

Project Princess Study Guide

Project Princess by Meg Cabot

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Plot Summary

Project Princess was written in 2003 by Meg Cabot. The novel is Volume Four and a Half of The Princess Diaries, a 14-volume series of books for young adults. The series chronicles daily life from the perspective of Mia, a young princess living in modern times.

The four books preceding Project Princess track Mia's transformation from typical ninth-grade student in Greenwich Village to living the life of a princess. Mia's father has revealed that he is the prince of Genovia, a small fictional country in Europe, and now Mia has double-duty living as a typical kid and as a high-profile public figure.

In Volume Four of the Princess Diaries series, Mia finally kisses her friend Lilly's brother, Michael, who has been her crush for a long time. She doubts he wants to be her boyfriend but at the conclusion of the novel, it is clear that he does. Mia has been despondent that she doesn't have a talent, but Michael points out to her that her gift is writing.

This book chronicles a field trip Mia takes with other kids from her school to volunteer for Houses for the Hopeful, an organization that builds houses for people in need. Mia's boyfriend Michael is also on the trip, as are her friends Lilly and Tina.

Mia first has to convince her mother she should be allowed to go. When she finally gets permission, she is thrilled, as this means that she will have some time with her boyfriend to make out without any parents around.

As Mia learns more about the trip- the bugs, the construction tools, and solar shower bags, she starts doubting whether this trip is really for her. Michael convinces Mia it will be a great time for them to spend some alone time.

When the students get to West Virginia, the rough living conditions are not what Mia had in mind. Tents, dew, and port-o-lets are all unfamiliar to Mia and she would rather they stay that way. At the same time, Mia is a good sport about it, recognizing that if she wants to volunteer with Greenpeace one day, she will need to get accustomed to this sort of living.

Mia finds reward in building a house for the Harmeyers, her host family, along with the others in her group. Over a period of time, Mia builds confidence in her ability to contribute to the process in a significant manner. She is also excited for the Harmeyer boys to be getting out of a trailer and into a real house.

When Mia returns to New York, she finds herself far more grateful for having her home than she was before she parted.



Thursday March 10

Thursday March 10 Summary

Mia's first diary entry in Project Princess is "Thursday March 10, The Loft." Mia writes about her recent exchange with her mother regarding a school trip.

Here the reader learns that Mia has only recently learned she is a princess. It is also revealed that Mia's mother Helen is pregnant and has recently married Frank- also known as Mr. Gianini, Mia's algebra teacher.

Mia is impatient with her family and finds the members of her family quite infuriating.

Mia goes to Albert Einstein High School. The school has arranged for her Gifted and Talented class to go to West Virginia over Spring Break to help build homes with an organization called Houses for the Hopeful. In this diary entry, Mia describes her conversation with her mother about whether she is allowed to go on the school trip or not.

Mia's first tries to persuade her mother to let her go as her mother is watching a movie on the Lifetime channel and eating ice cream. Mia explains the philosophy of Houses for the Hopeful, called Theology of the Hammer. Their theory is that anyone can use a hammer, and building houses can unite people from all different sorts of backgrounds, rich and poor, even if they have different religions and cultures.

When Mia goes on to say that a hammer can manifest peace and love, Helen worries that Mia has joined a cult. While this infuriates Mia, she points out that her mother's perception is clouded by the hormones associated with her pregnancy. Helen disregards Mia's logic and calls to her husband that Mia has joined a cult. Mr. Gianini comes into the room and assures her that Housing for the Hopeful is not a cult. He goes on to say he accompanied students on this field trip for five years, and only bowed out this year due to the pregnancy.

Mia tries a new tactic and starts listing all the kids who are going. Even Tina Hakim Baba's overprotective father is allowing her to go. Mia's best friend Lilly Moscovitz and her boyfriend Boris are also going on the trip, as is Mia's boyfriend Michael, Lilly's brother.

Mia admits in her diary that the real reason she wants to go to the Appalachian mountains of West Virginia is to be alone with Michael. She wants to make out with her boyfriend without parents interrupting.

Mia assures her mother that the outing will be supervised by three teachers, the high school principal, and the Director of Housing for the Hopeful. She points out they will be a mere seven-hour bus-ride away from New York, and the trip is for only five days.



Mia then points out that Grandmère (Mia's grandmother on her father's side) blames Helen for Mia's desire to go in the first place. Grandmère attributes Mia's wanting to go as a result of being enrolled at a liberal "hippy-dippy" school. When Helen hears this, this does the trick and she gives permission to Mia to go.

Mia is thrilled and tells Michael the news. His reaction is less than Mia had hoped for, and she realizes he does not have the same notions as her about the trip. She suspects that he is actually going because he genuinely wants to help those in need.

