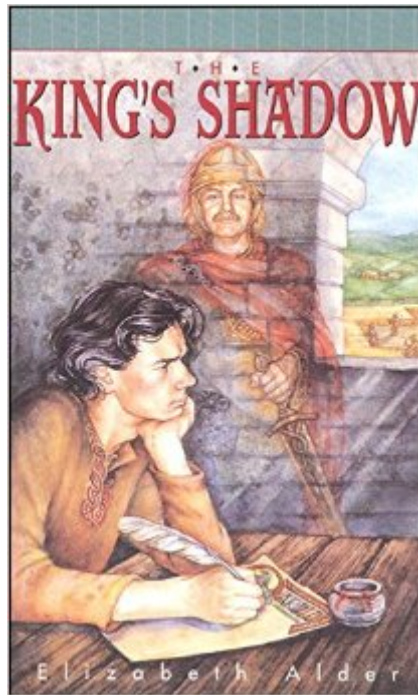


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# The King's Shadow



## Synopsis

Evyn, a young Welsh serf, has dreamed all his life of becoming a storyteller. But in a cruel twist of fate, Evyn and his father suffer a brutal attack by a group of murderous ruffians. Evyn's tongue is cut off and his father is killed. Orphaned and unable to speak, Evyn assumes he is destined to a life of slavery. But Evyn is resilient and teaches himself to read and write. He is then appointed the personal companion to Earl Harold of Wessex, who later becomes the King of England. The two travel the countryside together, forming a close father-son bond. Evyn chronicles all of their exciting journeys, which culminate at the Battle of Hastings, where the future of the country is decided.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (55 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

It's often said that history is written by the winner. We know of William the Conqueror and his victory at the Battle of Hastings. What few know is who it was he fought against and what that enemy was like. Now, 931 years after the fact, Elizabeth Alder has told us the story of Harold II, the last Saxon king of England. We are shown Harold's tragic story through the eyes of his "shadow", a voiceless squire who becomes one of the king's most trusted friends. While some apparently think the story boring, it touched me like few other books have. Harold is portrayed as one of the few kings who gives all of himself for his realm and it is heartbreaking to read of all his efforts to unite England, knowing that in a very short while it will all be gone. Even the chapter headings tick off the years

leading up to 1066 like some sort of death knell. As to how this story has anything to do with us? If it were not for the events in this story many of us, myself included, would not even be able to read this book. We would be speaking and reading French.

Mrs. Alder is my English teacher and I say, we didn't think she was capable of writing this well. It is strange to think of the person who yells at you and gives you detentions when you don't have your red marking pen writing a terrific book. But she did! We had to read the book for class and I know many people were prejudiced at the beginning, but towards the end, I think most of us enjoyed it. So here goes on the review: Evyn is a young Welsh farmworker in the mid-1000's. He loses his tongue in revenge by the brothers of someone who his uncle killed. With it goes his dream of becoming a revered storyteller. His father is killed also, and he is sold into slavery. Luckily, his lady is kind and sends him to a monastery to learn how to read and write. He joins Harold the Fair as his squire and friend, and later on, his foster son. He returns to the monastery after the Battle of Hastings to write the history chronicles of their journeys and adventures. I think this book was well written, but there were a few points that I did not enjoy. When Mrs. Alder wrote about the Battle of Hastings, she was a little too descriptive. In fact, I felt sick. I understand that some information was vital to the battle, but the whole "He was hacked until he was unrecognizable" was just a touch too much. Also, in class, she told us that Ealdgyth and Harold had children together, but that was not included in the book. Since the Little Queen had no children, the children of Ealdgyth would have been heirs to the throne. I thought this would have been very important, and she only mentions it at the very end of the last chapter. But I also think there were very many strong points. She kept true to the historical truth and detailed everything well, but not too much throughout the books. I really enjoyed this book and look forward to more of her work!

Well-written historical fiction like this makes the period come alive. Late Saxon England is sometimes overlooked, notched between the Dark Ages and feudal Britain. Stone castles and chivalry came later; this was the age of wooden feast-halls and "housecurls" (a little like knights). The King's Shadow focuses ostensibly on Evyn, a Welsh boy whose dreams of becoming a bard are stolen from him by violence, but it is also the story of Harold, the last Saxon king of England. Evyn is drawn to Harold after being sold into slavery. He becomes Harold's guide, his squire, and, ultimately, his chronicler. Alder handles the violence of the time just right for younger readers, toning it down without sugar-coating it, and manages to pull a satisfactory measure of believable and unforced happiness from the story's mostly sad conclusion. The details of her clearly extensive

research never force themselves on the reader but emerge naturally as part of the story. One criticism is that Alder's sympathies are perhaps a little too clearly with the Saxons. (One could easily imagine William the Bastard's lackeys addressing him as "Lord Vader", by contrast.) I felt she explained away some of Harold's faults/mistakes a little too neatly. Still, Evyn's respect and devotion to Harold are always believable. The King's Shadow sufficiently piqued my historical interest to make me browse a translation of the Anglo-Saxon chronicles. I felt a chill while doing so, knowing that real people like Evyn must have written them. Recommended.

This is the kind of book that a teacher is always delighted to discover! This is an excellent first novel by an author who has created a vivid picture of the world in which Harold becomes king of England and then loses his throne and his life to William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings. The story is told from the viewpoint of Evyn, a Welsh boy who loses his ability to speak in a brutal attack in his village and who is then sold as a slave to the court of Harold's common-law wife. The story is enormous in its scope but uncomplicated in the telling, with action-filled battle scenes and authentic descriptions of the politics and treachery of the time. Suitable for middle school readers, it brings the end of Anglo-Saxon England to life. Highly recommended!

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