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The Renaissance

1485-1625

The spirit of the age



The 16th century was marked by great changes and great events. Perhaps the greatest of these were the **discovery of new lands** and of the Pacific ocean, the circumnavigation of the world enabling a more precise evaluation of its real size, the **Copernican theory** which revolutionised planetary astronomy, and the achievements of **Galileo Galilei**.

Europe was shaken both by a religious revolution, the Reformation, and an intellectual revolution, the Renaissance.

The **Reformation** gave England a Church that was independent from the Pope, which gradually became more Protestant. It was against this background of religious reformation that the spirit of the Renaissance developed in England. The Renaissance had started in Italy, and the new ideas spread across Europe in huge numbers of **printed books**, which had now replaced handwriting. This rebirth of intellectual curiosity influenced literature, science and art. There was the discovery of the mental and physical potential of man, interest in all kinds of knowledge and a desire for man to possess the power to create his own destiny and control the world.

The English Renaissance was dominated by **Queen Elizabeth I** and the Golden Age of English culture and literature. England lay the foundations of its empire and assumed a leading role in Europe. Queen Elizabeth commissioned explorations in the New World; in Europe, she kept peace with Scotland and France. With her strong personality, she contributed to the most important achievements of the creative talents of her time. In addition to this, her relative religious tolerance spurred people to turn their attention to the simple joy of living, so theatres became very popular. While Elizabeth dominated the political scene, the outstanding figure of **William Shakespeare** and his plays made London the centre of European cultural life. Shakespeare's plays reflected his views on the society and politics of the time and the views of Elizabethan England. He contributed to the development of language and had a lasting influence on the world's culture.

After Elizabeth I's death a political crisis broke out. The first Stuart king, **James I**, was a more absolutist monarch, being convinced that he was king by divine right. Even though the cultural life of the country was still alive, the energy of the Elizabethan period slowly started to fade. The Jacobean Period laid the foundations for the political crisis of the following decades.

A Midsummer Night's Dream in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, London, 2013.



Milestones in English History



1485-1509

King Henry VII

Henry VII was a clever sovereign who enforced law and order **unifying the reign** after the Wars of the Roses, encouraged commerce and pursued peace with neighbouring countries. He supported the merchant classes and the gentry, taxed the nobles and stopped them **having** their own private armies, thus avoiding the risk of further civil wars.

1707

Towards Great Britain

Even though James I did not create Great Britain as a single state, he was the first monarch to reign simultaneously over England, Scotland and Ireland. In 1707 the **Act of Union** **united** the **monarch** of Scotland and England. **He** also devised a new flag for his reign by fusing together St Andrews's **diagonal white cross** on a blue field to represent Scotland, and St George's **red cross** on a white field to represent England.

1509-1547

King Henry VIII

Henry VIII proved to be a very good statesman by maintaining a valid position between Spain and France. He **started the Royal Navy** and gave importance to shipbuilding. The most significant claim to fame of Henry VIII's reign is certainly his **religious reformation**. During the first years of his reign, Henry was very orthodox in his religious feelings and was granted the title of *Defensor Fidei* (Defender of the Faith) by Pope Leo X for having defended the papacy against Martin Luther.

Later, Henry VIII wanted the Pope (now Clement VII) to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, to marry Anne Boleyn. He **had** already a daughter, Mary, but was afraid of leaving **no male heirs**, without which the Tudor dynasty might become extinct. There were also **economic and political reasons**. The king needed money: he had established a magnificent court on the Renaissance model which cost enormous sums, and was well aware that the Church owned large estates. In addition, people had to pay taxes to the Church, thus reducing the Crown's income. Moreover, the power of the Church in England was great, and was not subject to the authority of the king. The Pope denied the request and Henry, with the support of Parliament, proclaimed himself Supreme Head of the Church of England (**Act of Supremacy**, 1534). He closed the **monasteries** and all their properties passed under the control of the kingdom. The theology and the liturgy, however, remained unaltered. Henry married six times; his second wife Anne Boleyn gave him Elizabeth. Only his third wife, Jane Seymour, however, produced a male heir, Edward.

1620

The Pilgrim Fathers leave England

In 1620 a group of English Puritans, known as the 'Pilgrim Fathers', sailed to America on the *Mayflower*, landing in Massachusetts, where they founded a **new colony**.

The Puritans had left England due to religious persecution. They believed that the Church of England had not been reformed enough and wanted to introduce more reforms. As a result, the Church of England was hostile towards the Puritans. However, when the Puritans, who were mainly wealthy tradesmen and craftsmen, founded the American colonies, they did not **show any toleration towards** other religions, in the same way as the Church of England had not tolerated them.



1547-1553

King Edward VI

Edward, Henry VIII's son, succeeded his father, but was very young, so the real power passed to his protector, Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset. Edward VI's short reign saw the approval of two **Acts of Uniformity**. The first imposed the *Book of Common Prayer* in English as the only basis for legal worship. The second urged conformity to Protestant doctrines, prohibiting the use of pictures, statues and ceremonies in churches. The services were in English.

1553-1558

Queen Mary I

After Edward VI, Mary, daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, became queen. She **married Philip II of Spain**. She **tried to restore Catholicism** and harshly persecuted Protestants, thus creating a fierce hatred against Roman Catholicism amongst the English. For this reason she was called **Bloody Mary**.

1558-1603

Queen Elizabeth I

When Elizabeth I became queen, she returned the country to **Protestantism**, but **with tolerance**. The doctrine of the Anglican Church was defined in a set of teachings and beliefs called the **Thirty-nine Articles** (1571).

Elizabeth never married. Her closest heir was **Mary Stuart**, the Roman Catholic queen of Scotland. Mary was the granddaughter of Henry VIII's elder sister Margaret; she married the Dauphin, heir to the French throne, but after his death returned to Scotland. For a few years she was favourably recognised as **Elizabeth's legitimate successor**, and when her son was born, her chances appeared consolidated. However Mary was involved in a series of intrigues which led to warfare, until she escaped to England, where she was kept prisoner for nearly twenty years by Elizabeth I. Mary was **executed** in 1587.



1603-1625

King James I Stuart

Elizabeth I died childless and the crown went to **James VI of Scotland**, now James I of England. He believed in the divine right of kings and created a **deep fracture between the monarchy and Parliament**, summoning the latter only to ask for money. When James I came to the throne, Catholics hoped that he would protect them but they were soon disillusioned. James I chose a firm Protestant, who had also served under Elizabeth I, as a Chief Minister, Robert Cecil. Cecil convinced the king to behave strictly towards religious dissent. As a result, in 1605 Catholic plotters attempted to blow up the Houses of Parliament while they were in full session. This conspiracy, known as the **Gunpowder Plot**, was exposed and many conspirators, including their leader Guy Fawkes, were put to death.

1588

Defeat of the Spanish Armada

At the same time the relationship between England and Spain was becoming alarmingly tense.

Frequent attacks by small and fast English ships, led by pirates, threatened the Spanish galleons carrying gold and silver from the New World ~~and robbed them.~~

Feeling challenged, King **Philip II of Spain** decided to invade England. In 1588 his armed fleet, the **Invincible Armada**, set sail against England but faced a disastrous defeat in the Channel. This happened because the agile British ships succeeded, with the technique of rapid attack, to prevent Spanish ships from manoeuvring to fight efficiently.



Humanism and Renaissance culture

After the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in **1453**, many Greek-speaking Christians emigrated from the Eastern Empire to Italy. Their presence influenced the spread of a re-evaluation of the **classical world** and the beginning of **Humanism**. This movement represented the desire to recover the study of ancient Roman and Greek literature and culture and produced intense cultural activity. The revival began in Italy but soon reached the whole European continent. Many Greek and Latin texts were translated, and frequent mistakes found in the medieval copying were corrected.

Along with Humanism, spread the **Renaissance** – a French word meaning, literally, the rebirth of learning. During the Renaissance, science, art and architecture flourished. Renaissance art developed the ideals of beauty, elegance and delicacy, as well as its pursuit of harmony and refinement to convey the spirit of rebirth associated with the Renaissance period.

The influence of translation

The translation from foreign authors, especially French and Italian, as well as from classical ones played an important role during the Renaissance, partly thanks to the **spread of printing**, and was considered a form of art. The sonnet, for example, was introduced into England thanks to **Thomas Wyatt's** translation of Petrarch's sonnets [[> page 173](#)]. Following the example of Martin Luther in Germany, translations of the Bible and philosophical works in prose started to appear. One of the most famous examples of them is Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, originally written in Latin and then translated into English.

The rebirth of learning is evident from the original literary works of this period. The creative outbursts of writers, poets and playwrights like **Christopher Marlowe**, **William Shakespeare**, **Ben Jonson**, **Edmund Spenser** and **John Donne**, to mention just a few, gave rise to what is known as 'the **Golden Age**', a historical period which saw an unprecedented flourishing of the arts.

The Protestant Reformation: a religious revolution

From the end of 15th century a wider circulation of books was possible thanks to the advent of printing press. The first book printed by Johann Gutenberg was the **Holy Bible** and this book played an important role in another major change that reshaped Europe: the **Protestant Reformation**. The translation of the Bible and the possibility to read it without the intermediation of the priests was one of the major key points of Martin Luther's Reform. The religious fracture among the Roman Church and the Reformed Church divided Europe, creating two different cultures, two different way of living and thinking.

The peculiar English Renaissance

The Renaissance reached England much later than Italy, due to the political instability during the years of the **Wars of the Roses and then to Henry VIII's break with Rome**. When Renaissance spread in England, Italy became a model to follow and many of English scholars travelled to Italy to visit its universities. The study of Greek and Latin was introduced at Oxford University and classic schools were founded.

The English Renaissance, however, was also characterised by factors which were not present in the Italian Renaissance. The new cultural spirit, for example, was particularly fertile in literature and drama rather than in the visual arts. The **translation of the Bible into English** under James I to make holy services accessible to all had great importance in the development of English culture



The solar system of Copernicus's heliocentric theory published in the *Atlas coelestis* by Johann Gabriel Doppelmayr, 1742.

and mentality and in the spread of **Puritan culture** [[> page 190](#)]. Finally, unlike the Italian Renaissance, the independence of the Church of England and the English Bible helped to spread a strong nationalistic feeling that influenced culture and literature in the following centuries.

