

**REFORMATION BRITAIN
- SIR THOMAS MORE:
LORD CHANCELLOR OF
THE REALM**



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Description

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas More and how his position on King Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church ultimately led to his arrest, trial and execution.

Subjects

European History
World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Chelsea Old Church
- Tower of London
- Chapel of St. Peter Ad Vincula
- Roper House, Canterbury
- Westminster Hall

Essential Questions

- Who was Thomas More? What was his relationship to King Henry VIII?
- Why did Henry VIII appoint Thomas More as Chancellor?
- Did Thomas More support Henry's decision to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon? Why or why not?
- What was the Act of Supremacy 1534? Why did Thomas More refuse to accept it?
- Why was Thomas More arrested and executed by Henry VIII?

Academic Summary

From the Act of Supremacy (1534)

Albeit the king's Majesty justly and rightfully is and ought to be the supreme head of the Church of England, and so is recognized by the clergy of this realm in their convocations, yet nevertheless, for corroboration and confirmation thereof, and for increase of virtue in Christ's religion within this realm of England, and to repress and extirpate all errors, heresies, and other enormities and abuses heretofore used in the same, be it enacted, by authority of this present Parliament, that the king, our sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England, called Anglicans Ecclesia; and shall have and enjoy, annexed and united to the imperial crown of this realm, as well the title and style thereof, as all honors, dignities, preeminences, jurisdictions, privileges, authorities, immunities, profits, and commodities to the said dignity of the supreme head of the same Church belonging and appertaining; and that our said sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall have full power and authority from time to time to visit, repress, redress, record, order, correct, restrain, and amend all such errors, heresies, abuses, offenses, contempts and enormities, whatsoever they be, which by any manner of spiritual authority or jurisdiction ought or may lawfully be reformed, repressed, ordered, redressed, corrected, restrained, or amended, most to the pleasure of Almighty God, the increase of virtue in Christ's religion, and for the conservation of the peace, unity, and tranquility of this realm; any usage, foreign land, foreign authority, prescription, or any other thing or things to the contrary hereof notwithstanding.

From the Trial of Sir Thomas More, 1535

As to the first article, charging me with having always maliciously opposed the King's second marriage, I will only answer that what I have said has been according to my conscience. I never wished to conceal the truth, and if I had, I should have been a traitor. For this error, if error it should be called, I have been condemned to perpetual imprisonment, which I have already suffered for fifteen months, and my goods confiscated. For this reason I will only reply to the principal charge against me, that I have incurred the penalty of the Statute made in the last Parliament since I was in prison, by refusing to the King his title of Supreme Head of the Church, in proof of which you allege my reply to the Secretary and Council, that as I was dead to the world, I did not care to think of such things, but only of the passion of Christ. I reply that your Statute cannot condemn me to death for such silence, for neither your Statute nor any laws in the world punish people except for words or deed, surely not for keeping silence." To this the King's proctor replied that such silence was a certain proof of malice intended against the Statute, especially as every faithful subject, on being questioned about the Statute, was obliged to answer categorically that the Statute was good and wholesome. "Surely," replied More, "if what the common law says is true, that he who is silent seems to consent, my silence should rather be taken as approval than contempt of your Statute. You say that all good subjects are obliged to reply; but I say that the faithful subject is more bound to his conscience and his soul than to anything else in the world, provided his conscience, like mine, does not raise scandal or sedition, and I assure you that I have never discovered what is in my conscience to any person living.

... Touching the third article, that when I was examined by the Council, I answered that your Statute was like a two-edged sword, for he who approved it would ruin his soul, and he who contradicted it, his body; and that the bishop of Rochester answered similarly, showing that we were confederates, I reply that I only answered thus conditionally, that if the Statute cut both ways like a two-edged sword, how could a man behave so as not to incur either danger? I do not know how the Bishop replied, but if he answered like me, it must have been from the agreement between us in opinion, but not because we had ever arranged it between us. Be assured I never did or said anything maliciously against the Statute, but it may be that this has been maliciously reported to the King.

