



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

## How did Elizabeth present herself?



Elizabeth I had a very clear understanding of the importance of image. Throughout her reign, she kept very tight control over how she was depicted. Elizabeth's portraits often contained symbols to represent a particular message that she wanted to convey to her subjects: for example, Elizabeth was often depicted wearing pearls, which were a symbol of her virginity, and a reminder to her people that she was the Virgin Queen. In this period, many people believed that your outer appearance reflected your inner personality, so a queen who was beautiful was a queen who was a good person. In her later years, Elizabeth didn't want to be thought of as old or ugly, so she had herself painted as young and beautiful.

Elizabeth also used speeches to present herself in a particular way. A good example of this is her 'Golden Speech' in 1601: members of Parliament had gathered together and were furious about Elizabeth's use of monopolies. They had planned to force her to stop giving them out. Instead, Elizabeth delivered a rousing speech which completely won the members of Parliament over and made them forget about their concerns. She was able to use speeches like this to increase support for her reign.

Elizabeth's final main method of presenting herself was through royal progresses. 'Progress' was the term given to the journeys that Elizabeth and her court made from one stately home to another. These were a way of rewarding the rich and powerful but they were also a way for Elizabeth to be seen by the public. Elizabeth travelled slowly and wore her finest outfits, presenting an almost god-like appearance to people.

## How did others depict Elizabeth during her lifetime?



In 1579, a Puritan called John Stubbs wrote a pamphlet criticising the queen's prospective marriage to the French Catholic Duke of Anjou. His argument was that



Elizabeth should not marry a Catholic and she was too old to have children anyway. Stubbs made his argument forcibly and rudely, which infuriated the Queen. She wanted to have him executed, but in the end she showed mercy and only chopped off his right hand.

Not all critics were punished however, as some were very clever with their criticism. John Foxe wrote a book, commonly known as 'The Book of Martyrs', before Elizabeth became queen which criticised Mary I. Foxe was a Puritan and was quite upset that Elizabeth had not done more to remove Catholicism from England. He therefore rewrote his book to gently remind Elizabeth that she was queen only because God willed it, and she should do more to please God to thank him for his gift. Likewise, Edmund Spenser wrote an epic poem called 'The Faerie Queene' which on the surface could be viewed as full of praise for Elizabeth. In reality, it was gentle criticism for Elizabeth's unwillingness to execute her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots, who Spenser saw as the root of all the troubles in England at the time. Elizabeth almost certainly understood that these men were critical of her; however, she chose to reward them instead of punish them because their criticism was heavily wrapped in praise, and the praise made her look good.

## How has Elizabeth been depicted in later years?



By and large, the image that Elizabeth presented of herself is one that has stood the test of time. Elizabeth is regularly viewed by the general public as one of England's greatest rulers. In 1778 the philosopher and historian David Hume wrote a fairly balanced **interpretation** of Elizabeth, considering both her successes and failures, but came to the conclusion that she would almost certainly be viewed as England's best-loved ruler. In the present day, the historian John Guy wrote that Elizabeth was the most talented of the European rulers alive in her time.

However, not every historian has agreed with this view. In 1856, the historian James Froude wrote a critical account of Elizabeth, in which he claimed that William Cecil, Lord Burghley, was the real power behind the throne, and Elizabeth just messed everything up whenever she didn't do what he told her to. Criticism of Elizabeth is also alive today. The historian Christopher Haigh's **interpretation** of Elizabeth is that she should not be seen as a skilled queen, but merely a lucky queen who hated making decisions and so often didn't, which sometimes actually worked out quite well.