The birth of political science

The Renaissance is also the age of the birth of political thought. Niccolò Machiavelli in Italy and **Francis Bacon** in England are two outstanding figures of [such a](#) field of investigation. According to Machiavelli, a prince should be capable of using force as a political strategy to maintain power, even at the cost of appearing cruel rather than pitiful. On the other hand, Bacon believed that rulers had to be moderate in their choices. Bacon distinguished between mean and great men: mean men are strong in their position, while great men are moderate. Hence, it is politically more rewarding not to remain rigid in one's [own](#) position. On the contrary, if a ruler remains inflexible in his determination, he will cause dissatisfaction and will fail to win the support of his people.

The scientific revolution

The Renaissance was also the [period of](#) a new outlook on scientific experimentation and theorisation. **Copernicus's heliocentric theory** is significant, since it opened up a new method of explaining questions that the previous Ptolemaic theory, which saw [also](#) the Earth at the centre of the universe, could not answer. According to the heliocentric theory, the sun is at the centre of the universe and all the other planetary bodies follow trajectories, called orbits, around it.

Explorations and discoveries

The **discovery of America** by Europeans and the explorations outside Europe changed [forever](#) the view of the world: it was bigger, mysterious, but above all it was full of unknown territories. Inevitably, human knowledge was reshaped, and very soon those territories and their riches, even if so remote, became [a](#) political and economical interest.

Reading competence

Answer the questions.

- 1 What do the words *Humanism* and *Renaissance* mean?
- 2 Which country did they originate from?
- 3 In what way did the translation of the Bible influence English culture and mentality?
- 4 Why did the printing press play an important role in this period?
- 5 What are the main differences between Italian and English Renaissance?
- 6 What is the heliocentric theory?



Through HISTORY *Henry VIII: a Renaissance king*

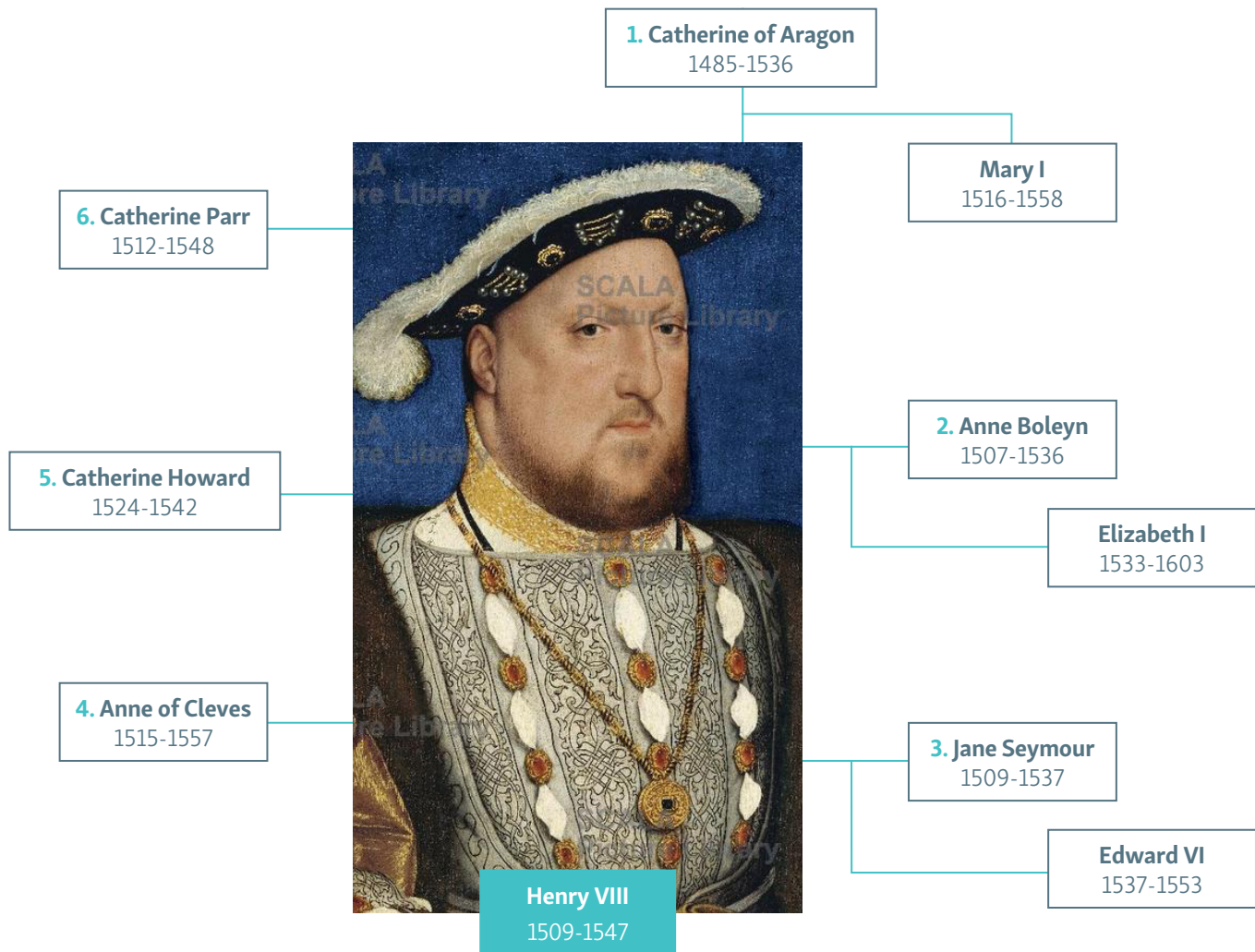
Henry VIII (1509-1547) was the first English monarch to be educated under the influence of the Renaissance. He was the archetypal Renaissance monarch: extremely well-learned and highly cultured.

He studied Latin, astronomy, maths and poetry and knew Erasmus's works well. He established a magnificent court on the Renaissance model and supported the arts and learning. He was also fond of sports and pageantry.

Henry VIII is, though, mainly famous for great changes in the English kingdom. The social and economic consequences

of his break with Rome influenced mentality and created new social classes. After the break with Rome, he not only became the Head of Church, he also dissolved monasteries, suppressed religious orders, annexed their estates and soon began to sell their lands and the valuable items they contained to the nobles. This gave birth to the **landed gentry**, a new class that began to spread in the country and formed one of the bases of the wealth and economic stability of England.

He became, however, one of the most famous kings in the world for his unscrupulous marriage policy, looking for a male heir, which led him to marry six times.



Reading competence

1 Answer the questions.

1. Henry VIII is considered to be a typical Renaissance king. Which of his qualities and skills made him famous?
2. What economic and social changes took place after his break with Rome?

FIRST Reading and Use of English Part 5

You are going to read a text about the six wives of Henry VIII. Choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

Henry VIII was King of England from 1509 to 1547, the year of his death. He married six times.

He married his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, daughter of King Ferdinand II of Spain, in 1509. She had six children, both male and female, but only one child, her daughter Mary, the future Mary I, survived for long. This gave Henry the justification to divorce her. In 1533 the marriage was declared null, a decision that caused the separation from Rome and the birth of the Anglican Church.

The same year as the marriage annulment, Henry married Anne Boleyn, one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting. Anne had grown up in France and was refined and educated. She could speak Latin and French, could dance, play musical instruments and was famous for her witty language. Henry was really fascinated by her, but with time he started to believe that his counsellors made him an object of ridicule for the attraction he had to Anne. Hence, feeling more and more uncomfortable, when she failed to produce the male heir he expected, he had her accused of conspiring against the king, adultery and incest. Even though the accusations were not fully convincing, Anne was imprisoned in the Tower of London and executed in 1536.

Only one week later, Henry married Jane Seymour, one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting. Unlike Anne, Jane offered Henry the safety and comfort he needed, thus reinforcing in him the self-confidence Anne Boleyn had undermined. In 1537, Jane gave

birth to a male heir, the future Edward VI, but she died twelve days after childbirth because of a puerperal fever.

After Jane Seymour, Henry married Anne of Cleves in 1540. The marriage, however, lasted only six months. Henry was infuriated with his counsellors when he saw that she was not as attractive as in a portrait of her made by Hans Holbein the Young. Hence, when he saw her personally, he immediately had his marriage to Anne annulled.

The fifth wife of Henry VIII was Catherine Howard, his previous wife's lady-in-waiting, whom he married the same year. She was an attractive woman but she did not have a strong personality. Their marriage was also short-lived because rumors were spread that she had had two affairs before their marriage. Henry reacted violently and made Parliament decide that it was a treason for a woman who had had other lovers to marry the king. Catherine was beheaded in 1542.

The last wife of Henry VIII was Catherine Parr, who he married in 1543. She had the reputation of being a deeply religious woman, firstly thanks to the support she gave Henry during his illness and then because she published a book of prayers and meditations, the first woman to do so under a female name. Also, she is considered to be a radical thinker for her effort to weaken Henry's increasing conservatism in religious matters. Catherine Parr died in 1548, after Henry.

- Catherine of Aragon
 - produced only female children.
 - gave birth to seven children.
 - could not have children.
 - did not give Henry a surviving son.
- Henry VIII had Anne Boleyn executed because
 - she was too educated for him.
 - she made a fool of him.
 - she was found to be an adulteress.
 - she did not have male heirs.
- Jane Seymour
 - was considered a strong-minded woman.
 - was not different from Anne Boleyn.
 - tried to undermine the king's self-confidence.
 - died of the consequences of childbirth.
- Anne of Cleves was divorced because
 - she had cheated the king with a false portrait by Holbein.
 - Holbein's portrait did not portray her as she really was.
 - she had corrupted Henry's counsellors.
 - Henry's counsellors did not like her.
- Catherine Howard was executed because
 - she was considered an empty-headed woman.
 - had many lovers during all her life.
 - she was unfaithful to Henry.
 - evidence was found that she had had lovers in her youth.
- Catherine Parr
 - was considered a very pious woman.
 - is considered a progressist woman for her times.
 - reinforced Henry's conservative views.
 - was made a saint.

The Elizabethan Golden Age

Elizabeth I (1558-1603) was an **incredibly** popular queen. Her **political and diplomatic ability** was immense, and she managed to impose herself, for English people, as an almost legendary queen. Elizabeth **did not marry**, so she was known as the 'Virgin Queen', 'married' only to her people. Elizabeth's decision not to marry had important political and even diplomatic reasons. Through marriage she was to unite the English crown with a foreigner king. For a long time her most insistent suitor was King Philip II of Spain, a fervent Catholic. This would have had consequences of internal instability, since the balance between Catholics and Protestants was very complex and precarious, and a union with Spain would have benefited Catholic claims.

