

# **The Selection Study Guide**

## **The Selection by Kiera Cass**

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## Plot Summary

When America Singer gets the invitation to register for the Selection, she dismisses it entirely. She is 16 years old, she is serious about her boyfriend, and she does not want to leave her family. But, the caste difference between her and her boyfriend Aspen is going to complicate life. She will be marrying down, and Aspen does not want a life of penury for her. He encourages her to register for the selection, and even when her name is called, she thinks she will just be dismissed, since other women will surely have a greater desire and greater talents to become the new princess.

America makes some friends among the other women. When she meets the prince, she tells him that she does not want to be a princess, but she offers to be his friend and to help him make a good decision. Through many tests and trials, she banters with Prince Maxon and earns his regard and affection in spite of her refusal to exert herself.

When she starts to figure out that Prince Maxon is becoming devoted to her, Aspen shows up as one of the Royal guards at the palace, and the book ends with America being put in the position of having to choose between the prince and her boyfriend. She has feelings for both of them.



# Chapters 1-3

## Summary

### Chapter 1

When America gets the letter asking her to register for the Selection, she is not interested, although her family is filled with anticipation. If she were to become the next princess and future Queen, it would help the family out of their dire economic circumstances. As 'Fives'—which is to say as the third-to-bottom caste in a strictly maintained social hierarchy—they are not well off and have known plenty of hungry times. The competition would give the family money, and the winters would not be so hard.

With her mother and father and her younger siblings, she watches the Report, where the government announces the Selection, and her siblings and parents all say she would be a great princess.

### Chapter 2

America meets her boyfriend Aspen in the tree house, which is their refuge together. They kiss, but they do not go further. Pregnancy out of marriage is strictly forbidden, and it could get them both in a lot of trouble. Aspen's twin sisters got the same letter America got, and he is hopeful that one of them will be chosen. He encourages America to apply as well, since it would be a good opportunity for her and her family to lift them out of the grinding poverty they live in. America brings food for Aspen. When she sings to him before they part, he pays her a penny, which she thinks he should be saving for his family.

### Chapter 3

America's mother wakes her up and bribes her with the offer of working for herself and keeping more of her income for herself. America agrees and fills out the form. Then her mother takes her to the registration for the Selection. A lot of women are already there, and many have gotten the news that they will be photographed. They are all done up and look beautiful or overdone, but America is so in love with Aspen that her photo shows a resplendently beautiful redheaded woman. At the registration, America sees Aspen's sisters, and his mother tells America and her mother that Aspen is certainly in love, as he has been saving his money and singing, recently.

## Analysis

### Chapter 1



This is not the America that we live in today. It is an autocratic monarchy, in which the leaders inherit their power and the castes are strictly policed. Like many love stories in strict societies, the main character Amanda has a boyfriend in another caste. Amanda is a plucky, self-reliant woman who is willing to cross caste lines and remain independent for the sake of love. She is only torn between her family and her boyfriend, at the Selection, because she does want to help. She just doesn't want to sacrifice anything important.

## Chapter 2

The caste system is a strict one in Illéa, and neither America nor Aspen want to run afoul of it by getting pregnant before they are married. Aspen's brother Jemmy was whipped for having stolen an apple in the market, and the two of them would face jail or death if they break the laws. Still, America is dizzy with her attraction to Aspen, and she cannot imagine leaving him. She only agrees to register in order to satisfy his conscience.

## Chapter 3

These opening scenes are ironic because the reader already knows that America is entered in the Selection and that she is bound to figure prominently in the Prince's choice. So, America's innocence seems a bit tragic, as it is going to be tested and she will be taken away from the place she loves.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Cass characterize America Singer? What kinds of words and situations does she use, to describe her personality? Who else's personalities are limned in similar detail?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the history that explains the shape of Illéan society and caste system? How do the Illéan laws affect the characters?

## Discussion Question 3

What are the advantages and disadvantages of America Singer being herself? What downfalls might she encounter?

## Vocabulary

Disobedient, colonies, vandalized, magnificent, compassion, precarious, destitute, magistrates, independence, creased, unreasonable, glutton, rehearsals, squealed,



romantic, practical, intently, province, exasperated, infuriating, silhouetted,  
devastatingly, distraction, genuine, abandon.



# Chapters 4-6

## Summary

### Chapter 4

America and her family watch the Illéa Capital Report, where Gavril Fadaye interviews Prince Maxon. America's family speculates about what the prince must be like and what kind of Queen America would make. After the show, Aspen sneaks up to America's window to kiss her goodnight. They kiss, and she sings him a lullaby. Soon, though, she sends him away because she doesn't want them to get in trouble.

