



***The Rival Queens* – Questions for Discussion**

1. While her husband, Henri II, was alive, Catherine de' Medici acquiesced in his relationship with his mistress, Diane de Poitiers, and even tried to curry favor with Diane by spying for her and pretending to enjoy her company. What do you think of this behavior? Do you think that Catherine had a choice, that she could have preserved her position as queen of France without being quite so accommodating to Diane? What would you have done in her place?
2. Catherine's entire reign was marked by conflict between Catholics and Huguenots. Do you think that her policies contributed to the violence, or were the circumstances simply beyond her control? Do you see any parallels between what happened in the sixteenth century during the wars of religion and what is happening today between the Muslim and Christian populations in France?

3. Catherine's parenting skills obviously left something to be desired. Do you think if she had been a better mother this might have helped her rule, or do you think that the two roles have nothing to do with each other?
4. Marguerite was thirteen when she came to live at court and was exposed to the predatory sexual practices of her mother's Flying Squadron. How do you think this overtly sensual environment influenced her ideas of love and marriage? Do you think that what Margot experienced in adolescence is similar to or different from the erotic images and themes routinely utilized in films, television series, advertising and other media that the average teenaged girl is bombarded with today?
5. It is clear that Marguerite was forced to marry her cousin Henry of Navarre, and that she did not love him. Why then do you think she refused her mother's offer of an annulment? Where did you think this spirit of self-sacrifice came from? Do you think Catherine would have behaved the same way when she was younger if she had been placed in Marguerite's position? What would you have done if you were Margot?
6. Do you think that Marguerite's reputation as a frivolous party girl is deserved? How do you think she compared as a politician with her mother, brothers, and husband? If she had been capable of having children do you think that Henry would have divorced her? If they did have a child and stayed together, do you think they could have made religious toleration work in Navarre?
7. Isn't it ironic that two women, Elizabeth I and Catherine de' Medici, both sentenced their female relations to death (Mary, queen of Scots in Elizabeth's case, Margot in Catherine's)? Do you think that on the whole women are as bloodthirsty as men or was this just a function of the times they lived in?
8. Now that you have read *The Rival Queens*, rent or stream the film "Queen Margot" starring Isabelle Adjani and Daniel Auteuil, based on the famous Alexandre Dumas novel, *La Reine Margot*. What do you think of Dumas's portrayal of Marguerite?