**Queen Elizabeth I**



**Directions**

**Read and annotate the following text, being sure to note the portions of the text that answer the questions that follow. In addition to your annotations, be sure to highlight or underline the text that answers each question and write the question number next to that excerpt in the margin. (Question #1 is already done for you as an example.)**

***Biography***

**#1** The reign of Queen Elizabeth I is often referred to as The Golden Age of English history. Elizabeth was an

immensely popular Queen, and her popularity has waned little with the passing of four hundred years. She is still one of the best-loved monarchs, and one of the most admired rulers of all time. She became a legend in her own lifetime, famed for her remarkable abilities and achievements. Yet, about Elizabeth the woman, we know very little. She is an enigma, and was an enigma to her own people.

Elizabeth was the daughter of King Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn. She was born on 7 September 1533 at Greenwich Palace. Her birth was possibly the greatest disappointment of her father's life. He had wanted a son and heir to succeed him as he already had a daughter, Mary, by his first wife, Katherine of Aragon. He had not divorced Katherine, and changed the religion of the country in the process, to have only another daughter. Elizabeth's early life was consequently troubled. Her mother failed to provide the King with a son and was executed on false charges of incest and adultery on 19 May 1536. Anne's marriage to the King was declared null and void, and Elizabeth, like her half-sister, Mary, was declared illegitimate and deprived of her place in the line of succession.

The next eight years of Elizabeth's life saw a quick succession of stepmothers. There was Jane Seymour who died giving birth to the King's longed for son, Edward; Anne of Cleves who was divorced; Catherine Howard who was beheaded; and finally Catherine Parr. For generations, historians have debated whether the constant bride changing of her father was responsible for Elizabeth's apparent refusal to marry. It is certainly possible that the tragic fates of Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard impressed upon her a certain fear of marriage, but there may have been other reasons for the Queen's single state, such as a fear of childbirth, which claimed the lives of a significant number of women in this period. Even if the Queen had no personal reservations about marriage, there were political problems with almost every contender for her hand. Religion was a major divisive issue, and there was also the problem of whether Elizabeth would have to relinquish any of her royal powers to a husband in an age when the political sphere was exclusively male.

As a child, Elizabeth was given a very impressive education. It had become popular amongst the nobility to educate daughters as well as sons and Elizabeth excelled at her studies. She was taught by famous scholars such as William Grindal and Roger Asham, and from an early age it was clear that she was remarkably gifted. She had an especial flare for languages, and by adulthood, she could reputedly speak five languages fluently.

Elizabeth's adolescence was no easier than her childhood. While the King lived, she was safe from political opportunists, but when he died in the January of 1547, she became vulnerable to those who saw her as a political pawn. Despite being officially illegitimate, Henry had reinstated his daughters in the line of succession. Mary was to follow Edward, and Elizabeth was to follow Mary. This meant that Elizabeth was now second in line to the throne. Edward was too young to rule himself as he was only nine years old, so his uncle, Edward Seymour, became Protector of England. His younger brother, Thomas Seymour, was jealous of his position and attempted to overthrow him. His scheme, which involved an attempted kidnapping of the Boy King, cost him his life. He had made no secret of his desire to marry Elizabeth (in Tudor times a girl was considered of marriageable age at twelve) so she was implicated in his plot. It was treason for an heir to the throne to marry without the consent of the King and his Council, and at only fifteen years of age, Elizabeth had to persuade her interrogators that she knew nothing of the plot and had not consented to marry the King's uncle. She succeeded in defending her innocence, but rumors of an illicit affair with Seymour, all the more scandalous because he had been married to her last step-mother, Katherine Parr, (before she died in childbirth), plagued her long afterwards.

