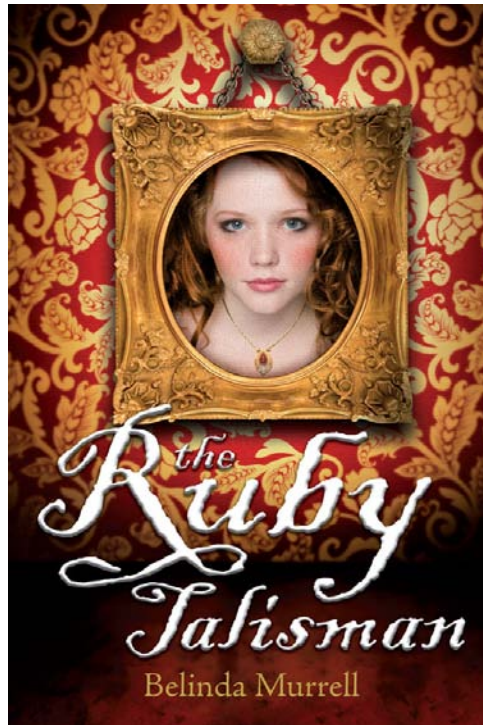


The Ruby Talisman

Belinda Murrell



TEACHING SUPPORT KIT

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1. PLOT SUMMARY

When Tilly's aunt tells her of their beautiful French ancestress, she shows Tilly a priceless heirloom. Tilly falls asleep wearing the ruby talisman, wishing she could escape to a more adventurous life . . .

In 1789, Amelie-Mathilde is living in luxury at the opulent palace of Versailles – but her guardians want her to marry the horrible old Chevalier. Amelie-Mathilde falls asleep wearing her own ruby talisman, wishing someone would come to her rescue . . .

Tilly wakes up beside Amelie-Mathilde. The timing couldn't be worse. Starving peasants are rioting across the country and the palace is in chaos. Tilly knows that Amelie and her cousin Henri must escape if they are to survive the Revolution ahead. But with mutinous villagers, vengeful servants and threats at every turn, there seems nowhere to run.

Will they ever reach England and safety?

2. BACKGROUND NOTES ON THE WRITING OF *THE RUBY TALISMAN*

Belinda Murrell says:

'When I was travelling with my family, we spent several weeks living in France. During this time, we had many adventures, some of which have influenced the writing of *The Ruby Talisman*.

'One of the fascinating experiences we had was to climb down into the tunnels under the streets of Paris. There are hundreds of kilometres of old limestone mines and corridors that wind under the city. In one section of these tunnels are the catacombs where, during the eighteenth century, thousands of human skeletons were stored. Many of these people were killed during the French Revolution, including Queen Marie-Antoinette's best friend, the Princesse de Lamballe, and King Louis XVI's sister Elizabeth. These tunnels were so spooky and atmospheric that I felt I had to write a book with a scene set in the catacombs.

'We were also inspired by the grandeur of the palace of Versailles and the many chateaux and historic places we visited. '

3. THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

- Grief/Loss/Anger
- Coping with change
- Family relationships
- Friendship
- Equality – peasants vs aristocracy
- History – the French Revolution
- Magic – talismans and time travel

4. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Tilly is angry because her father has left home to live with another woman, and she takes this anger out on her mother, father, brother and friends. How would you react if there was a dramatic upheaval in your life, like switching schools, moving to a new town or a change in your family?
- Through her journey, Tilly changes from an angry teenager into a more mature, confident, happy girl. Collect some quotes from *The Ruby Talisman* that show the gradual shift in her attitude and state of mind.
- People in pre-Revolutionary France thought very differently about issues such as equality and politics. Can you list some of the differences between 1780s France and modern-day Australia?
- If you could travel back in time, what era would you visit and where?

5. ACTIVITIES

Letter writing

While Tilly is escaping to England on the *Mermaid of Zennor*, she thinks a lot about the importance of friendship. Write a letter from Tilly's perspective back home to her old friend Maddie, explaining what has happened to her and how she's changed. Describe Amelie and Henri and why they have become such good friends. Explain why this friendship makes Tilly learn to treasure her old friendships back home.

Glittering Versailles

Imagine you are Amelie and have been invited to your first party given by Queen Marie-Antoinette at one of her salons at Versailles. Describe the setting – the food,

the clothes, the room, the entertainment, the people and, of course, the Queen. How do you feel – excited, nervous, frightened, overwhelmed, happy? Use your other senses to describe what you see – the smells, the tastes, the feel, the sounds.

Reverse time travel

Imagine Amelie-Mathilde was able to travel to the future, using the ruby talisman, to visit Tilly in Sydney. What amazing things she would discover? How might she react to modern-day life? Would this be more difficult than Tilly's journey to the past? Write a scene that describes a modern-day adventure that Amelie and Tilly could share.

Peasant life

Imagine you are the peasant boy outside the palace of Versailles when Amelie and Tilly leave on horseback. You are hungry and angry, and you see two aristocratic girls with their expensive clothes and horses. Describe your life as a peasant – are you a farmer's son, a worker's child, an apprentice? How do you feel towards the King and Queen? What would the Revolution that is brewing mean to you?

Living in the eighteenth century

Amelie and Tilly are girls who are about the same age, but they live 230 years apart. Think about the lives of children in the 1780s and in the twenty-first century. Make a list of some of the differences between then and now. Think about food, clothing, education, conveniences, family, health, freedom, transport, dangers. Would you rather live now or in the 1780s? Why?

Family history

Interview your parents or grandparents about your family history. How did your family come to Australia? Are there any famous or interesting ancestors in your family history, like writers, artists, doctors or engineers? Ask them to tell you an interesting family anecdote – this could be something like Amelie-Mathilde escaping the French Revolution. Ask them if you could share the story with your classmates (some family stories are private and some are fun to share with your friends).

Time-travel story

Write a short story about travelling back in time. Where do you go? How did you get there? (For example, Tilly falls asleep wearing the ruby talisman.) Who do you meet? What do you see? What happens – is it frightening, funny, interesting, dangerous? Do you have an adventure? How do you get back home? How do you feel when you are safely home? (Are you relieved, happy, angry – or just sad the adventure is over?) How has the adventure changed you?

6. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Belinda Murrell, author of *The Ruby Talisman*, spent two years travelling with her family in Europe and around Australia in a caravan. While they travelled, Belinda home schooled her three children – Nick, Emily and Lachlan – wrote books and researched *The Ruby Talisman*.

Some of the family adventures included living with an Aboriginal family on the remote Dampier Peninsula, staying on vast outback cattle stations, sailing the islands of the Barrier Reef, fossicking for gold and gemstones and exploring France.

Belinda comes from a very literary family, with a history of Australian writers stretching back 180 years. Her great-great-great-great grandmother, Charlotte Atkinson, published the first Australian children's book in 1841.

Belinda lives in Manly, New South Wales, in a beautiful old house overlooking the sea with her husband, Rob, three gorgeous children and lots of animals, including a beautiful Rhodesian Ridgeback called Asha, who was the inspiration for one of her characters in her Sun Sword Trilogy.

You can learn more about Belinda Murrell by visiting her website www.belindamurrell.com.au