### Chapter 5

America arrives at the tree house before Aspen and lays out a meal she cooked for him. She knows he is always hungry, and she is thrilled to provide for him. He is angry at her for providing, as it embarrasses him and injures his pride. Aspen is angry about being a Six, because he is doomed to a life of servility and low pay for hard work. He cries in front of America, who is upset as well, and he breaks up with her and leaves. When the next Illéa Capital Report comes on, America's name is announced as the woman from Carolina.

### Chapter 6

Now that America has been selected as a competitor, her life is no longer her own, as media and government officials are always disrupting her family. One official comes with vitamins to compensate any nutrient deficiencies she might have suffered on account of her low caste. He asks her whether she is a virgin, and she says that she is. He tells her the rules of the competition and that her new status is a Three from now on, and her whole family will be ones if she is chosen as the princess. The man, whom America calls Skinny, tells her that she should not refuse Prince Maxon any of his desires—which infuriates America. Aspen comes to America's house with flowers from his sisters and helps America pack. She gives him money she had saved and returns all but one of the pennies he had given her. She won't need money now, but he will. He plans to get drafted, when she gets back, so they can live together after his service.

## Analysis

### Chapter 4

Aspen and America are playing a dangerous game, as youth tend to do. They are flirting with the possibility of getting caught, and worse, if they break any laws. The flirtation with the Selection is amusing to America only because she knows that she will not be chosen, but since it means more money for her, she is willing to go along.



## Chapter 5

The fateful moment has come: America is going to be sent away for the Selection, and it seems that the timing is perfect, as she and Aspen have just split. This opens the door for a relationship with Prince Maxon, in time, but America seems to be taking the news hard. There isn't much time for her to do anything about it, though, with all the hubbub over her selection.

## Chapter 6

America is still planning to quit the competition as soon as possible, but the excitement is exciting nonetheless. She reserves a thoroughly American sense of independence and self-reliance, barely tolerating the government's game of selection.

### **Discussion Question 1**

What dangers are America and Aspen running, in their affair? How willing do they seem to be, to be caught and held to account?

### **Discussion Question 2**

What does it mean for America to lose Aspen? How does she console herself for the loss? How does she explain it to herself, to keep her emotions in check?

### **Discussion Question 3**

How American is America? What makes her a quintessential American heroine in this novel?

### **Vocabulary**

Eligible, requirement, conversation, commentary, environmental, infrastructure, invasion, patriotism, applauded, sauntering, radiated, formality, disposition, rearranged, jubilant, charity, capitalize, emblem, affectionate, announcement, serene, congratulating, radiant, dismissed, infuriating.





# Chapters 7-9

## Summary

### Chapter 7

America goes to a sending off celebration where she is cheered and applauded. America sees Aspen there with a girl named Brenna, and she is angry and saddened that he could have replaced her so quickly. Maybe she was the one Aspen's mother was talking about him being in love with, and America was only on the side. America says goodbye to her siblings and parents before she is led away to a white limousine.

### Chapter 8

At the airport, America meets Marlee Tames, Ashley Brouillette, and Celeste Newsome. They size each other up: Marlee is kind and sweet, Ashley is innocuous, and Celeste is obnoxious and cocky. The girls tell each other that the only way to succeed in this competition is to be themselves—they cannot beat the other girls. Marlee and America become friendly, and when they arrive, there is a huge crowd to greet them at the airport. America shakes hands and signs autographs and keeps the other girls waiting while she says hello to her well-wishers.

Chapter 9: America and the others arrive at the palace, where they take 'before' pictures, and then the girls are all made over, hair, nails, skin, etc. While the other girls want big changes, America stays simple and keeps her looks. She lets the beauticians clean her up and trim her hair, but she keeps her makeup simple and natural. America finds the dresses that have been made for her, and puts one on. She is done earlier than the other girls, so she is interviewed for the Illéa Capital Report, and then all the girls are gathered together and told the rules—where they can and cannot go in the palace. Then they all go to their rooms, and America meets her three maids. Later, they gather again to watch the Report on tv, and America wins glares from the other girls when the announcer says that she made herself a favorite at the airport.

## Analysis

### Chapter 7

America is confused by Brenna's appearance with Aspen, and she cannot tell whether he had been in love with Brenna or her. Her life is changing so much with the Selection that she has no time to tell, so she can only look on in shock and sadness. But the reader senses that big changes are in store for her, so this short chapter is not as devastating as it might be.

### Chapter 8



The reader meets the first of America's competition, and only one of the four of them seems obnoxious, which is in accord with the formula for this kind of book: there has to be an obnoxious character to use as a foil, and Celeste fits the part, brash, arrogant, knowledgeable and sly. America, though, has more power than she thought, and she becomes a favorite at the airport when they arrive.

## Chapter 9

Life in the palace is quite different from what America had known at home, and it feels like a frenetic tv show, where everything is in motion and producers have a schedule to keep, with multiple beauticians working on each contestant. America has not lost her genuineness, yet, and some of the other contestants make themselves unflattering in contrast to her natural ease.

