

Option B4 Topic booklet



Early Elizabethan England, 1558–88

GCSE (9-1) History

Pearson Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in History (1HI0)

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1. Overview

Threats to the security of the country from home and abroad; differing views on religion; the education of young people; attitudes towards the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society. All these issues are matters which concern young people in Britain today, but they are not matters which have suddenly appeared in recent years. On the contrary, all of these were important features of early Elizabethan England in the years 1558–88. Students studying this option will thus have a general understanding of the issues involved, but will study them in a different historical context. They will investigate matters which include religious issues, especially the Catholic threat to Elizabeth's security, relations with Philip II of Spain, several social and economic issues, and England's changing relations with the wider world, including the first steps towards the creation of a seaborne empire.

It appeared unlikely to contemporaries that the third child of Henry VIII, daughter of Anne Boleyn, would ever succeed to the throne of England. It was the death of her brother at the age of 15, and of her elder sister at 42, which propelled the 25 year old Princess Elizabeth to the throne in 1558. Although she quickly gained the loyalty and the affection of most of her people, many regarded rule by a woman as contrary to the natural order.

Elizabeth inherited a country torn by religious division and decided the issue with her settlement of 1559, which attempted to steer a middle course in religion. She had to contend with a number of plots from leading Catholic nobles aimed at replacing the queen with the Catholic Mary Stuart.

Elizabeth's main concern abroad centred on relations with Spain and Philip II, the most powerful ruler in Europe, with political, religious and commercial rivalry leading to the Spanish Armada of 1588. The adventures of the privateers were one feature of a new era of exploration and discovery in late sixteenth-century Europe.

There were changes to the policies towards the poor, as well as to Tudor education and culture in this period, and cultural activities flourished in these years.

This topic includes many areas of study which should engage most students. There is considerable interplay and linkage between the three key topics in the specification, and students will gain an understanding of the complex forces which shaped society in a different historical period.

1.1 Assessment

This option is one of the Paper 2 depth study options, and students will answer Question 5 on the examination paper.

- Part (a) carries 4 marks, is compulsory and targets AO1. It focuses on describing features.
- Part (b) carries 12 marks, is compulsory and targets AO1/AO2. It focuses on causation.
- Part (c) carries 16 marks and allows students a choice of two questions: (i) or (ii). These target AO1/AO2 and require a judgement. They may focus on any of the following: similarity, difference, change, continuity, causation or consequence.

Detailed information and guidance on assessment can be found in the separate Getting Started guide.

2. Content guidance

2.1 Summary of content

The first key topic is concerned with queen, government and religion in the years 1558–69. Students should be aware of the main features of England in 1558 when Elizabeth came to the throne. They should understand that frequent, though unsuccessful, attempts throughout this period were made to persuade Elizabeth to take a husband and ensure the succession to the throne, and that Elizabeth resisted these demands.

Students should understand why religion was such an important feature of national life, and the reasons for the settlement of 1559. They should be aware of the divisions between Catholics, Protestants and Puritans, and the challenges they posed to Elizabeth. They should understand Mary Stuart's claim to the throne, and how Elizabeth dealt with Mary in the years 1568–69.

Key topic 2 deals with challenges to Elizabeth at home and abroad in the years 1569–88. Students should understand the nature of the threat to the queen posed by the different plots of 1569–86 and the role of her Chief Minister Walsingham and his large network of spies in neutralising them. They should recognise that the execution of Mary Stuart in 1587 ended the primary challenge to the queen's security. Students should be aware of Philip II's power – as King of Spain and also ruling over the Netherlands, England's most important trading partner – and that he wanted to restore England to Catholicism. They should be aware that Philip's empire in the Americas supplied Spain with phenomenal supplies of gold and silver, and that he was offended by the actions of English privateers such as Francis Drake, who frequently attacked Spanish gold and silver fleets with great success. They should understand how these factors, along with England's involvement in the Netherlands and the execution of Mary Stuart in 1587, led to the 'Enterprise of England', the Spanish Armada of 1588.

The third key topic 3 deals with Elizabethan society in the Age of Exploration, 1558–88. Students should be aware of the links between this topic and key topics 1 and 2. They should be aware of the nature of education in the home, schools and universities and the social groups involved. Students should be aware of the types of cultural activities, sports and pastimes that were popular in these years and their key features, for example a recognition that while theatres attracted large audiences drawn from all social classes, there was more social differentiation in sporting activities, as sports requiring equipment, such as tennis, remained a preserve of the rich, while the favoured pastime for young apprentices and villagers was football.

Students should understand the factors which caused the growth of poverty and unemployment and the different steps taken to tackle the problem, including the distinction between the 'deserving poor' and the 'undeserving poor'.

