



# EARLY ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

1558–88

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# KEY TOPIC 1

## Queen, government and religion, 1558–69

Elizabeth knew that as Queen she would face many problems. The imagined conversations on this page help you to identify those problems before you explore them in detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

### Elizabethan moments in time – London 1558

#### DECISIONS FOR ELIZABETH, 1558

1. Use the conversations in the speech bubbles and your own knowledge to answer the following questions:
  - a) Why did it seem important for Elizabeth to marry quickly?
  - b) Why did there seem to be more problems having a queen than a king?
  - c) Why was Elizabeth's choice of husband likely to create tensions?
  - d) Which 'everyday' problems had made life miserable for many people during the previous reign?
  - e) What decision about religion did Elizabeth have to take, and why might her decision create problems?
  - f) Which country was at war with England, and how well was the war going for England?
  - g) King Philip of Spain proposed to marry Elizabeth. What were the possible problems and advantages of this marriage?
2. List the problems Elizabeth was facing in 1558.
3. Did any events in the previous reigns suggest that people would support Elizabeth? Look back to page 3 for information

#### CHECKING WHO'S WHO

1. Who were Elizabeth's father and mother?
2. Who were her brother and sister?
3. Who had been king or queen immediately before Elizabeth?



Another woman on the throne! She will not be able to rule on her own.

Maybe Elizabeth will marry an English noble?

That might make the other nobles jealous.

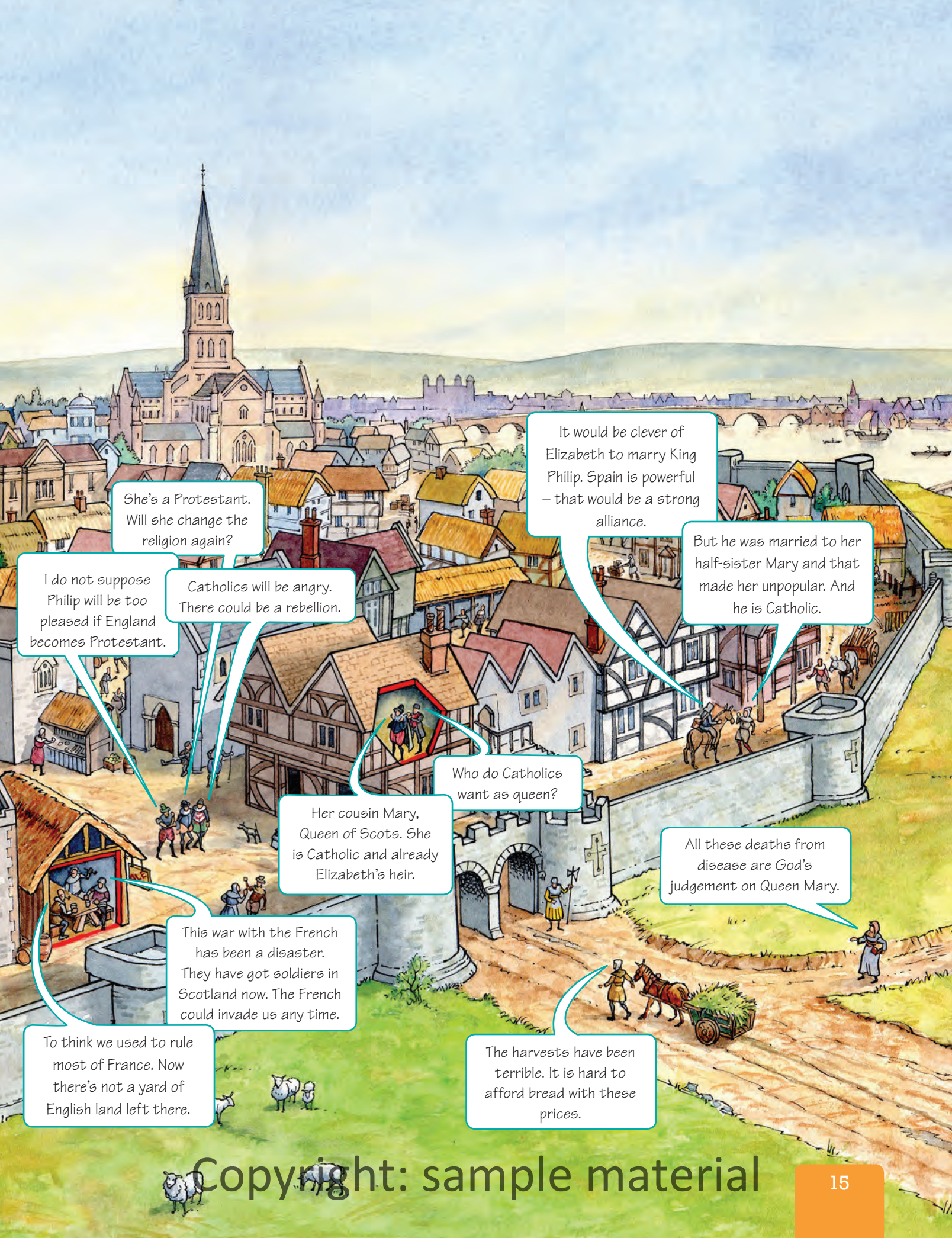
But if she marries a foreign prince, we might end up fighting his wars against his enemies.