### **Discussion Question 1**

What do the contestants' names tell you about their personalities?

### **Discussion Question 2**

What is the nature of the competition, and how can a woman compete for Prince Maxon's hand? What strategies do the girls adopt, and what strategies seem likely to pay off?

### **Discussion Question 3**

Compare and contrast life in the palace with life in Carolina for America. How are they similar? How are they different? How does her new environment change her?

### **Vocabulary**

Uniform, enthusiasm, survey, polar, abruptly, giddy, flailing, therapeutic, dedicated, unbearably, offensive, intimidation, aggressive, cower, terminal, autograph, interacting, royal, innocent, gravel, commanded, makeovers, doubtfully, bustling, conditioned.



# Chapters 10-12

## Summary

### Chapter 10

America eats a delicious steak for dinner, but she feels uncomfortable with the girls, who are all also ill at ease. Marlee says that the girls were strange to America because she was so likeable. She says that girls have ways of getting under each other's skin, and they reassure each other. America goes back to her room and dismisses her maids. She just wants to be alone. She looks out the window and wants fresh air. Her balcony is behind bars, so she tries to go down to the garden. The guards at the doors try to turn her back, but she is desperate to get outside. She can't breathe. Prince Maxon arrives to tell the guards to let her outside. When he tries to comfort her, his royal manner unnerves her and angers her, so she yells at him that she is not his dear, and she is not here because she wants to be. She tells him to try to put himself in her shoes, and her position might not look so enviable. The Prince tells America that he hopes he can see her fight for something she wants, in the competition.

### Chapter 11

America's maids dress her for breakfast, where she and the others will be introduced to Prince Maxon. After a brief lesson on table etiquette, the girls assemble and are taken to the Great Room to meet Prince Maxon, who meets each of the girls individually, for a brief interview, and he and America banter about their previous night's encounter in the garden. America bargains with Prince Maxon: she will help him with inside knowledge of the other girls if he will let her stay on for a week at least. The girls meet the King and Queen, and eat a big breakfast, and the first eight of them are sent home.

### Chapter 12

America enjoys her breakfast, and Prince Maxon notices her delight. She says that the tarts are exquisite, and regrets that her sister cannot have one: she says that she would cry if she had one. Prince Maxon wagers on whether May will cry, and sends tarts to America's house. He offers to let America wear pants for a week if May does cry, or, if she does not, America will go for a walk with him. America gets letters from her family with news and questions from all of them. May does not in fact cry when she gets the tarts, so America goes for a walk with Prince Maxon, and tells him all about her family. When she asks him what he wants, and he draws near to tell her, she knees him in the thigh—aiming for his groin—and he leaves angry. When she gets back to her room, there is a box with pants for her, from Prince Maxon.

## Analysis

### Chapter 10



America steals a march on the other girls, by panicking and trying to get outside. The reader meets Prince Maxon through America, and she finds him human and decent, although she is still wary. Her self-reliance is boundless, and she makes quite an impression on the Prince with her straightforwardness. This entire scene is so exceptional and beyond what any of the other girls can expect. It seems like America has put herself in an enviable position, in spite of her repeated statement that she is not interested in the competition.

#### Chapter 11

America's desire to stay at the palace is starting to increase, as she offers Prince Maxon help with the crowd, in return for staying on for the week. She is charming him without knowing it, of course, which is an irony the reader sees, while she herself remains ignorant of it. The axe is falling for eight of the thirty-five girls. This is a sobering prospect for the remaining twenty-seven.

#### Chapter 12

Once again America proves herself genuine and spunky in her banter with Prince Maxon over her sister's enjoyment of the tarts. This sets up the walk where she knees him in the thigh, which nearly gets her sent home. But, the prince's curiosity seems to have been piqued, so she may just stay. His generosity is making him look like a good person.

### Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Prince Maxon's life as a one and America's life as a five. How are they similar? How are they different?

### Discussion Question 2

Why is the irony that America does not see herself as charming so entertaining for the reader? What other stories resemble this narrative of humble self-esteem among royalty?

### Discussion Question 3

What leads America to misread Prince Maxon's intentions? Why does she have the reaction she does?

### Vocabulary

Sandwiched, radiating, outranked, behavior, assortment, debating, mysterious, backhanded, flimsy, purposeful, tremor, natural, interrupt, permanent, luxurious,



political, balcony, stationed, thunderous, stammered, collapsed, bravery, companion,  
awkward, jealous, diplomats.