Mia finishes the diary entry relating that she is going to work on Michael's sense of romance.

Thursday March 10 Analysis

In this first diary entry, Mia reveals that she is, in many ways, a typical high-school student, despite her title of princess. This diary entry also reveals some dynamics in the family about Helen, Frank, and Grandmère.

Mia simply wants to go on a field trip away from her family so she can spend some alone-time with her boyfriend. She does what any teenager would do and sets out to persuade her mother to give her permission. Mia goes through a series of tactics before she lands on the right one.

Grandmère is Mia's grandmother on her father's side, and it is clear that she and Mia's mother, Helen, do not get along. Grandmère has no trouble telling Mia what she thinks of her school and her mother's choices. Helen is so ruffled by Grandmère that she allows her daughter to go on the field trip strictly as a reaction to Grandmère's disapproval of it.

Helen is suspicious of Homes for the Hopeful. It seems difficult for her to understand that people would contribute without an ulterior motive or ultra-religious angle. She is concerned for her daughter's well-being and the influences she may fall under.

Helen has married Mia's algebra teacher and they are going to have a baby. Mia believes Helen's behavior has been affected by her pregnancy. Mia seems to appreciate Frank's presence, though in her diary she still refers to him formally as Mr. Gianini, revealing she still thinks of him more as her teacher than her stepfather. Frank explains to Helen that this is a good cause and a reputable organization. Mia treats Frank with respect and she is grateful that he seems to be on her side in this matter.

Mia is disappointed when Michael does not seem thrilled she's finally earned permission to go on the trip with him. It dawns on her that Michael naïve about the opportunities this gives them away from their parents. Instead of being discouraged, this prompts Mia to action, to bring about change in Michael.



Friday March 11

Friday March 11 Summary

In Homeroom, Mia writes of Lilly's excitement to go on the trip. Lilly has a public-access cable TV show called Lilly Tells It Like It Is. She plans on filming a piece for her TV show while in West Virginia. The video will focus on how the public housing system is not meeting housing needs.

Lilly encourages Mia to write about the experience to submit to the school paper. Mia, however, does not think she will get published. Since Mia joined the school newspaper, she's only been allowed to write the cafeteria menu, as Mia is still a freshman.

Mia goes on to express that even if she could get published, she wouldn't have anything to write, as she doesn't know much about building houses. She is even concerned she won't be able to help on the construction team that much. Mia relates her feelings that she lacks talent.

Though Mia recognizes that she does have a knack for writing, she does not see writing as useful. She would rather have a talent for something useful. She understands that she might have to accept that writing is her only talent.

Mia then concedes that even her skills, however, would be an improvement over Boris' skills. While Lilly's boyfriend Boris is the most gifted person in her class and is a violin virtuoso, he does not have much common sense. He once got locked in a stairwell and missed his entire concert because of it.

At lunch, Mia writes that she is having second thoughts about the trip. They have had a meeting about the excursion. The list of things to buy is overwhelming and Mia doesn't have a clue what a solar shower bag is, for instance. She has no hammers, utility belts, or other building supplies. Mia, a princess, feels out of her comfort zone.

Mia was expecting some guidance at the meeting, a lesson in the basics of building, but there is none. She is given a release form for her parents to sign. The form excuses the school and the organization from any responsibility should she be maimed or killed.

Handouts contain further information that causes Mia distress. Sometimes they will have to resort to washing themselves with wet wipes. They are instructed not to drink the water or pet the local animals. They are warned to expect tons of insects. Mia is not impressed.

After school, Mia writes about the daily princess lesson with Grandmère. Mia's grandmother is outraged that Helen would let Mia go on such a trip, which she refers to as 'boot camp'.



Grandmère is outraged that Mia will have to rise at 6am. She explains that waking up any earlier than 8am is improper for a princess. She suggests that Mia accompany her to Palm Springs, where she is going to have a rest from the grueling ordeal of giving Mia princess lessons. She lures Mia with thoughts of a hotel pool, room service, and waffles. Mia pushes the temptation aside and refuses, sticking to her guns that she is going to contribute to society instead.

Grandmère sees that Mia is determined, and makes her promise not to start dressing like the 'natives' of west Virginia, which in her mind- and soon in Mia's mind- means gunnysacks and housedresses.

Before bed that night, Mia writes of her talk with Mr. Gianini about his experiences on previous trips. The other outings had not been in West Virginia, but he assures Mia that it was a great and worthwhile experience. He also offers Mia his hammer for the trip. He does not actually say, though, that the people won't be wearing gunnysacks.