What happens if she dies young, before she has children?

Civil war. That is what used to happen when there was no heir.

She needs to get married and have children quickly so we know who her heir is.





She's a Protestant.  
Will she change the  
religion again?

I do not suppose  
Philip will be too  
pleased if England  
becomes Protestant.

Catholics will be angry.  
There could be a rebellion.

It would be clever of  
Elizabeth to marry King  
Philip. Spain is powerful  
– that would be a strong  
alliance.

But he was married to her  
half-sister Mary and that  
made her unpopular. And  
he is Catholic.

Who do Catholics  
want as queen?

Her cousin Mary,  
Queen of Scots. She  
is Catholic and already  
Elizabeth's heir.

All these deaths from  
disease are God's  
judgement on Queen Mary.

This war with the French  
has been a disaster.  
They have got soldiers in  
Scotland now. The French  
could invade us any time.

To think we used to rule  
most of France. Now  
there's not a yard of  
English land left there.

The harvests have been  
terrible. It is hard to  
afford bread with these  
prices.



## 2 1558 – Elizabeth's problems and decisions

### 2.1 The problems facing the 'Virgin Queen' in 1558

In 1509, Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, had been welcomed joyfully as a dynamic young king. Elizabeth's situation was very different. Many people were suspicious of having another queen after the disasters of her half-sister, Mary's, reign. Was it possible for a woman to rule England successfully or was a queen bound to fail? Later on in the reign, Elizabeth felt confident enough to use her gender to her advantage, encouraging the image of a powerful, independent 'Virgin Queen', who was married to her country, but in 1558, marriage was just one of many problems facing her. This chapter explores the problems Elizabeth had to deal with at the start of her reign and the choices she made.

#### ELIZABETH'S PROBLEMS ?

1. Look at the diagram below. What heading would you give to each problem?
2. Which two problems do you think were the most important to tackle straightaway? Explain your choices. Think about how problems might be dangerous to Elizabeth and what choices Elizabeth faced.
3. What advice would you give Elizabeth about how to handle the two problems you chose in question 2? Think about the events of the previous reigns (see pages 14–15).

#### Problem 1

Should she keep the Catholic religion or return to Protestantism? What penalties would be imposed on anyone who did not attend church? Elizabeth had to think about the possible reactions of people who did not agree with her decision. Would they rebel or even try to depose her?

#### Problem 2

All monarchs needed to enforce the law fairly and try to reduce hardship and poverty. If harvests, wars or other events went badly, then poverty, unemployment and high prices could increase the monarch's unpopularity and lead to rebellion.

#### Problem 7

Elizabeth's legitimacy or right to the throne was questioned by some Catholics, who believed that Elizabeth could not be queen because her parents' marriage had been illegal, and therefore Elizabeth was **illegitimate**.

#### Problem 3

Elizabeth had to take the important decisions herself, but she was expected to listen to the advice of the members of the **Privy Council**. First, she had to choose her councillors – would she choose just those who would support her, especially about religion?

#### Problem 6

Many people, including many of the wealthiest and most powerful nobles, thought a woman was too weak to rule the country. The issue of Elizabeth's gender and the expectation that she would marry were of national interest.