... More then spoke as follows: "Since I am condemned, and God knows how, I wish to speak freely of your Statute, for the discharge of my conscience. For the seven years that I have studied the matter, I have not read in any approved doctor of the Church that a temporal lord could or ought to be head of the spirituality." The Chancellor interrupting him, said, "What, More, you wish to be considered wiser and of better conscience than all the bishops and nobles of the realm?" To this More replied, "My lord, for one bishop of your opinion I have a hundred saints of mine; and for one parliament of yours, and God knows of what kind, I have all the General Councils for 1,000 years, and for one kingdom I have France and all the kingdoms of Christendom." Norfolk told him that now his malice was clear. More replied, "What I say is necessary for discharge of my conscience and satisfaction of my soul, and to this I call God to witness, the sole Searcher of human hearts. I say further, that your Statute is ill made, because you have sworn never to do anything against the Church, which through all Christendom is one and undivided, and you have no authority, without the common consent of all Christians, to make a law or Act of Parliament or Council against the union of Christendom. I know well that the reason why you have condemned me is because I have never been willing to consent to the King's second marriage; but I hope in the divine goodness and mercy, that as St. Paul and St. Stephen whom he persecuted are now friends in Paradise, so we, though differing in this world, shall be united in perfect charity in the other. I pray God to protect the King and give him good counsel.

From The Life of Sir Thomas More (written in 1556)

By William Roper (More's Son In-law)

So remained Sir Thomas More in the Tower more than a sevendnight after his judgment. From whence the day before he suffered he sent his shirt of hair, not willing to have it seen, to my wife, his dearly beloved daughter, and a letter, written with a coal, contained in the foresaid book of his works, plainly expressing the fervent desire he had to suffer on the morrow in these words: "I cumber you, good Margaret, much, but I would be sorry if it should be any longer than to-morrow. For to-morrow is St. Thomas' even, and the Octave of St. Peter, and therefore to-morrow long I to go to God, that were a day very meet and convenient for me. And I never liked your manners better, than when you kissed me last. For I like when daughterly love, and dear charity hath no leisure to look to worldly courtesy." And so upon the next morning, being Tuesday, St. Thomas' even, and the Octave of St. Peter in the year of our Lord God 1537, according as he in his letter the day before had wished, early in the morning came to him Sir Thomas Pope, his singular friend, on message from the King and his Council, that he should before nine of the clock in the same morning suffer death, and that therefore forthwith he should prepare himself thereto. "Mr. Pope," saith he, "for your good tidings I most heartily thank you. I have been always bounden much to the King's Highness for the benefits and honors which he hath still from time to time most bountifully heaped upon me, and yet more bounden I am to his Grace for putting me into this place, where I have had convenient time and space to have remembrance of my end, and so help me God most of all, Mr. Pope, am I bound to his Highness, that it pleased him so shortly to rid me of the

miseries of this wretched world. And therefore will I not fail most earnestly to pray for his Grace both here, and also in another world." "The King's pleasure is further," quoth Mr. Pope, "that at your execution you shall not use many words." "Mr. Pope" (quoth he), "you do well that you give me warning of his Grace's pleasure. For otherwise, had I purposed at that time somewhat to have spoken, but of no matter wherewith his Grace, or any other should have had cause to be offended. Nevertheless, whatsoever I intend I am ready obediently to conform myself to his Grace's commandment. And I beseech you, good Mr. Pope, to be a mean unto his Highness, that my daughter Margaret may be present at my burial." "The King is well contented already" (quoth Mr. Pope) "that your wife, children, and other friends shall have free liberty to be present thereat." "O how much beholden," then said Sir Thomas More, "am I to his Grace, that unto my poor burial vouchsafeth to have so gracious consideration." Wherewithal Mr. Pope taking his leave of him could not refrain from weeping, which Sir Thomas More perceiving, comforted him in this wise, "Quiet yourself, good Mr. Pope, and be not discomfited. For I trust that we shall once in heaven see each other full merrily, where we shall be sure to live and love together in joyful bliss eternally." Upon whose departure Sir Thomas More, as one that had been invited to a solemn feast, changed himself into his best apparel; which Mr. Lieutenant espying, advised him to put it off, saying, That he that should have it was but a worthless fellow. "What Mr. Lieutenant" (quoth he), "shall I account him a worthless fellow, that will do me this day so singular a benefit? Nay, I assure you, were it cloth of gold I would account it well bestowed on him, as St. Cyprian did, who gave his executioner thirty pieces of gold." And albeit at length, through Mr. Lieutenant's persuasions he altered his apparel, yet, after the example of that holy martyr St. Cyprian, did he of that little money that was left him, send one angel of gold to his executioner. And so was he brought by Mr. Lieutenant out of the Tower, and from thence led towards the place of execution, where going up the scaffold, which was so weak that it was ready to fall, he said to Mr. Lieutenant, "I pray you, I pray you, Mr. Lieutenant, see me safe up, and for my coming down let me shift for myself." Then desired he all the people thereabouts to pray for him, and to bear witness with him, that he should then suffer death in and for the faith of the holy Catholic Church, which done he kneeled down, and after his prayers said, he turned to the executioner, and with a cheerful countenance spake unto him. "Pluck up thy spirits, man, and be not afraid to do thine office, my neck is very short. Take heed therefore thou shoot not awry for saving thine honesty." So passed Sir Thomas More out of this world to God upon the very same day in which himself had most desired.