# Chapters 13-15

## Summary

### Chapter 13

In the morning, America's maids dress her, and she goes to breakfast, where the rebels make an attack that terrifies most of the girls. Metal gates swing closed, and things are thrown against the metal from outside. But, no one gets in. America gets Marlee to dry her eyes and compose herself, realizing that this is a test for Prince Maxon's hand. America asks what will happen to her maids, and she is told that they have their own shelter. She gives Prince Maxon advice on how to comfort hysterical girls, and she tells him why she kneed him. She'd been told to expect his advances. He forgives her, and tells her about the rebel groups that attack the palace. There are different groups from the North and South. The Southerners are more violent and deadly. The Northern rebels don't kill people. They just search the palace as long as they can. When America gets back to her room her maid Lucy is hysterical, and the other maids explain that she was attacked once. She is very afraid.

### Chapter 14

America learns about the servants in the palace, and she befriends her maids by playing cards and chatting. Prince Maxon shows up, and the maids disappear. Prince Maxon suggests a secret code. They should tug their ears to signal that they should talk. On Friday, the girls will be shown off on the Illéa Capital Report while Gavril Fadaye interviews Prince Maxon. All the girls are busy preparing for it. The king makes some announcements, and then Gavril Fadaye interviews Prince Maxon, who says that one of the girls yelled at him on her first day there. But, he says that the girl is still there, and he plans to keep her "for quite a while." (p. 181).

### Chapter 15

America is thinking about Aspen when Prince Maxon comes to see her after dinner. She has been thinking about the single penny in the jar, wondering what she will do about Aspen. Maxon takes her outside and explains the risk he is taking by exposing his heart to all thirty-five women, but America isn't having it. She tells him how hard it is to compete, to wait around for other people's schedules. She sympathizes with his lack of control in his own schedule. He has meetings to attend and business to see to. She tries to sell him on Marlee. Prince Maxon asks why America doesn't like it at the palace, and she tells him about her family, Aspen, and their difference in caste. She confesses her love for Aspen. She tells Maxon about the send-off, when Aspen showed up with Brenna. Prince Maxon sympathizes with her, and he promises to keep her at the palace until the last possible moment.



## Analysis

### Chapter 13

The attack on the palace is an unexpected trial for the girls, and America passes, leaping into action. She is forgiven by Prince Maxon, and she is entrusted with some information about the rebels and the true state of life in the palace. Prince Maxon is charming toward her. Even though she is still not competing, she does seem to be enjoying his attention. His resolve to protect her maids in the future will be tested soon.

### Chapter 14

America's maids' affection for her is the right kind of compliment for her to receive in Prince Maxon's eyes. Prince Maxon's interview with Gavril Fadaye is quite funny, considering America's behavior with him, but the interview ends on a sweet, foreshadowing note for America. He plans to keep her around. As his feelings develop, America is going to have to decide whether she wants to play for keeps or not.

### Chapter 15

It is clear to the reader that Prince Maxon is falling in love with America, but it is not clear to America, who still sees the Selection as a big game and a distraction from her real business which is her heartache over Aspen. The prince is intent on her—but she cannot see it, and now she runs the risk of losing him without realizing her opportunity to be his wife.

## Discussion Question 1

What are the advantages and disadvantages of America's cheeky attitude?

## Discussion Question 2

What are the dangers America faces? List them in order of the magnitude of the threat.

## Discussion Question 3

How has America's relationship Prince Maxon changed since she first met him? Where does it seem to be going?

## Vocabulary

Hint, indescribable, murmur, interject, massive, disobey, filtering, registered, comprehend, protest, reassuring, immediately, huddled, alignment, slimmer, ushering,

distressing, minority, verge, pounce, dismantled, bewilderment, even-tempered, rendered, intrigue.





# Chapters 16-18

## Summary

### Chapter 16

In the morning, Marlee tells America about her date with Prince Maxon: they went to the movies, and he made popcorn for her. She and America exclaim on the prince's ability to seem totally engrossed with them when he is with them. They look at the other girls, half of whom are grumpy for not having had their date with Prince Maxon yet. A girl named Tuesday asks America about her second date with Prince Maxon, and complains about the injustice, when many girls hadn't seen him once yet. Across the room, a girl slaps Celeste across the face. America knows she was provoked, because Celeste can be like that, but the girl is asked to leave by dinner.

### Chapter 17

The girls get a history lesson on the background of Illéa, which is news to America, since she was home-schooled. Apparently there was a World War III, which started because of American debt to China, and then a war between Russia and China. The outcome was to leave the Chinese in charge of America, and the Chinese royal family looking for American brides. After their lesson, the girls have their pictures taken with Prince Maxon, who makes America laugh when it is her turn. Someone comes with news of a rebel attack in Midston, and Prince Maxon allows America to hear the news, because he trusts her. Another girl is sent home for reasons that are kept secret from the others. Celeste antagonizes America, but America resists the temptation to hit her and be sent home.

America gets letters from home, and tears off a piece to send a note requesting Prince Maxon's presence. He comes running to her, but since nothing is wrong, they just spend time together, and America tells Prince Maxon what it's like to be so hungry you would consider stealing. This is news to Prince Maxon, who doesn't understand what it's like for his subjects to be held down by the caste system.