Mia, still full of stress and doubt, goes online to chat with Michael. He reassures her the locals will not be wearing bags. Mia is nervous about injury and disease. Michael points out that the principal would not let the trip happen if it was not safe. Michael asks Mia to focus instead on the best part about the trip. After some thought, Mia concludes he must mean the part about helping others. To her surprise and delight, it turns out that Michael is talking about being alone together for five days.

Friday March 11 Analysis

Mia starts her school day thinking about what she lacks. It is clear that Mia does not think writing is a worthwhile talent, and she alternates between feeling bad about it and accepting reality. Mia does know under it all that she is a capable person, at least more capable than Boris.

Mia is concerned that her lack of ability will be even more evident on the trip, where her non-existent construction skills will be obvious to all. She does hold a secret hope, however, that in building houses, she may discover a new talent that she didn't know she had.

Mia writes for the school newspaper this year. Even though she doesn't get to publish articles yet, the fact that she joined the paper is a sign that she does acknowledge and enjoy her ability to write. Mia's best friend Lilly is supportive of her writing and encourages her to use her talent whenever she can.

When the reality of the trip sets in, Mia starts to lose her nerve. Until now, she has painted in her mind a romantic getaway for her and Michael, kissing under the stars of West Virginia. Here she is confronted with a different, more sobering picture, of solar shower bags and insect repellent, early mornings, nails, tools and hard work.

Mia has an internal struggle between wanting to do good for humanity and being princess-like. She is not sure she is ready to be deprived of her creature comforts. The



helping argument gets a boost from her boyfriend's presence on the trip. The princess side is indulged by Grandmère's images of a luxurious trip instead.

Mia clearly wants to go on the trip but she needs her fears to be quelled. She seeks help in Mr. Gianini, who promises it will be a great experience, but she is still not convinced. She discusses her concerns with Michael but it doesn't help either. Mia is only finally convinced when Michael tells Mia that the most important part of the journey will be their time together.



Saturday March 12

Saturday March 12 Summary

Mia writes thirty minutes into the drive to West Virginia. So far, the journey has not been pleasant. Boris vomited quite a few times, and he didn't always make it to the bag. Without proper cleaning supplies or paper towels, this resulted in all of the students cramming at the back of the bus until their first stop where the bus can be hosed down.

Mia is proud that her boyfriend Michael is the only person who was willing to stay with Boris at the front of the bus. Mia offered to stay with them, but Michael gallantly told Mia to save herself.

At the rest stop, the teachers will get Boris Dramamine. Boris complains that this will make him sleepy and dull, though this sounds great to Mia.

Mia points out that while Tina's bodyguard had been excused from the trip, Mia's bodyguard Lars was coming along. Mia's dad was not happy about her going but he would not contradict her mother's decision, and so he sent Lars along to protect Mia. This was not what Mia wanted, but she didn't have a say in the matter.

Mia reflects on how wonderful Michael is. She is aware that he will have to accomplish great feats in order for the Genovian Parliament to let him marry her, but she is sure he will rise to the challenge. She believes that the people of Genovia will fall in love with Michael. She points out his multiple talents: playing guitar, html, being smart and compassionate.

Meanwhile, Lilly has been filming everything, including the vomit.

Five hours into the drive, things have improved on the bus. The bus driver, Charlie, has hosed down the bus and now all of the windows are open. Boris has been given Dramamine. He is sleeping, his head against Lilly's shoulder. Mia is sitting with Michael.

Michael doesn't believe in public displays of affection, which doesn't sit well with Mia. She agrees that she doesn't want to make out in the cafeteria for the world to see, but holding hands at a minimum would be nice. Then again, she reflects, holding hands isn't that comfortable, and it makes her hands sweaty.

Boris and Lilly were caught making out at the rest stop, and while Mia writes in her diary, Boris wakes up and he and Lilly continue to kiss. Mia wants Michael to want that too. She looks forward to arriving, washing her hair, and spending some time alone with Michael.

Mia next writes in her diary once they've arrived at their destination. The reality of the week ahead hits Mia full on. They will be sleeping in tents. Not raised tents with wooden floors as shown in the brochure, but regular tents. Mia is not happy about this. She is



scared of bears. Of the Blair Witch Project. Of snakes. The showers are just stalls where you can hang your solar bag. There is no indoor plumbing. Their washrooms will be port-o-lets.

Lars assures Mia that he will ensure no animals or harm will reach her. But Mia has fears nonetheless. Mia likes Lars and doesn't want to lose him to bears. Lars is funny, and he doesn't mind when Mia and Michael make out. Not that it matters at this point, as the girls' tents and boys' tents have been separated and Mia is finding it less and less likely that she'll be able to find a place for her and Michael to kiss.

Mia will share a tent with Tina and Lilly. The three of them will be work on one of the houses along with Michael, Boris Lars, Peter Tsu and two of the teachers. They have not yet met the family whose home they will be building.

