

# Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots



Additional material

Our lesson slides contain the visual elements, such as historical images or timelines, associated with rich explanations. This document provides the verbal explanation that accompanies these visual elements - otherwise known as a narrative. The narrative and slides are matched via this icon

## Who was Mary, Queen of Scots?



How different would history have been if one family had ruled all of England, Scotland and France? Under Mary, Queen of Scots, this was almost possible... In reality, however, Mary died a criminal without a kingdom, without any close family to comfort her, and by having her head savagely hacked from her shoulders. How did one of the most respected women in Europe meet such a tragic end?

Mary Stuart was born on 8th December 1542 and became Queen of Scotland just six days later, when her father, James V, suddenly died. Although she was Queen of Scotland, for her own protection she grew up with her family in France from the age of five years old, so knew little of the country she ruled. This was because she was a Catholic, and Scotland was experiencing its own Reformation. She knew a great deal of France though and was well-loved by nobles and royalty in the French court. Mary was tall, beautiful, intelligent, and charming. She was married at the age of 15 to the heir to the French throne; at the age of 16 she became Queen of France when her father-in-law died in a jousting accident. Being the great-grand-daughter of Henry VII meant that Mary also had a strong claim to the throne of England, and was next in line to be Queen after her cousin, Elizabeth I. Many Catholics regarded Mary as the rightful ruler of England after Mary I, as Elizabeth, in their eyes, was the daughter of an illegal marriage between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. All of this made Mary a dangerous rival to Elizabeth.



## Why did Mary come to England?



In 1559, when Mary was 16, her future looked incredibly bright: Queen of Scotland, Queen of France, and heir to the throne of England. By the time she was 17 however, things had taken a significant turn for the worse. Her husband, King Francis II, died of an ear infection. Her mother, Mary of Guise, who had been ruling Scotland for the young Mary whilst she was in France, also died. Scotland itself changed from a Catholic country to a strict **Presbyterian** country, under the leadership of John Knox, leaving the Catholic Mary in an awkward position when she returned to her country of birth the following year in 1561. Mary married again, to her cousin, Lord Darnley, in 1565, which only strengthened her claim to the English throne as Darnley himself was related to the royal family. Although they did have a son who became king James VI of Scotland, their marriage was not a happy one. The marriage ended when Darnley was murdered in suspicious circumstances in 1567, which were made worse when Mary then married the prime suspect of her second husband's murder, Lord Bothwell! The marriage outraged the Scottish people and many Scottish lords rose up in rebellion. Mary and Bothwell were defeated on the battlefield by the Scottish lords and Mary was imprisoned for nearly a year on a remote island in the middle of a lake, before managing to escape. After another failed attempt to defeat the rebellious Scottish lords, Mary fled to England in 1568, hoping that her cousin Elizabeth I would help restore her to the Scottish throne.

## The imprisonment of Mary



Mary thought she would be safe in England. England and Scotland were on fairly good terms and her cousin, Elizabeth I, was in control and understood first-hand the problems that a female ruler had to face. From Elizabeth's perspective, however, the arrival of Mary was a potential disaster. Elizabeth wasn't entirely sure that she could trust her



Catholic subjects, and the arrival of the Catholic Scottish Queen, who many saw as the rightful English Queen, could have led to rebellion.

Elizabeth had several options for how to deal with her cousin Mary. She could send her back to Scotland, which would make the Protestant Scottish lords happy, but would mean that she would have helped to put her own cousin back in prison or potentially **executed**. If Mary escaped imprisonment again, she wouldn't be happy with Elizabeth and might try to start a war against her. Elizabeth could have sent her to her family in France, but here she would have been free to act against Elizabeth, and might have convinced France to go to war against England. She could imprison Mary to keep her from causing trouble, but Mary hadn't actually committed any crimes in England and doing so would have made her a **figurehead** for Catholic rebels. Or she could have Mary **executed** to guarantee that she wouldn't cause any trouble, but this would have angered a lot of other monarchs and might have led to war. Any decision Elizabeth made could have drastic consequences ...

## The execution of Mary



Elizabeth reluctantly chose to imprison Mary. As she had not committed any crimes in England, was not one of Elizabeth's subjects and was a royal and a member of Elizabeth's own family, Mary was imprisoned in relatively comfortable conditions. She had over 50 servants and had 16-course meals served to her four times a day! Despite this, the problems that Elizabeth had feared Mary would bring did come about. In 1569, there was a rebellion in the north which aimed to replace Elizabeth with Mary and make England a Catholic country again. The Northern Rebellion was put down fairly easily, but more trouble was to come ...

In 1571, a **plot** was uncovered to replace Elizabeth with Mary, as well as another in 1583. Each of these **plots** were squashed before they ever had a chance of succeeding, and there was no proof that Mary herself had any knowledge of them. However, Mary had



become a **figurehead** for Catholic rebels, and that by itself made her dangerous. Not trusting that she was innocent of these **plots**, Elizabeth had Mary placed in less comfortable living conditions. In 1586, another plot known as the Babington Plot, was uncovered, but crucially this time Elizabeth's **spymaster**, Sir Francis Walsingham, had proof that Mary was planning it. Mary was put on trial, found guilty and sentenced to **execution**. The **execution** took place in February 1587 in Fotheringhay Castle in Northamptonshire and was a sad end for the once-proud Mary. The executioner needed three blows of the axe to chop off Mary's head, and when he held it up to show people she was dead he picked it up by her wig and could only watch as her head dropped to the ground!

The **execution** of one monarch by another monarch shocked people across Europe. Elizabeth herself also appeared shocked, and claimed that her government acted without her orders in **executing** Mary. This may not have been entirely true, as Elizabeth might have wanted to appear innocent so that other countries wouldn't declare war. If it was just an act it was not successful, however, as the next year Catholic Spain, the most powerful country in Europe, sent an invasion force to remove Elizabeth from the throne, partly because the Spanish king was angry over Mary's execution. Even when dead, Mary, Queen of Scots, was causing Elizabeth problems.