Finally, students should understand the technical developments which stimulated voyages of exploration and discovery, allowing for longer voyages in search of trade routes and land and the extent of their success. The attempts to establish colonies on the North American seaboard and the failure of Virginia should be covered.

Key terms

It may be useful at the start of the course to provide students with a list of key terms and concepts that they will need to be familiar with for this option. The list of terms below is not intended to be a comprehensive checklist, rather simply a useful starting point for teachers to produce their own list of terms that their students may not fully understand or have difficulty spelling.

2. Content guidance

Lords, Commons, Privy Council, legitimacy, vestments, clergy, ciphers, the slave trade, privateers/privateering, colonisation, enclosure, inflation, real wages, vagabondage, idle poor, deserving poor, navigation.

2. Content guidance

2.2 Content exemplification and mapping

This section provides additional guidance on the specification content. It should be remembered that the official specification is the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance. Any examples provided here do not constitute additional specification content.

| Key topic 1: Queen, government and religion, 1558–69 | | Exemplification |
|--|---|--|
| 1 | <p>The situation on Elizabeth's accession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elizabethan England in 1558: society and government. The Virgin Queen: the problem of her legitimacy, gender, marriage. Her character and strengths. Challenges at home and from abroad: the French threat, financial weaknesses. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population size: town and cities; the importance of London; the significance of the cloth and wool trade. The role in government of the monarch, Lords and Commons, and the Privy Council. Elizabeth's illegitimacy: contemporary views on gender and on the abilities of women. The importance of marriage in providing an heir and a male ruler. The queen's self-confidence as well as her indecisive nature: her deeply religious and intellectual character. The domestic problems caused by high taxation coupled with poor harvests. The threat from France. |
| 2 | <p>The 'settlement' of religion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious divisions in England in 1558. Elizabeth's religious Settlement (1559): its features and impact. The Church of England: its role in society. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catholics, Protestants and Puritans: their different religious beliefs and practices. The strength of their support in different parts of the country. The role of the Marian bishops in 1558–58: the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, 1559: reasons for maintaining some Catholic features in churches, such as candles, crosses and vestments. The important role of the Church in national government: its position within town and village life. The role of parish clergy. |

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| 3 Challenge to the religious settlement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature and extent of the Puritan challenge. • The nature and extent of the Catholic challenge, including the role of the nobility, Papacy and foreign powers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for the Puritan challenge and the forms it took: the significance of Puritan opposition to the 1559 religious settlement. • The state of Catholic England in 1558: Catholic influence in outlying areas, especially the north: the threat posed by the Catholic nobility. • Growing papal opposition to Elizabeth: the importance of the excommunication of 1570 [relates to plots and revolts in key topic 2]. • The political threat posed by the Catholic powers of France and Spain. |
| 4 The problem of Mary, Queen of Scots | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary, Queen of Scots: her claim to the English throne, her arrival in England in 1568. • Relations between Elizabeth and Mary, 1568–69. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significance of Mary's descent from Henry VIII's sister Margaret Tudor: support for Mary from Catholics in England. • The implications for Elizabeth of Mary's flight from Scotland in 1568. • Elizabeth's attitude to Mary and factors affecting their relations including, for example, the so-called 'Casket Letters' affair and the York Conference, 1569, which investigated possible wrongdoing by Mary. |

| Key topic 2: Challenges to Elizabeth at home and abroad, 1569–88 | | Exemplification |
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| 1 Plots and revolts at home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reasons for, and significance of, the Revolt of the Northern Earls, 1569–70. • The features and significance of the Ridolfi, Throckmorton and Babington plots. Walsingham and the use of spies. • The reasons for, and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength of Catholicism in the north: noble anger at the extension of Elizabeth's power in the region. Effects of the suppression of the revolt on the north. • Aim of each plot to overthrow Elizabeth and place the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots on the throne, and the nature and extent of the threat they posed. • Walsingham's efficient network of spies and informers. His methods, for example the use of ciphers in written |