One positive surprise is that the people look and dress just like people back in New York. Mia tries to come to terms with the living conditions, as she plans to work with Greenpeace in the future and she will need to be ready for it.

Before going to sleep, Mia relates the rest of the day's events in her diary.

Mia has now met her host family, the Harmeyers. Angie and Todd have two young boys, and they are expecting their third child next month. The family currently lives in a trailer and they are looking forward to having a house.

Angie has heard rumors about Mia being a princess and Lars being her bodyguard. Mia confirms this is true. Angie can't understand why Mia would choose to come here for her spring break. When Mia explains it is her civic duty, and that she wants to learn new skills, Angie just doesn't get it, so Mia then tells her that she came because she wants to make out with her boyfriend. This, Angie understands.

Mia is vegetarian, so in the dining tent, she just took some vegetables and a bun. At dinner, Lilly says she's already amassed so much footage that she is going to feature the town of Hominy Knob on her show for an entire month.

The port-o-lets have no lighting and Mia is preoccupied with this thought throughout dinner. On the way back to her tent, she finally lets this slide from her mind as Michael takes her hand in the dark, leads her to a tree and starts kissing her. It is lovely until Michael notices the smell of vomit in Mia's hair and the moment is ruined.

Mia settles in her tent for the night, secure in knowing that Lars set up his tent just in front of hers. She is not sure how she'll be able to sleep with all the noise from the owls.

Saturday March 12 Analysis

The beginning of the bus ride sets the tone for what will follow. Nothing about it is serene or romantic. Even in this smelly and uncomfortable situation, Mia goes on about how wonderful her boyfriend is, particularly with his sense of compassion. Mia is



consumed with thoughts of Michael's ability to rise to the level of marrying a Genovian princess. She has faith in him and she is sure he will rise to the challenge.

Nonetheless, Mia is disappointed that Michael isn't quite as affectionate as she would like to be in public settings. Seeing Lilly and Boris make out highlights Mia's feelings. She notes they can't keep their hands off each other and she wants Michael to be the same way. Michael is older than Mia- he is a senior, and she understands that he is different.

While Mia did not choose for Lars to accompany her on the trip, she seems to be fairly at ease with his presence. She has gotten used to him over time.

Again Mia reveals an inner struggle between wanting to contribute to society in a meaningful way and not wanting to live in discomfort. She is shocked by the tent situation, yet she knows this is something she should learn to overcome. Mia is a teenage girl who is scared. She is scared of what is lurking in the woods, scared of the snakes on the ground, and scared of what creatures lie in wait for her in the port-o-let. She has the advantage, however, of taking comfort from having a bodyguard who will protect her.

Mia is relieved and happy when Michael kisses her. She had clearly been concerned this was not going to happen. Even though the moment gets ruined, it is a start.

Meeting the host family is eye-opening for Mia. She quickly adapts to expressing herself in a less intellectual way. Angie has always been in need of money, so the concept of Mia choosing to live in a tent for a week baffles her. Angie doesn't understand concepts of civic duty, but she certainly understands wanting to kiss a boy.

Mia refers to the noise of the forest, which is unusual, as she lives in Manhattan, which is equally noisy. But the comforts of the familiar sounds ring different to her ears.



Sunday March 13

Sunday March 13 Summary

Mia has made it through her first night in the tent and her first morning building. She does not enjoy trying to sleep on the ground, nor does she appreciate that everything is covered with dew when she wakes up. She does take comfort in knowing that at least the dew got rid of the vomit smell in her hair.

Mia has tried her hand at hammering, sawing, drilling, and pouring cement, and has not succeeded at mastering any of these tasks. As a result, Mia is given the job of holding frames up while others hammer them into place. It requires upper body strength and Mia unwilling to acknowledge she has none, so she suffers through it.

Tina has mastered use of the nail gun and the males in the group are doing the bulk of the heavy labor. Boris, however, has proven to be a hindrance, as he has two asthma attacks and drops a cinderblock on his foot. Soon Boris is given the job of keeping Mitchell and Stefano (the Harmeyers' sons) away from the chain saw, and replenishing everyone's Gatorade bottles.

Mia deduces that Tina is trying to show off for Peter Tsu. Mia finds Peter attractive but not as attractive as her boyfriend. Mia hopes the weather will heat up so Michael will take off his shirt.

At lunch, Mia again avoids the meat, and opts for mashed potatoes and salad. Mia notices how much corn is involved in every meal and she thinks corn is to West Virginia what bagels are to New York.

Later, before bed, Mia writes more, though she is so tired she writes an abbreviated entry. Mia continued holding up frames for the rest of the day.

