

POLITICS AND POWER IN THE *Elizabethan World*

Dear Educator,

All history teachers face the challenge of making the distant past relevant to today's students. The Elizabethan period of English history is not only one of the richest and most intriguing, but also a time that offers many parallels to our world today. These connections are brought vividly to life in the new two-part HBO FilmsSM miniseries event, *Elizabeth I*, premiering this April on HBO. *Elizabeth I* explores the intersection of the private and public life of the Queen in the latter half of her reign, offering a personal look at her allies, her enemies and her suitors as she struggled to survive in a male-dominated world.

HBO has teamed with the award-winning curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired (YMI) to bring you this classroom program based on this richly-detailed film.

The two curriculum-based activities—perfect for the end of the year—are designed as extra-credit or extension lessons to supplement your World and European History curricula. The first activity explores the political challenges faced by a queen who led her country to an age of prosperity and ascended into the pantheon of great rulers. The second activity looks at Elizabeth as a woman in power in a world dominated by men. In both activities, students will find parallels to today's world, and be challenged to consider the effects of these types of conflicts and issues in their own lives.

You and your students do not need to see *Elizabeth I* to use these activities, but viewing the miniseries will enrich student understanding. *Elizabeth I* premieres April 22nd (Part 1) and April 24th (Part 2) on HBO at 8PM/7C.

Feel free to make photocopies of these copyrighted materials and share them with colleagues. As a former teacher, I encourage you to take advantage of this unique opportunity to explore a fascinating period of history while helping students forge connections to their lives today.



Sincerely,
Joel Ehrlich
President and former teacher

A Miniseries Event from HBO Films

Elizabeth I



Who Should Use This Program

This program has been designed for high school and college students of World and European History. Please share it with other teachers as appropriate.

Program Components

- This teacher's guide
- Two student reproducibles
- A colorful wall poster focusing on Elizabeth's life and reign
- A reply card for your important feedback

Program Objectives

- To explore the political, religious, and personal challenges faced by Queen Elizabeth.
- To relate 16th-century events to today's world in terms of political and religious conflicts and the challenges faced by female leaders today.
- To help students make connections between history and their lives today.

How To Use The Teacher's Guide and Poster

Review and schedule the two activities into your lesson plans, and photocopy them for students. Photocopy the **Resources** list in this guide and distribute it to students to aid in their research. Display the poster in a prominent location to engage student interest.

World History Curriculum Connections

Activity 1—Elizabeth I: Political Leader

Explores the rising military and bureaucratic power of European states in the 16th century.

Activity 2—Elizabeth I: Powerful Woman

Delves into how the deeply patriarchal European society experienced political, economic, and cultural transformation in the 16th century through the influence of a strong female leader.

ACTIVITY 1

Elizabeth I: Political Leader

Review the material on the sheet detailing the problems Elizabeth faced as the ruler of a nation devastated by the effects of the plague and financial ruin, as well as her accomplishments in leading the country to an era of wealth and prosperity. Assign students individually or in groups to research the events and individuals listed on the reproducible sheet. Lead a class discussion about their discoveries in light of the questions at the bottom of the sheet.

Extension Activities Ask students to find parallels in today's world for each of the key events in Elizabeth's political life. Discuss the role of religion in the political shaping of the world then versus now.

ACTIVITY 2

Elizabeth I: Powerful Woman

Elizabeth's personal life was keenly entwined with her role as monarch. Elizabeth was a powerful woman who used her position to get what she wanted both politically and personally. She was faced with seemingly contradictory desires—to retain power meant she wouldn't marry the man she loved, yet when she became aware that he was not available to her, she took a measure of revenge against him. Assign students individually or in groups to research the events and individuals listed on the sheet. Have students consider the questions at the bottom of the reproducible sheet as they relate to life today.

Extension Activities Review each of the key events listed on both sheets from the perspective of Elizabeth as a strong female leader. Did the fact that she was a woman influence political events and outcomes? How?

Resources

Photocopy this list of resources to help students with their research.

Books

- *Elizabeth I: Her Life in Letters*, by Felix Pryor, University of California Press, 2003.
- *Elizabeth I: Then and Now*, by Georgianna Ziegler (editor), Folger Shakespeare Library, 2003.
- *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I*, by Susan Doran, Routledge, 1996.
- *The Life of Elizabeth I*, by Alison Weir, Ballantine Books, 1999.

Web Sites

- www.luminarium.org/renlit/eliza.htm Quotes, biographies, essays, images
- <http://tudorhistory.org/elizabeth/> Biography, Elizabeth's writings and poetry, images
- www.britannia.com/history/monarchs/mon45.html Biography and timeline
- www.elizabethi.org/us/ Multi-link site with biography, facts about life at court, life in England, and Elizabeth's writings
- www.yमितeacher.com

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Elizabeth I: Political Leader

Actress Helen Mirren, who plays Elizabeth in the HBO FilmsSM production of **Elizabeth I** (Part 1 premieres April 22nd and Part 2 premieres April 24th on HBO), found a strong connection between the issues Elizabeth faced and issues we face today. "Look at the present conflicts between people of different religious persuasions and what they're prepared to do for their religious persuasion," Mirren notes. "There are enormous resonances within the Elizabethan story."