Elizabeth again found herself implicated in treason after the Wyatt rebellion of 1554. Edward had died in the summer of 1553 from prolonged ill health, and Elizabeth's half-sister, Mary, was now Queen of England after a brief fight for the throne against the scheme of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, to make his daughter in law, Jane Grey, Queen. Mary was not a particularly popular monarch, and was suspicious of her Protestant half-sister. It was thus not difficult to persuade her that Elizabeth may have been conspiring with Thomas Wyatt and his men to seize the throne. Whether or not the rebellion was to make Elizabeth queen is uncertain, and it is also unknown whether Elizabeth had any knowledge of the conspirator’s plans. Even if she did have knowledge of them, there is no evidence that she approved of the actions of Wyatt and his followers. Elizabeth said she was innocent of the accusations made against her, but she was still arrested and sent to the Tower of London as a prisoner.

Many of those surrounding the Queen would have liked Elizabeth to have been executed, but there was no evidence against her and she was popular with the people. Elizabeth was kept a captive at the Tower for two months and then removed to Woodstock Manor in Oxfordshire, where she was kept a prisoner for a year. The house itself was uninhabitable so she had to be lodged in the gatehouse with her servants. It was only at the behest of the Queen's husband, Philip of Spain, that she was allowed to return to her childhood home of Hatfield in Hertfordshire. Philip was aware of the Queen's poor health and wanted to gain the friendship of Elizabeth to ensure peaceable relations between England and Spain should his wife die and Elizabeth succeed to the throne.

Elizabeth did finally succeed to the throne on 17th November 1558. It was a moment of supreme triumph for the unwanted daughter who had spent her life in the shadow of the court, cast aside and forgotten. The years following the death of her father had called for sobriety and caution, but now that she was Queen, Elizabeth was determined to enjoy her newfound freedom and live life to the full. She loved all kinds of sports, especially horse riding, and in the early years of her reign spent many an hour riding. She also loved hunting, hawking, bear baiting, and watching the male courtiers excel at jousts or other sporting contests. She loved music and dancing, pageantry and masques, and could even play the virginals and the lute herself with skill. She had no time for the Puritan theologians who deemed such things impious. She also loved watching plays and created the atmosphere responsible for the flourishing of the literary masterpieces of the period against the Puritan demands for the closure of all theatres and playhouses.

Now that Elizabeth was Queen, proposals of marriage flooded in, but Elizabeth committed herself to none of them. In a genius of political wheeling and dealing, she managed to use her single state to benefit the country by using the bait of marriage to draw in enemies, or to frighten them by suggesting she would marry one of their foes. Whatever Elizabeth's personal feelings towards marriage, on two occasions she did come close to matrimony. For many years, the most serious contender for her hand was Robert Dudley, created Earl of Leicester in 1564. He and Elizabeth had known each other for years and had been imprisoned in the Tower of London at the same time. He was the only serious personal love interest of the Queen's life. Politically, however, marrying him would have been a disaster. He was unpopular as he was the son of the traitor Northumberland, and was loathed even more after his wife was found dead in mysterious circumstances. It was thought he had murdered her so he would be free to marry Elizabeth. The other serious contender for the Queen's hand was Francis, Duke of Alencon/Anjou, heir to the French throne. But again, political considerations made the match ultimately impossible.

Not marrying and having a child of her own meant that the succession was unsettled. Elizabeth did not like to talk about the succession and tried to have talk of it suppressed, but people were anxious about what would happen to the country when she died. However, having a child of her own may not have been an end to all problems. In the eyes of Catholics, Elizabeth was illegitimate and had no right to the throne. To them, Mary, Queen of Scots was the rightful Queen of England. Plots were made to make Mary queen and these would have been formed regardless of whether Elizabeth had a child or not. This is perhaps especially so when Mary was Elizabeth's prisoner following her disastrous reign in Scotland.

Forced to flee her own country, having abdicated her throne in favor of her son, Mary landed in England, seeking Elizabeth's help in restoring her to her kingdom. She was immediately imprisoned. 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 Mary's complicity in the Babington plot of 1586 made the execution, in the eyes of many, unavoidable. It was a traumatic time for Elizabeth, and for a while it seemed that she would not have the strength to go ahead with the execution, but she did, and Mary was executed at Fotheringay Castle on 8 February 1587.