Mia finds herself eating tater tots and salad again at supper, while others eat hamburgers and corn. Following dinner, the teacher Mr. Gonzalez makes an inspirational speech, during which Mia falls asleep on Michael's shoulder.

Tonight Mia is so tired she goes to sleep before lights out.

Sunday March 13 Analysis

The reality of Mia's surroundings have set in, and while she is unhappy about the dew, she seems less surprised and less disappointed about the campsite in general.

Mia gives it her all when it is time to build. While she is disappointed that she didn't find a hidden talent with a hammer, she does her part without complaining.



Mia points out that Boris is the weak link on her team. She does not address this with sympathy but she rather sees Boris as an annoyance that must be tolerated. She also points out how grateful she is for the males in her group. She is aware this may sound sexist but the guys are handling the more challenging tasks.

Mia does not complain about the food other than the abundance of corn. She is only eating various forms of potatoes and salad at every meal, but it does not occur to her to write how she feels about this.

After a long day of work, Mia is exhausted, so much so that she barely writes anything in her diary before bed, which is highly uncharacteristic of her. The fresh air and the demanding work have challenged Mia in a way she has not been challenged before. On her second night, sleeping on the ground no longer seems a concern, as long as she can sleep!



Monday March 14

Monday March 14 Summary

Mia wakes up on her second morning to find it is pouring rain. The dew has gotten to her sleeping bag and she is feeling the cold and wet. The showers won't be possible today, so everyone uses wet wipes to clean up. Mia is also feeling her sore muscles from the demanding work a day earlier.

On the first day, Mia's group had managed to get the roof framing up, so the rain today doesn't stop them from working today, putting up gypsum board for the interior walls. Mia thinks she's getting the hang of it, and today she has only punctured the board with her hammer five times. Angie is a sport about it, saying she can cover it with pictures, though Michael insists they will patch up the holes with plaster.

At lunch, Mia eats Jell-O and potato salad, while the others also have turkey sandwiches and corn chips.

In the afternoon, the weather clears. Mia teams up with Tina, Lilly and Peter to shingle the roof. Mia falls once but she lands on Boris and does not seem to be injured.

The rest of the group works on the plumbing. When the toilet is finally installed and working, Angie is overcome with emotion and she cries.

At dinner, Mia is stuck eating salad and rolls. Afterwards, Michael volunteers himself and Mia to take inventory of the tools in the supply tent. Mia is nervous that he may try to kiss her and he will be repulsed by her smelling of b.o. Tina tells Mia she smells fine but Mia is still nervous.

Mia and Michael encounter a surprise at the supply tent. Two teachers, Mr. Wheeton and Mademoiselle Klein, are in the tent, having some alone time. When they see Mia and Michael, they have the students promise not to tell others.

Once Mia and Michael are alone, contrary to the kiss that Mia is expecting, Michael starts to take inventory of the tools. Mia concludes this is because she smells bad. Mia then finds a centipede crawling up her leg. She screams so loudly that Lars appears with his gun in his hand.

Mia is exhausted after a second long day of being exposed to the elements. She realizes she is not as fond of nature as she thought she was when she was in the protected urban life of New York.



Monday March 14 Analysis

Mia's second full day at the campsite sees changes in Mia. While she is still creeped-out by bugs, centipedes and dew, Mia finds a new confidence in her abilities to contribute to building the house, both in putting up the gypsum and shingling the roof. She brushes off her weaknesses now- a few holes in the wall, a tumble from the roof- and no longer describes herself as hopeless.

Angie cries when the toilet is installed and Mia is moved. It is in this moment that Mia has an opportunity to be reminded of the purpose of this field trip.

Mia doesn't make much of running into the two teachers, and she doesn't feel the need to share the information with anyone- other than her diary. Though she doesn't say they were kissing, she certainly implies that is what happened. This entry hints at Mia's relationship with her diary. It is her confidante, her number one place to record secrets.

Mia is forever nervous about kissing Michael and upset that they aren't kissing. Either option concerns her.



Tuesday March 15 and Wednesday March 16

Tuesday March 15 and Wednesday March 16 Summary

Mia has reached the last work day and her team works hard in the morning. Boris drops a window on his foot and dislocates a toe. A teacher takes care of Boris and tapes two toes together to protect the injured toe.

At lunch, Mia is overwhelmed with all that is still left to be done: paint, trim, install flooring, etc.

Angie has heartburn following breakfast, but Mia suspects it has to do with the diet coke she is drinking. Mia is concerned that the amount of aspartame Angie is consuming is hurting her unborn child. Mia has been watching TV to learn about these things in preparation for her own little brother or sister who is soon to arrive.

The group completes the three-bedroom house. Once the vinyl siding is in place, it feels like a real house and Mia and her team are proud of the accomplishment.