### Chapter 18

Prince Maxon arrives at dinner with the king, and announces that girls in the upper castes will no longer be compensated so well, but lower caste girls will. He tells them that this is non-negotiable, and no one complains. Tonight, the girls will be interviewed by Gavril Fadaye on the Illéa Capital Report, and America is nervous about what he will ask her. Americas' maids dress her in a spectacular red dress, after she has looked so plain for so long. Celeste is envious of America's dress, and tears the sleeve right before the Report begins. Before the interviews, Prince Maxon announces an anti-hunger program which will be funded by the money saved by the Selection budget, among other places. When America is interviewed, she refers to Prince Maxon casually



as 'Maxon,' and confesses that she was the one who yelled at Prince Maxon on her first night. She says that he is a good and noble person, and he will make his wife very fortunate. Prince Maxon visits America in her room, and she says that her praise was genuine. Maxon moves to kiss America, it is his first kiss ever. He asks her if she can forget her boyfriend, and she offers to. He asks her if it's possible for her to love him, and she says that it is.

## Analysis

### Chapter 16

The competition for Prince Maxon's hand is shaping up. America is still solidly behind Marlee—she still hasn't started to want anything for herself—but it's taking its toll on the other girls, who are grumpy and aggressive under the pressure of waiting.

### Chapter 17

This chapter starts with a history lesson—the reader is finally told why the political arrangement is so different from the current American democracy—and ends with America performing a democratizing mission for the people of Illéa. By telling Prince Maxon about the shortage of food in lower-caste houses, she unwittingly sparks a reform movement, and moves herself even nearer to his heart: now she is affecting politics.

### Chapter 18

This chapter represents a climax of sorts, as America shines in spite of her torn dress. She wins the hearts of the crowd and the royal family, and Prince Maxon is impressed with her. He comes to her for his first ever kiss, and she says that she might be interested in him as a partner. Much of the rest of the story will hinge on whether she can forget Aspen.

## Discussion Question 1

How plausible is the history that leads to the society of Illéa? How important is it for the history to be plausible?

## Discussion Question 2

What reason is given for the occurrence of World War III? Is this a realistic scenario? Explain.



## Discussion Question 3

What is Celeste's motive for antagonizing America? How does Celeste's actions actually help America with the Prince?

## Vocabulary



# Chapters 19-21

## Summary

### Chapter 19

A few days later, another girl says that Prince Maxon kissed her. The girls all say that they can't stand to hear that Prince Maxon has done something nice with another girl. However, they hold to their resolve to be themselves. The girls agree that they want to give each other support. Silvia, the minder, announces a visit from the King and Queen of Swendway. America meets a sister of the royal family. When the sister is drunk, people make comments about how marrying royalty changes people's families. America wonders whether hers would change. She loses patience with the Selection, and hides from Prince Maxon. She meets Adele, the Queen of Swendway, who says that the Queen of Illéa is anxious to have a daughter-in-law. America sees him playing with his cousins, and realizes that she has strong feelings for him.

### Chapter 20

As the time has passed, America finds she is one of the front-runners for Prince Maxon's affections. Marlee says that she cannot feel attraction to Prince Maxon, but America tells her to stay and see what happens. Maxon calls America to him, and they see a movie together. On their way to the theatre, Aspen says hello to America. He is now one of the palace guards. Prince Maxon is gracious to him and says that he must be pulling for America to win the Selection. America does not remember any of the movie, and feels a little pale afterward.

### Chapter 21

America hides from Aspen and Prince Maxon in the Women's Room. When one of the girls has a birthday, America plays a song on the violin for her at the party. Celeste tells stories about her own birthday party, taunting America with her low caste again. America plays her song, and Prince Maxon hears it. As he smiles at America, Celeste spills red wine all over Kriss' elaborate cream-colored gown.

## Analysis

### Chapter 19

The royal visit from the King and Queen of Swendway gives America a chance to see Prince Maxon playing with young children, and she learns that the queen is looking forward to a daughter-in-law. So, she starts to soften toward Prince Maxon. This seems to resolve the plot line about Aspen, but this will be revisited soon. At this point, the competition is getting serious for America, as she wants something from it.



## Chapter 20

Aspen's arrival throws a monkey-wrench into the affection that has been developing between America and Prince Maxon. Since she has not been honest with the Prince about her feelings toward Aspen, Aspen's presence goes officially unnoticed. Finally, America is going to be tested in terms of what she wants from the two men in her life.

## Chapter 21

Except for the pressure Aspen puts on the narrative, this chapter would be another triumph for America, as Prince Maxon hears her play for Kriss. Celeste reveals her true colors, and America can see through her. However, this chapter does nothing to resolve the tension within America over her affections for Prince Maxon and Aspen.

