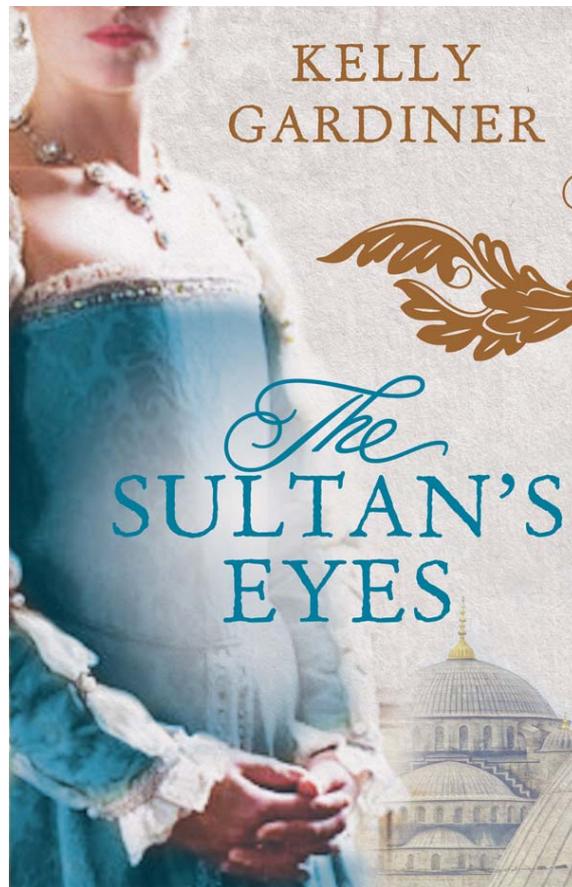


***The Sultan's Eyes* by Kelly Gardiner**



**TEACHERS' NOTES**

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**Notes by Rachel Ford**

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Curriculum area: English

Literacy and language

Themes:

- Belonging and Isolation
- Cultural Understanding and diversity
- Persecution and Fear
- Gender
- Social Change and Innovation

This text will be useful in addressing the Australian Curriculum: English objectives for year 10.

Learning Outcomes

Students will have the opportunity to:

- ACELA 1564, 1565, 1567 and 1569
- ACELT 1639, 1642, 1643
- ACELT 1812, 1815
- ACELY 1749, 1752, 1753, 1754, 1776

- **Blackline Masters and questions for reading and discussion**
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## **Blurb**

The year is 1648 and life in Venice is serene for Isabella Hawkins and her friends Willem, Al-Qasim and Signora Contarini. Together they publish fine books like the controversial encyclopaedia, *The Sum of All Knowledge*. When a new Inquisitor declares war on free speech however, they are forced to flee across the seas to the wondrous capital of the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople, which is ruled by the infamous Sultanate of the Women. Old friends and new, including the boy Sultan and his sister, welcome them to the world's greatest city. But Isabella is soon entangled in poisonous palace intrigues, while her friends secretly play perilous games of their own.

## **About the author**

Kelly Gardiner is the author of the award-winning *Act of Faith* and the *Swashbuckler* series (HCNZ) for younger readers and has also published a number of picture books.

Kelly has degrees in writing, editing and literature and is currently combining working at the State Library of Victoria doing a PhD.

Kelly lives in North Warrandyte, Victoria.

## **Author Inspiration**

Kelly has said:

### **Style**

'I very much wanted people to hear Isabella's own voice, as if she was talking to us, through her words and through the centuries. So I chose to write in the first person, and I made her voice match (I hope!) her character. She's smart, articulate and quick-thinking, but there are times when her emotions leave her less observant and less able to describe what's going on around her. She's well-read, but I hope she wears that lightly – her work and her love of books are simply a part of her.

It's not an action book as such, but there are times when the tempo steps up and the pace quickens; there are also quiet times when she's in reflection mode, and many debates with her friends that are based in dialogue. So I hope readers experience a range of writing styles to match the different stages in the narrative.'

### **Inspiration**

'Most of the time, over the past decade, my professional life has been spent online, either in media or managing websites for organizations. So I'm very conscious of the enormous explosion in access to information taking place right now, and it seemed to me to parallel those decades in Europe after the initial shock of the Reformation, when the printing presses were thumping out millions of pages — for the first time in history— and the authorities reacted to this in many different ways. Some of them used propaganda very well, some banned books and pamphlets they didn't like, some hunted down authors and printers and treated them as criminals — some authorities did all of those things. It was a very confusing and dangerous time for those involved in publishing. Thankfully, in most countries now

authors and bloggers, readers and book buyers, publishers and printers are not persecuted, but it still goes on in far too many parts of the world to this day.

