Princess Diana

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About the author
Cherry Gilchrist was born in 1949 and now lives in Bristol, England. She is an expert on social history and has written educational books on English life during the First World War and in the 1930s. She has also written stories for children and is well known for re-telling traditional stories and legends. Cherry Gilchrist also writes and lectures on myths, symbolism and ancient wisdom. She has written several books on alchemy and astrology, including Planetary Symbolism in Astrology and The Elements of Alchemy. She is interested in Russian art and culture and arranges exhibitions and sales of Russian traditional arts and crafts.

Gilchrist loves to travel. She has a home in Russia and has visited many parts of Asia and the Middle East.

Summary
Princess Diana is the biography of Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales, who died at the age of 36 in 1997. The book explains how her ‘fairy-tale romance’ with Charles, Prince of Wales, went wrong and how she eventually freed herself from the Royal Family and started to lead an independent life. We learn of the contribution that Diana made to Britain and the world and the lessons which her life can teach us all.

Chapter 1
Diana was born into a family that has been close to the Crown since the times of Charles II. She grew up in Park House, near the Queen’s house in Sandringham. When she was six, her mother left with Peter Shand Kydd, whom she later married. Her father refused to let the children go with her, so Diana would see her mother at weekends or on holiday. In 1970 she went away to school. A few years later her grandparents died, the family moved to their house in Althorp and her father married again. After she graduated, Diana spent a few months in Switzerland and returned to London. Her father bought her a flat and she started working at Young England School.

Chapters 2–3
Though Diana had known Charles for a long time, they started seeing each other in 1980, after they met at a country house party. When the press found out that Charles had a new girlfriend, paparazzi started following her everywhere and in 1981, when the marriage was imminent, Diana moved to Clarence House. She soon found that Charles was still in close contact with his former girlfriend, Camilla Parker-Bowles. The paparazzi and royal life overwhelmed her, and she started losing weight. In the meantime, people were enthusiastic about the ‘fairy-tale marriage’, which led a million people to the streets of London and was watched on TV by millions of people all over the world.

Diana gradually became used to public appearances, and was soon more popular than her husband. In 1982, William, her first son, was born. The following year, Diana made her first big public journey with Charles and, in contrast to the traditions of the Royal Family, she took her baby with her. In 1984, Harry, her second child, was born. By 1987, when the children started school, Diana was a ‘busy princess, wife and mother’, actively working with charities.

Chapters 4–5
Although Diana’s life looked perfect, she was far from happy. She suffered a serious eating disorder and in 1982, during her first pregnancy, she tried to kill herself for the first time. After the baby was born, she would sometimes inflict wounds on herself. Her marriage had failed and she felt alone and devastated. Charles was still seeing Camilla and showed no interest in her. In 1988, while Diana and Charles were in Switzerland on holiday, one of their friends died in an accident. Diana helped his pregnant widow overcome the grief, and found it was time to also help herself. She had her eating disorder treated and became more active in her charity work. Already separated from Charles though not yet divorced, at home there was war between her and the Royal Family.

In 1992 her father’s death was followed first by Andrew Morton’s book Diana – Her True Story, which made public both her eating disorder and Charles’s affair with Camilla, and then by the tabloid newspapers publishing private telephone conversations between Diana and James Gilbey.
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which showed they were lovers. Little is known about her life at this time, but it was clear she was seeing other men. In 1993, private conversations between Charles and Camilla were made public. Harassed by paparazzi, Diana told the press that she wanted to live quietly, and in 1995 she made her famous appearance on TV where she said that she wanted to be ‘the Queen of people’s hearts’.

Chapter 6

In 1996, Diana finally divorced. She continued to work with charities and focused on stopping the use of landmines. In July 1997 she went on holiday with her children and the Al Fayeds, a rich Muslim family who had been friends of the Spencers for a long time. During the holiday she started a romance with Dodi Al Fayed. Paparazzi were so frantically following them on their first holiday alone that they decided to return to Paris on August 30th. That night, after they had dinner at the Ritz Hotel, owned by Dodi’s father, they were trying to escape from paparazzi when their car, driven at over 160 km an hour, crashed against a pillar. Both Dodi and Diana died in the accident. Britain and the world were shocked by the news. By the time of her funeral, on September 6, there was a sea of flowers in front of Kensington Palace. Her body now lies on an island in a lake in the gardens of her family house in Althorp.

Background and themes

During the 1980s and 1990s, Diana, Princess of Wales was one of the world’s most glamorous and famous figures. Few people, however, knew the real person behind the media image. It is this real person that the book examines.

Broken families: Princess Diana shows how the many painful experiences Diana had to endure as a child of a broken marriage influenced her. The effect of childhood experience on the adult is an important feature of the text.

Motherhood and work as self-help: Cherry Gilchrist also shows how easily marriages can be built on illusions and the terrible cost that has to be paid when these illusions are shattered. The author is frank about Diana’s disastrous marriage, her illnesses and suicide attempts, the affairs, and the ultimate bitterness between her and Charles. A key theme is the part Diana’s two sons and her charity work played in helping her to form a new role for herself after her divorce in 1996.

