

Henry VIII and his Six Wives

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Introduction

This ungraded summary is for the teacher's use only and should not be given to students.

The story

Henry VIII and his Six Wives is the story of one of the most famous kings of England and the six women that he married. After King Henry's death, his last wife Catherine Parr finds a box of letters, one from each of Henry's other wives. She reads the letters with her young maid Margaret, telling her the fascinating story of all the different women.

Henry's first wife was the Spanish Katherine of Aragon. She was married to King Henry for twenty-four years but he divorced her because she only had one daughter, Mary. Henry needed a male heir who could become a strong king of England after him.

Henry then married the beautiful Anne Boleyn, but again she only had a baby daughter, Elizabeth. After only three and a half years of marriage Anne was accused of having lovers and Henry had her beheaded.

Henry's next wife, the sensitive Jane Seymour, gave Henry his longed-for son, Edward. However, Jane died in childbirth leaving Henry devastated at the loss of a woman who he really loved.

After seeing Holbein's picture of Anne of Cleves Henry agreed to marry Anne. However, when she came to England, he found her very ugly so divorced her six months later.

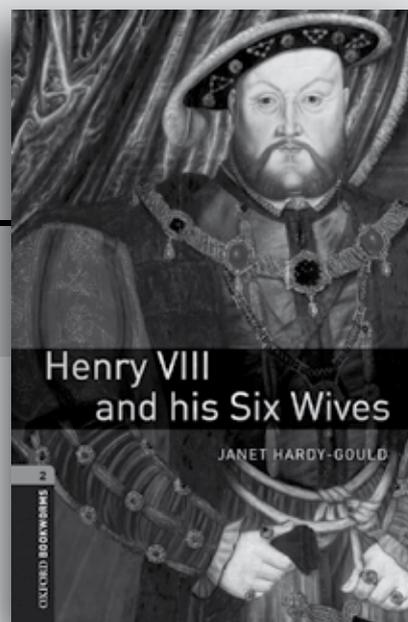
An eighteen-year-old girl called Katherine Howard became Henry's next wife. The King was now forty-nine years old and very fat. Katherine foolishly took lovers while married to Henry. He found out and she was immediately beheaded.

Henry's last wife, Catherine Parr, was a kind and gentle woman who cared for him in his old age. She survived him and helped to look after his three children, Mary, Elizabeth and Edward. Edward became King at the age of nine.

Background to the story

Henry VIII was born in 1491, the second son of Henry VII. He became King of England after the death of his brother Arthur in 1509. Henry died in 1547 at the age of fifty-five.

As a young man Henry was tall, good-looking and very athletic. He spoke several languages, played



various musical instruments and was good at a number of different sports including hunting. He was also very keen on chasing women. However, as the years passed he grew very fat, ugly and ill. During his forties Henry's face became almost unrecognisable and he could hardly walk. He was increasingly cruel and by the end of his reign he had been responsible for the deaths of at least fifty thousand people.

Henry holds the marrying record of all the English kings. His first three marriages were for love, but he also desperately wanted to have a male heir to the throne. At this time it was considered essential to have a king to ensure strong government.

It was Henry's search for a male heir that led to his break with the Roman Catholic Church. After many years of marriage, Henry's first wife Katherine of Aragon hadn't given Henry a living son so he decided to divorce her and marry again. However, the Pope refused to give Henry a divorce and the King decided to break with the Church in Rome and become Supreme Head of the Church of England himself. This was the beginning of the Church of England.

Before reading

Here are some ways to help your students approach the story:

- 1 Give students the title of the book and show them the picture on the cover. Ask them to try and guess what kind of story it is.
- 2 Ask the students to read the text on the back cover of the book, and the story introduction on the first page. Then ask them a few questions about the story, or use the Before Reading Activities in the back of each Bookworm.
- 3 Use the pre-reading activity in this worksheet.
- 4 If there is a recording of this title, play the first few pages and stop at an interesting point.

