

Unit summary

When Elizabeth I ascended to the throne in 1558, she faced many problems. These included religious instability, weaknesses within the privy council, financial problems, threats from abroad and doubts about whether a woman could rule successfully. It could be argued that she had overcome many of these problems by 1569 as she had decided upon a religious settlement which found a ‘middle way’ between Puritans and Catholics, successfully shrunk the privy council to only include trusted advisors, and had started to convince the English population that a Queen could be trusted to rule.

Key topic 1: Queen, governments and religion, 1558-69

1.1 The situation on Elizabeth’s accession	1.2 The religious settlement	1.3 Challenge to the religious settlement	1.4 The problem of Mary, Queen of Scots
<p>Elizabethan society had a clear hierarchical structure. The monarch was at the top of the social scale, followed by the nobility and gentry. It was believed that God chose the monarch (The Divine Right of Kings). Elizabeth made all the country’s important decisions (such as declaring war, making peace, calling parliament, ruling in legal cases and granting titles, lands, money and jobs). Even so, many people questioned the ability of a woman to rule. This was compounded by the fact that the previous monarch, Mary I, had been a weak ruler. Mary had run a large and ineffective Privy Council, burned many Protestants and left the crown in debt. Elizabeth had all of these problems and more to resolve.</p>	<p>Religion was central to life in the 16th Century. The rituals of life (baptism, marriage and death) were marked by religious ceremonies and people lived in constant fear of going to hell. Under the Elizabethan religious settlement, England was transformed from a Catholic to a Protestant nation. Elizabeth’s religious settlement can best be described as a middle way, as it aimed to keep Puritans, Protestants and Catholics happy. The main features you will need to know are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Act of Supremacy made Elizabeth supreme governor of the Church of England - all clergy and royal officials had to swear an oath of allegiance to her as head of the Church. • The Act of Uniformity established the appearance of churches and the form of serviced they held (e.g. services were given in English for the first time). • The Royal Injunctions was a set of instructions issued by Sir William Cecil (Elizabeth’s closest advisor) in the attempt to reinforce the above acts. It included instructions on how people should worship God and the structure of services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puritan challenge: Puritans hoped that Elizabeth’s religious reforms would be the beginning of further, more Protestant developments to the Church. They were unhappy with the Catholic elements that remained in Elizabeth’s settlement, particularly the use of crucifixes and more elaborate clothing as they believed that religion was about listening to the word of God, rather than using images or icons. • Catholic opposition abroad: Catholic opposition abroad was limited by the fact that the Pope did not excommunicate Elizabeth until 1571. Although he passed an instruction in 1556 saying that Catholics should not attend Church of England services, the pope remained politically loyal to Elizabeth - any would-be plotters didn’t have a figurehead to get behind! • Catholic opposition at home: Up to a third of Catholic nobles continued to secretly practice Catholicism in their homes, but it must be noted that Catholic opposition in this period was limited. There were few plots against Elizabeth, they could still think of the Pope as Head of the Church and the Elizabethan Government did not seek to stop Catholics worshipping privately. Any fines given out were rarely enforced. 	<p>Mary, Queen of Scots was Elizabeth’s cousin. She was a Catholic with a strong claim to the English throne as she was Henry VII’s great granddaughter. She was a problem to Elizabeth because she was a potential rallying point for English Catholics who wanted a Catholic monarch. She had been forced to abdicate in favour of her baby son, James in 1568. When she attempted to win back her throne, her forces were defeated and she then fled to England. After 1569, Mary was involved in many plots against Elizabeth. Elizabeth was reluctant to execute Mary, however, as she was a legitimate monarch and there was no concrete proof of her plotting until 1586.</p>