Her long reign **lived** many difficult moments, often she was menaced by plots against her, but even in **presence** of tensions and crisis, she succeeded in giving England a sense of stability and nationalistic fervour.

With Elizabeth **the Renaissance culture and poetry spread** and flourished so much that **was called** The 'Golden Age'. She promoted **the new impulse for learning**; she herself spoke five foreign languages and encouraged education. Moreover, the national language had become a powerful instrument of expression, suitable for the highest forms of writing. With Elizabeth **theatre** flourished and became an important vehicle **for both culture and political propaganda**, celebrating the exploits of the kingdom and helping to give great importance to the figure of the queen.

Diego Valadés, 'Great Chain of Being'
from *Rhetorica Christiana
ad concionandi et orandi usum
accommodate...*, 1579.



The Chain of Being

Copernicus's theory, which went against the Holy Scripture and the **view of man** as the ultimate aim of creation, started a revolutionary method of observing the universe. It also caused feelings of insecurity and fear **in people's minds**, which **they** counterbalanced by striving for **order and stability**. **They** found it in their queen and in the political system she had created. A phrase coined to explain the Elizabethan's outlook on life is 'Chain of Being'. According to **it**, all living beings and all that was created were linked to each other in a hierarchical, complex order. Therefore nothing could happen in isolation and everything was associated through the idea of **correspondences**. This hierarchy was applied to everything: the natural world, the human body and the immaterial world, in a circular design similar to that of the universe. The sun was at the centre and the planets revolved around it. God was at the centre of the universe and all **the other** creatures revolved around Him: angels, human beings, animals, plants and so on. Within each circle, there was a further hierarchy: in the human body, the brain was the centre, then came the arms and so on.

A fascination for the occult

The Elizabethans believed in fairies, magic, witches, spells and prophecies [as you can see for example in *Macbeth*, > **page 156**]. Superstitions and folklore were often as important to people as the official religious beliefs taught by the Church. People believed that fairies, goblins and sprites (imaginary creatures with magic powers, which looked like a very small person) came out at night and played tricks on people. They could make you go insane or give you terrible nightmares or even lure you into the underworld.

Elizabethan culture was also fascinated by the occult, and one of the most important personalities in this field was **John Dee** (1527-1608), mathematician, astrologer, alchemist and spiritualist, who was even consulted by Queen Elizabeth about a propitious day for her coronation. He also gave advice and instruction to courtiers, practitioners and navigators, and greatly stimulated scientific thought. John Dee had acquired many books and manuscripts over the years and his personal library was the greatest in England.

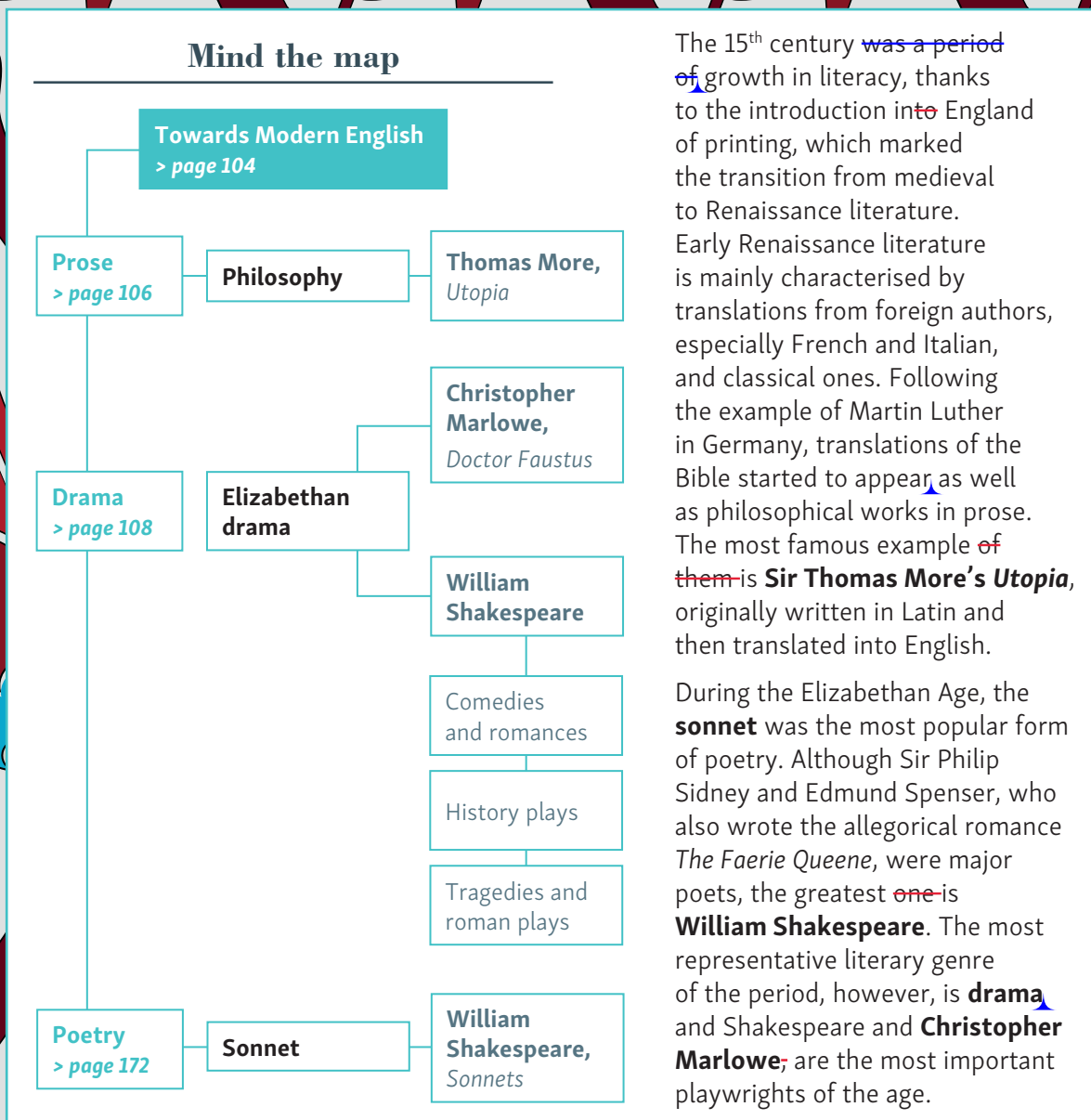
Reading competence

Decide if the following statements are true or false.

- Elizabeth's reign was always a peaceful one. (T) (F)
- Elizabeth favoured prose more than every other art. (T) (F)
- The Chain of Being confirmed Copernicus's theory. (T) (F)
- Theatre was also a vehicle of political propaganda. (T) (F)

What about literature?

Mind the map



The 15th century was a period of growth in literacy, thanks to the introduction into England of printing, which marked the transition from medieval to Renaissance literature. Early Renaissance literature is mainly characterised by translations from foreign authors, especially French and Italian, and classical ones. Following the example of Martin Luther in Germany, translations of the Bible started to appear as well as philosophical works in prose. The most famous example of them is **Sir Thomas More's Utopia**, originally written in Latin and then translated into English.

During the Elizabethan Age, the **sonnet** was the most popular form of poetry. Although Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, who also wrote the allegorical romance *The Faerie Queene*, were major poets, the greatest one is **William Shakespeare**. The most representative literary genre of the period, however, is **drama** and Shakespeare and **Christopher Marlowe** are the most important playwrights of the age.



Through HISTORY *A queen and a woman*

Elizabeth I understood not only the importance of her image and presence for her reign but also the (crucial) importance of enjoying the loyalty of her people. On one hand she was the queen, a powerful woman with the enormous responsibility of running a kingdom, ~~who being unmarried, had to make a great effort~~ to be trusted in an age where only a male king could rule alone. On the other hand she was a woman, with human qualities and weaknesses. Elizabeth I was painted in many portraits, each time with a different aim: the sovereign, the warrior, but always a beautiful woman.

Elizabeth the woman

Queen Elizabeth wanted to be regarded as the most desirable woman at court, even as she entered old age. However, what was considered desirable at the time would be surprising in our age. Women painted their faces white (as appears also in the *Armada Portrait*), and also enhanced the blue of their veins with pigments, to underline that they belonged to a higher status: being sun-tanned revealed that a woman made her living in the fields. Elizabethan women were so concerned about this that they wore a mask when they walked out in the sun. The mask was held in place by holding a button between the teeth. The white paint worn on the face of Elizabethan women and the queen herself was called 'ceruse'. It was made of lead, ground marble, figs and vinegar, which were mixed and turned into a thick paste using an elaborate process. In the long run it burnt away the surface of the skin and was toxic.

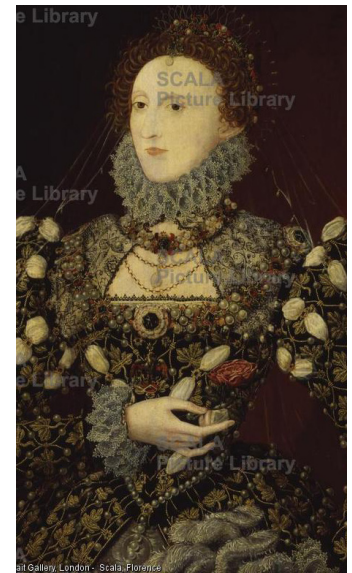
The *Armada Portrait* (1588) by George Gower shows the ships that defeated the Spanish Armada in the background. The queen is depicted as successful and powerful, with the crown beside her and a hand on the globe showing her reign's greatness.

In the *Phoenix Portrait* (1575) by Nicholas Hilliard, the queen is portrayed with a jewel representing a phoenix, a mythical bird symbol of resurrection, eternal life and virginity.

Elizabeth the Queen

In 1558 Elizabeth gave a memorable speech at Tilbury, near London, to rally her troops to fight the Spanish invasion. She was able to describe the strength of her own kingdom and her soldiers and silence those who ~~wanted to~~ consider her weak just because she was a woman. Here below a short passage of the speech:

Let tyrants fear. I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good-will of my subjects [...]. I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm: to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field [...]. We shall shortly have a famous victory over those enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people.