I also wanted to create a character who was remarkable for her time but not unique. We often read books about young women in history who are like ourselves, who are out of time — like modern young women stuck in the 17th century. The reality is that the vast majority of women had little education and few options in life, but there were many who worked for a living in all sorts of industries and some who were extremely well-educated and accomplished.'

## Pre-reading and reading strategies

Students can find working with literary fiction difficult at times. By providing the student support through pre-reading and reading strategies, students are better able to engage and work with literary texts.

The following strategies use the prediction to help students connect the text with their prior ideas as well as engage with the new knowledge and information they will gain from the text.

The novel is called *The Sultan's Eyes* and features a young, European woman on the cover. What do you think this tells the reader about the novel before they begin? What do the background buildings tell you?

Each chapter titles provide the reader with an insight into what is going to happen. This **signposting** approach enables readers to connect with ideas and information that they already possess as well as predict what they believe is going to happen in the text.

*Activity:* Using a **Prediction chart [see Blackline Masters]** students write the names of each chapter. They then predict what they think the chapter will be about before they start reading. After they have read the chapter, the students write down what the chapter was about. Students should also summarise any important information, character insights, use of language etc. that they find in the chapter. This will assist them with other tasks as they complete the unit of work.

*Activity:* Read the first chapter. Make predictions about the following:

- What do you think will happen in this novel?
- If you had to describe the characters in three words based on the introduction, what words would you use and why?

Creating a summary of a literary fiction novel while the students are reading the text will help them make better connections to the text and be able to use this information in their tasks. One way to do this is to use a **visual representation** of the text. A visual representation helps the students to see the novel as a whole rather than in fragments.

*Activity:* At the end of each chapter use a structured overview **[see Blackline Masters]** to summarise what has happened.

## Literacy and language

*The Sultan's Eyes* is an example of **literary fiction**. Literary fiction is not necessarily a genre, but there are characteristics which books of this type share.

**Historical fiction** is a genre that takes place during a period or event in history. A historical fiction author engages in masses of research to ensure the novel is an authentic representation of the past.

Historical fiction can be confused with **alternate historical fiction**. Alternate historical fiction speculates on what might have been. Historical fiction employs creative licence, but stays true to the past. The point of view of the event can change based on the interpretation of the fictional character.

*Activity:* read the authors notes before beginning the novel. Use this to create a timeline of events and information. As students read the novel, tick off and comment on the timeline as these events occur.

**Intertextuality** is the use of other narratives within a text. Intertextuality adds another layer of meaning to a novel or work. Isabella often uses intertextuality to add to the dramatic tension of her story

**Hyperbole** is the use of exaggerated language. The meaning of the words used are not literal, rather they meant to be indicate strong emotions, reactions and situations.

*Activity:* Find several examples of hyperbole in the text. For each example write what the author is trying to achieve. Rewrite the example without hyperbole and try to reach the same effect. Ask the students to evaluate the two different approaches and the different impact these would have on a reader.

**Foreshadowing** indicates to the reader what is going to happen in the story. It is used as a hook to keep the reader engaged. Isabella, as narrator of her own story, uses foreshadowing to indicate approaching moments of climax and tension.

*"When great power is at stake, men will take many risks".*

*"So will women," I said.*

*I was just joking at the time – I had no idea how true my words would turn out to be (p 72)*

*Activity:* As students read the novel have them identify moments of foreshadowing in the chart [**see Blackline Masters**]. Students should predict what they think will happen and then compare their predictions with the action in the novel.

**Imagery** and **evocative language** help in painting the picture for the reader. Evocative language creates an emotional connection to the content rather than using factual language. Imagery helps to create a strong visual picture for the reader.

*But the idea of the printing press, dismantled, wrapped up in oiled cloth and on its way across the sea, cheered us all. (p 213)*

In one sentence the author has painted a very detailed picture of the printing press as it crosses the ocean as well as connecting this picture to an emotional state, happiness.

