



Henry VIII: medieval or modern?

In this section you have been studying how ideas were changing during the Renaissance and the Reformation. To sum it up you are going to look at one person, King Henry VIII, who ruled England at the end of this period. Were his ideas medieval – just like all the other kings you have studied in this book; or was he a modern man?

ACTIVITY

The best way to find out about someone's ideas and attitudes is to study their actions – what they do or don't do.

1 Work in groups and choose one of these topics.

- War
- Power
- Religion
- Caring for the people
- Science

2 Choose any cards on this spread that are useful for your topic. NB Some cards may be useful for more than one topic. Some topics have more cards than others.

3 Once you have gathered your evidence decide where Henry belongs on this scale:



Old, medieval ideas

New, modern ideas

4 Be ready to explain your reasons for positioning him where you did.

5 Once all the topics have been placed take a class vote: where would you put Henry on the scale?

a

He spent much effort (and a lot of English money) fighting wars against the old enemy France. He did not win!

b

One of his heroes was Henry V – the last English king to win great victories over France.

c

Unlike the King of Spain he did not send any English ships on expeditions to look for new trade routes or new countries.

d

When he first heard about Luther's Protestant ideas Henry wrote a book attacking the new ideas. He was given a title by the Pope: Defender of the Faith.

e

When the Pope would not give him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon he broke away from the Catholic Church, made himself King of England and gave himself a divorce.

f

He closed down all the monasteries – which were one of the most important ways that poor people got help.



g

When he did finally get a son he had him educated by Protestants because he thought they were the cleverest people with the most enquiring minds.

h

He took all the land from the monasteries and kept some of it himself to pay for his wars, but he gave the rest to his nobles to keep them happy and make sure they supported him.

i

When poor people protested against the closing of the monasteries he pretended to listen to them and promised he would do what they wanted but then he rounded up the leaders and had them executed.

j

He believed it was not the King's job to look after the poor. If God sent bad harvests that caused poor people to starve then that must be what God wanted to happen.



k

In 1515 Henry said 'By the laws of God, I am King of England and the Kings of England in times past have never had any superior but God alone.'

l

Henry did not think a woman could rule England. That was why he was so desperate to have a son to be king after him.

m

Henry ordered everyone in the country to be members of his new Church of England and to obey him as Head of the Church. Anyone who did not obey him was a traitor. Between 1534 and 1540, over 300 people were executed for refusing to agree to Henry's religious changes.

o

A report on Henry VIII by the Venetian ambassador, sent back to his country in 1515: 'This King is the handsomest prince I ever set eyes on. He is tall with extremely fine legs, his complexion fair with auburn hair combed short and straight. He plays music and sings well and draws a bow with greater strength than any man in England.'

p

Written by someone who knew Henry well: 'The King, after he had been to church, used to send for Sir Thomas More [his top adviser] and discuss with him new ideas about astronomy, geometry, politics and many other subjects. And sometimes they used to go up to the roof and talk about the movement and positions of the stars and the planets.'

n

In 1515 the Venetian ambassadors wrote a report on Henry who was then in his 20s. 'The King looks like St George on horseback. He joustured for three hours and excelled all others, breaking many lances and unhorsing his opponents.'

q

'If cutting off my head could win him a castle in France, then my head would be sure to go.' Sir Thomas More, Henry's friend and Chancellor who was executed on Henry's orders.

r

Henry had his wife Queen Anne Boleyn executed in 1536 after she did not have the son that Henry wanted.

s

Henry was very keen on the navy and his favourite ship, the Mary Rose, built in the first year of his reign, was the most advanced warship of its time.