Reading competence

1 Answer the questions.

- Look at the paintings and read the text about Elizabeth I. What trend of the time did she follow as regards women's fashion?
- Elizabeth's 1558 Tilbury speech was a very powerful one. Choose one or more from the adjectives below to define it. Justify your choice.

a. <input type="checkbox"/> poetic	d. <input type="checkbox"/> emotional
b. <input type="checkbox"/> persuasive	e. <input type="checkbox"/> rational
c. <input type="checkbox"/> elegant	

- What feelings do you think she strived ~~for~~ for her soldiers to feel?

a. <input type="checkbox"/> Pride in being English.
b. <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of belonging.
c. <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of the enemies.
d. <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance of one's destiny.
e. <input type="checkbox"/> Resignations.
f. <input type="checkbox"/> Determination.
- What evidence does the text provide about Elizabeth's will to highlight her role as female leader?



Through MOVIES *Two queens for one reign*

Elizabeth

Director: Shekhar Kapur

Main actors: Cate Blanchett, Geoffrey Rush, Joseph Fiennes, Richard Attenborough, Fanny Ardant

Place and year of production: GB, 1998



The story deals with the early period of Elizabeth I's reign and is set in the mid-1550s, when the country was torn by financial and religious conflicts. Mary I is about to die and, being a fervent Catholic, exacerbates her persecution against the Protestants. Even Elizabeth is persecuted, being her junior sister and, as such, a legitimate heir to the throne. Mary I, however, doesn't want her to be queen because of Elizabeth's leanings towards the Protestant faith. When she dies, Elizabeth is made Queen of England.

Immediately, she calls back Sir Robert Dudley, her lover, from his exile. Elizabeth has to face both external enemies, like Spain, France and Mary of Guise, and internal, like the Duke of Norfolk, a Catholic. Sir William Cecil, Elizabeth's secretary, advises her to marry to be protected against her enemies, but she refuses. Eventually, Elizabeth accepts the advice of Lord William Walsingham, head of the secret police, to kill her enemies. The film ends with Elizabeth I giving up the idea of getting married to be the Virgin Queen.

Reading competence

- BEFORE YOU WATCH** Why was Elizabeth called the 'Virgin Queen'?

Visual competence Video

- WHILE YOU WATCH** What does Elizabeth mean when she says, 'I am married to England'?
- AFTER YOU WATCH** Which adjective/s best describe/s Elizabeth's personality at the end of the film?
 - submissive
 - extravagant
 - stylish
 - determined
 - charismatic

Speaking competence

- AFTER YOU WATCH** Think of the political, religious and personal vicissitudes Elizabeth went through in her early life. Do you think they may explain her final choice concerning marriage?

Mary Queen of Scots

Director: Josie Rourke

Main actors: Saoirse Ronan, Margot Robbie, Jack Lowden, David Tennant

Place and year of production: USA, 2018

The film tells the story of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, from 1542 to 1567. Brought up in France, after the death of her husband Francis II of the House of Valois, King of France, Mary returns to her country to claim the throne. She also claims the English crown as a legitimate heir, supported by many Catholics. She has, however, to face the fierce opposition of her cousin Elizabeth I, Queen of England and a Protestant. Each of them perceives the other as a rival, both being women in a world ruled by men, who have to fight to achieve their independence. In a society full of intrigue, rebellions, betrayal and internal conflicts, the two queens live a life of constant danger. Eventually, Mary is charged with treachery by Elizabeth and is executed.

Reading competence

- BEFORE YOU WATCH** After reading the plot, what kind of relationship there was in your opinion between Mary and Elizabeth and for what reasons?

Visual competence Video

- WHILE YOU WATCH** Focus on how the two queens are represented. Which do you think the director looks at more favourably? How?
- WHILE YOU WATCH** What is the symbolic role of the veils in the scene?
- AFTER YOU WATCH** The clip you have watched shows the meeting between Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I (which probably never took really place), when Mary is already a prisoner. Write E or M and decide who appears...
 - more sympathetic
 - prouder
 - more sensitive
 - more detached
 - self-confident
 - arrogant
- AFTER YOU WATCH** Focus on the physical appearance of the two queens. How do they differ?
- AFTER YOU WATCH** What kind of relationship does *Mary Queen of Scots* suggest there was between the two queens?

Towards Modern English

During the 15th century Middle English underwent a process of slow but steady change. This process, which had already started in the 14th century, lasted until approximately the first decade of the 17th century.

During this period, the pronunciation of long vowels (the ones which have a longer sound) either changed into diphthong or became closer. As regards the first phenomenon, while in Middle English a vowel like /i:/ in the word 'bite' was pronounced as /bi:te/, in Modern English it was pronounced /baɪt/, with the sound /i:/ changing into /aɪ/.

The second phenomenon consisted in making the sound of certain vowels **closer**, that is to say with the tongue raised towards the palate, so as to let less air pass. For example, the sound of the vowel /e:/ (e.g. /meet/) changed into /i:/ (e.g. /mi:t/).

Also, final consonants or vowels became silent, which means that they were no longer pronounced as they had been in Middle English.

This change is known as the **Great Vowel Shift** and among the main factors that caused it was the introduction of printing (1476), which accelerated the standardisation of the language modelled on the dialect of London, the most important cultural and economic centre in the country.

A common national language

More and more people could read and write and the price of books was more affordable. These were two significant factors which contributed to the establishment of a common national language. In addition, the revival of classical learning during the Renaissance enriched English with many words of Latin and Greek origin and, by the time William Shakespeare started his literary career (mid-late 16th century), English was becoming a modern language. His writings influenced the English language too, as his works contributed to standardize English language rules and grammar in the following centuries. [**> page 116**].

The *Book of Common Prayer*

The progression from medieval English to today's language was also prompted by the publication of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549), the book for use during liturgical services in England. It is the end result of the work of a group of scholars led by the powerful Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, Anglican reformer and theology teacher at the University of Cambridge. The *Book* sets the rules of official rites like weddings, baptisms and funerals in the Church of England as well as private meditations, and it has been updated and revised over the centuries according to the religious changes in the kingdom. *The Book of Common Prayer* was written in 15th-century English, which replaced Latin. It contained a rich inventory of new vocabulary and rhetorical phrases, due to the new interest in the classics and the Bible. The short extract below shows the changes in English language and its steps towards Modern English.

Reading competence

Consider the changes in pronunciation caused by the Great Vowel Shift. Can you find any difference between the Early Modern and the Today's version of the extract below? Focus on:

- style;
- word spelling;
- use of vowels.

Early Modern English

When Jesus was borne in Bethleem a city of Jury, in the tyme of Herode the kyng: Behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying: where is he that is borne king of Jewes? For we have sene his starre in the East, and are come to worship him. When Herode the kyng had heard these thynges, he was troubled, and all the citie of Jerusalem with him

Today English

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the time of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

King James Bible: a milestone in English language

A few decades after the publication of the *Book of Common Prayer*, King James I commissioned a translation of the Bible (1604). It was not the first translation but many churchmen declared that the existing Bible contained many mistakes and inconsistent passages. More than fifty revisers worked on the text that was published in 1611 and is known as *King James Bible*. The final version contained added, changed, integrated, amended and updated parts from previous versions, to conform to the religious climate of the times.

The *Authorised Version*, which includes a dedication to King James I, is rich in innovative and evocative phrases and sentences. Among the most famous there is 'Father, forgive them, for they not know what they do' (from Luke 23.24). The sentence is still used today to mean that we should forgive people for the bad things they do if they are not aware of them. Yet, many of these phrases had already appeared in previous versions. This version of the Bible, however, had an unprecedented impact on English conscience and thought compared to the others, to the extent that it gradually substituted all of them. Many poets of the 17th century, for example, drew inspiration from it to refine their poetic style. Among them, a few examples of poets are John Donne, George Herbert and Henry Vaughan.

The *King James Bible* also had a deep influence on the development of the English language, since it coined phrases and sentences that are still used in today English. Probably, one of the most quoted is the phrase 'the root of the matter' to mean 'the essential point of something', or 'a thorn in the flesh', which means 'a person who continually teases you'.

There were also a few printing issues with the *Authorised Version*. In 1631, for example, the word 'not' was accidentally omitted in the sentence 'Thou shall not commit adultery', thus completely changing the meaning of the commandment. All the copies of this edition, which is called *The Wicked Bible*, were destroyed and burnt. The printer was firstly fined and then sent to prison for debts, where in the end he died.

Reading competence

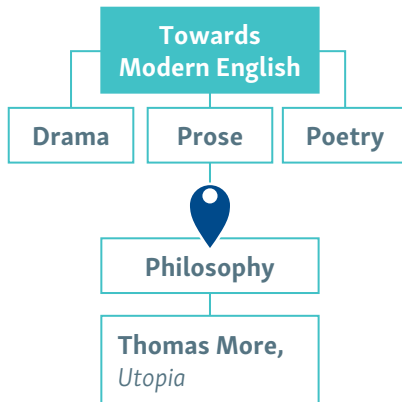
Answer the questions.

- 1 How did the *Authorised Bible* arrive at its final version?
- 2 In what way did *King James Bible's* style influence poetry?
- 3 What impact does it have on Today's English?
- 4 What is *The Wicked Bible*?



Frontispieces of *King James Bible*.

English Renaissance prose



Quentin Metsys,
Erasmus of Rotterdam, 1517.



its strong doctrinal convictions. He trusted in **tolerance** and **humanism** and wished for a return to the authentic foundations of the early Church, believing in human reason and **man's** capacity to do good in life. Erasmus was convinced that it was possible to achieve the reform of the Church through slow, gradual and peaceful steps. In addition, he thought that it was impossible to achieve an authentic interpretation of the Holy Scripture, especially as regards the interpretation of free will.

English Renaissance prose was mainly concerned with philosophy, science and religion.

Among the great humanist thinkers and prose writers of the time it is worth remembering **Erasmus of Rotterdam** (c. 1466-1536), who spent long periods of time in England. His wit and his independent, anti-authoritarian spirit made him a very influential figure. His most famous work, *Praise of Folly* – written in Latin in 1511 and then translated into English – is a satire that targets the element of superstition in religion and empty ritualism.

Erasmus criticised the corruption in the Catholic Church, anticipating the Protestant Reformation. However, he never agreed to Lutheranism, rejecting

Francis Bacon and ~~the~~ Empiricism

One of the greatest thinkers, philosophers and scientists of the second half of the 16th century was **Francis Bacon** (1561-1626). As he was an empiricist, in his *Novum Organum* (1620) he rejected the deduction-based Aristotelean logic. He believed, instead, that man could learn from experience, rather than from what he could deduct from general principles. He wrote:

'I. Man, as the minister and interpreter of nature, does and understands as much as his observations on the order of nature, either with regard to things or the mind, permit him, and neither knows nor is capable of more.

[...]

