Mary, Queen of Scots

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Introduction

The story
Mary, now in prison in England, tells the story of her life in a letter to her son, King James of Scotland. She has not seen him since he was ten months old.

Mary became Queen of Scots when she was a baby. She spent much of her childhood in France and married the French king. This made her queen of both France and Scotland at a young age. However, her husband soon died and she returned to Scotland. As a Catholic she was not popular with the many Protestants in Scotland.

At twenty-three she married her cousin, Henry Darnley. He was a lazy, drunken man who didn’t like the hard work of a king. Mary became friendly with an Italian, David Riccio. One night, the jealous Darnley and his friends killed Riccio.

Mary became pregnant and she left Edinburgh with Darnley because the Scots lords wanted to take her future child and make him king. They soon returned with the help of the powerful Lord Bothwell. Mary ruled for a short time in Edinburgh and her son James was born.

Bothwell became close to Mary and helped her. One night Darnley was killed in a house outside Edinburgh. Many people thought Bothwell had done this.

A few months later Bothwell asked Mary to marry him. Mary refused at first, but agreed when Bothwell kidnapped her with his army. However, this marriage was unpopular with the Scots lords, and Mary was imprisoned in a castle. She agreed that her half-brother could rule the country until James was old enough to be king.

Mary escaped, but lost the fight to become queen again. She went to England hoping to get help from Queen Elizabeth, but was put in prison for twenty years. The Protestant Queen Elizabeth saw the Catholic Queen Mary as a danger and Mary was executed in 1587.

Background to the story
Mary was the daughter of King James V of Scotland and the French Mary of Guise. She was a direct descendant of Henry VII of England and therefore had a strong claim on the English throne. Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, had divorced his first wife to marry Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's mother. The Pope didn't recognize this divorce and so many Catholics believed that Elizabeth was an illegitimate child and not a true queen.

Religion. The sixteenth century was a time of great religious change. In Northern Europe a large number of people began to reject the teachings of the Roman Catholic church and the authority of the Pope in Rome. These people were called Protestants. Elizabeth was a Protestant as were many of the people in Scotland at this time, under the leadership of John Knox. Mary Queen of Scots was a Catholic and became the symbol of hope for many English Catholics.

Scotland. At this time Scotland was still a separate country from England with its own king or queen. It was a dangerous and divided place with a small population, most of whom were very poor. The Scots lords often fought amongst themselves in order to gain more power. Violence and fighting were very common throughout the country. It was also a very difficult time for a woman to rule on her own as queen, and some people thought that Scotland should have a king.

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 the story it is.
2. Give students a copy of the text on the back cover of the book, and of the story introduction on the first page. When they have read the texts, 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.
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Pre-reading activity

Prediction

England and Scotland in the 1500s. Two famous queens – Mary, the Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I, the Protestant Queen of England. It was an exciting and a dangerous time to be alive, and to be a queen. Mary was Queen of Scotland when she was one week old. At sixteen, she was also Queen of France. She was tall and beautiful, with red-gold hair. Many men loved her and died for her. But she also had many enemies – men who said: ‘The death of Mary is the life of Elizabeth.’

True or False?

Look at the picture on the right of Mary Queen of Scots. Do you think these sentences are true or false? Why? Discuss with your partner.

a Mary Queen of Scots lived 100 years ago.
b Mary never got married.
c Mary was a Catholic.
d Mary had a quiet life.
e Mary was good-looking.

Which words do you think will appear in the story? Why?

horse army newspaper castle president marry elephant
fight telephone blood king America car France

To the teacher

Aim: To encourage students to predict the content of the story and to introduce key vocabulary
Time: 30 minutes
Organization: Give out the worksheet. Students can then decide as a class the most probable answers to the questions. Once they have done this, check understanding of the words in the list and ask the students which words they think they will find in the book and why. They can do this as a class or in pairs.

Key 1: af; bf; {although we can’t tell exactly from the back cover} cT, df, eT.

Key 2: Students could justify any choice of words. The words that appear in the book are: horse, army, fight, castle, blood, king, marry, France.
Mary was Queen of England when she was ten years old. At first she lived in Scotland with her English mother but when she was twelve she went to Spain and married the King. The King died and Mary returned to Scotland at the age of thirty. When she first walked off the ship in Scotland there were hundreds of people to meet her. Many of the people in Scotland were Catholics and they were very happy when Mary went to a Protestant church on Sunday. A Protestant man called John Knox came to see Mary. He was a quiet man with black clothes. He liked Mary a lot and wanted to marry her.
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After reading activity

Who died, where and how?

1  Mary Queen of Scots
   Where did she die? ...........................................................................................................................
   How did she die? ..............................................................................................................................
   What was she doing before or when she died? ......................................................................................
   Why do you think she was killed? ........................................................................................................

2  David Riccio
   Where did he die? ..............................................................................................................................
   How did he die? .................................................................................................................................
   What was he doing before or when he died? ........................................................................................
   Why do you think he was killed? ........................................................................................................

3  Henry Darnley
   Where did he die? ..............................................................................................................................
   How did he die? .................................................................................................................................
   What was he doing before or when he died? ........................................................................................
   Why do you think he was killed? ........................................................................................................

Where: A castle in Scotland, the house of Kirk o’Field, Fotheringhay Castle in England.

How: Killed with a knife, executed with an axe, blown up in a house.

What they were doing: Eating dinner with Mary, wearing night clothes, wearing a red petticoat, lying outside in the garden, holding a little dog, screaming for two or three minutes.

To the teacher

Aim: To focus students’ attention back on the characters and their deaths
Time: 20 minutes
Organization: Give each student a worksheet.

Ask them to identify where each person died, how they died and what they were doing before or when they died. The final discussion question could be done in pairs or as a class.