Early Elizabethan England: Queen, Government and Religion 1558-69


Topic 1 key terms	
Act of Supremacy	This made Elizabeth supreme governor of the Church of England.
Act of Uniformity	This established the appearance of churches and the form of services they held.
Counter Reformation	the campaign against Protestantism
Divine Right of Kings	the belief that a monarch was chosen to rule by God
Ecclesiastical	an adjective used to describe things to do with the Church
Excommunicated	being expelled from the Catholic Church by the Pope
Gentry	similar to nobility; people of a high social class
Heretics	people who refused to follow the religion of the monarch
Legitimate	Being born in wedlock when the existing king and queen were married.
Martyr	someone who dies for their religious beliefs
Nobility	a member of the aristocracy
Papacy	the system of church government ruled by the Pope
Patronage	to provide someone with an important job or position
Privy Council	Elizabeth's closest body of advisors; Elizabeth's chief advisor was William Cecil.
Puritans	extreme Protestants
Recusants	Catholics who were unwilling to attend church services laid down by the Elizabethan religious settlement
Royal Injunctions	a set of instructions to reinforce the acts of Supremacy and Uniformity
Royal Prerogative	Elizabeth could insist that Parliament did not talk about certain issues
Secretary of State	Elizabeth's most important Privy Councillor
Succession	the issue of who was going to succeed the throne after Elizabeth died
Visitations	inspections of churches and clergy by bishops to ensure that the Act of Supremacy was being followed
Yeomen	men who owned a small amount of land or an estate

Topic 1 key events	
1532	Start of the English Reformation
1556-58	Dutch Revolt against the Spanish
1558	Elizabeth's accession
1559	Mary Queen of Scots became queen of France
1559	Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis - England had to return Calais to France
1559	Religious Settlement and visitations commenced.
1559	The Pope issued an instruction that English Catholics should not attend Church of England services.
1560	Elizabeth helped Scotland Protestant lords defeat Mary of Guise. Treaty of Edinburgh.
1562	Religious war in France
1563	Philip II banned import of English cloth into Netherlands
1567	Elizabeth allows Dutch Sea Beggars to shelter in English harbours
1568	Genoese loan
1568	Mary Queen of Scots fled to Scotland and then arrived in England.
1569	Revolt of the Northern Earls

Exam-style questions
Describe two features of Elizabeth's Religious Settlement.
<p>Explain why the Catholic threat to Elizabeth increased after 1556. You may use the following in your answer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Papal excommunication of 1571 - Arrival of Mary, Queen of Scots in England
<p>By 1569, Elizabeth had solved all of the problems that had faced her in 1558. How far do you agree? You may use the following in your answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Privy Council - Act of Uniformity 1558

Topic 1 summary

Elizabeth faced many serious challenges in the years 1569-88, after a relatively peaceful beginning to her reign. These came from both England and abroad, but were often linked.

<p>Threat 1: English Catholics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Catholics were increasingly under suspicion after the Revolt of the Northern Earls in 1569. • In 1570, the pope freed England's Catholics of their duty to obedience to Elizabeth by excommunicating her. This meant that Catholics had permission to plot! • From 1574, Catholic priests were smuggled into England from Europe in order to try and keep English Catholics true to their faith! 	
<p>Threat 2: Mary, Queen of Scots</p> <p>Mary had a legitimate claim to the English throne and was the focus of several plots to depose Elizabeth after fleeing to England in 1568.</p>	<p>Threat 3: Spain</p> <p>Philip II of Spain was a strict Catholic who wanted to destroy Protestantism. Spain had a large and growing empire in the Americas (The New World), which made it the richest and most powerful country in Europe.</p> <p>Threat 4: The Dutch Revolt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philip II of Spain persecuted Dutch protestants, leading to a revolt of 1566 that lasted decades. • A large Spanish army sent to the Netherlands in 1567 was seen as a grave threat to Protestant England. • Elizabeth's support for the Dutch Protestant rebels was an important contributory factor in explaining the Anglo-Spanish war of 1585.