III. Knowledge and human power are synonymous, since the ignorance of the cause frustrates the effect; for nature is only subdued by submission, and that which in contemplative philosophy corresponds with the cause in practical science becomes the rule.'

Reading competence

Answer the questions.

- 1 What did Erasmus think about religion?
- 2 What did Erasmus think about Lutheranism?
- 3 What did Francis Bacon think about the power of knowledge?
- 4 In what way was Thomas More a humanist thinker?

His extended knowledge of philosophy, science, religion, history and politics made him a model ~~of true~~ Renaissance thinker.

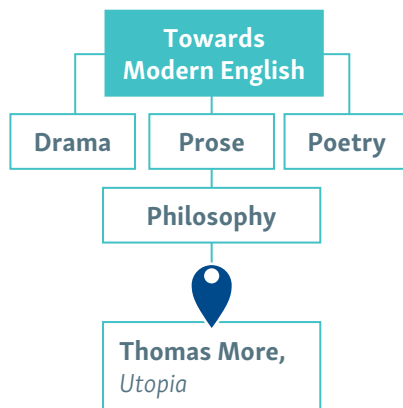
The ideal State of Thomas More

In his best-known work, *Utopia*, the thinker and philosopher **Thomas More** describes an ideal society [**> page 107**]. His ideal State has a truly representative government, both men and women are educated, all religions are tolerated, war is detested, and the welfare of ~~the~~ citizens is the chief concern.

T11 Religions and tolerance

The extract from *Utopia* illustrates the religious beliefs of the Utopians, which are based on tolerance and acceptance of the others' beliefs.

From *Utopia*
by **Thomas More**



There are several sorts of religions, not only in different parts of the island, but even in every town; some worshipping¹ the sun, others the moon or one of the planets. Some worship such men as have been eminent in former² times for virtue or glory, not only as ordinary deities, but as the supreme god. Yet the greater and wiser sort

- 5 of them worship none of these, but adore one eternal, invisible, infinite, and incomprehensible Deity; as a Being that is far above all our apprehensions³, that is spread over the whole universe, not by His bulk⁴, but by His power and virtue; Him they call the Father of All, and acknowledge that the beginnings, the increase, the progress, the vicissitudes⁵, and the end of all things come only from Him; nor do they offer divine honours to any but to Him
- 10 alone. And, indeed, though they differ concerning other things, yet all agree in this: that they think there is one Supreme Being that made and governs the world, whom they call, in the language of their country, Mithras⁶. They differ in this: that one thinks the god whom he worships is this Supreme Being, and another thinks that his idol is that god; but they all agree in one principle, that whoever is this Supreme Being, He is also that great essence to whose
- 15 glory and majesty all honours are ascribed⁷ by the consent of all nations. 'By degrees they fall off from the various superstitions that are among them, and grow up to that one religion that is the best and most in request; and there is no doubt to be made, but that all the others had vanished long ago, if some of those who advised them to lay aside their superstitions had not met with some unhappy accidents, which, being considered as inflicted by heaven, made them
- 20 afraid that the god whose worship had like to have been abandoned had interposed and revenged themselves on those who despised⁸ their authority. [...]

- 1 **worshipping**: adoring, being devoted to.
 2 **former**: previous.
 3 **apprehensions**: understandings.
 4 **bulk**: size, magnitude.
 5 **vicissitudes**: changes, variations.
 6 **Mithras**: reference to a proto-Indian-Iranian deity.
 7 **ascribed**: attributed.
 8 **despised**: hated, disliked.

Who's who?

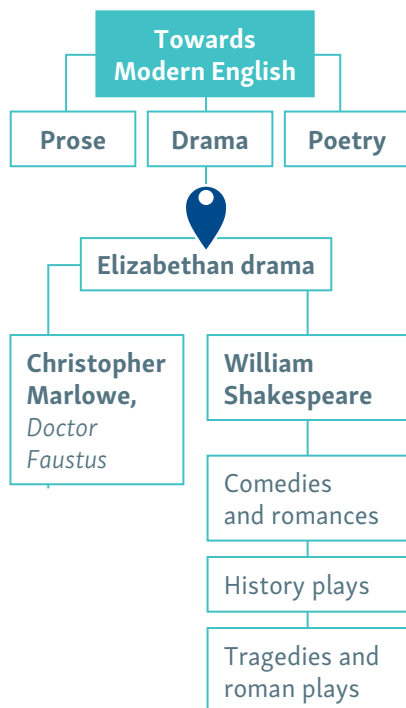
Thomas More (1478-1535)

was an English Humanist and politician. He was a Catholic and served as Chancellor of England under Henry VIII. He contributed to the declaration of Henry VIII as 'Defender of the Faith' by Pope Leo X, inspiring the king in his defense of papal authority. Their relationship began to deteriorate in 1534 on the question of Henry VIII's divorce from Anne Boleyn and the Act of Supremacy. When Henry VIII became Head of the Church of England several acts of Parliament were passed. One of them, the Treasons Act, charged those who denied the king's supremacy with high treason. By invoking this act, Henry sent his chancellor Thomas More to his death in 1535. Before dying, he gave a powerful speech re-stating his belief that in religious matters the King could not prevail over the Pope.

Literary competence

- 1 COMPREHENSION** Read the text and answer the questions.
 - Utopia is founded on principles of tolerance and freedom and people can follow different religions. What do these beliefs have in common and how do they differ?
 - Despite the variety of religions, there is one which prevails. What is its god called? How does such a religion differ from the others?
 - In the last part of the extract, More talks about superstitions. Have they disappeared in Utopia? Why/Why not?
- 2 ANALYSIS** How is Mithras described? Which qualities does he possess?
- 3 INTERPRETATION** In your opinion, is Mithras a reassuring god? Why?
- 4 INTERPRETATION** Quickly revise Thomas More's life. Does it contradict or confirm his attitude towards religion, as it is shown in this extract? Why?

Renaissance drama



The spirit of the Renaissance brought widespread interest in the classics, notably Latin and Italian. Terence and Plautus were the models for comedy, while Seneca was the main reference point for tragedy.

Seneca followed the model of Greek drama, and also provided the division of the play into five acts. He introduced the human motive of **revenge** to substitute the religious idea that divine justice and fate would punish those who broke the moral law. His subjects were characterised by **atrocious** and **monstrous crimes**, and bloody actions were usually shown on stage. The appearance of ghosts was also frequent. Seneca appealed to the Elizabethans, who were used to violence and bloodshed. We must not forget that this 'golden' period witnessed terrible cruelty in the religious persecutions, as in witch hunts and in the pitiless repression of political plots.

Patrons and playwrights

Drama flourished during 16th century thanks to the new appearance of **public companies of players**. The players were at first hunted by the authorities because they were considered vagrants. Their situation slowly changed when drama became the main court entertainment. Henry VIII had appointed a Master of the Revels whose aim was to superintend the performances. Public players were normally employed; consequently court helped them and contributed to the survival of the popular theatre. The companies began to place themselves under the protection of **some** powerful **noblemen**; in this way they came to be considered his servants and had their own position in society. The most famous courtiers became patrons of actors; among them the Earl of Leicester, the Lord Chamberlain, the Lord Admiral, and later King James I himself.

The development of theatre under Elizabeth

Elizabeth's influence on the development of drama was great. 16th century was the golden age of theatre and the most appreciated playwrights were **William Shakespeare** and **Christopher Marlowe**. Yet, the church tried to oppose its popularity as much as possible, but the protection of the queen and, in general, of the aristocracy allowed drama to flourish, even though with ups and downs. The theatre, in fact, was a terrific instrument of political propaganda as well as a source to search popular consensus. Playhouses, however, were often closed because of the outbreak of the bubonic plague, for example from 1592 to 1594. At such times, acting companies were obliged to travel to continue to perform their plays. During the Civil War, however, from 1642 to 1660, attending theatres was illegal, because they were considered meeting places for those who supported the king against the Parliament. In addition to this, the Puritans who took control of the country considered them frivolous and sinful.

Acting companies

Many actors acted in companies: they were very much like a commercial enterprise, in which all the partners were sharers. Each company had its own dramatist, and the plays were written to suit the actors, both physically and in particular aspects of their personalities. In the 16th century, women did not appear on the stage (they were allowed to act in 1662), and female parts were performed by boys. This was only possible until their voices changed, so there were not many boy actors available; as a result there were not many women among the characters.

The **plays** were the property of each company, and the company which had the best playwright was the most successful. Although the plays were not published, 'pirated' versions were written shorthand during the performances. This is what often happened with Shakespeare's plays, which were by far the most admired. The circulation of these illegal versions, not completely faithful to the original, made the editing of his works very difficult [[> page 118](#)].



During the Elizabethan reign there were two main theatrical companies: the **Lord Chamberlain's Men** and the **Lord Admiral's Men**. The first was Shakespeare's company, and it became so important that after Elizabeth's death King James I himself became their patron; so they were later called the King's Men.

Jacobean drama

During James I's reign, the most representative playwrights of the period were **George Chapman** and **John Webster**. Chapman's plays were very sophisticated in their splendid descriptive rhetoric and were written for a selected few. As regards Webster, his works are rich in poetic imagery and deal with themes like human feelings, compassion and evil. His most famous play, *The Duchess of Malfi*, has often been revived on the English stage in recent times: redolent of the Senecan tragedy with its feast of horrors, it features a tragic love story and secret marriage of the title character with her steward which entails tragedy, madness and ultimately death.

James I spent enormous sums of money on all kinds of entertainment, often against the will of the Parliament, which was worried about the finances of the state. James I himself commissioned forms of stage representations called '**masques**' [examples of masques appear in Shakespearean's plays, > **page 168**]. These were performances often used at court to celebrate weddings and included music and dance. There was a great disequilibrium, however, in terms of money invested between these performances and those played at the theatre, even though the actors could perform in both.

James I's protection of the theatre companies explains why most of the actors supported the king in a period in which the Puritans started to take hold in English society and wanted to close the theatres because they considered them places of sin.

Drama as political propaganda

Drama was not only a form of entertainment during the Elizabethan and Jacobean period. Unlike poetry, which required a certain degree of education, it was open up to all classes of society, from the aristocracy to the lower classes and it showed an important instrument for political propaganda. As England was torn by conflicts, both abroad against Spain and France, and at home with the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, Elizabeth I did not hesitate to exploit drama to control the most powerful medium of her era and influence theatregoers.

Theatres in London at the end of the 16th century. As you can see on the map, most of London's theatres were located on the south bank of the Thames. However a number of buildings owned by craft associations, such as Mercers' Hall, Drapers' Hall and Merchants Taylor's Hall, were also used as theatres.

