



# Key themes to focus on while reading the story of Egypt's most famous queen:



1.

In the opening chapters, track closely how much information Cleopatra receives through official channels versus what she gathers via unofficial routes. Note the scenes that surprise you regarding who the young queen speaks with and the topics they discuss – observe how unorthodox her relationships can be.

Highlight and note down how her advisors behave, how they block change, what arguments they deploy, and the lengths they will go to protect their own influence.

Mark every single moment where you spot sabotage and microaggressions from the 'old guard'.



2.

Draw up a list of criteria that determine whether Cleopatra considers someone fit or worthy of a place at court and within her inner circle. For each character, try to answer the following question: what matters more – competence or loyalty, and why?

3.

Make a list of everything Cleopatra 'inherited', dividing it immediately into two columns – domestic and international.

- The 'domestic' legacy: old promises, connections with governors, emerging historical obligations, tax exemptions, and agreements no one else knew about.
- The 'international' legacy: debts owed to the Romans and neighbouring rulers.

**Additional task:** as you read the novel, note down how Cleopatra dealt with each of these debts and evaluate her decision. Would you have made the same choice?

4.

For Cleopatra, tradition is sacred in many situations, but there is one area she personally emphasised above all else – cultivating her own 'Egyptian identity' and adopting the symbolism of Isis. When reading about each such instance, every public appearance, and every ceremony, write down your answer to the question: 'why is she doing this, why in this manner, and why does it matter in this context?'. Nothing here is accidental, every gesture and word has a purpose and... an audience. Can you identify who that audience really is?

5.

How does Cleopatra prepare the backdrop, staging, and script for key 'business' discussions? Pay attention to how she uses architecture, banquets, her own erudition, and her understanding of psychology and the world to achieve her goals. Observe how she ensures the other party feels comfortable, yet never allows anyone to forget that she is the ruler.

**Advanced task:** every time Cleopatra uses her version of 'soft power', ask yourself what alternative route she could have taken. Blackmail? War? Political conflict? Legal wrangling? Which would you have chosen? What outcome would you expect to see then?