Key topic 2: Challenges to Elizabeth at home and abroad, 1569-88

2.1 Plots and revolts at home

Exam-style questions

- **Revolt of the Northern Earls 1569:** The first, and most serious, rebellious act by English Catholics against Elizabeth I. It prompted harsher treatment of Catholics from this point onwards and encouraged the pope, Pius V, to excommunicate Elizabeth I. His papal bull marked a turning point for English Catholics: their loyalty to Elizabeth was now always in doubt.
- **Ridolfi Plot 1571:** Roberto Ridolfi, an Italian banker arranged a plot to murder Elizabeth, launch a Spanish invasion and put Mary, Queen of Scots, on the throne. Elizabeth executed one noble (The Duke of Norfolk), following this plot, but refused to execute, or even bar Mary from the succession, despite her involvement. Although Philip never sent any formal help to the rebels, it reinforced the threat to England from Spain.
- **Throckmorton Plot 1583:** The Throckmorton plot planned to free Mary from prison, overthrow Elizabeth and restore Catholicism in England. The pope knew and approved of these plots. Sir Francis Walsingham uncovered the plot and so it was unsuccessful. It was significant because Throckmorton's papers included a list of Catholic sympathisers in England, suggesting that the government's fear of English Catholics as 'the enemy within' was real. Life became harder for English Catholics after this and they were treated with great suspicion by the government.
- **Babington Plot 1586:** The Babington Plot centred on the murder of Elizabeth and encouraged English Catholics to rebel. Anthony Babington, a Catholic with links to the French, wrote to Mary, Queen of Scots, in July 1586 about the proposed plot. However, Mary was being closely watched and her letters were intercepted by Francis Walsingham. The government now had sufficient evidence to persuade Elizabeth to execute Mary.
- **Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots 1587:** Mary's execution ended any hope of replacing Elizabeth with a Catholic heir.

Walsingham and his network of spies used many tactics to uncover Catholic plots against the Queen!

- Intercepting coded letters and messages (as happened in the Babington Plot)
- Employing a network of overseas spies and agents.
- Enacting Acts of Parliaments (e.g. The 1584 Bond of Association pledged that in the event of Elizabeth's life being threatened, Mary, Queen of Scots would have to be executed)
- Interrogation and Torture
Capturing Catholic priests and recusants.



1. Describe two features of plots against Elizabeth in the years 1569-88.
2. Explain why Mary, Queen of Scots was executed in 1587. You may include the following in your answer
 - The Babington Plot
 - Pressure from Councillors
3. 'The only reason war broke out between England and Spain in 1585 was due to English Direct Involvement in the Netherlands.' How far do you agree? You may include the following in your answer
 - The Treaty of Nonsuch
 - Trade and Commercial Rivalry

2.2 Relations with Spain

War broke out between England and Spain in 1585 for four main reasons:

- **Direct involvement in the Netherlands**

This was the trigger factor for war breaking out with Spain in 1585. At first, Elizabeth sent money and weapons secretly to Dutch rebels in order to help them win against an army sent by Philip II, but following the assassination of their leaders William of Orange, Elizabeth actually sent an English army led by the Earl of Leicester. Under the Treaty of Nonsuch in 1585, Elizabeth agreed to take over the protection of the Netherlands and sent an army of 7,000 men to help the rebels.

- **Trade and commercial rivalry**

Before 1550, the bulk of English trade abroad was based on woollen cloth which was exported from Antwerp (in the Netherlands). When this market collapsed, the English had to look elsewhere to make money. They looked particularly to the New World, which was owned by Spain. English explorers attacked Spanish treasure fleets, or traded with the colonists, who were short of many goods. Unfortunately for the English, this trade was illegal, because it required a licence from Spain. Elizabeth knew and supported the English pirates, instead calling them privateers. This reason contributed to war breaking out in 1585, as Philip II made many formal complaints, but was not the 'trigger factor'.

- **Religious rivalry**


It must be remembered that Spain was a Catholic nation who still disapproved of the changes made under Elizabeth's religious settlements some 25 years earlier. Additionally, Philip II had previously been married to Mary I and so always felt it was his duty to restore England to the 'true faith'! It was clear that war did not happen because of this factor because Philip took no action when Elizabeth created the English Protestant Church, or when the Pope excommunicated Elizabeth in 1571, however it must be seen as an underlying/long term factor.

- **Political rivalry**

Another long term, underlying factor for war breaking out in 1585 was Political Rivalry. Philip did not want any other country to challenge Spanish power, but he seemed more worried by France than by England. In fact, Philip's anxiety about the power of France was so great that he preferred to have Elizabeth as Queen of England rather than Mary, Queen of Scots, who, although Catholic had close ties with France. If Mary was Queen, he feared an alliance between England and France. This also contributed to explaining why Spain never sent an army or explicitly helped any of the rebels involved in plotting against Elizabeth!