Reading competence

Complete the sentences with the missing information.

- Elizabethan dramatists found their model for comedy in and for tragedy in
- Elizabethan tragedy is characterised by
- Actors had no professional status in this period and to avoid being arrested as vagrants they had to
- Female parts were
- The Master of the Revels had to
- The most important theatrical companies in 16th century were



The age of theatres

During the last decades of the 16th century, theatre flourished in London. Plays were usually performed in courtyards or public halls, not only in private theatres. Soon special buildings were built up on the south bank of the Thames, which was out of the city walls, as plays were thought to encourage bad behaviour.

The first to be built was the Theatre (1576). Other important theatres were the Curtain, the Rose and the Swan, but the most successful of all was the Globe, Shakespeare's theatre, which was built in Southwark, south London, in 1599.

It was made of timber and thatch, and it burned to the ground in 1613, when a stage cannon shot a glowing piece of wood into the thatched roof during a performance. A new Globe was built on the same site in 1614. In 1642 it was closed by the Puritans, and in 1644 it was pulled down.

A project to rebuild the Globe was presented in 1945; the remains of the old Globe were discovered in 1989 and the construction started in the same year, trying to keep the original form through the observation of old documents and drawings. In 1997 the theatre reopened and the first plays of the season were *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*. In June of the same year Queen Elizabeth II inaugurated the official reopening of the theatre.



The Globe Theatre today, London.

The Elizabethan playhouse

Elizabethan playhouses were small and circular or **1.** in shape. They were built around a **2.** or pit, where the poorer spectators stood, exposed to the rain and sun, since there was no roof. They were called the 'groundlings' and were the **3.** people of the London streets. Sharp and critical, they were eager for **4.** and strong emotion. The three rows of galleries provided **5.** arrangements under cover for those who paid more. In spite of the small size, a theatre could hold even over a **6.** people.

The most important part of the stage was a large **7.** which jutted out into the pit and was surrounded by the spectators on three sides. It was called '**8.** stage' because its shape suggested an apron on a woman's gown. The **9.** were free to move during the performance and kept in close contact with the actors. Some even leaned on the stage. This created a unique **10.** between actors and spectators, which was also helped by the fact that there was no **11.**

The stage area was covered by a **12.** At the back of the stage there were two side doors, through which the actors entered or **13.** These doors could be conveniently exploited when an army or a procession passed over the **14.**, because it could enter at one door and go out by the other. Between the two doors there was the inner stage, an opening, generally hidden by curtains, which was used sometimes by the actors as a **15.** room. When necessary, the curtains which hid the opening were drawn and the **16.** was also used to represent **17.**, tombs and bedrooms.

Over the inner stage, in correspondence with the second **18.**, there was the upper stage, which was either **19.** off or used when an upper level was required. A platform jutted out formed a **20.** that could be used to represent the walls of a castle or of a town. A famous example of its use was the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. Above the upper stage was another room where sound and **21.** effects were made.

Performances' organisation

Performances took place in daylight. There was no scenery, so there was no limit to the number of scenes, and much was left to the imagination of the public. A chair was sufficient to indicate indoors scenes, a king wearing his armour to indicate a battlefield, and so on. The dialogue itself provided information, e.g. references to darkness or to the stars meant that it was night. A scene finished when the actors left the stage.

The costumes were rich, and there were music and sound effects. Some attempts were made at realism: when characters were wounded they really seemed to bleed, in agreement with the taste for violence and bloodshed which was very strong at the time. But it must be remembered that, in the age of Shakespeare, people went to the theatre first and foremost to hear plays, not to see them.

The strength of language


It was through language that the play made its impact. The Elizabethan theatre was not a theatre of action or of illusion, but of language – in fact of poetry – which conquered the audience with the power of its appeal to the emotions and the imagination. In Elizabethan England people were accustomed to poetry: ballads were a very popular vehicle of stories, legends and happenings of the day, while lyrics and love-songs were the common expression of the people's feelings.

The Elizabethan audience was a cross-section of society. All social classes went to the theatre: nobles, commoners, citizens and lawyers – people with different tastes and cultural backgrounds. It was the dramatist's business to please them all, and Shakespeare did.



The Globe Theatre today, London.

Listening competence

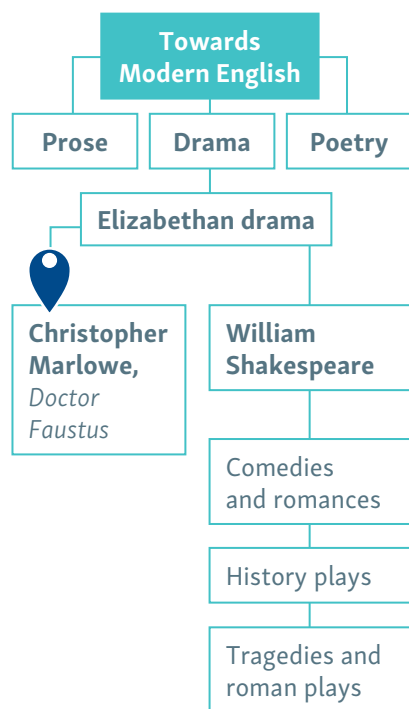
- 1  A00 Listen and complete the text 'The Elizabethan playhouse'.

Reading competence

- 2 Answer the questions.
 1. What is the history of the Globe Theatre?
 2. How much important were costumes, light and scenery?
 3. What was the most appealing feature for Elizabethan audience?

Christopher Marlowe

(1564-1593)



Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury in 1564. Unorthodox in thought, violent in manners, probably a government spy, Marlowe was a mysterious and somewhat sinister figure in the Elizabethan world, but he possessed extraordinary talent. He became **notorious for his atheism**, and was a friend of Sir Walter Raleigh and his aristocratic group of scholars, mathematicians and astronomers, equally suspected of atheism. The combination of his inquiring mind and rebellious spirit made him **impatient with conventions and with authority**. Indeed he was part of the group of the University Wits in Cambridge, but after taking a Master of Arts degree he preferred to move to London where he joined the **Lord Admiral's Company** and became their dramatist. In 1593 the Privy Council were investigating serious charges brought against him, when he was killed at an inn during a brawl. Nobody will ever know exactly what was behind his death.

Themes and style

Christopher Marlowe was the first dramatist to express the deep spirit of the Renaissance: the **centrality of man**, his lust for domination, power and his impatience towards authority, even the religious authority.

He gave the theatre his wonderful **blank verse**. He discovered the beauty of rhythm and the power of the sound of words, including of proper names. The **dramatic tension** in his works makes him the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors.

Marlowe's heroes all have two features in common: they are dominated by an

unquenchable aspiration for the unattainable that will ultimately destroy them, and they are **lonely**.

All his plays possess the **driving force of the characters' aspirations**, and this is the factor which gives them artistic unity. However, even though in developing his characters he highlighted the sense of tragedy, he was not at his best at presenting an action in a dramatic manner. Likewise, his extraordinary capacity for intuition of the great themes was not matched by an ability to command the action.

Reading competence

Answer the questions.

- 1 What makes Marlowe the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors?
- 2 What aspects of Faustus can be recognised in Marlowe's personality and life experience?
- 3 It has been said that style was one of Marlowe's greatest achievements. What stylistic devices does he use?

Works

Marlowe wrote his plays between 1587 and 1593. **Tamburlaine the Great** (c. 1587) depicts the career of a Tartar shepherd who became the ruler of Asia. **Lust for power** is the dominating feature of this cruel, sometimes grotesque hero.

In **The Jew of Malta** (1590) Barabas, the Jew, seeks infinite riches, is unjustly treated by

the Christians, and pursues a terrible revenge that becomes a real **lust for destruction** which ultimately ruins him.

Edward II (1591) is a national chronicle on a subject of English history. Unlike the heroes of the other plays, Edward II is not aggressive but weak, and becomes the victim of ambitious and cruel people.

Doctor Faustus (1604)

The German legend of Faustus fired Marlowe's imagination, and inspired his **Doctor Faustus** (1588-89). In this play, the hero sells his soul to the devil in return for ultimate knowledge.

The Tragical Historie of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus is based on the biography of a magician and alchemist who lived in Germany between 1480 and 1540. This biography, the *Historia von Doktor Johann Fausten*, was published anonymously in 1587, and became extremely popular throughout Europe, making this unknown sorcerer more famous than Paracelsus or Nostradamus. Marlowe was fascinated by the book, especially by the idea of the pact with the devil and the final damnation, which are the bases of his own work.

Plot Faustus wants to achieve supreme knowledge and the power deriving from it. He also wants to have access to 'forbidden knowledge', i.e. magic, to ~~have the capacity~~ to transcend reality and soar above the others, thus becoming similar to God. Faustus agrees to sell his soul to the devil in exchange for constant help and ~~for~~ having his own wishes satisfied for twenty-four years.

Faustus comes to this dramatic decision after much doubt and many hesitations. He is torn, and his internal conflict is symbolically represented by the presence, at his side, of a good angel and an evil angel, each trying to lead him in opposite directions. He does obtain the power to perform some magical tricks, and one day he orders the devil to summon up Helen of Troy from Hades, but what he sees is in fact a demon disguised as a woman. With this trick – which is in fact an illusion – the devil overcomes Faustus's final attempt to resist temptation. When the time allowed by the pact is over Faustus knows that the devil will come to claim his due.

Themes Faustus' aspiration is limitless knowledge, and this ~~makes him the symbol of the story~~ of the fall of man through eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. But Faustus is also the **forerunner of modern**

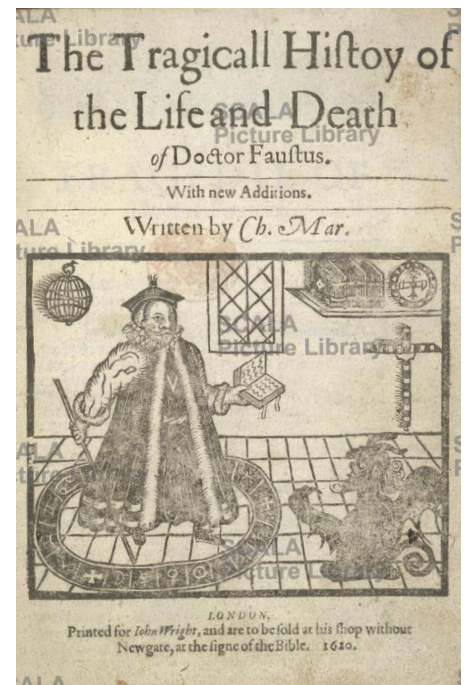
~~man~~, who rejects traditional values but is defeated by the impossibility of replacing them. The presence, at Faustus's side, of the good and evil angels, and the fact that he is damned only when he loses faith and hope in the mercy of God, place the play in the tradition of the English morality plays [**> page 72**].