## Discussion Question 1

What does the royal visit from Swendway expose about the Illéan royal family? Compare and contrast the Swendway and Illéan royalties.

## Discussion Question 2

How much does Aspen's appearance really confuse things for America? Has she already decided on the Prince, or is she still open to Aspen?

## Discussion Question 3

How have America's competitors changed throughout the course of the Selection so far?

## Vocabulary

Blurt, shattered, malice, strategy, competitive, ornaments, precious, received, extended, pavilions, curvaceous, cackled, decorum, aggravating, curtsy, insult, caste, international, refrigerator, crystal, plausible, opinion, circumstance, fumbled, incompatible.



# Chapters 22-25

## Summary

### Chapter 22

America tells Prince Maxon that it wasn't an accident when Celeste spilled wine on Kriss' dress, but Prince Maxon is not ready to admit that Celeste is diabolical. When America insists on her point of view, he scolds her for presuming to tell him how to act. He is the prince, not some friend of hers. At the Report later, he tugs his ear, but America doesn't answer.

That evening, Aspen comes to America's room, and she lets him in, even though they could both get in trouble. They kiss until finally he says that he has to get back.

### Chapter 23

America realizes it would be treason for her to be with Aspen, but she says that she doesn't care. Aspen comes back to her room in the morning, and America has to send her maids away so he can talk to her. Aspen apologizes for how he behaved before she left, and he says that Brenna had tripped and fallen into his arms, but he wasn't interested in her. America says that she never stopped loving Aspen. America falls asleep after Aspen leaves, but she is awakened when the palace comes under attack. She takes her maids to the refuge, overcoming the guards' opposition. Prince Maxon tells America that the rebels are Southerners, the dangerous, murderous rebels, but they are subdued, and America returns to find her room ransacked. Three other girls leave because of the violence, but America stays and calls her parents to say she's all right.

### Chapter 24

The next morning, after the number of girls is reduced to nineteen, America says that she feels a bond with these girls that will last her whole life. Then, Prince Maxon announces that he does not want to keep the women here where they might be in danger, and he sends another thirteen of them home. America, of course, is one of the remaining six. Aspen is there for the announcement, so he is confused by America's willingness to remain. Prince Maxon comes to her room, and she dismisses her maids. He apologizes for having scolded her, but he says that he would choose her if she would have him. He says that he is nervous about the rebels, who are intent on getting something from the palace. America does not tell him anything firm, only that they are 'definitely more than friends.' (p. 322).

### Chapter 25

Aspen sneaks into America's room at night, leaving the door open. He sees the penny on America's dresser, but she says that she can't date him while she's part of the



Selection. Still, she does not say whether she is choosing Prince Maxon or Aspen: she says that “I’m choosing me.” (p. 325). Aspen says that he is going to fight for her, and America does not give him any answer. He leaves, and she goes to sleep. In the morning, she wakes up and says that she is going to enjoy being one of the elite.

## Analysis

### Chapter 22

Aspen’s arrival throws a curve-ball into the book, as America was just about to start feeling comfortable with Prince Maxon. His brazen act of coming to her room spells danger. The fact that it has occurred this late in the novel seems to indicate that he might force things to a hasty conclusion.

### Chapter 23

This rebel attack is another proof of America’s value as a woman and leader, as she takes care of her maids in spite of the rules about how the maids’ well being is typically handled. Her empathy is serving her well, except in Aspen’s case, where she is not certain what she wants. She is allowing herself to be dangerously occupied with two men when the consequences could be very bad for her.

### Chapter 24

Prince Maxon confesses that he would choose America if the choice were his to make, but he acknowledges that her feelings are involved, and he respects her autonomy enough to give her the choice. This seems risky, considering that she has allowed Aspen back into her heart.

### Chapter 25

America’s confrontation with Aspen sets a dangerous tone for the ending of *The Selection*. America’s non-committal answer to Aspen only whets his hunger for her, setting up a potentially dangerous situation with the royal family and putting America herself in danger as well. America’s decision to enjoy being one of the elite—in spite of the danger Aspen puts her in—indicates that she might be willing to be a shallow, powerful person like the girls she has always disliked. But, the book does not conclude here. The ending is not an ending. Any questions unresolved in this book will have to be answered in the sequel, like a soap opera that keeps the viewer engaged from one episode to the next.

## Discussion Question 1

What are the advantages and disadvantages of empathy for America? How does it both help her and hurt her?



## Discussion Question 2

Debate the proposition that America is throwing away her life by agreeing to see Aspen in her room.

## Discussion Question 3

What do you think will happen in the sequel? What hints has Cass given the reader, and what loose ends remain to be tied up, or developed further?