Relations between Elizabeth and Philip, now King of Spain, had begun amicably, but had deteriorated over the years as their different political and religious agendas clashed. By 1588 they were enemies of the first rate. Philip had spoken of invading England and dethroning Elizabeth for years but the execution of the Queen of Scots gave him an added incentive. Now he could claim the English throne for himself and not for her. In the summer of 1588 he sent his mighty fleet against England. But by superior tactics, ship design, and sheer good fortune, the English defeated them. Elizabeth's popularity reached its zenith. It was also another personal triumph as she had proved that she, a woman, could lead in war as well as any man.

*http://www.elizabethi.org/uk/biography.html*

***Historical Context***

In the sixteenth century, the western world centered on Europe. America had only recently been discovered and was a land for adventurers and explorers to conquer and discover and bring back to Europe all kinds of wonders such as potatoes and tobacco. It was not a developed country architecturally or economically. The most important person in Europe was arguably the Pope who resided then, as now, in the Vatican at Rome. Roman Catholicism was still the dominant European religion and the Pope, as its head, wielded enormous power in Roman Catholic countries. Even in non-Roman Catholic countries such as England, the Pope had a great influence amongst those still adhering to the Roman Catholic faith.

The most powerful ruler, however, was Philip II of Spain. His father, Charles, had been one of the most powerful men ever to have lived in Europe. Not only was he King of Spain, but also governor of the Netherlands and Holy Roman Emperor, a very prestigious title indeed. Philip inherited the throne of Spain as well as the Netherlands, was King of Portugal for a while, and owned lands in the Americas that were a source of great wealth. Unlike his father, Philip made Spain his central home and under his rule, Spain was at the height of its influence and recognized as the most powerful country in Europe, if not the world.

However, relations between Philip and his neighbors were poor. He was constantly in conflict with France, mismanaged the government of the Netherlands to the extent that there was open rebellion and eventual war there, and he came into conflict with Elizabeth. The powers of Europe were wary of Philip and Queen Elizabeth in particular tried to keep in check his wealth, and the potential threat Catholic Spain posed to Protestant England, by discretely authorizing her sailors to pirate his ships as they came from America. William Cecil, the Queen's chief minister, did not approve of this, so Elizabeth tried to keep knowledge of what was going on from him. Capturing a Spanish ship laden with treasure improved her finances while depleting Philip's, hopefully stalling his often-threatened invasion of England, his so called "Enterprise of England."

England and Spain were officially at war in 1585 after years of underhanded conflict, and the war lasted until the Queen's death. Philip died in 1598, but his son, Philip III, continued the war, even though he did so half-heartedly. He saw the conflict between Elizabeth and Philip as just that, a clash of personalities, and in many ways, perhaps that was the case.

France experienced a troubled time during the reign of Elizabeth. In 1559 it seemed that France was on the verge of rivaling Spain as the dominant power. When Henri II died in a jousting accident, his son, Francis, became King. He was the husband of the young Mary, already Queen of Scots. Thus Mary was Queen of Scotland *and* of France. This was a considerable danger to Queen Elizabeth. Mary claimed to be Queen of England, and England was vulnerable to an attack/invasion from both France and Scotland. However, this never happened as Scotland itself was a troubled land. Mary's mother, Mary of Guise, was regent of Scotland in Mary's absence, and she faced considerable opposition to her regency from the Protestant lords of the land. The French also had internal conflicts of their own that did not allow them to invest their resources into an invasion of England.