Angie once again complains of heartburn and wonders if it could have been the potato salad. Mia confirms she ate the potato salad at lunch and she is fine. Mia then shows Angie her morning's diary entry that shows Angie had complained of heartburn after breakfast as well. Mia then goes on to suggest that perhaps what Angie is experiencing in contractions. This causes the Harmeyers to race off to the hospital, leaving their two young sons with the team.

One of Mia's teachers, Mr. Gonzales, is impressed with Mia's powers of observation and her skill of writing everything down. This makes Mia think that perhaps writing is a useful skill after all.

Mr. Gonzales asks Michael to drive to town to pick-up some supplies for the final night, and the rest of the students in the team come along for the ride. At first Mia is upset that it will not be just her and Michael, but she gets caught up in the enthusiasm of the others who have come along for the ride.

The town is small and Mia and her friends are disappointed that there is not much to it. They don't even have bagels at the grocery store. But Michael knows there is something great West Virginia has to offer, and he drives straight to the Dairy Queen. Everyone loves it. Mia points out that after the past few challenging days, her chocolate-dipped vanilla soft ice cream seems like the best thing she's ever tasted.

A limo pulls up at the Dairy Queen and Grandmère emerges from the car. Mia is shocked. She tells Mia she's been to the work site, and she was reassured by what she saw and the people she met.



Grandmère offers Mia and her friends the use of her shower at her hotel. They jump at the offer and follow her to her hotel. Everyone showers the grime of four days off their bodies.

The group returns to the campsite, with Grandmère in tow. When they arrive, they learn that Angie Harmeyer gave birth to a healthy baby girl, who they have named Princess, as a tribute to Mia.

That night there is a celebration dinner, followed by roasting marshmallows around the fire. The students sing, accompanied by Michael's guitar. Lilly, Tina and Mia sing a modern song by Destiny's Child, and in return the host families sing a song from West Virginia.

Mia and Michael finally find some romantic time alone together at his tent. Mia is grateful for her grandmother because she is sure that without the shower, it never would have happened.

Tuesday March 15 and Wednesday March 16 Analysis

This is a special day for Mia, as this is when her efforts pay off. She gets to see the house that she's built with her group. She feels an enormous sense of accomplishment. Mia is very proud that she contributed to building a house in such a short time, or at all, really.

Mia doesn't mention any of the hardships of the campsite on this final day. She is exuberant that it is over, but also that she had the experience.

Mia doesn't mind when her grandmother shows up on the trip, because at that point she is just so grateful for the shower. The comforts Mia has been missing are more important at this moment than worrying about Grandmère's presence. Mia even has the opportunity to make out with Michael, without interference from her grandmother.

Mia is touched that the Harmeyers have named their daughter after her, but she is disappointed when she finds out the girl's name is Princess rather than Mia. This reveals Mia identifies more as her own person than she does with the title of Princess.

The ride back to New York is uneventful. Boris is properly dosed with Dramamine and everyone is so tired that they sleep on the bus. Mia is thrilled to be home and she lets her mother know it.



Characters

Mia Thermopolis

Mia is a fourteen-year-old high school student who lives in Greenwich Village, New York. Mia found out recently that she is actually the princess of a country called Genovia.

Mia is a strong-willed teenager and she doesn't give in without a fight. She is determined to go on the school trip and doesn't leave her mother alone until she is given permission. Mia is persistent, and she is good at reasoning and explaining herself.

Mia has two close friends- Lilly and Tina. Mia is a loyal friend and they have a lot of laughs together. Mia's boyfriend is Michael, and she thinks the world of him.

Mia's unique talent is that she writes everything down in her diary. She is a very good writer, although she is not convinced though writing is a useful skill. Mia writes for the school newspaper, though she hasn't been allowed to publish any articles yet.

Mia is somewhat of a princess in the sense that the campsite is below her standard of living, but she gives it a chance and she gets into the swing of it. She is also a princess in a different sense: she wants to do volunteer work and make a difference in people's lives. Mia is not afraid of hard work and she wants to contribute her share along with everyone else.

Helen

Helen is Mia's mother. She is remarried to Mia's algebra teacher and she is pregnant with their baby. Helen's hormones are in flux due to the pregnancy and she is nervous about giving Mia permission to go on her expedition.

Helen does not have a good relationship with Grandmère, Mia's grandmother on her father's side.

Michael

Michael is Mia's boyfriend and Lilly's brother. He is a senior, and he seems to have many talents, at least in Mia's eyes. He plays the guitar, he genuinely wants to contribute volunteering, he is strong, and he is kind.

When the other kids move to the back of the bus to escape Boris and the odor of his vomit, Michael sits with him for the rest of the ride. Michael is good-hearted.