## Vocabulary

Mortified, apologetic, tenuous, gracious, scolded, assume, typical, mulling, homemade, halfhearted, veins, guilty, chatter, giggle, regretted, stubborn, concentration, desperate, temporarily, mercifully, incredulously, temperature, frantic, disbelief, confirmation, penetrated.





# Characters

## America Singer

This is the main character of The Selection. She is a young woman who is chosen to compete with thirty-four other women to become the wife of the King and Queen's only son.

## Aspen Leger

This is a six who follows a lover by being drafted into the royal guard.

## Prince Maxon

This is the unmarried leader of Illea, who befriends the women from the different territories as he tries to select a bride.

## Magda

This is the main character's mother.

## Gerad

This is the main character's younger brother, who has a hard time picking a vocation.

## May

This is the main character's younger sister.

## Marlee

This is the person the main character hopes will become the new princess, a sweet person who is friendly and supportive of the main character as well.

## Celeste Newsome

This is the main character's main competition for the position of princess. This character is a back-stabber who treats the other competitors badly.



## **Gavril Fadaye**

This person is the emcee on the Illéa Capital Report, where he interviews the women in the Selection about their impressions of the prince.

## **Southern rebels**

This is a group of dissidents who attack the palace and kill people on their way to the attack.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Illéa

This is the country America Singer lives in, a fictional country made up of a merger of America and China.

## The Selection

This is the process by which one young woman from each territory is brought to the Palace to compete for the position of princess. She will be the wife of Prince Maxon.

## The penny jar

This is the container in which the main character keeps a memento of her previous relationship.

## Illéa Capital Report

This is a weekly television show in which the government tells the people the state of the nation, recent news, and any changes in policy.

## America's blue jeans

These are a gift from Prince Maxon, which he had wagered. He gives them even though he had won the bet.

## Violin

This is a musical instrument with which America performs a song for Kriss at her birthday celebration.

## Caste

This is a social rank that determines how affluent a person and their family can be in Illéan society. In this novel, caste is described by a number, from one to eight. One is for royalty, and eight is for the poor.



## Strawberry tart

This is a dessert America enjoys at the palace, and it becomes the subject of a bet when America says that her sister would cry if she had one of these. Prince Maxon wagers on this and sends this dessert to America's sister. America loses the bet when her sister does not cry.



# Settings

## Carolina

This is where America Singer and Aspen Leger are from, roughly the Southeast part of the current U.S.

## The Tree House

This is where America and Aspen have their secret meetings before America is sent to the Palace for the Selection.

## The Garden at the Palace

This is where America is trying to get some fresh air when she meets Prince Maxon for the first time. It then becomes their favorite place to spend time together.

## The Women's Room

This is a place in the palace where the contestants in the Selection spend a lot of their time preparing for the events with the Prince.



# Themes and Motifs

## Love vs. Family Interest

When America gets the notice to register for the Selection, she is only tempted because her family sees it as a chance for all of them to prosper. If they won the longshot competition, and America did become royalty, the entire family would be elevated from their ramshackle existence to a life of privilege and plenty. Pulling America in the other direction—against her family's interest—is her love for Aspen, who is a caste lower than her caste. She would actually be taking a social step down to marry him. In the beginning, the tension between these choices is resolved fairly easily. Aspen breaks up with America, and she leaves. But, when he finds her in the palace, the love is still there. The caste problem is apparently solved. As a soldier, Aspen is no longer below her family's rank. But, his new rank in caste status is only traded for the danger of their courtship during the Selection.

## Caste System vs. Democracy

In the world of *The Selection*, social mobility has been reduced to only a few rare circumstances. People can move down in rank by marrying beneath them, but they cannot move up except in circumstances like the Selection itself, where thirty-five girls are given the opportunity to compete for Prince Maxon's hand. This strict caste system has created certain injustices. The class barriers are maintained by the state, with punishments for breaking them without a sanction. The consequences are real. Lower castes suffer poverty, while the higher castes enjoy wealth. By putting a girl's family's hopes for advancement in one competition, *The Selection* takes typical adolescent trials, such as choosing which boy to date, and gives the family hope that, perhaps, their daughter will be able to move them higher in the caste system.

## Authenticity vs. Pretense

When the girls come to the palace, they are not sure what Prince Maxon will like, and many of them try to change their appearance to be more of one thing or another. They dye their hair, or get hair extensions, or put on a lot of makeup. America, on the other hand, plays these things down, and allows her beauticians to just clean her up a little. America is also free and open with her opinions, whereas most of the other girls are deferential and uncertain what to say that will put them in the prince's favor. America's spontaneity, which borders on recklessness, makes her a favorite with the prince, especially since he himself has been groomed from a young age to take everyone else's positions into account before speaking.