Royal families in the modern world: One other major theme that the book examines is the question of how a princess in the modern world should behave. Diana’s open and informal style is contrasted with the more rigid traditions of the British Royal Family.

Celebrities’ right to privacy: The author also describes the intrusion of the press into Diana’s private life and raises the question of the extent to which the public is entitled to know about the personal lives of celebrities. This is an issue which has remained at the forefront of public debate since Diana’s death.

A fulfilling life: In her conclusion the author looks at the importance that helping others and being open can have in achieving a fulfilling life, however short that life might be.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Discussion: Tell students: Look at the photographs of Diana in the book. Can you tell how she felt at different points in her life? Why do you think so?

Chapter 1, pages 1–6

Before reading

2 Discuss: ask students: What do you know about Princess Diana’s childhood?

After reading

3 Discussion and group work: Students discuss weather Diana’s childhood was similar to or different from a non-royal child. In groups, they look for details that support their ideas.

4 Read carefully and write: Tell students: Look at page 2. What does Diana remember about Christmas when she was a girl? Imagine a letter she wrote to Santa Clause and write it.

5 Role play: Divide the class into pairs. Tell them: Students A: You are Johnnie Spencer. The woman who looks after the children wants to leave. Try to convince her to stay. Students B: You look after the Spencer children. Tell Johnnie Spencer why you want to leave.

6 Write: Students write the CV Diana wrote when she decided to look for a job.

7 Research: Have students search the Internet for videos of Diana’s childhood. They try to identify who the people in the videos are and how the images relate to the story told in Chapter 1.

Chapters 2–3, pages 6–20

Before reading

8 Guess: Logical puzzle
Tell students: Diana had many encounters with the paparazzi in her life. In the coming chapters you will read about the first ones. On the board write these 4 events and the people she was with.
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After reading
9 Read carefully, discuss and research: Ask students: Why is ‘English rose’ between quotation marks on page 15? Tell them that Bernie Taupin and Elton John wrote the song Candle in the Wind for Diana. On the blackboard, write this stanza: ‘Goodbye England’s rose / May you ever grow in our hearts / You were the grace that placed itself / Where lives were torn apart / Goodbye England’s rose / From a country lost without your soul / Who’ll miss the wings of your compassion / More than you’ll ever know’
   a Students discuss what aspects of Diana’s life this stanza makes reference to.
   b Students search the Internet for videos of Elton John singing the song and find out when he sang it.
10 Discuss: Ask students: What did Diana do that helped people with AIDS? Do you think this action was helpful because it was Princess Diana? Do famous people have more responsibility for helping others than ordinary people? Do royal families have more responsibility than other famous people? Why? Why not?

Before reading
11 Guess: Tell students: These are lines from the coming chapters. Who do you think is speaking to whom? What is happening? Students discuss their ideas in groups.
   a ‘Something inside me died.’
   b ‘I’ll give you an hour. If you don’t go to a doctor, I’ll tell the world about your illness.’
   c ‘How many times have you tried to kill yourself?’
   d ‘Is it all right if I touch your face?’

After reading
12 Check answers to activity 11.
13 Debate: Tell students: Cherry Gilchrist suggests that age difference was a problem for Diana and Charles. Do you agree? (page 22). Divide the students into two groups and tell them to support these statements: Group A: Age is not important if there is love. Group B: Love is not enough if there is a big age difference.
14 Research and discussion: Tell students that Diana’s eating disorder is called bulimia, and is associated with low self-esteem. Divide them into groups and have them do an Internet search and prepare short oral reports on this illness. After the presentations, students discuss what they think led Diana to bulimia.
15 Role play: Students work in pairs. Tell them: Student A: You are Carolyn. You are worried because the newspapers are talking about Diana’s affairs with other men. Student B. You are Diana. You feel lonely and want somebody to love you. Students role play their conversations.

Chapter 6, pages 31–38

After reading
16 Debate: Put the students into two groups.
   Group A are members of the government and they want to pass a law to make the paparazzi’s photographs of famous people’s private lives illegal. Group B oppose this and think the paparazzi’s photographs should be legal. After the debate, students vote for or against the law.
17 Discussion: Ask the class to look again at the last few paragraphs on page 37 and to make a list of what they think ‘doing the best with the time we have’ means. Write the ideas on the board. Students put the ideas in the order of importance for them.

After reading
Project
18 A publicity campaign for a tribute on TV.
A TV channel will screen a one-hour special tribute to Princess Diana on the anniversary of her death. Students are the team in charge of the publicity campaign. The programme will have 6 blocks: opening, Diana’s childhood, her private adult life, her public life, her death, and the conclusion.
   Group work and artwork: Students design advertisements for the programme for newspapers, magazines and billboards. The ads should focus on the different aspects of Diana’s life that the programme will deal with, and be aimed at making readers curious.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.