Grandmère

Grandmère is Mia's grandmother on her father's side. After Mia's regular school day, Grandmère gives Mia princess lessons. She is quite snobby, and she does not like Mia's liberal school. She certainly doesn't like the idea of the field trip to West Virginia, though ultimately she is kind enough to visit the area, offer Mia's friends the use of her showers, and join the final night's celebration barbecue.

Lilly

Lilly is Mia's best friend and Michael's sister. Lilly has a boyfriend named Boris, and both of them are part of Mia's team to build the Harmeyers' house.

Tina

Tina is Mia's other close friend. She is on the same building team, and she seems to take to the nail gun. Mia suspects that Tina has a crush on Peter Tsu.

Boris

Boris seems to always mess things up, from Mia's perspective. He vomits on the bus on the way to West Virginia, and he has a series of accidents while building the Harmeyers' house. The team tries to give him safer tasks but he still manages to bungle some things. Boris is Lilly's boyfriend. Mia takes comfort in thinking that while she may not be great on the construction site, at least she is better than Boris.

Angie Harmeyer

The team is building a house for Angie Harmeyer and her family. Angie, her husband and two sons currently live in a trailer, and she is looking forward to the new house, especially because she is pregnant with her third child. She is so moved and excited about the house that she cries when the toilet flushes for the first time.

On Mia's final day in West Virginia, Angie complains of heartburn after both breakfast and lunch, and Mia suggests this may be contractions. Mia is right, and Angie gives birth later that day, naming her baby daughter Princess, in honor of Mia.

Lars

Lars is Mia's bodyguard. Her father insists that Lars accompanies her on the trip.



Objects/Places

New York City

Mia lives in New York City. While most of the story happens in West Virginia, New York is significant because Mia's experience of the field trip is so very different than Mia's home, where she can get bagels and cold noodles and she doesn't have to deal with bugs, dew, nature, and the sounds of the forest.

West Virginia

Mia goes on a school field trip to West Virginia to help build houses for an organization called Houses for the Hopeful. It is a seven-hour bus ride away from home. Mia has romantic notions about what it will be like to be under the stars in West Virginia with her boyfriend Michael, though she quickly discovers that the campsite and living in nature are not the romantic adventure she thought it would be. The town of Hominy Knob is small and the only thing exciting about it is the Dairy Queen that Mia experiences on her last day there.

Diary

Mia takes her diary everywhere, including on her field trip. She writes every chance she gets- during meals, and almost always before she goes to bed. Mia keeps track of all of the details of the day in the diary.

Dairy Queen

The final day of the trip, when the house is complete, the students go to Dairy Queen. Michael presents this as one great feature of West Virginia that New York doesn't have. They all love the food. Grandmère shows up there in her limo.

Showers

The students have been using solar shower bags- and sometimes wet naps- to clean themselves when they are at the campsite. When Grandmère offers the students the use of her showers, the students are thrilled.

The bus

The bus ride on the way to Virginia is challenging as Boris vomits in the bus and it is some time before the bus gets cleaned up and aired out. Mia sits with her friends Lilly

and Tina when they are at the back of the bus. Once it is cleaned up, Mia sits with Michael, her boyfriend.

Houses

The students are in West Virginia to build homes for people who don't have houses and are not able to afford proper housing. The students work hard in teams for the construction. Mia is very proud of the three-bedroom house that she has helped build.

Genovia

Mia is Princess of this fictional country in Europe.

Car

Michael is given keys to a car to drive to Hominy Knob and the other students on his team join along.



Themes

City vs. Country

In this episode of the Princess Diaries, Mia leaves her familiar surroundings of New York City to live in a camping environment in West Virginia for four nights. Mia lives in one of the busiest, most metropolitan city in the world. She travels to a place abundant in nature, yet without the creature comforts of home.

New York City is big and busy, where the streets are always bustling and you can get pretty much anything you want whenever you want. The city has a pulse and the rhythm of New York is fast-paced.

The smells, tastes, sights, and sounds of the city are entirely different from what Mia encounters in her tent in the woods. Mia finds that the sounds of the forest are far more disruptive to her sleep than what she thinks of as the lulling sounds of her home, full of taxis, car horns and sirens.

Country is often associated with purity, simplicity and truth, while cities are often depicted as soulless. For Mia, though, this is not the case. She does not associate the woods, the dew, or the animals with any sort of better existence than the city. She does, however, volunteer for the betterment of mankind. Her experience of country has become full of helping others while in the city people focus on themselves.

Self-worth

Mia is an excellent and talented writer but she does not see this as important or significant. She feels that her skill is not one that has life applications. With every nudge she receives, however, she becomes a bit more convinced of the validity of her writing. Her teacher's comments, her friends' comments, and Michael's words all encourage Mia to believe in the talent that she has.