*Activity:* The first paragraph of the novel uses imagery and evocative language. Rewrite this paragraph so it is factual and contains no emotion. Compare the new paragraph with the novel and write a short evaluation of the effect of the two paragraphs on the reader. Students should focus on any changes of meaning and the ways in which their engagement with the text changes.

**Personification** is where an author gives an object human like qualities. In *The Sultan's Eyes* inanimate objects such as books are given human like qualities. This adds to the importance that books and education have for the characters and for the reader.

*What a miracle, to have so much wisdom, beauty and genius at my fingertips. It felt like saying farewell to dear friends. I had no idea if I would ever see them again. (p58)*

In this quote Isabella empowers the books so that they are just as important as saying goodbye to a person.

*Activity:* Find other examples of personification in the text. Evaluate the use of personification and what the author is trying to achieve by using this technique.

## Themes

### Belonging and Isolation

A sense of belonging and being isolated from family and culture motivates each of the characters. Isolation from one's culture can make a person behave differently. At times a person may shun his or her own culture in an attempt to hide, or to become a part of new culture more quickly. At other times a person may rebel against the new culture due to a lack of understanding or to need to belong to their original culture.

Isolation from a culture and then returning to the culture after some time can also create a form of culture shock and challenge a person's sense of belonging.

*"Sanctuary?" said Justinian.*

*'How do you know that?'*

*He shrugged. 'It is all any of us wants.'" (p 304)*

Belonging to a culture, a family or group is important to most human beings. When isolated from your culture, a person will most often try to find something that enables them to feel at peace in their new surroundings. Justinian and Isabella's need for sanctuary shows that they are trying to find a place where they belong.

#### Activities:

- Identify examples of isolation that each of the main character experiences.
- Evaluate the importance of belonging to each of the characters and describe the way that each character shows this
- Think of a time when you have felt isolated, lacking a sense of belonging. Create a short story about this time. Write it in first person, using some of the same literary techniques as the novel.
- Think of a time when you have felt a true sense of belonging. Create a multi-modal text that shows what it is like to belong.

### Cultural Understanding and Diversity

The group that escapes Venice for Constantinople is quite diverse culturally, especially for the seventeenth century. The group contains an English woman, a Venetian woman, an Arabic man and a Dutchman. Despite this cultural diversity, they experience many examples of culture shock and at times struggle to understand the culture in which they are living.

#### Activities:

- Using the novel, the internet and other resources, research the cultural restrictions and understandings in regards to cultural backgrounds of the female characters
- Choose a few examples in the novel that involve a clash between cultures. Analyse the use of language as a technique for investigating this clash

- Each of the cultures in the novel wears a 'mask' at one stage of the novel. Choose one of these masks, for example the Venetian mask, the veils of the court, the 'mask' of fine clothing and analyse the purpose of this mask in relation to the character and in relation to the plot.

### **Persecution and Fear**

At the start of the novel, the characters have settled in Venice after escaping fear and persecution. They experience fear driven by new ideas and persecution as a result of spreading ideas that were contrary to the authorities and the main stream.

The authority figures in the novel are also exposed to persecution. The King of England is deposed and killed during the novel. The Sultan and Ayşe face persecution as a result of learning new and different ideas and philosophies as well as challenging the status quo.

Fear is a powerful driving force for the characters in the book. It encourages Isabella, Al-Qasim, Willem and Signora Contarini to embark on their journey from Venice to Constantinople. Fear encourages the characters to keep secrets from each other, such as the feelings that Justinian and Isabella have for each other.

Fear of change prevents progress and the discussion of new ideas.

*The Kishlar Agha laced his fingers in front of his chest.*

*"You more than anyone should know, Mistress Hawkins," he said, "that all learning, any book, has the potential to be dangerous to a young mind. Empires can be shattered by one book, one idea. That is why you are hiding after all." (p 202).*

The fear of new ideas is often accompanied by the threat of persecution as is shown in the speech by Kishlar Agha to Isabella.

### *Activities:*

- Brainstorm all the examples of persecution that are in the novel
- Choose one of the examples of persecution from the brainstorming activity. Identify similar examples in the world today. Create a short presentation that shows how persecution still exists and suggest ways to overcome it.
- Brainstorm all the examples of fear that are in the novel. Categorise these examples for example fear of rejection, fear of new ideas, fear of being exposed etc.
- Choose one of examples of fear from the brainstorming activity. Create a multi-modal text set in contemporary Australian society based on the chosen fear.

