when her beloved husband was guillotined and her young son was torn from her arms, never to be seen again.

Erickson brilliantly captures the queen's voice, her hopes, her dreads, and her suffering. We follow, mesmerized, as she reveals every detail of her remarkable, eventful life—from her



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teenage years when she began keeping a diary to her final days when she awaited her own bloody appointment with the guillotine.

## About the Author

Distinguished historian **Carolly Erickson** is the author of *Rival to the Queen*, *The Memoirs of Mary Queen of Scots*, *The First Elizabeth*, *The Hidden Life of Josephine*, *The Last Wife of Henry VIII*, and many other prize-winning works of fiction and nonfiction. Her novel *The Tsarina's Daughter* won the *Romantic Times* Reviewer's Choice Award for Best Historical Fiction. She lives in Hawaii.

## Discussion Questions

1. In most works of fiction the outcome is not known. Even though you know Marie Antoinette is going to die, were you still able to enjoy the unfolding of her story?
2. Discuss the narrative structure of *The Hidden Diary of Marie Antoinette*. Did the diary format bring you closer to the character of Marie Antoinette? Or how, if at all, might it have compromised your objectivity toward the other characters and events in the book?
3. Did you think that the beautiful love affair between Marie Antoinette and Axel Ferson redeemed the sorrows and tragedy of her life? Did their affair change your opinion of her?
4. How did you feel, after reading the author's Note to the Reader, once you realized that the characters of Eric, Amélie, Sophie, and Father Kunibert were "inventions?" Take a moment to talk about the nature of fact vs. fiction in this historical novel.
5. Why is Louis XVI such a sympathetic character in this novel even though he was such a weak king?
6. Did your view of Marie Antoinette change as you learned more about her anguish over her children?
7. Was Marie Antoinette a victim of her upbringing in that she chose to stay in France and sacrifice her life at her husband's side? To what extent was she following her mother's training and example in reaching this decision?
8. What did you know about the French Revolution before reading *The Hidden Diary of Marie Antoinette*? How, if at all, did reading this book teach you about—or change your image of—the French Revolution?

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