#### Problem 4

It was important to know who the next monarch would be if Elizabeth died young and had not married. People feared that if she died without a clear heir there could be a **civil war**, with ambitious nobles or foreign princes trying to seize power.

#### Problem 5

The two most powerful countries in Europe – France and Spain – were Catholic. England was at war with France, a war that had gone badly. France was allied with Scotland, which provided a base for an invasion of England. Defending the country was the monarch's most important duty, but a queen could not lead her army into battle. Defeat in war could result in Elizabeth being deposed.

**Illegitimate** The child of unmarried parents. The illegitimate child of a king or queen had no right to inherit the throne.



## Elizabeth's character and strengths

Elizabeth was 25 years old when she became Queen. She had already had many experiences that prepared her for tackling the problems she faced. Her character was also very important in helping her deal with the problems and crises.



▲ This portrait shows Elizabeth at the age of 12 in 1545.

### Her parents

Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, was beheaded for treason in 1536. Elizabeth was declared illegitimate and lost her right to the throne. When Henry's new wife (Jane Seymour) gave birth to a son, Edward, all chance of Elizabeth becoming queen seemed to have gone. Elizabeth now only saw her father and half-brother on special occasions. In 1543, when Henry married his sixth wife, Catherine Parr, she persuaded him to bring Elizabeth back to **court**.

### Education

Elizabeth was brought up as a Protestant and learned Greek, Latin, French and Italian. She was taught Bible stories, dancing, riding, archery and needlework, and was especially fond of music. Roger Ascham, her tutor, wrote:

*My illustrious mistress shines like a star. So much solidity of understanding, such courtesy and dignity, which I have never observed at so early an age. She hath the most ardent love of the true religion and the best kind of literature. Her mind is free from female weakness and she is endued [blessed] with a masculine power for hard work. No memory is more retentive than hers.*

## ELIZABETH'S BACKGROUND

1. Read the page below. Identify:
  - a) two experiences when Elizabeth faced great stress and danger
  - b) three personal qualities that would help her as Queen
  - c) evidence that there were doubts that a woman could rule a country.
2. Look at the diagram on page 16. Which of the problems and issues in the diagram would the experiences and qualities identified in question 1 most help with?
3. Do you think that in 1558 Elizabeth:
  - a) promised to be an excellent ruler?
  - b) was potentially a good ruler, but that was uncertain?
  - c) looked likely to be a failure?
 Explain your choice.

### Danger

In 1554, the new Queen, Mary I, suspected Elizabeth of being involved in Wyatt's Rebellion (page 3) and Elizabeth was accused of treason, which carried the death penalty. Eventually, Mary was advised that there was not enough evidence to put Elizabeth on trial. Elizabeth wrote to Mary that:

*I never practised, advised nor consented to anything that might be prejudicial to yourself in any way. Your Highness's most faithful subject, that hath been from the beginning and will be to my end.*

### Apprenticeship

Unless Mary had a child, Elizabeth was heir to the throne. Foreign **ambassadors** and English courtiers began to take far more notice of her. The Venetian ambassador wrote in 1554:

*her figure and face are very handsome, and such an air of majesty pervades all her actions that no one can fail to suppose she is queen.*