Queen Elizabeth and her subjects

When Elizabeth I took the throne in January of 1559, England was facing a plague, a costly defeat by France, the brink of monetary ruin, and threats from Spain and France to turn England back into a Catholic country. Because Elizabeth refused to marry for the sake of producing an heir, there was no clear successor in line for the throne. She also faced plots against her from foreign nations, her own cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, and some of her closest advisors.

As you'll learn in the HBO Films production of *Elizabeth I*, by the time of her death in March of 1603, Elizabeth had turned England into a world power. The country was financially sound, militarily powerful, and religiously secure as a Protestant nation, launching an English Renaissance during which important legal and social changes improved the lives of citizens.

How did one woman, operating in a world dominated by men, achieve this? Research the following people and events that played a major part in Elizabeth's realm:

- **Mary, Queen of Scots**—Elizabeth's cousin, a Catholic who desired the throne and who for 20 years plotted against Elizabeth. Elizabeth had her executed in 1587.
- **Attack of the Spanish Armada**—In 1588, the "invincible" Spanish fleet was defeated by the much smaller British Navy. This single event cemented Elizabeth's role as England's savior and protector.
- **Spain's annexing of Portugal**—In 1580, King Philip II of Spain took over Protestant Portugal, making it a Catholic country and threatening to do the same to England.
- **Robert Cecil**—William Cecil's son. He took over his father's role as Elizabeth's closest advisor after the death of his father. He secretly orchestrated the succession to Elizabeth's throne of James VI of Scotland, following Elizabeth's death.

For Discussion

Discuss parallels to the following situations in the world today:

- One of the greatest risks to Elizabeth's rule was the threat of other countries invading Protestant England to impose their religion (Catholicism) on the country.
- Elizabeth dealt with the conflict between Catholics and Protestants. What are some of the similarities and differences in today's world regarding politics and religion?
- Political intrigue and the threat of assassination dominated Elizabeth's reign.
- Not all of Elizabeth's decisions were popular with her advisors, Parliament, and the people of England. She manipulated those closest to her to get what she wanted.



Encouraging soldiers before battle

Discuss how the culture and actions of a nation impact its citizens:

- If your country needs resources that are in short supply (troops, funding) to achieve its objectives, how does that potentially affect you as a citizen?
- Is it ever acceptable to give up some of your rights for the greater good?
- If you rely on laws to help you, and those laws change because of higher national priorities, how do you flex your political power to get what you want?
- Many people decry politicians. Is it possible to be effective without being somewhat manipulative?

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ELIZABETH I PREMIERES APRIL 22ND (PART 1) AND 24TH (PART 2) ON HBO AT 8PM/7C.

Elizabeth I: Powerful Woman

*The issue of marriage was a major theme of Elizabeth's reign. Actress Helen Mirren, who plays Elizabeth in the HBO FilmsSM production of **Elizabeth I**, says, "It was extraordinary how much of her reign actually had to do with whether she got married or not. And once she let go of that, in a way, that liberated her."*

All the great challenges Elizabeth faced were overcome by a woman leading a country in what was clearly a man's world. As you'll see in the HBO Films production of *Elizabeth I*, she had great pressure on her to marry and produce an heir to the throne. But she followed her own path, and retained power despite never marrying or having children.

Elizabeth's personal life was filled with contradictions and paradoxes. She believed that God had put her in power, yet she viewed herself as a woman of the people who instituted the beginnings of social justice. She loved Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, but refused to marry him, at times banishing him from her court. She later loved his stepson, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, but ordered his execution when she felt that he had betrayed her and the nation.

Research the following in preparation for the discussion topics:

- **Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester**—The man Elizabeth loved most in her life.
- **Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex**—Dudley's stepson, who overstepped the bounds of familiarity with Elizabeth and incurred her wrath.
- **Parliament blocks the Queen's funds**—In 1566, the British Parliament blocked Elizabeth's financial subsidies unless she immediately announced her plans to marry. She didn't follow through—once again skillfully manipulating the men who sought to control her.
- **Betrothed!**—In 1578, at the age of 45, Elizabeth announced her intention to marry 20-year-old Prince François de Valois, the Duc d'Alençon and d'Anjou. Fear of Elizabeth marrying a Catholic spread throughout England. Again she recanted, having met her true goals for the engagement—to gain France's support against Spain in Portugal, and to get back at the Earl of Leicester, whom she discovered was secretly married.



Jeremy Irons as Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Hugh Dancy as Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex

For Discussion

Discuss the challenges of being a woman in power:

- What issues did Elizabeth face as the leader of the country simply because she was a woman?
- How did being a woman work to her advantage? To her disadvantage?
- Consider the challenges and achievements of women such as Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State; Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, President of the Philippines, and Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, compared to those of Elizabeth.
- Consider women in power today. What qualities do they share with Elizabeth? How do they differ? Elizabeth was encouraged to marry and bear children to solidify her success. How do marriage and children affect powerful women today?

Consider the impact of the balance of power between men and women:

- Discuss why women have become heads of state in some foreign countries but have yet to achieve that in the U.S. What role does American culture play?
- Elizabeth waged many wars during her reign. Are women in power today expected to use diplomacy rather than force?
- Imagine Elizabeth I's character and qualities being brought to bear as President of the U.S. today. How would political events be influenced?



Helen Mirren as Elizabeth I

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