



Princess Elizabeth, Are You a Traitor?; God Bless Queen Victoria!

Books Reviewed:

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

2

Ross and Evans have added two more titles to the growing list in their 'Coming Alive' series. They have covered a variety of periods from the Ancient Greeks to Queen Victoria. In each book, an historical event is told as a story suitable for 7-9 year-olds, with an eye to providing the required fictional component to history teaching in the English National Curriculum.

There are interesting stories to tell: how Elizabeth survived as a Protestant princess in the reign of her Catholic sister, Mary; and how Victoria's choice of husband helped her to develop the skills necessary to her role as queen. Ross succeeds in bringing out the human interest, and, by the end of each book, we feel that we know and care a little more about these great queens. However, the books are an unhappy compromise between history and fiction.

The stories sit between a short prologue ('The Story so Far') and an afterword ('What Happened Next') that are written as conventional historical narrative. There is a glossary, a note on sources and a time line, but no index and no way of accessing the information in the story except for reading it all the way through. The presentation is unattractive compared to more conventional information books.

As fiction, the stories are pale and bloodless. They lack both period detail, which gives the sense of being in another time and place, and the interest and drama that can come from taking some liberties with historical events or offering an unusual view of them.

The uniform format does not help. Although there is a different illustrator for each book, the technique and layout are much the same: inexpressive black and white line drawings, with frequent portrait caricatures of the main figures, and larger illustrations with vague backgrounds. It could all do with more panache and excitement. It is perhaps unfair to compare, but a book like last year's **Castle Diary** shows what can be achieved by mixing fictional techniques with historical material.

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