

The Trial of King Henry VIII: Hero or Villain?

1. As a young man, Henry was more interested in sports and parties than in paperwork and law-making.

2. Henry had a carnival with the King of France – the “Field of the Cloth of Gold”, with gold cloth tents and wine flowing from all the fountains.

3. At the Field of the Cloth of Gold, Henry won a jousting competition, but lost a wrestling match with King Francis I of France.

4. Henry married the Spanish Princess, Catherine of Aragon, who gave birth to the future Queen Mary. She was the widow of his brother.

5. When she failed to produce a baby boy after 20 years of marriage, he wanted to divorce her and marry Anne Boleyn (he had also had an affair with Anne’s sister, Mary).

6. Because the Pope was a prisoner of Catherine’s nephew, he refused to give Henry a divorce. So Henry created his own Church – the “Church of England” – and gave himself a divorce!

7. Henry closed down the monasteries, saying they were evil. He took all of their money and spent it building great palaces.

8. Henry made everyone in England promise to accept any future children of Anne Boleyn as heirs to the throne.

9. Henry’s best friend, Thomas More, refused to accept Henry’s divorce. So Henry had him beheaded.

10. When Anne Boleyn gave birth, it was a girl – the future Queen Elizabeth. Henry said Anne was a witch, and had her executed!

11. He then married Jane Seymour, who died after giving birth to the future King Edward VI. Henry was very upset by her death.

12. As he started to get older, Henry got so fat that he could not even walk by himself, and his gums started to rot so his breath stank!

13. Thomas Cromwell persuaded Henry to marry the Dutch Anne of Cleves. When he saw her he called her a “Flanders Mare” (Dutch horse!)

14. Henry executed Cromwell for letting him down. He also sacked the artist, Hans Holbein, who had painted Anne of Cleves’ picture.

15. He divorced Anne of Cleves without ever living with her, and gave her a large pension. She looked after Princesses Mary and Elizabeth.

16. He then married the teenager Catherine Howard, but had her executed when it became clear that she was having an affair.

17. Henry executed Protestants when he was a Catholic and Catholics when he was a Protestant.

18. His final wife was Catherine Parr, who looked after him like a nurse. He died in 1547. His young son Edward VI became King.

Procedure

1. Paired Work

- a. Working in pairs, you will be presented with a sheet of evidence. Read through the story as a class, then cut the evidence into slips.
- b. Now put them into two piles:
 - (i) Evidence **criticising** Henry; (ii) Evidence **supporting** Henry.
- c. Now order the piles so that the strongest evidence is at the top of each pile, and the weakest at the bottom.
- d. If you do this quite quickly, compare your ideas with the other pairs of students sitting nearby. Try to reach an overall group decision.

2. Group Work

- a. The teacher will now divide the class into three groups:
 - KING (1 person – this is an optional role)
 - JUDGES (3-5 people only)
 - PROSECUTION will criticise Henry
 - DEFENCE will support him.

5 minutes

The KING will prepare a speech in his own defence. At the end of the trial he will have a chance to deliver this closing speech trying to persuade the judges that he does not deserve to be found guilty. Include as much detail as possible.

JUDGES will be presented with a list of “surprise exhibits”:

http://www.activehistory.co.uk/Miscellaneous/menus/Year_8/misc/hviii_trial.htm

For each one, discuss what it means, and whether it can be trusted. As judges you will be able to present some of these “surprise exhibits” to the rest of the class and they will have to respond under pressure. Organise these exhibits in order, with the most interesting at the top.

PROSECUTION and DEFENCE teams should decide upon the best three pieces of evidence to use for your case. Turn each one into a question for Henry to answer (“Is it not true that...”)

5 minutes

PROSECUTION and DEFENCE teams will now share their evidence with the class. The teacher will write the 3 prosecution questions onto the board, then the 3 defence questions. For each question, a person in the group must volunteer to read it out at the trial.

When the trial starts, the prosecution team will have to answer the defence team’s questions, and vice versa. So now decide as a team who will answer each question, and what they will say (is the evidence incomplete? unreliable?). Whilst you are working on this the teacher will make a note of which members of the class will answer which questions.

JUDGES should be considering the evidence and finishing their tasks whilst this is going on; the KING should continue writing his speech.

3. The Trial

- During the trial, the judges should all take notes to help them reach their final verdict.
- They can also ask any other questions that occur to them as the trial proceeds.
- One judge should have the specific task of completing a trial record sheet (in the format shown below).

	Question	Response
Prosecution Q1		
Defence Q1		
Surprise Exhibit 1		
Prosecution Q2		
Defence Q2		
Surprise Exhibit 2		
Prosecution Q3		
Defence Q3		
Surprise Exhibit 3		

Stage 5: The Verdict

Based on the evidence, you should now vote individually and out of role to decide which of the following four verdicts you think is most appropriate. Highlight your personal choice, and then record the classroom verdict in the second column.

	Votes
a. Henry was guilty of treason, and deserves to die.	
b. Henry was guilty of treason, but does not deserve to die.	
c. Henry was not guilty of treason, but should no longer be King.	
d. Henry was not guilty of treason, and should be made King again.	

Homework / Extension

- Each person should now be given a completed copy of the trial record sheet to answer the question "Was Henry VIII a villain or a hero?"