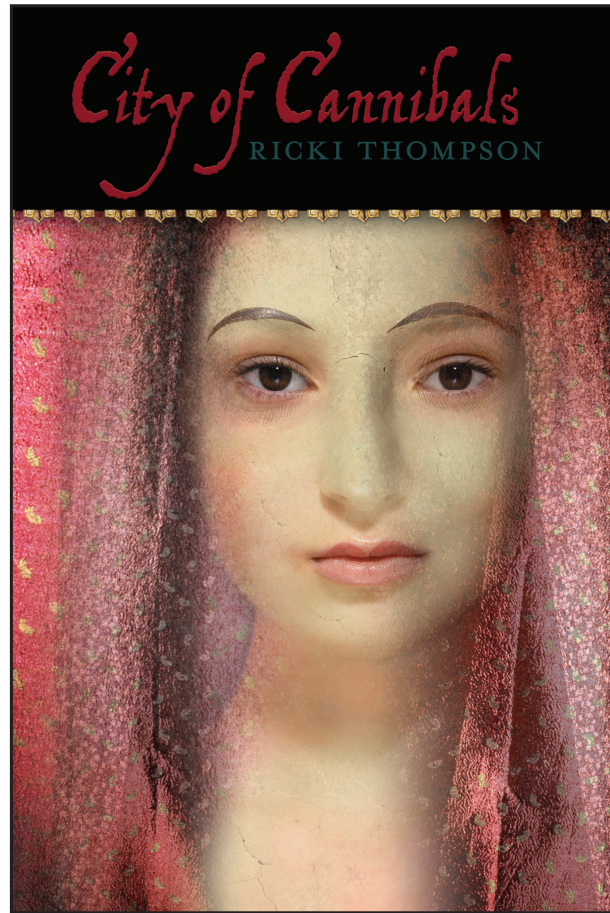


# Discussion Guide

## City of Cannibals

By RICKI THOMPSON



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1536 LONDON IS A FRIGHTENING place for Dell—a city literally filled with cannibals, her father tells her. She’s lived on the mountain as long as she can remember with her father, brother, and auntie. But Father is becoming more cruel each day. The only bright spots in Dell’s life are her beloved handmade puppets and the monthly visits from “the Brown Boy” who leaves a sack of provisions by her mother’s grave while Dell hides behind the trees.

When she can no longer stand her father’s cruelty, Dell runs away to the city in search of the beautiful Brown Boy. Surely he will help her. But London is a terrifying place and Dell knows nothing of city ways. King Henry VIII is pillaging the churches, the streets are filled with beggars, and those who refuse to sign the Oath of Allegiance are being publicly executed. Dell discovers the truth about her past in this strange place and her love for the Brown Boy blossoms—as does her skill as a puppeteer—but can they survive the City of Cannibals without being eaten alive?

## Questions for Discussion

- Dell frequently talks things over with her puppet Bartholomew. Is this evidence that she's crazy? Why is Bartholomew important to her? How are his opinions different from Dell's? Dell says she wants to keep Bartholomew safe. Safe from what?
- Father says, "The past is done." Was he right? Do you think "the past is done" in your own life?
- Dell tells Bartholomew, "Soon enough Margery would see me for who I truly am." What does Dell mean? Who does she believe she truly is? Do her beliefs about herself change? How does the discovery of her true name affect her? Have you ever wanted to change your name? Why?
- How are Dell and Margery different? How are they alike? Why do they become friends?
- Why do you think Dell and Ronaldo are attracted to one another?
- Should Dell have taken apart John's hearth? If she had minded her own business, would Brother Gregory have escaped unharmed?
- Dell's father tells her that she will be eaten alive in the City of Cannibals. Why does he tell her that? Is he lying? How do Dell's feelings about the city change? How are Bartholomew's beliefs about the city different from Dell's?
- Lemons recur throughout the novel. What do lemons have to do with Dell's past? What do they mean to Dell? To Margery? To Ronaldo and Tomás? What do lemons symbolize?
- Besides her physical condition, why does the legless beggar woman upset Dell? What does she represent to Dell? Why are the woman's words disturbing to Dell?
- The monk at the gate accuses Dell of being Eve. What does he mean? Do you agree with him? Is Dell like Eve?
- Margery understands money, but she can't read. Dell can read, but she doesn't understand money. Which girl has the greater advantage/disadvantage? Why? Does Dell's lack of money limit her? Does Henry VIII's wealth limit him?
- In 1536 criminals, including thieves, heretics and traitors, were publicly executed. Do you think public execution deters criminals?
- Brother Gregory refuses to sign the Oath of Allegiance, even though he understands the consequences of his decision. Do you agree with his choice? Is there any cause (or person) worth dying for? Brother Gregory says that a person's death can make a stronger impact than their life, but John argues the opposite. Who do you think is right?
- A number of vocations are presented in the novel. John works as a joiner; Brother Gregory is a monk; Dell is a puppeteer; Blanche runs a tavern; and Dell's mother and father worked at the court of Henry VIII. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these different vocations? Which one would you choose? Ronaldo didn't choose to join the Benedictine order. Would you rather choose your vocation or have someone else choose it for you?

- In 1536 people lived in constant fear of the pestilence (or what we call the plague). What do people fear most today?
- Why does Dell return to her family? What do you think happened when Dell and Ronaldo arrived at Auntie’s cottage?
- If you were turning this novel into a movie, who would you cast as Dell? Ronaldo? Margery? John? Brother Gregory? Nathaniel? Why?
- How is your life different from Dell’s or Ronaldo’s? In what ways is your life the same?

## Topics for Writing

- Be the author. Write the scene in which Dell and Ronaldo return to Auntie’s cottage. Include Dell, Ronaldo, Father, Auntie, Nathaniel, and Bartholomew in your scene. Send your scene to *City of Cannibals* author Ricki Thompson via e-mail ([ricki@rickithompson.com](mailto:ricki@rickithompson.com)).
- *City of Cannibals* is filled with details of city life in 1536 London—from chamber pots being dumped from upstairs windows, to the blood and stench of Butcher Street, to corrupt priests selling indulgences, to entertainers working the crowds in public squares. Pick an aspect of medieval life from the novel that you found intriguing and research it in more depth. Write an essay detailing your discoveries.
- Dell feels alone in the city, even though she is surrounded by people who look like her. Have you ever felt alone in a crowd? Write an essay entitled “Alone at the Prom,” or “Alone at the Party,” or “Alone at the Football Game.” Describe what’s going on outside you and what’s going on inside you.
- Research monastic life in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Write a journal entry as if you were Ronaldo, describing one day in your life as a Benedictine novice.
- Write a thoughtful book review of *City of Cannibals*. Include an analysis of Dell’s character in your review—how did she change over the course of the novel? Would you recommend the novel to your friends? Why or why not?

## About the Author

**RICKI THOMPSON**, a former teacher, has also worked as a puppeteer and the producer/director of a children’s summer Shakespeare company. She grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, and currently lives with her husband and family in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She has an MFA in writing for children and young adults from Vermont College. *City of Cannibals* is her first book. Learn more about Ricki by visiting her website, [www.RickiThompson.com](http://www.RickiThompson.com), or by finding her on Facebook. She enjoys speaking to classrooms, libraries, and book groups in the Minneapolis area about *City of Cannibals*, medieval history, and the writing process. Contact her via e-mail ([ricki@rickithompson.com](mailto:ricki@rickithompson.com)) for more information.