In West Virginia, Mia starts out believing that she can't contribute much when it comes to building a house. She had hoped for a secret magical house-building talent to emerge but that didn't materialize. Instead, she discovers that over time, she learns the skills needed to contribute to the construction, and this gives her a lot of confidence. Mia's confidence is reflected in her level of happiness and the decrease of mentions of worry in her diary.

Family

At the outset of Project Princess, Mia is impatient with her mother. She finds parents a nuisance in general, a weight that every teenager must bear. She also has Grandmère to deal with, who is extremely snobby and interfering.

By the end of Mia's journey, however, she has a new appreciation for her mother, her home, and Grandmère.

Another story line that highlights the theme of family is the Harmeyers' journey from trailer to house. The parallel of Mia's mother and Angie Harmeyer both being pregnant highlights that even though they come from different worlds, family is family, no matter what or where you come from.



Style

Point of View

Project Princess is written in the first-person point of view from the perspective of Mia Thermopolis, a teenage girl finding her way in the world as a growing woman and as a princess. The novel is in the form of a diary that Mia keeps.

Mia is constantly writing in her diary, and so she fills in many details. At the same time, the only perspective shown is through Mia's eyes.

Setting

Project Princess is set in Greenwich Village in New York City as well as Hominy Knob, West Virginia. Mia lives in the lap of luxury in New York, and she lives in a beautiful and spacious apartment by New York standards.

When Mia gets to West Virginia, she is confronted with living in a tent on the ground in the woods without plumbing or hot water. The meals consist mostly of meat, which Mia does not eat as a vegetarian and alternate options are sparse.

Language and Meaning

Mia uses the language of a typical teenager and yet her extensive vocabulary suggests that she reads a lot. Mia is witty and her writing is smart and sharp.

Meg Cabot's voice is never heard, just Mia's language, and this makes for a feeling of a true diary.

Structure

The novel spans the period of one week, from the time Mia tries to convince her mother to go on the outing, to the evening of her return.

Mia writes entries in her diary each day. Some days she writes two or three entries, while other days she only has time- or energy - for one writing session.



Quotes

"...on account of my mom being pregnant with his unborn child, the sex of which we do not know because my mom says if she knows it's a boy she won't have any incentive to push, men being the reason we even need organizations like Housing for the Hopeful" (March 10, p. 2-3).

"It's a wonder I'm as well-adjusted as I am, if you think about everything I have to put up with" (March 10, p. 4).

" [Grandmère says] "The last time I got up at six a.m. was when the Germans were shelling the palace, back during the war"" (March 11 p. 11).

"Oh my God, I hope they don't expect us to dress like the natives in order to blend in! I don't own a housedress! I don't even think you can buy one of those in New York" (March 11 p. 13).

"So I went online and instant messaged Michael, because after all, he is my heart's desire, and the only person on earth who can soothe me when my soul turns fractious as an injured pony" (March 11, p. 14).

"Maybe he will be a doctor someday, and discover a cure for cancer. I certainly hope so, because that is the only way the Genovian Parliament is going to approve me marrying him" (March 12, p. 18).

"Anyway, West Virginia itself isn't so bad. So far we haven't met one person wearing a gunnysack or playing the banjo in a menacing way" (March 12, p. 25).

"I miss Manhattan already. What I wouldn't give to be lulled to sleep by the dulcet tones of a car alarm" (March 12, p. 32).

"There is no dew in New York City. Pigeons, maybe. Lots of rats. But no dew" (March 13 p. 33).

"I am sick of corn already, though I understand it is the staple of the West Virginia diet, like bagels and lox are in New York" (March 13, p. 35).

"It is much easier to be an environmentalist when you live in the city where there aren't that many bugs, than when you are in the country and are being eaten alive by them. I am not sure I love nature as much as I used to think I did" (March 14, p. 39).



Topics for Discussion

How does Mia try to convince her mother to give her permission to go to West Virginia? What arguments does she use? What argument finally changes Mia's mother's mind? Why?

Where is Mia going with her class? What is the official purpose of the trip? What are the various reasons Mia wants to go?

In what ways does the trip fulfill Mia's expectations? In what way does it differ from her expectations? How does Mia feel about these differences?

Is Mia different at the end of the trip than at the beginning? What has changed and why?

What is Homes for the Homeless? Is it important? Why?

How does Mia feel about Grandmère? What does Grandmère think of the trip before Mia departs? What does she think of it once she shows up in West Virginia?

In what ways are Angie Harmeyer and Helen (Mia's mother) the same? In what ways do they differ? Why do these differences exist?