2.3 Outbreak of war with Spain, 1585-88

The main event you need to know is the **Singeing of the King of Spain's beard**: In 1587, Elizabeth ordered Francis Drake to attack Spain's navy. On 19 April, he sailed into Cadiz harbour, Spain's most important port and destroyed over 30 ships. This attack was known as the 'singeing of the King of Spain's beard'. It disrupted preparations for the Armada and bought the English more time to prepare.

2.4 Defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588		
The Armada was defeated for several reasons:		
<p>How many examples of symbolism can you spot? Note Elizabeth's hand on the globe showing England's increasing power</p>	<p>English ship design</p>	<p>The English had new ships known as galleons. Their technology was over 100 years ahead of the Spanish and the ships were easier and faster to manoeuvre. This being said, the English only had 24 of these new ships, whereas the Spanish fleet was greater than 130! Therefore, ship design alone cannot explain English victory.</p>
	<p>The Armada was poorly supplied</p>	<p>The Armada was not as well supplied as it might have been. Provisions were stored in barrels made of inferior wood. This was because Drake's raid on Cadiz had destroyed so many barrels that new ones had to be made quickly. Delays in setting sail and bad weather meant that by the time the English engaged the Armada, it had already been at sea for ten weeks. When the English boarded the first Spanish ship they captured, they found its food supplied already rotting.</p>
	<p>Weaknesses in the Spanish plan</p>	<p>For the Spanish plan to work, timings had to be spot on. The Spanish wished to link up with the Duke of Parma who had an army waiting in the Netherlands, however, communication was so poor that the armies failed to link up and the Spanish lost the bulk of the men they would have had.</p>
<p>Key topic 2 exam-style questions</p>		
<p>1. Describe two features of Elizabethan theatre.</p> <p>2. Explain why the attempt to colonise Virginia in 1585-8 was a failure. You may use the following in your answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the colonists - Virginia 	<p>The weather</p>	<p>Poor weather plagued the Spanish to such an extent that whilst en route, the Spanish Commander (Medina Sidonia) wrote to Philip II asking if he was sure that God had blessed their voyage. After the battle of Gravelines, the Spanish were forced to return home via Scotland and Ireland where further storms destroyed their remaining boats.</p>
<p>3. The main reason for the increase in poverty and vagabondage was continued bad harvests. How far do you agree? You may use the following in your answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Act for Relief of the Poor, 1576 - Inflation 	<p>English tactics</p>	<p>The English used several tactics including lighting beacons to alert others to the Spanish arrival and fire ships. On the night of 6 August, the English sent fire ships in to cause panic amongst the Spanish feet. Although they did very little damage to the Spanish ships, they created havoc by scattering the Armada. When it regrouped on 8th August, the English engaged the Spanish at the Battle of Gravelines. Medina-Sidonia had to fight without Parma's army (as they had failed to link up) and against faster, more mobile English ships with canons which were easier to load.</p>

Key topic 2: Challenges to Elizabeth at home and abroad, 1569-88

Summary: This topic considers whether Elizabethan England should be considered a ‘Golden Age’, looking at topics as diverse as education, theatre, the poor and exploration. Golden Age (definition): An age of prosperity, peace and happiness for all social classes.

For a Golden Age	3.1 Education and leisure		
The majority of people’s homes were built from bricks and glass for the first time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitudes to education: There was no national system of schooling, but education became increasingly valuable in Elizabethan England. Although attitudes were beginning to change, schooling still reflected the wider social hierarchy in the country. Only a small percentage of wealthier boys went to school and very few girls received any formal education at all. This being said, when Elizabeth came to the throne, only 1/10 men could read. By the time she died, ¼ could read. Noble children learned a great variety of subjects including foreign languages and the arts. Wealthy daughters learned a variety of skills including music, dancing and needlework. Middle class children were increasingly sent to grammar schools. This was the greatest change in Elizabethan education and the number of schools steadily increased over Elizabeth’s reign. 	Sports	Pastimes
As the age progressed, people started to accept the idea of being ruled by a queen.		Nobility: hunting on horseback, hawking, fishing, fencing and tennis	Nobility: reading literature, listening to private music performances
Education became available to more children; there was a flourishing of new grammar schools. At these schools boys would learn Latin, Greek and become gentlemen.		All classes: wrestling and swimming	All classes: going to the theatre, music and dancing
People had leisure time; they would spend this at the theatre, bear baiting and listening to choral singing.		Lower classes: public wrestling and football	Lower classes: reading aloud to each other in taverns, listening to music in church or at fairs.
It was an age of military success; The Armada was defeated and Spain became afraid of the English Navy.		The four types of people in Elizabethan England:	
It was an age of great exploration. Walter Raleigh and Drake were famous explorers!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gentlemen: Nobles, lords and gentry - Citizens and burgesses in the towns: merchants, master craftsmen and lawyers. - Yeoman: farmers who owned their own land. - The fourth sort: farm labourers, servants, shopkeepers and craftspeople (such as tailors or bricklayers). 		
Against a Golden Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different leisure activities pursued: The fact that all social classes enjoyed leisure time is a strong argument that Elizabethan England could be considered a Golden Age. 		
There was an increase in vagabondage; there were many more poor people on the streets.			
Many people became unemployed because the farming system moved from an open field to enclosure system.			
By modern standards, we would view many of these activities (e.g. bear baiting and cock fighting) as cruel and unnecessary.			