2. Content guidance

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| | <p>significance of, Mary Queen of Scots' execution in 1587.</p> | <p>communications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary's involvement with conspiracies against Elizabeth, especially Babington's plot. Significance for Elizabeth of the execution of an anointed monarch. Philip II's plans for retaliation against England. |
| 2 Relations with Spain | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political and religious rivalry. • Commercial rivalry. The New World, privateering and the significance of the activities of Drake. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philip II's power as a European rival to England; his strong Catholicism: his opposition to the religious settlement of 1559. • Anglo-Spanish commercial rivalry, for example in the Netherlands. Growing English involvement in the New World: Drake's attacks on gold and silver fleets heading for Spain in the 1560s and 1570s. |
| 3 Outbreak of war with Spain, 1585–88 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English direct involvement in the Netherlands, 1585–88. The role of Robert Dudley. • Drake and the raid on Cadiz: 'Singeing the King of Spain's beard'. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of English trade with the Netherlands, especially Antwerp. Treaty of Nonsuch, 1585, aimed at preventing the collapse of the Dutch Revolt: Dudley's disastrous expedition of 1585. Role of the navy in supporting the Dutch. • Drake's role spying on Spanish naval activity. The destruction of Spanish ships and supplies in Cadiz harbour, 1587. Effect of the raid on Spain's preparations for the Armada. |
| 4 The Armada | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spanish invasion plans. Reasons why Philip used the Spanish Armada. • The reasons for, and consequences of, the English victory. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philip's plans for the 'Enterprise of England'. The Armada's role in transporting Parma's army from the Netherlands to land in England. • The combination of factors accounting for English success, including superior technology and tactics (the use of fireships at Calais, for example) and the fate of the remnants of the Armada on the route around Britain and back to Spain. • The end of threats from Spain to Elizabeth's rule. The emergence of England as a strong naval power: the significance in 1588 for trade and exploration. |

| Key topic 3: Elizabethan society in the Age of Exploration, 1558–88 | | Exemplification |
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| 1 Education, and leisure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education in the home, schools and universities. • Sport, pastimes and the theatre. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature of education in home, schools and universities, including for example, the impact of the printing press. • The role of the parish school. • The significance of the growth of grammar schools. • The expansion of university education. • Popular sports and pastimes, including fishing, football, bear-baiting and cockfighting. • Aristocratic pastimes, for example fencing and bowls. The growing popularity of tennis. • The growing number and popularity of public theatres, especially in London. Theatres in Southwark. The acting companies. |
| 2 The problem of the poor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reasons for the increase in poverty and vagabondage during these years. • The changing attitudes and policies towards the poor. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term factors, for example rural enclosure, price inflation and the fall in the value of real wages, and the effects of a rising population. • Short-term factors: high levels of taxation: the effects of the bad harvests of the 1550s and 1560s. • The government's belief that growing poverty would lead to disorder and rebellion. Changing attitudes towards the poor, for example the aims and effects of the Vagabonds Act, 1572 and the Act for the Relief of the Poor, 1576; the distinction between the idle poor and the deserving poor. |
| 3 Exploration and voyages of discovery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors prompting exploration, including the impact of new technology on ships and sailing and the drive to expand trade. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New shipyards and the development of faster and more stable ships. • The development of new navigational aids, and the new science of transatlantic navigation. |

2. Content guidance

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reasons for, and significance of, Drake's circumnavigation of the globe. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to compete with European powers in acquiring overseas possessions. • Exploration to extend trade. • The growth of trade and the founding of trading companies such as the East India Company. • Drake's expedition against Spanish colonies, 1577. His reasons for crossing the Pacific. His return to England in 1580 with a huge amount of treasure. |
| 4 Raleigh and Virginia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significance of Raleigh and the attempted colonisation of Virginia. • Reasons for the failure of Virginia. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The granting of a patent to Raleigh to colonise Virginia, 1584. • The attempts to establish a permanent settlement on Roanoke Island, 1585–86 and 1587. The unexplained disappearance of the Lost Colonists. • The combination of factors accounting for failure, including inadequate planning of the colony, the provision of inadequate food supplies, and the failure to supply the second settlement thanks to the Spanish Armada. |

3. Student timeline

The timeline below could be given to students, and could be further edited and added to by them. Inclusion of dates and events in this timeline should not be taken as an indication that these are prescribed: the official specification and associated assessment guidance materials are the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance.

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| 1533 | Birth of Elizabeth to Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn |
| 1558 | Elizabeth accedes to the throne on the death of her sister, Mary Tudor |
| 1559 | The Elizabethan religious settlement: the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity |
| 1568 | Mary, Queen of Scots flees to England |
| 1569 | Revolt of the Northern Earls aims at placing Mary, Queen of Scots on the throne |
| 1570 | Pope Pius V excommunicates Elizabeth from the Catholic Church, declaring her deposed from the throne |
| 1571 | The Ridolfi Plot, the second major Catholic threat to Elizabeth |
| 1572 | Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds establishes harsh treatment of offenders |
| 1576 | Act for Setting the Poor to Work displays a more enlightened attitude towards poverty |
| 1577 | Drake begins his circumnavigation of the globe: the expedition lasts three years |
| 1583 | The Throckmorton Plot, a further Catholic plot against Elizabeth |
| 1585 | War begins between England and Spain |
| | Dudley's disastrous expedition to the Netherland |
| | All Catholic priests ordered to leave the country |
| 1586 | The Babington Plot. Ciphered letters prove that Mary, Queen of Scots was directly implicated in the plot |
| 1587 | Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots |
| | Drake's assault on the Spanish fleet in Cadiz harbour |
| 1588 | The Spanish Armada sent against England. The Spanish suffer serious losses at Calais, leading to the failure of the whole enterprise |

4. Resources

The tables below list a range of resources that could be used by students and teachers for this topic. Inclusion of resources in this list does not constitute endorsement of those materials. While these resources — and others — may be used to support teaching and learning, the official specification and associated assessment guidance materials are the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance. Links to third-party websites are controlled by others and are subject to change.