Francis died not long after becoming king and Mary was once again only Queen of Scotland. Her mother in law, Catherine de Medici, was hostile to her and Mary returned to Scotland. The French "wars of religion" plagued the country in the last half of the sixteenth century. France was officially Catholic, but there were many Protestants in the country that wanted the freedom to worship their own way, called Huguenots. The conflict resulted in a brutal massacre of Huguenots in 1572, the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve. It was said that six thousand or more men, women, and children, were butchered to death on the streets of Paris until the roads ran with their blood. This act of brutality sent shock waves throughout Europe and Queen Elizabeth cancelled negotiations for the hand of King Charles's brother, Francis, Duke of Alencon.

However, despite the internal conflict in France, both France and England wished to foster an alliance to protect them from the might of Spain. When the horror of the massacre began to recede into history, negotiations were again made for Francis's hand. He was considered the most suitable candidate for Elizabeth's hand, despite being young enough to be her son, as he was known to have Protestant sympathies. When he became next in line to the throne following the death of his brother, Charles, and the accession of Henri III, the marriage became even more appealing. But there was much opposition to the Queen marrying a French Catholic in England, and, perhaps for political reasons, the marriage never went ahead. France experienced more trouble with the death of Henri III. Francis was dead having died of a fever, and there was no direct heir. Henri of Navarre was recognized by many to be the rightful King, but he was a Protestant. French Catholics set up a counter King and it was only by becoming a Catholic, deeming "Paris to be worth a mass,” that Henri was finally accepted as King Henri IV of France. He was assassinated in 1609.

The Scandinavian countries were monarchies, Sweden and Denmark having their own sovereign. Norway was under the rule of the Danish. Sweden was a Protestant country and so in a tacit form of alliance with England, but it was not a particularly wealthy country. King Eric of Sweden hoped to marry Queen Elizabeth for some years, but his suit was unsuccessful.

Hungary and Poland were larger than they are today and were on the edge of the Turkish states belonging to the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans were a considerable threat to Christian Europe (Christendom) and Philip II, who also governed Poland, put much effort into fighting them. For a century they had taken land after land and added it to their vast empire, but their strength was beginning to ebb as their internal government was slowly eaten by corruption. The Battle of Lepanto in 1571 was a turning point in European history, for after the defeat of the Ottomans by Philip, they never again posed such a threat to Christendom.

Russia was ruled by a Tsar and did not play a great part in the history of Elizabeth's reign. However, Elizabeth was on good terms with Ivan IV, "The Terrible". The Queen even once sent the Tsarina her own doctor.

The centre of European trade was Antwerp (in the Netherlands). However, with the outbreak of the rebellion against Philip II, the centre of trade slowly began to move to London. Many Protestant from the Netherlands fled to England during Elizabeth's reign and brought with them craftsmanship skills that the English could learn.

*http://www.elizabethi.org/uk/europe/*

Reading Questions

***Biography***

1. What is the reign of Elizabeth I often referred to in English history?

2. How many languages could Elizabeth speak?

3. Why was Elizabeth implicated in the plot to kidnap the “Boy King?”

4. What were Elizabeth’s interactions with her stepmother’s new husband like?

5. Why did Queen Mary’s husband, Philip of Spain, eventually allow Elizabeth to return to her childhood home after she had been sent away? (In other words, what were his motives?)

6. How old was Elizabeth when she became Queen?

7. What were some activities that Elizabeth enjoyed doing?

8. How did Elizabeth use the “bait of marriage” to her advantage?

9. Who were the two people Elizabeth came closest to marrying?

10. Who was Mary, Queen of Scots and what eventually happened to her?

***Historical Context***

11. Who was the most important person in Europe during this time?

12. Who was the most powerful ruler in Europe during this time? Where was he/she from?

13. What made Mary, Queen of Scots quite a threat to Elizabeth’s rule in England?

14. What was the St. Bartholomew’s Massacre? Explain.

15. What type of government prevailed in the Scandinavian countries?

16. What was happening to the Ottoman Empire? Explain.

17. Who ruled Russia?

18. Where was the center of trade in Europe?