The Execution of Thomas More (1535)

Account Written by Tudor Chronicler Edward Hall

This year also on 17 June was arraigned at Westminster in the king's bench John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, for treason against the king, and he was condemned there by a jury of knights and esquires (the lord chancellor sitting as high judge), who passed this sentence on him - that the said John Fisher should go from thence to the place where he came from, which was the Tower of London, and from thence to be drawn through the City of London to Tyburn, there to be hanged, cur down alive, his bowels taken out of his body and burnt before him, his head cut off, and his body be divided into four parts and his head and body be set in such places as the king should assign. The effect of the treason was denying the king to be Supreme Head of the Church of England, according to a statute, The Act of Supremacy, made in the last session of Parliament.

This year also on 1 July, being Thursday, Sir Thomas More, sometime chancellor of England, was arraigned at Westminster for high treason and there condemned, and the Tuesday after, being 6 July, he was beheaded at Tower Hill and his body was buried within the chapel in the Tower of London, and his head was set on London Bridge. The effect of his death was for the same cause that the bishop of Rochester died for.

On the morning of 06 July 1535, Sir Thomas More, former Lord Chancellor of the Realm and one of the greatest Renaissance humanists of the age, climbed the executioners platform at the Tower of London. He asked the crowd to pray for his friend, King Henry VIII and told the people assembled that he would pray for them in the next life. He then asked the royal officials present to tell their lord that "More had died a faithful servant to the king, but to God first." He then knelt down in prayer. When More was finished praying, he put his head on the block and stretched out his arms. The executioner's blade came down quickly administering the king's justice. With one stroke, Thomas More was gone.

Only a few years earlier, More's execution would have been unthinkable. He had been perhaps the closest advisor to King Henry VIII, a man the king could trust. A man whose principles were known to be beyond reproach, More was even known to disagree (from time to time) with Henry about politics and legal matters. Both men considered themselves to be children of the Renaissance and humanists to the core, so arguments over theoretical situations were common. Over time, More grew closer and closer to Henry. When Cardinal Woolsey, the chancellor (chief advisor) fell from the king's grace over Henry's desire to procure an annulment of his first marriage, the king turned the office over to his friend More.

The new chancellor was reluctant to accept his new office, but hesitantly did so as the king's humble servant. It would prove to be a fateful decision. More's legal integrity and skill was unchallenged, but so were his beliefs in the supremacy of the papacy and the Roman Catholic Church. At first, More used the chancellorship to go after what he deemed to be the heresies of the Reformation, but as the rift between his master and Pope Clement VII deepened, More was forced to choose between his religious beliefs and the reality of the situation in England. It was a choice that would ultimately doom the chancellor to the executioner's block.

In 1532, as the split deepened, More convinced the king to let him step down and to retire with the promise that the former chancellor would never speak ill of the monarch or the decision to break with Rome. Henry relented. It was only a temporary reprieve. More never believed that Henry's new marriage to Anne Boleyn was legal, although he did admit publicly that Parliament could make her queen. In Apr 1534, More was summoned before a legal commission to swear an oath of allegiance to the crown as the supreme head of the English church. He refused. Henry put him in prison for over a year, trying to soften More's stance, but to no avail. On 01 Jul 1535 More was tried and convicted for treason against the king. He spent the next few days in the Tower of London. Five days later, More was executed on Tower Hill.

