

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Throughout the novel, the author includes multiple references to Shakespeare's sonnets, and Henry also writes quite a few of his own poems. How does the author use sonnets to convey Henry's emotions and thoughts?
- The Dark Lady is set in Elizabethan times, in the year 1599 when 'London stank', Shakespeare entertained the upper and lower classes alike, when violence and punishment were the order of the day. How does this setting add to the story? How does the author use evocative language to draw you into the time and place?
- Henry grew up in the Devil's Gap, Elizabethan London's most notorious slum, infamous for producing the city's most feared killers and skilled thieves. How does the author depict life on the streets in Elizabethan London? What impact does this have on Henry?
- Steal or starve, cheat or be cheated. Henry and his friends all agree – to survive the cruel order of Shakespearean London you must break the law. Do you think they're justified?
- Henry is a mixed-race orphan in Elizabethan London. The colour of his skin sets him apart wherever he goes. How has this impacted him? Do you think he has grown stronger or perhaps weaker as a result of his status as an outsider?
- In what other ways does the novel explore race and identity?
- The author took his inspiration for the Dark Lady from Shakespeare's sonnets 127 – 152. Who, in your opinion, is the Dark Lady? Metaphor or real?
- Henry's superpower, the ability to translate the most difficult and obscure texts, not only saves his life, but helps him rise in a society that values class and wealth above all else. Do you agree that reading is a superpower? Why do you think it might be, and has the novel impacted the way you view reading?

THE
DARK
LADY

(Akala)