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Pre-reading activity

Word search

P	T	N	E	C	K	L	A	C	E	Q	D
A	F	J	V	H	W	N	D	I	V	S	I
L	R	K	T	U	M	E	P	T	A	J	V
A	E	I	C	R	Q	Y	Z	X	F	W	O
C	J	W	S	C	V	H	S	H	F	X	R
E	D	B	E	H	E	A	D	E	D	W	C
T	W	K	N	D	L	N	T	H	B	C	E
K	I	N	G	O	P	D	S	N	E	O	C
I	V	M	L	F	J	S	W	O	R	D	H
K	E	W	A	Z	R	O	M	B	Y	G	Q
F	S	O	N	P	S	M	A	R	R	Y	P
X	A	P	D	L	N	E	S	F	W	T	V

To the teacher

Aim: To introduce key vocabulary

Time: 20–25 minutes

Organization: Show the students the cover of the book and tell them they are going to read it. Give one copy of the word search to each student or put the word search on an overhead projector. Give the students between 5–10 minutes to find as many words as possible. There are twelve words, all from the book: *beheaded, Church, divorce, England,*

handsome, king, marry, necklace, palace, son, sword, wives. Ask the students to say how these words might be associated with Henry VIII. For example Henry was King of England. One of his wives was beheaded. Do not focus on correct or incorrect answers at this stage. Tell them they will find out how the words are associated with Henry when they read the book. Generate as much discussion as possible.

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While reading activity

Spot the mistakes

One of Margaret's friends has helped her to write a letter to her mother in Somerset. She has made some mistakes. Can you find them? The first one has been done for you and there are twelve others for you to find and correct.

Dear Mother

I'm really enjoying my new job in London. My lady ^{*Catherine Parr*} ~~Katherine of Aragon~~ is very kind and helpful.

Yesterday, something very interesting happened. We went to Buckingham Palace where King Henry lived and we found a bag of letters from each of Henry's children!

I learnt so many new things. I didn't know that Henry had seven different wives and that two of them Anne and Jane were beheaded at the Tower of London. Poor Henry's fourth wife, Maria of Cleves, was so ugly that he put her in prison!

The poor King really wanted a daughter but his first two wives Katherine of Aragon and Mary Boleyn only gave him sons.

We saw a painting of Henry when he was a young man. I don't know why his first wife married him! He looked really short and ugly in the picture.

I will write to you again soon and tell you all about my exciting new life in London.

Lots of love

Margaret

To the teacher

Where: At the end of Chapter 1

Aim: To help with summarizing and revision of reading

Time: 20 minutes

Organization: Give each student, or pair of students, a copy of the summary and ask them to write in their corrections. This activity includes a letter from Catherine Parr's maid, Margaret, to her mother. There are twelve mistakes (not including the example) about facts established in Chapter 1. Go through the answers as a class and elicit any other information they can remember from the first chapter. At the end

of some of the following chapters students could write their own letters from Margaret summarizing what she has learnt up to that point.

Key: Buckingham Palace – *Whitehall Palace*; bag of letters – *box of letters*; children – *wives*; seven different wives – *six different wives*; Anne and Jane – *Anne and Katherine (Howard)*; Maria of Cleves – *Anne of Cleves*; put her in prison – *divorced her*; daughter – *son*; Mary Boleyn – *Anne Boleyn*; sons – *daughters*; short – *tall*; ugly – *handsome*

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After reading activity

Matching words and phrases with each of the six wives

Katherine of Aragon	
Anne Boleyn	
Jane Seymour	
Anne of Cleves	
Katherine Howard	
Catherine Parr	

Put these words or phrases next to the most appropriate wife.

a painting by Holbein

Spain

red and gold flowers

a sword

a son

lovers

twenty-four years

German

a witch

Princess Mary

a piece of hair

Margaret

Princess Elizabeth

a gold cross

couldn't speak English

eighteen years old

died after twelve days

a nurse for Henry

To the teacher

Aim: To focus student's attention back on the characters

Time: 15 minutes

Organization: Give each student or group of students a copy of the chart. Ask them to identify which word or phrase goes with each wife. Go

through the answers as a class and then ask students to say in their own words how the words or phrases fit into the story. For example, *Henry's artist Holbein painted a picture of Anne of Cleves. In the picture Anne looked very beautiful but when Henry met her, he thought she was very ugly.*