## Gender

The 'traditional' gender roles of men and women, in both Europe and Constantinople are challenged and explored in the novel.

*"The whole world has changed," said Al-Qasim. "I have had to think about this matter a great deal myself. Watching our friends at work has helped me realise how little I knew women before this..."*  
(p 214)

*"God made man," said Willem. "Then Woman. And then she..."* (p 213)

In this quote, Al-Qasim shows that many stereotypes and preconceived notions exist because of tradition, as well as because of a lack of knowledge and understanding. Willem shows that his understanding of gender roles is based on a traditional argument rather than knowledge and understanding of the capabilities of each person.

### Activities:

- Complete the sentence Willem began on page 213. Evaluate why this may be used as a justification for sexism.
- The roles of women in Constantinople are not what they appear on the surface. Create a compare and contrast chart [see **Blackline Masters**] that compares and contrast the similarities and differences between the women in Europe and the women in Constantinople. Use evidence from the text support any statements.
- Identify a time when you have had a preconceived notion about a person based on gender or another reason. Show how your opinion changed as you learnt more about this person.

## Social Change and Innovation

The seventeenth century is part of the early modern age. It is known as the 'Dutch Golden Age' and was when the Baroque cultural movement began. During this period the 'Glorious revolution' occurred in England.

The Dutch Golden Age is important as it spanned for most of the seventeenth century. It is a period when Dutch art, science, trade and military explorations and prowess were known as some of the best in the world. New social classes began to emerge as social status was judged by income rather than birth. Religion was not strong, Catholicism was suppressed after the Eighty years war with Spain and Protestantism was yet to become established. Developments in The Arts included the developing importance of and spread of literature.

As a result of changes in the Netherlands and other parts of Europe, there were a number of innovations and social changes during this period. Some of these changes were not new and were based on the writings of classical philosophers and scientists.

*Activities:*

- Identify why the discovery of the mathematician Hypatia's manuscript was so important
- Identify two to three cultural and or social changes that occur in the novel. Research the importance of these events and evaluate why these events have been included in the novel.

**Questions for reading and discussion:**

1. Create a character trait chart for each of the characters in the novel **[see Blackline Masters]**.
2. As students read the novel ask them to reflect on what 'The eyes of the Sultan' and the 'Sultan's eyes' may mean and examples while engaging with the text. After concluding the text, write a short statement entitled 'I believe the Sultan's eyes are...'
3. Choose one of the character in the novel other than Isabella and tell their narrative. It can be a narrative that goes over the whole novel or one key event. The narrative should be told in the first person and can include the same literary devices used in the novel such as foreshadowing, intertextuality, hyperbole etc.
4. Review the last chapter of the novel and rewrite it from the point of view of one of the other characters.
5. The novel discusses religion and philosophy as part of the story. Identify several philosophical ideas and compare these to Australia today as well as two other countries. Ideas could include free speech for all, the role of men and women, the role of the monarchy etc. In the comparison students should reflect on the role of these ideas in the past and the changes, if any, in these ideas today. Additionally students can make recommendations for change, that is, reflect on and identify their own philosophies in regards to these issues.
6. Signora Contarini foreshadows what may be ahead for the characters in London. Research what is occurring in London at the time. Create a cover for a new novel and and write the first chapter.

**Prediction chart**

<b>Chapter title</b>	<b>Prediction – pre-reading</b>	<b>Post reading</b>	<b>Summary</b>

## Structured overview

Title of the novel

Chapter title	Chapter title	Chapter title
Key events	Key events	Key events
Key quotes	Key quotes	Key quotes
New characters	New characters	New characters
Any other information	Any other information	Any other information

**Foreshadowing chart**

<b>Chapter title</b>	<b>Quote - event</b>	<b>Prediction</b>	<b>Comparison</b>

**Compare and Contrast chart**

Topic One \_\_\_\_\_

Topic Two \_\_\_\_\_

How they are alike


How they are different




## **Bibliography**

The historical novel society

[www.historicalnovelsociety.org](http://www.historicalnovelsociety.org)

## **About the author of these notes**

Rachel Ford began her professional career as teacher after completing a double degree in Arts and Teaching. Rachel also has a Master of Education and is currently studying a Master of Business Administration. Rachel has worked as a publisher in Melbourne and Sydney. She currently lives in Sydney where she works as a freelance writer and publisher.