The play tackles various religious, philosophical and social themes. In fact, Faustus renounces God and chooses Satan instead, thus condemning himself to eternal damnation. Even though it is always possible for him to be redeemed, he never regrets his choices. Only at the end of the play, does he implore God's help to be saved. In depriving Faustus of the possibility of being forgiven, Marlowe seems to abandon the orthodox Christian belief in God's infinite mercy.

The play explores the contrast between medieval and Renaissance individual. The medieval individual placed God at the centre of the universe, whereas the Renaissance individual placed ~~man~~ at the centre. Though not a scientist in the modern sense, Faustus's Renaissance frame of mind is shown by his deep interest in philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, medicine and in Aristotle's works. It is his thirst for knowledge, however, that condemns him. In fact, according to medieval theology, absolute knowledge belonged only to God.

From a social point of view, Faustus surrenders to the allure~~ment~~ of power. He pursues both material wealth and the possibility of gaining more power than ~~that~~ the Pope and the Emperor ~~had~~. It is his will of power at any cost, ~~that~~ makes him corrupt.

Language The language of the play is very elaborated. Except for the use of blank verse, Marlowe's vocabulary is rich in polysyllabic words which are suitable to the cultured context the play is set in. ~~Also~~ the use of foreign and Latinate proper names, like Mephistopheles, Lucifer, Beelzebub, The Cardinal of Lorrain, Cornelius and others, evoke an educated setting. Imagery drawing on all senses abounds throughout the play to stress critical points.



The frontispiece of *Doctor Faustus*, 1620.



Visual competence

A00 Look at the image, listen to its explanation and complete it with the missing words.

The **1** in the picture show in detail many symbols linked to **2**, like the zodiac, where each **3** has a meaning which is related to strength, femininity, masculinity, emotions and transcendent knowledge. The **4** stands in the middle of the **5** and in his hand a book symbolises knowledge. The monster in front of him and the **6** on the wall show the presence of Good and **7**

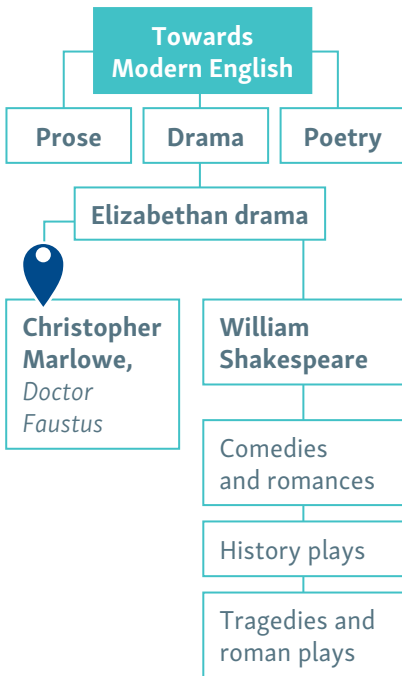
T12 I'll burn my books!

The final soliloquy is the most famous passage in the whole play *Doctor Faustus*. Faustus is alone. It is eleven at night, and at twelve his time will expire. He in turn fears the wrath of God, hopes to be saved, is desperate and wishes he could escape his fate.

From *Doctor Faustus*
by **Christopher Marlowe**,
Scene XIX



A12



[The clock strikes eleven.]

FAUSTUS

Ah, Faustus,

Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually.
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven¹,
That time may cease, and midnight never come;
Fair nature's eye², rise, rise again, and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul.

*O lente lente currite noctis equi*³!

The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.

O, I'll leap up⁴ to my God! Who pulls me down?

See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!

One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ! –

Rend not⁵ my heart for naming of my Christ;

Yet will I call on him. O, spare me, Lucifer! –

Where is it now? 'Tis gone: and see where God

Stretcheth out his arm and bends his ireful⁶ brows.

Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me,

And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!

No, no:

Then will I headlong run into the earth.

Earth, gape! O, no, it will not harbour me.

You stars that reign'd⁷ at my nativity,

Whose influence hath allotted⁸ death and hell,

Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist

Into the entrails of yon labouring cloud⁹,

That, when you vomit forth into the air,

My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,

So that my soul may but ascend to heaven.

[The watch strikes.]

Ah, half the hour is pass'd: 'twill all be pass'd anon¹⁰.

O God,

If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,

Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransom'd me,

Impose some end to my incessant pain;

Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,

A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd.

O, no end is limited¹¹ to damned souls.

Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul¹²?

Or why is this immortal that thou hast?

Ah, Pythagoras' *metempsychosis*¹³, were that true,

1 **spheres of heaven**: according to the Ptolemaic system, the Earth was at the centre of the universe, and the stars, the sun and the planets *went* around it.

2 **nature's eye**: the sun.

3 *O lente... equi*: O run slowly, horses of the night! (cfr. Ovid, *Amores*).

4 **leap up**: jump towards.

5 **Rend not**: don't tear apart.

6 **ireful**: angry.

7 **stars that reign'd**: in astrology the stars and planets influence people's character and destiny.

8 **allotted**: assigned.

9 **Into... cloud**: in the deepest guts of those stormy clouds.

10 **anon**: in a short time.

11 **limited**: (here) posed.

12 **wanting soul**: without a soul.

13 **metempsychosis**: theory of the transmigration of the soul from one body to another after death.

45 This soul should fly from me and I be chang'd
Unto some brutish beast: all beasts are happy,
For when they die
Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements¹⁴;
But mine must live still to be plagu'd in hell.

50 Curs'd be the parents that engender'd me!
No, Faustus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer
That hath depriv'd thee of the joys of heaven.

[The clock strikes twelve.]

55 O, it strikes, it strikes! Now, body, turn to air,
Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell!

[Thunder and lightning.]

O soul, be chang'd into little water drops,
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found.

[Enter Devils.]

60 My God, my God! Look not so fierce on me!
Adders¹⁵ and serpents, let me breathe awhile!
Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer;
I'll burn my books! – Ah, Mephostophilis!

[Exeunt with him. Exeunt LUCIFER and BEELZEBUB]

¹⁴ **elements**: according to the ancient Greeks the world consisted of four elements: earth, air, fire and water.

¹⁵ **Adders**: a type of viper.

Literary competence

1 COMPREHENSION Read the text and answer the questions.

1. What desperate, vain hope is expressed in lines 5-10?
2. In the course of the soliloquy Faustus tries to escape his destiny. Who does he invoke? What does he beg for?
3. What does he ask of mountains and hills, the earth and the stars?
4. What is his prayer to God?
5. What is the last, desperate promise Faustus makes, in the vain attempt to save his soul?

2 ANALYSIS In some lines Faustus addresses himself as 'Faustus'; in other lines with the first-person pronoun 'I'. What feelings does such a change reveal about his state of mind?

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. <input type="checkbox"/> Anguish. | c. <input type="checkbox"/> Arrogance. |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/> Confidence. | d. <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion. |


3 ANALYSIS Where is the emphasis, at this crucial moment in the play? Justify your choice.

- On what Faustus expects.
- On the moral teaching implied.
- On Faustus's state of mind.

4 ANALYSIS Focus on the stage directions referring to the clock. Besides signaling the passing of time, what functions do they have in this context?

- The clock gives ~~the last chance to~~ Faustus to repent.
- They express the idea that time flows inexorably.
- It is impossible to stop time.
- It is impossible for Faustus to escape damnation.

5 INTERPRETATION It has been said that *Doctor Faustus* contains features of the Middle Ages and features of the Renaissance. Decide which items apply to the Middle Ages (M) and which apply to the Renaissance (R).

1. Inner conflict between sin and repentance. (M) (R)
2. Aspiration to explain the nature of matter. (M) (R)
3. Rebellion against orthodoxy and dogma. (M) (R)
4. The presence of the Devil.  (M) (R)
5. Aspiration to discover the secrets of creation. (M) (R)
6. The presence of a good angel and an evil angel, which recalls the morality plays. (M) (R)
7. Fascination with what man can achieve. (M) (R)
8. Aspiration to control natural elements. (M) (R)
9. Thirst for unlimited knowledge. (M) (R)

Creative competence

6 Dr Faustus is not the only character to wish to go beyond man's limits, to challenge traditional knowledge or even death. Dante's characters also have similar wishes and these desires runs parallel with the history of mankind. Discuss this, and mention examples of 'overreaching' which led to terrible punishments.

- Do you think this challenge to the limits imposed by morals, or by religion, is definitely an aspect of the past, or can you recognise the same spirit of perennial challenge in certain aspects of the approach to science, even today?
- Do you accept the idea that there should be a limit to certain types of research, or must scientific discovery be totally free?

Examine the questions, choose one particular aspect and develop it. Support your ideas with examples from history, myth, literature or present-day life.

 **Video**
INTRODUCTION


Why is William Shakespeare so important?

- William Shakespeare is certainly one of the most celebrated playwrights of all times. The central themes of his plays are about **humankind**: love, friendship, hatred, ambition, thirst for power, jealousy, revenge, death and procrastination.
- His characters, which possess a unique touch, have become **universal landmarks** throughout world literature. They show the human weakness of the common man mingled with a superior emotional and intellectual consciousness rarely found in the characters of other playwrights. The tragic fall of Shakespeare's heroes and heroines always depends on their own choices and actions. It is this **free will** that makes his works unique, distinguishing them from the Greek heroes, whose destinies were invariably predetermined.
- Shakespeare was a **master of language** and took full advantage of all its potentialities. He exploited any kind of register: in poetry and prose; conversational tones and formal registers; vulgar and highly educated language; sexual expressions and slang. His imagery is as extraordinarily rich, employing an incredible variety of figures of speech, like metaphor, simile, irony, symbolism, use of musical effects and many others.

A worldwide reputation, a mysterious life

Shakespeare's reputation is worldwide, but very little is known about who he was or how he lived. We know that he was the third child of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, and was baptised on 26th April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. Both his parents came from families of **yeomen** – small landowning farmers – in Warwickshire. His father was a prosperous glover and a leading member of the small community of Stratford. Around 1576 his father was plagued by financial difficulties, and the family went through a difficult period. William probably helped his father at his trade after leaving school. There is also a report that he may have worked as an assistant master at the grammar school. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway, and five months later a daughter, Susanna, was baptised. Twins Judith and Hamnet were born and baptised in 1585.

