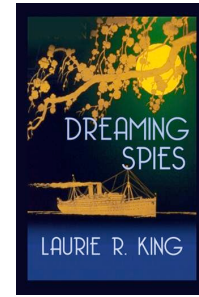


## ***Dreaming Spies***

**by Laurie R. King**

### **A discussion guide**



1. Although the story begins on a ship, imagery of “the road” or path permeates the book: the road Russell & Holmes walk through Japan; the idea of “the Way” (bushido, the traditional Samurai code); the illustrated book of the Kisokaido that forms the center of the story. Is having a road to follow always a good thing? In the series, Russell & Holmes are often walking roads (*The Game, O Jerusalem*). Do you find this an effective metaphor for discovery, both self- and of the plot’s crimes?
2. The Haiku is a form of poetry simple on the surface, but infinitely complex in subject matter. What does that say about that other literary form, the mystery novel? Can a page-turner deal with complicated ideas, or do they get in the way?
3. In a number of places, Russell reflects on clothing and how it affects the person wearing it. Do you find the clothing you wear restrictive, or freeing? Do you behave differently when you wear different kinds of clothing? What does a culture’s clothing reveal about that culture, and what does it conceal? For example, the veil: symbol of oppression or means of privacy? The kimono (or the corset, for that matter): restriction, or support? When Russell & Holmes don foreign clothing in *Dreaming Spies*, do they feel closer to the culture, or even more foreign to it?
4. In this story as in many others, Sherlock Holmes has a particular loathing for blackmailers. Would you consider blackmail as bad as murder?
5. The Fool is a figure of anarchy, a damaged person who presents a skewed but insightful message to figures of authority (sensible people, after all, take care

around the powerful.) Can the Fool also be a tool of authority? Can a Fool be a hero, or would heroic acts make his or her Foolishness a mere pretence? In *Dreaming Spies*, the Fools of Lear and Henry V are mentioned. Can you think of any other great Fools in literature? How do they affect their stories?

(Note: Laurie wrote her BA thesis on “The Role of the Fool in Western Culture”, and the fool appears in some of her other books such as *To Play the Fool* and *God of the Hive*.)

6. Can war have ethics? The Samurai code of ethics (bushido) and Western chivalry agree that war has boundaries—the ultimate statement of this being, “Gentlemen don’t read each other’s mail.” However, the essential fact of espionage, whether Western or ninja, is that ethics is a luxury you can’t afford. Would you agree? Would espionage be justified if it prevented a war, or an atrocity? Or does ignoring ethical considerations of an act mean that you’ve lost the battle before you’ve started?

7. In *Dreaming Spies*, Japan’s Prince Regent is both a young man deeply sympathetic to Western ideas and the future Emperor Hirohito, who will preside over a huge military push and war against the West. How could things have gone differently? Could one man, even a Son of Heaven, have stood in the way of his advisors? Are there ways of averting this kind of disaster? Does a novel provide a way to talk about such matters?

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To supplement book club discussions, see the *Dreaming Spies*—

[Pinterest](#) page, with images of the time and setting

The [LRK YouTube channel](#) for a book trailer and vintage Japan research videos

Collection of [blog posts](#) about Laurie’s research and travel

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