4.1 Resources for students

| Resource | Details |
|---|---|
| <i>Edexcel GCSE History (9-1) Early Elizabethan England, 1558–88</i> (Pearson, 2016) | New resources for this option in the new GCSE specification. |
| <i>Hodder GCSE History for Edexcel: Early Elizabethan England, 1558–88</i> (Hodder, 2016) | New resources for this option in the new GCSE specification. |
| Colette Roberts: <i>Elizabethan England Student Book</i> (Heinemann, 2009) | Textbook aimed at students working on the OCR Schools History Project GCSE examination. |
| Andy Harmsworth: <i>Elizabethan England: an SHP Depth Study</i> (Hodder 1999) | Textbook for the Schools History Project. |
| David Loades: <i>The Tudors for Dummies</i> (Wiley, 2011) | Part IV, 'Ending with Elizabeth', gives a useful overview of the whole of Elizabeth's reign. |
| The History of Parliament http://historyofparliamentonline.org/periods/tudors | Has some excellent material on Elizabeth, especially the religious settlement of 1559. Follow the links on the right-hand side under 'Articles'. |
| <i>Time Traveller's Guide to Elizabethan England</i> by Ian Mortimer (BBC2, 2013) | Useful for helping students get a sense of England in this period. |
| <i>The Armada: 12 Days to Save England</i> by Dan Snow (BBC2, 2015) www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05xc107 | Documentary on the Armada. The accompanying BBC website has clips and links to other useful articles. Clips can also be found on YouTube. |
| <i>Elizabeth</i> (1998) and <i>Elizabeth: The Golden Age</i> (2007) | Two films, the first based on the early years of Elizabeth's reign and the second covering the later part of her reign. Note that dramatic licence is used in both films. |

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| <p>BBC sites</p> <p>Elizabeth I: Troubled child to beloved Queen: www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/ztfxtfr</p> <p>Elizabeth I: www.bbc.co.uk/history/people/elizabeth_i</p> | <p>Two pages on Elizabeth I on the BBC website, with links to other useful pages and articles.</p> |
| <p>School History www.schoolhistory.co.uk</p> | <p>Several resources for KS3 study on the Making of the United Kingdom are very useful.</p> |

4.2 Resources for teachers

| Resource | Details |
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| Alison Weir, <i>Elizabeth the Queen</i> (Vintage, 2009) | Good introduction, and overview, on the years 1558–1603. |
| John Warren: <i>Elizabeth I, meeting the challenge</i> (Hodder, 2008) | Aimed at A Level students, and strongly focused on religion and foreign affairs. |
| Christopher Haigh: <i>Elizabeth I</i> (Routledge, 2013) | A popular and accessible text. |
| Derrick Murphy: <i>England, 1485–1603</i> (Harper Collins, 2013) | A Level textbook. Chapter 10 covers religious matters. Chapter 12 is very useful and detailed on social, economic and cultural matters. |
| Barbara Mervyn: <i>The reign of Elizabeth</i> (Hodder, 2001) | An A Level SHP text. Very detailed on all aspects of Elizabeth's reign. A number of exercises might be adapted for GCSE students. |
| Andy Harmsworth: <i>Elizabethan England Teacher's Book</i> (Hodder, 1999) | Now out of print and difficult to get hold of, but useful if old copies can be found. Published for the SHP course on Elizabethan England, it contains many invaluable lesson plans. |
| <i>Elizabeth I: Gender, Power and Politics</i> (History Today, May 2003) | Interesting article on how Elizabeth responded to the challenge of ruling in a men's world. Subscription required to access online. |
| <i>Poverty in Elizabethan England</i> (History Today, October 1984) | Good overview of government attitudes towards, and treatment of, the poor. Subscription required to access online. |
| History on the Net www.historyonthenet.com/tudors/tudorsmain.htm | Much useful content on social issues, including entertainment and the theatre. |
| Tudor History www.tudorhistory.org | Information on the Elizabeth I, daily life and entertainment etc., as well as links to other sites on Elizabethan England. |
| Elizabeth I www.elizabethi.org/ | Website dedicated to the life and reign of Elizabeth I. |
| National Portrait Gallery www.npg.org.uk | Website includes many portraits of Elizabeth. |