3.2 The problem of the poor	
The table below demonstrates the main reasons there was an increase in poverty and vagabondage.	
Harvest and changes in farming	Elizabethan people depended on strong harvests; if there were three years of bad harvests then thousands of people would die. There was a series of bad harvests in the mid-1570s and 1590s.
Unemployment in industries	The only important industry in the 16 th century was cloth and this trade collapsed in the 1550s.
Inflation	Prices rose all over Europe whilst real wages stayed the same, meaning that many people could not afford basic food.
Population growth	There was huge population growth over Elizabeth's reign, but there were not enough jobs for these people to do! More and more people struggled to find work.
Attitudes to the poor:	Most people believed that everyone should work hard and look after themselves; they thought that beggars set a bad example. Additionally, they thought that everyone had a fixed place in society and that the poor should obey their social superiors. Additionally, it was illegal to help a vagabond from another village and so people looking for work were continually moved on.

3.2 Raleigh and Virginia		3.3 Exploration and voyages of discovery
Below is a timeline of events and an exploration of why these attempts to colonise Virginia were significant.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elizabethans wanted to explore because: there were opportunities to expand trade across the globe and there was a lot of money to be made! Additionally, many Elizabethan men went on voyages of discovery in the hope of making a fortune and having an adventure. It was the perfect time to do this because navigational aids were becoming much more accurate. • Francis Drake and his circumnavigation of the globe: Drake's circumnavigation of the globe took almost three years, from December 1577 until September 1580. Following this achievement, he was knighted by Elizabeth I. It was in this time he was responsible for the Singeing of the King of Spain's beard and delayed the Spanish Armada setting off. His journey was significant because it developed England's reputation as a great sea-faring nation, encouraged explorations and further damaged Anglo-Spanish relations.
Undermining Spain	One of the main reasons that the colonisation of Virginia was significant was because it provided England with a base from which to attack Spanish colonies in the new world.	
The roots of the British Empire	The English succeeded in establishing a strong presence in North America in the next century. This was because they had learned from the mistakes made in Virginia. They put the roots of the British Empire in place.	
Economic benefits	Trade was vital to the English economy and many of the things that were supplied from Southern Europe and the Mediterranean could be provided from Virginia.	
Why did attempts to colonise Virginia fail?		
The voyage	- vital supplies on board the <i>Tiger</i> ruined - illness which weakened colonists - set off too late to plant crops	
Colonists: expectations and reality	- wrong mix of people and skills - could not cope with hardship	
Inexperience	- poor choice of colonists - first attempt at establishing a colony led to lots of mistakes being made	

Topic 3 key terms	
Social mobility	Being able to change your position in society.
Grammar schools	private schools set up for boys considered bright who largely came from well off families in towns
Petty schools	set up in a teacher's home, for boys
Dame schools	set up in a teacher's home, for girls
Poor relief	financial help
Itinerants	people who had moved from their home parishes looking for work
Enclosure	The process of replacing large, open fields that were farmed by villages with individual fields belonging to one person.
Rural depopulation	When the population of the countryside falls as people move away in search of a better life.
Subsistence farming	Growing just enough to feed the family but not to sell.
Vagabonds	Homeless people without jobs who roamed the countryside begging for money or perhaps committing crimes in order to survive.