

ELIZABETH I (1533-1603)

Considered by many to be the greatest monarch in England's history, Elizabeth I became a queen at 25 upon the death of her half-sister Mary I. She had to survive scandal and trouble but above all had to solve complicated state problems. The fact that people called her rule *The Golden Age* and she herself was fondly called _____ or the *Virgin Queen*, suggest how much she was loved by her subjects. However, when she ascended to the throne in 1558, most European monarchs and enough Englishmen considered her illegitimate as her father, _____, had declared her so after ordering the execution of her mother, _____, falsely accused of adultery. Moreover, English history had only had 2 other queens before her, none remarkable: Lady Jane Gray or the "9-day queen" and her half-sister Mary I, nicknamed "_____".



IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Elizabeth was tall and strong and had her father's golden-red hair. She was a remarkable woman and was highly educated. Like Henry VIII, she could quickly and realistically grasp at any situation but unlike him, she could control her feelings and be patient, sometimes appearing undecided when she was only waiting for the right moment to act. For example, she made the _____ king, Philip II, who was courting her, wait for her for 20 years before she decided she did not want to marry him. By this time, her fleet was ready to face the Spanish naval attack.

2. Elizabeth was also an incredibly gifted scholar, and loved learning. She reputedly would often study for two or three hours a day, and was well read in the Classics, as well as having a very extensive knowledge of history. Her skill for languages meant that she could read books in Latin or French, and especially as she grew older, she loved to translate Classic works into English. She also spoke French, Italian and Spanish. In addition, she liked to write poetry, and a few of her poems still survive.

3. She was vain of her appearance and loved to dress richly, using many jewels and cosmetics until well into old age. She was never a beauty but knew how to use her womanly charms to win over the strong men surrounding her. Although her _____ pressured her to marry, she understood that her strength lay in her single state and cleverly played her many suitors from home and abroad until she was well past her middle age.

4. The Elizabethans loved music, and Elizabeth was no exception. She was a skilled musician and played the virginal and the lute. She enjoyed music, encouraged musicians and composers, and was especially fond of dancing. Elizabeth was also a patron of arts and literature, and loved watching plays, masques, and other dramatic performances. She had her own company of actors, called "_____". With such artistic activities, her court was an interesting place, which glittered like the queen herself.

5. Although as a woman she could not fight or lead men in battle, she encouraged her army before the battle of 1588 with these words: "I am come amongst you in the midst and heat of the battle to live and die, to lay down for my God, for my kingdom and for my people, my honour and my blood... I know I have the body of a weak and _____ woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a _____, and of a king of England too...and if any prince of Europe should dare to invade my realm, I will myself take up arms!"

6. Elizabeth loved to horse ride. Her love for the sport terrified her councilors, who feared that she would seriously injure, or even kill herself, from a fall. She also loved hunting and other pastimes such as _____, cock-fighting and bear-biting.

7. She was a loyal mistress to those who served her loyally and chose excellent councilors on whom she relied. Her only weakness was her fondness of unworthy favourites such as the Earls of Essex or Leicester. However, when the former tried to betray her after a courtship of over ten years, she ordered his execution, proving that she never allowed herself to lose sight of the fact that she was a queen while the rest were merely subjects.

ROYAL ACTIVITIES

She inherited a bankrupt nation, torn by religious discord, a weakened pawn between the great powers of France and Spain. The columns below contain the problems she had to face and the clever ways she devised to solve them. Read the two columns that present the problems she faced and the solutions she implemented.

PROBLEMS

1. After Edward VI, a Protestant, had persecuted English Catholics, smashing statues and decorations in their churches, Mary I had killed Protestants in an attempt to re-impose Catholicism. When Elizabeth, who was a Protestant, came to the throne, the country was on the brink of civil war due to religious conflicts. Something needed to be done quickly.

2. Elizabeth's right to the throne was disputed by Catholic extremists who would have liked to see Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, take her place. Although Mary was her cousin, Elizabeth treated her with great suspicion and rightfully so, as Mary foolishly allowed the dissatisfied Catholics include her in their plots of deposing Elizabeth from the throne.