## Privilege vs. Poverty

As one of only three 'fives' in the competition, America is among the poorest of the competitors, and she is constantly needled by the other competitors, who come from more status and money than she does. America bears her lowly origins nobly and upbraids the other girls for their snobbery and their callousness about other people's sufferings. She even tells Prince Maxon about her experiences of hunger.. As a result of their conversation, he starts an anti-hunger campaign.

# Styles

## Point of View

The Selection is told from America Singer's point of view, without any narrative intervention to provide other viewpoints than her own. America is a middle child, third of five, in a family of artisans. She is not a natural performer, but she enjoys her own life and making her own decisions. She is still young and fairly naïve, although like the stereotypical American girl, she is sassy and independent, even when she does not know what the consequences of her sassiness might be. In the beginning this makes for irony, as the reader knows that America is cut out for bigger things than she would admit. Later, however, it makes for potential complications, as America allows situations to develop that will require cruelty and possible danger to resolve.

## Language and Meaning

America's vocabulary is not very sophisticated, though most students will probably find some vocabulary they could brush up on. There are not many metaphors or symbols in the writing, and the meanings are literal in most cases.

## Structure

The Selection is told chronologically, from beginning to end, and the chapters are broken up to follow incidents from start to finish. Chapters are not all the same duration, and sometimes there are long intervals between chapters, as several weeks pass between them. The real structure can be described as America's motion away from Aspen toward Prince Maxon and then back to a new triangular relationship in which America is somewhat involved with both of them. This makes it unstable as a love story, but the love triangle is perhaps the oldest version of the genre.





## Quotes

I just want you to try. And if you go, then you go. And if you don't, then at least I don't have to beat myself up for holding you back.

-- Aspen (Chapter 2 paragraph 21)

**Importance:** This quote from Aspen gives America her motivation to apply for the Selection. Their difference in class is going to be an issue, and Aspen does not want her to think that she might have had a different life if she marries down to be his wife.

There wasn't a trace of sarcasm. This thing that seemed like little more than a game show to me was his only chance for happiness.

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 115)

**Importance:** America realizes that Prince Maxon is a person from a different culture, and by understanding his feelings, she identifies herself with his situation and pities him. This is the foundation of the bond between the two of them.

You're busy all day, what with helping run a country and all, and you're supposed to find time to narrow thirty-five, well, thirty-four girls down to one?...Wouldn't it be better for you if you had someone on the inside? Someone to help?

-- America Singer (Chapter 11 paragraph 130)

**Importance:** America makes this bargain with Prince Maxon before she ever wants to win his love. She offers to help him in return for being allowed to stay at the palace for at least a week. Unbeknownst to her, this bargain only charms Prince Maxon and wins his heart.

I think that everyone here is trying to protect me from eh statistics, but I'm not stupid. People die when [the Southern rebels] come.

-- Prince Maxon (Chapter 12 paragraph 158)

**Importance:** In this quote, Prince Maxon indicates the source of the gravest danger in The Selection, the rebels from the South. It is not clear what the rebels want or what they are looking for when they attack the palace. This leaves some questions to be sorted out in subsequent books in the America Singer series.

It seemed like Maxon's experience with women was so great and so small at once. He was gentlemanly enough, but when he got too close, he came undone.

-- America Singer (Chapter 15 paragraph 183)

**Importance:** America indicates that Prince Maxon has some contradictions which seem to come from his upbringing: He is a sheltered only child, who was not raised in a big household with playmates and relatives. America is a good counterbalance to this trait—insofar as she is comfortable with almost anything as a result of her large family.



When the United States couldn't repay their massive debt, the Chinese invaded, as the United States was beyond bankruptcy.

-- Silvia (Chapter 17 paragraph 209)

**Importance:** This quote explains the back story that took place before the novel began, when the U.S. ceased to be a world power and became a monarchy with fixed castes.

[My mother] said she had a fighter on her hands, so she named me after the country that fought so hard to keep this land together.

-- America Singer (Chapter 18 paragraph 245)

**Importance:** America explains that her name comes from the wars that have ended the United States as we know it today. The country has turned into a monarchy with fixed castes.

Maybe Queen Amberly was right. The only thing to do is be yourself.

-- America (Chapter 19 paragraph 259)

**Importance:** America says that there is only one way to come out of the experience intact. You must be yourself all the way through. So many girls are intent on being the image that Prince Maxon might want, but it is obvious that America is doing well precisely because of her refusal to budge for him.

If I don't, I'll die anyway.

-- Aspen (Chapter 22 paragraph 291)

**Importance:** Aspen says this when he comes to America's room at night, which is a clear violation of rules. He is following the 'young love' script, and he can't give her up. It is not clear whether America is as willing to throw away her prospects.

I'm not choosing you or him. I'm choosing me.

-- America (Chapter 25 paragraph 325)

**Importance:** In telling Aspen this, America leaves the door open for the next novel in the series. She is refusing to make the choice the entire novel has been leading her to make.