Nothing certain is known about Shakespeare's experiences in the years between 1585 and 1592. It is possible that he joined one of the wandering troupes of professional actors who travelled under the patronage of important noblemen and performed almost yearly in Stratford. In 1587 at least five companies passed through Stratford on a route that ultimately took them to London, a town dazzling with the splendour of the English Renaissance.

There are several records of Shakespeare's name in the years that followed, including the publication of a poem, *Venus and Adonis*, in 1593. The same year saw the closing of the theatres owing to the plague, and in 1594 Shakespeare published his second poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*. It is probable that in the years that followed he joined the theatrical company called **Lord Chamberlain's Men**, and the connection continued as long as he worked for the theatre. 1596 saw Hamnet's death, recorded in the Register of Stratford Parish Church. The loss of his child may have affected Shakespeare deeply. 1609 is the year of publication of his 154 **Sonnets**, the composition of which probably started in the early 1590s. In 1616 the poet died and was buried in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Considering that Shakespeare was not educated at the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge, his extremely intricate and culturally eclectic works often gave rise to theories which suggested that they were written by other learned men of letters. The fact is that Shakespeare was actually very well educated; first at a good grammar school and subsequently through his own readings.



Through his friendship with the Earl of Southampton, to whom he dedicated his two long poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare had access to an extensive library and to the intellectual breadth of many cultivated intellectuals. It is very difficult to sum up the genius of Shakespeare. He does not belong to any literary school. His work is representative of the Renaissance cultural revolution and remains today a landmark in world literature.

Many works but no manuscripts

Shakespeare's production of drama covered a period of about twenty years, from 1590 to 1611, and consists of **37 plays**. However, no manuscripts of his plays exist. This is not strange, at the time the press had just been invented and there was no way for an author to protect his original works from copying. Moreover, the theatre companies were competing with each other and easily tried to be 'inspired' by texts written by others. In fact a number of unauthorised editions appeared in quarto form (a volume made up of eight sheets of paper folded twice) during his life, but the first complete edition of his works is universally considered to be the **First Folio of 1623**. A folio was a volume made up of sheets of paper folded once; it was a volume of the largest size. In the *First Folio*, which was printed just a few years after his death, thanks to two actors in Shakespeare's company, his work was safeguarded and protected. This edition does not contain any indication as to the dates of composition, and the very limited evidence of chronology that we do have comes from records of performances. Although some estimations can be attempted on the basis of the editions issued during his lifetime or immediately after his death, critics do not always agree on the dates. The *First Folio* divides Shakespeare's plays in three categories: **comedies, histories** and **tragedies**.

Reading competence

Answer the questions.

- 1 What social class did Shakespeare's family belong to?
- 2 What education did Shakespeare receive?
- 3 How did he probably come into contact with the theatre?
- 4 What did Shakespeare do before becoming the most famous playwright in the world?
- 5 Did Shakespeare only write for the theatre?



Through ART *Many faces for the Bard*



The Bard remains a somewhat shadowy figure. There has long been controversy over the accuracy of some of the portraits' claims as likenesses of Shakespeare. In 2009 there was another development regarding William Shakespeare's 'true' portrait, as reported by the following blog from the *New York Times*.

On Monday in London, Stanley Wells, the chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, unveiled what he claims is the only picture of William Shakespeare painted during the playwright's lifetime. The trust explains the significance in a statement on its Web site: 'Up to now only two images have been accepted as authentic representations of what Shakespeare may have looked

like. One is the engraving by Martin Droeshout. The other is the portrait bust in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon. The engraver, who was only in his teens when Shakespeare died, must have had a picture, until now unidentified, to work from.'

As *Time* magazine explains: 'The picture has languished for centuries at Newbridge House, home base of the Cobbe family outside Dublin, where until recently no one suspected it might be a portrait of the Bard.'

Then, three years ago, a member of the family that has owned the painting for generations, an art restorer named Alec Cobbe, noticed during a visit to the National Portrait Gallery in Britain that a painting of Shakespeare then on loan from the Folger Shakespeare Library, which is believed to be a copy of an earlier one, strongly resembled a painting in his own family's art collection.

The tests produced persuasive evidence that the wood panel dated from around 1610 and that the Cobbe painting was the source for the one in the Folger and several others.

Funerary monument bust of William Shakespeare, Church of the Holy Trinity, Stratford-upon-Avon, England.

Reading competence

1 Answer the questions.

1. Why is the Cobbe portrait believed to be more accurate than other representations? Why does this painting mark an important development?
2. How did Mr Cobbe realise that the painting was a portrait of William Shakespeare?

Shakespeare's plays



Phases

The collection of Shakespeare's plays can also be divided in four main production phases, each one with its own features.

The first phase (1590-1595) This is the phase of his apprenticeship, when he needed to test his powers. He experimented with the farce, the comedy and the chronicle play – dealing with English history. This phase includes *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the first mature tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

The second phase (1596-1601) The second period is dominated by the chronicle play and the comedy. The chronicle plays written in this period show great mastery in character delineation and, at the same time, the scope widens to the investigation of the very nature of kingship and to the presentation of the variegated world of commoners which formed the nation itself. Also the best of the comedies was written in this period: each of them is a new experiment, as if Shakespeare wanted to touch different traditions, from the Roman comedy to the pastoral, from the court comedy to the farce. The pains and pleasures of love, disguise, the fooling of humourless and egotistical people, the blending of dramatic and comic episodes, together with the extraordinary verbal beauty, give these plays a sure hold of the stage.

The third phase (1602-1608) This is the period of the great tragedies. They share the same, basic struggle between good and evil, and are marked by a sombre atmosphere, violence, the loss of humanity in a soul dominated by passion, ambition or pride, the agony deriving from inability to tackle events beyond one's powers, and finally the pursuit of evil for its own sake. An example is *Macbeth's* awareness of the monstrosity of his crime and inability to repent. The comedies written in this period are tinged with bitterness and pessimism; these 'problem' comedies, as they are called, hardly arouse any laughter.

The fourth phase (1609-1613) A completely different atmosphere marks the last phase: reconciliation, serenity and forgiveness pervade the most famous of his final plays, *The Tempest*, together with an atmosphere of magic. It looks as if, after experiencing the evil side of the world and the sufferings of life, Shakespeare has acquired the smiling outlook of wisdom which does not seek revenge but is aware that there is something much more important to think of.

Shakespeare's themes and features

Characterisation The most easily recognisable feature of Shakespeare's greatness is characterisation. One of the most striking features of Shakespeare's plays is the fact that the characters belong to all social strata, even though at different levels. The largest group, nearly a third of them, belongs to the aristocracy. Then, there are the representatives of the lower classes, amounting to about a quarter of the total and the gentry to nearly a fifth.

The remaining characters belong to other groups. Among them, a crucial role is played by the 'fools'. These were comic characters, or 'jesters', who had a dual role: the first role was to entertain the audience by making it laugh. The second and much more important role was to express opinions without any censure, which common characters could not express openly. In short, in Shakespeare's plays the fool is a wise character disguised as a silly character.

Also important was the role played by women (their roles were performed by young boys). Women often influence their husbands, for example in *Macbeth*, where Lady Macbeth encourages her husband to commit regicide. Yet, they are often subjected to their husbands and fathers, especially those belonging to the upper classes, like Lady Anne in *Richard III*, one of his victims, while the women belonging to the lower ones were more independent.

Reading competence

Answer the questions.

- 1 What phases are usually recognised in Shakespeare's activity as a playwright?
- 2 What are their characteristics?
- 3 What are the 'problem' plays?

Themes and imagery Shakespeare's plays deal with almost all themes affecting human beings and the world in which they live. As a consequence, a complete list is impossible since they range from the contrast between appearance and reality, from **love** to **hatred**, from **order** to **chaos**, from **thirst for power** to **revenge** and **corruption**. This is the greatness of Shakespeare: the observation of human life and the kaleidoscope of human behaviour.

Disorder – in man or in state – is also very important, and it is usually related to images of **disease and supernatural phenomena**, while **storms** indicate conflict. The imagery throughout *Hamlet* constantly points to illness, suffering and death, and this suggests the inner corruption of the Elsinore court and of the new king. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the love quarrel between Oberon and Titania brings disharmony and negative effects to all the characters.

Peace, unity and love are usually accompanied by **music**, which plays a very important role in Shakespeare's work. Love – a precious value – is often associated with **gold and jewels**.

Flowers, which indicate natural sweetness, are also often mentioned in relation with love.

Conflicts are of primary importance: especially love vs. honour, opposition vs. concord, evil vs. love and death vs. life. **Light** usually stands for life, goodness, virtue, and **darkness** for evil and death. **Fire** is also very important; it may be associated with spirit but also with wrath and destruction.

Images from **nature and animals** are frequent and help understand meaning; in *Macbeth* the references to beasts of prey, blackness and blood make it easier to see him as a dangerous and evil man.

Reading competence

Answer the questions.

- 1 What aspects of Shakespeare's works are particularly important features?
- 2 What themes emerge from the majority of his plays?
- 3 What natural elements characterise disorder on the one hand and peace on the other in Shakespeare's plays?
- 4 Light and shadow identify precise moods and values: which ones?

Production phase	Date	Comedies and romances	History plays	Tragedies and roman plays
First phase	1590-1593	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i> <i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i> <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i>	<i>Henry VI</i> <i>Richard III</i> [> page 120]	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>
	1593-1594 1595 1595-1596	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> [> page 134]	<i>King John</i> <i>Richard II</i>	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> [> page 126]
Second phase	1596 1597 1598 1599	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> [> page 138] <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> <i>As You Like It</i>	<i>Henry IV</i> <i>Henry V</i>	<i>Julius Caesar</i> [> page 144]
	1601	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> <i>Twelfth Night</i>		<i>Hamlet</i> [> page 150]
Third phase	1602	<i>Troilus and Cressida</i> <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>		<i>Othello</i> <i>King Lear</i>
	1604 1605 1606 1607	<i>Measure for Measure</i>		<i>Macbeth</i> [> page 156] <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> <i>Timon of Athens</i> <i>Pericles</i>
Fourth phase	1608			
	1609 1610 1611 1613	<i>Cymbeline</i> <i>The Winter's Tale</i> <i>The Tempest</i> [> page 164] <i>Henry VIII</i>		<i>Coriolanus</i>