3. Ever since she came to the throne, Elizabeth was pressured into marrying and having an heir. It was considered that, being a woman, she could not rule alone and an heir was vital in avoiding the fight for succession to the throne.

Having a child was a matter of state as it allowed for a peaceful transition when she died.

4. England was surrounded by powerful, Catholic neighbours, the most important of which were France and Spain. While she managed to avoid conflict with France, Spain, ruled by Philip II, finally attacked England in 1588 threatening to include it in a Catholic Empire.

5. When she became queen, Elizabeth inherited a difficult financial situation which forced her to find ways of making the country and the Crown rich again. In addition, the country was plagued by hordes of poor people, who roamed in search of food or a job, but often begged, ambushed or even killed others to steal from them.

SOLUTIONS

After being suspected of killing her husband, Mary Stuart fled Scotland and took refuge in England, where Elizabeth immediately imprisoned her. This was as much to protect her as to minimize the danger she posed to Elizabeth. Mary was kept a prisoner for almost twenty years. In that time, Elizabeth refused to hear about executing her cousin, but after Mary was proven to have plotted against her, Elizabeth signed her execution warrant in 1587.

After keeping Philip of Spain at bay for twenty years, Elizabeth was finally ready for war and the naval battle of 1588 with the Invincible Armada was won by England, which became the number one naval power of the world.

Smart as she was, Elizabeth realized that she could benefit from encouraging private businessmen to invest their money in developing trade all over the world and thus bring profits to the Crown and to England, in general. Moreover, another activity she encouraged was that of the so-called English privateers (read pirates) who were allowed to attack the Spanish ships which returned from America loaded with silver and gold. However, in return, they shared their loot with the Crown too. As regards the solution of poverty at individual level, it was reduced by *The Poor Law* of 1601. Workhouses were created for able-bodied poor who needed jobs, and money was collected in every parish to help those who could not work.

Learning from her siblings' mistakes, Elizabeth made religious peace by making Protestantism the national religion, but allowing some changes requested by the Catholics. However, everybody was compelled to attend service at the local church or else pay a fine.

However, even having a child of her own may not have ended all problems. In the eyes of Catholics, Elizabeth was illegitimate and had no right to the throne. Plots would have been organised to make Mary Stuart queen regardless of whether Elizabeth had a child or not. As for the choice of a husband, an Englishman would have been inferior in rank and a foreign prince or king would have tried to take all power and subdue England, so Elizabeth chose to stay single. When she died, she was succeeded by James VI of Scotland, son of Mary Stuart, who became James I of England.

REVISION ACTIVITIES

1. Summary of the Elizabethan Age:

"Elizabeth reigned from _____ until _____. During this long reign England achieved a large measure of religious peace, although a minority of _____ and another minority of protestants continued to agitate for different religious changes. This peace was one of the reasons why England was able to enjoy great developments in other directions. Elizabeth's fleet not only defeated the Spanish _____ in the year _____, but they also sailed in search of new land and so helped England become economically richer while also laying the foundations of its future Empire. One sign of the greater prosperity was the many fine houses built for the increasing number of wealthy townspeople and landowners. Another sign of England's evolution under Elizabeth was the outpour of music, books and above all of great plays written by a group of artists of which _____ is the best known."

DID YOU KNOW?

- Elizabethan punishments were varied and cruel, but maybe necessary considering the high crime rate and the unsafe life at the time. They ranged from fines, flogging, brandishment, humiliation in the pillory or stocks, hanging and even _____.
- The forms of entertainment were equally diverse, including cock-fights, bull-baiting and bear-baiting. Theatre was also very popular, the first theatre huoses being built in the shape of inns. The famous _____ dates from this period.
- Despite the great social and material progress made now, cities were _____ places, infested with vermin. One reason was the fact that trash and wastes were thrown in the middle of the street, often on the head of an innocent passer-bys
- Due to the precarious living and sanitary conditions, as well as the backward medicine of the time, few people reached 50 in Elizabethan times.
- Eating excessive amounts of _____ was very popular among Elizabethans and a sign of wealth as it cost very much. However, it led to the blackening of people's teeth.