More's body was buried at the Chapel of St. Peter Ad Vincula at the Tower (ironically, More's nemesis, Anne Boleyn, would meet a similar fate less than a year later and is buried in the same chapel). The chancellor's head was boiled, stuck on a pike and placed on London Bridge for a month. Reports say that More's daughter Meg was able to purchase the head before it was thrown into the river. Legend says that it was buried in the Roper family burial chamber in Canterbury.

Through an in-depth analysis of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas More and how his position on King Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church ultimately led to his arrest, trial and execution.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the story of Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas More and his place in England during the Reformation.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how More's positions on King Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how More's positions on Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church ultimately led to his arrest, trial and execution.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What is an annulment? Why might it be used? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Sir Thomas More (20 min)
- Video – excerpts from A Man for All Seasons (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the primary sources and articles on Sir Thomas More, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles as preparation for class discussion.
- Suggestion: AP / Advanced students should focus on primary sources full text.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: Sir Thomas More. (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the story of Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas More and his how his position on King Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church ultimately led to his arrest, trial and execution.

Extension

On tour: Tower of London (Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula)

While on tour, students visit the Tower of London, where both Anne Boleyn and Sir Thomas More were executed under orders from Henry VIII. Queen Boleyn is buried in the Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula. Her remains were positively identified in the 19th century. As for Sir Thomas More, his remains are a bit harder to trace. According to records from his execution, his headless body was put in the chapel at the Tower, but the head itself was parboiled and then placed on London Bridge for a month. According to multiple sources, Margaret Roper, More's daughter, then purchased her father's head and had it buried in the Roper family vault in Canterbury.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- <http://englishhistory.net/tudor/primore.html>
The last letter of Sir Thomas More, 1535 (primary source)
- <http://englishhistory.net/tudor/1535exec.html>
The executions of Fisher, More, etc., 1535 (primary source) – from the Tudor Chronicler Edward Hall
- www.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/16Croper-more.asp
William Roper: The Life of Sir Thomas More (primary source) – from the Modern History Sourcebook at Fordham University
- <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/more/more.html>
The Trial of Sir Thomas More (website) – from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Law School, this website contains primary and secondary sources on Thomas More's life, trial and execution. Highly recommended as a starting point for all classes.
- www.thomasmorestudies.org/
The Center for Thomas More Studies (website)
- www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/more_sir_thomas.shtml
Sir Thomas More (website) – from the BBC
- www.duhaime.org/LawMuseum/LawArticle-112/1535--The-Trial-of-Sir-Thomas-More.aspx
The Trial of Sir Thomas More, 1535 (web article)
- [http://sharepoint.chiles.leon.k12.fl.us/Winsetts/Lists/Announcements/Attachments/181/Sir%20Thomas%20More%20\(1478-1535\).ppt](http://sharepoint.chiles.leon.k12.fl.us/Winsetts/Lists/Announcements/Attachments/181/Sir%20Thomas%20More%20(1478-1535).ppt)
Sir Thomas More (PowerPoint) – from Sherri Winsett, English teacher at Lawton Chiles High School (FL)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- <http://gloria.tv/?media=83577>
A Man for All Seasons (video). This 90-minute video, an academy award winning film from 1966, is still the definitive work on Sir Thomas More. Although it is probably too long for most in-class showings, it is highly recommended for out-of-class viewing by students in preparation for this lesson plan.

Background Information

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_More
Thomas More – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Succession_Act
First Succession Act (1534) – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treasons_Act_1534
Treasons Act 1534 – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/the_united_kingdom/country_profile
On the Road: Britain (country profile) – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/sir-thomas-more
Reformation England – Sir Thomas More
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/english-reformation
Reformation England – An Overview
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/reformation-britain-pilgrimage-of-grace
Reformation England – Pilgrimage of Grace 1536-37
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/anne-of-cleves
Reformation England – Anne of Cleves: Henry's 4th Wife and Beloved Sister

Key Terms

- Anne Boleyn
- Arranged marriage
- Chancellor
- King Henry VIII
- Thomas More
- Treason