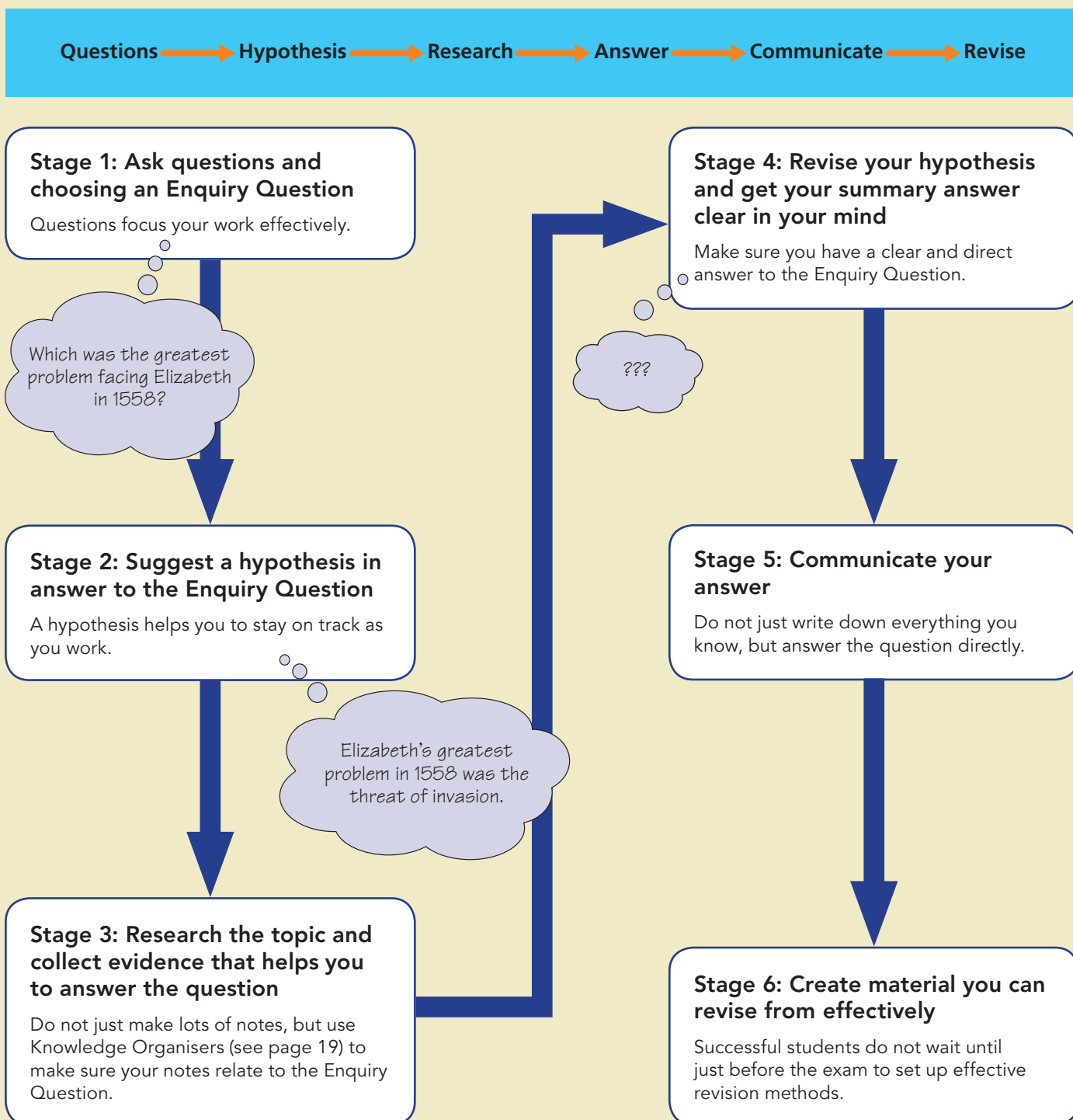
In November 1558, Mary died and Elizabeth became Queen. The Spanish ambassador wrote to his king, Philip II:

*She seems to be greatly more feared than her sister and gives her orders and has her way as absolutely as her father had.*

## 2.2 Visible learning: developing independence

On page 8 we introduced the idea of making learning **VISIBLE** – if you can see and describe how you go about learning, you will learn more effectively. Otherwise your brain just muddles along, without a route-map helping it to reach its destination. In History, that destination is understanding a topic and being able to provide good answers to questions on that topic.

This page is a crucial example of visible learning. What you see below is your route-map – how to get from knowing a **LITTLE** about a topic to knowing a **LOT** about it. It is important because in the future you will need the skills to study independently, perhaps at A level, at university or at work. The route-map or process below will help you to work independently and effectively. The box below shows the process in six stages. Then the diagram explains it more fully.



## 2.3 Your Enquiry: Which was the greatest problem facing Elizabeth in 1558?

### Stage 1: choosing the enquiry question

It was essential for Elizabeth to make a successful start to show she was not a weak ruler. This meant prioritising the problems. She had to decide what needed to be done straightaway: in other words, she had to decide '**which was the greatest problem in 1558**'. Elizabeth's situation therefore creates the enquiry question for this chapter.

### Stage 2: suggesting a hypothesis

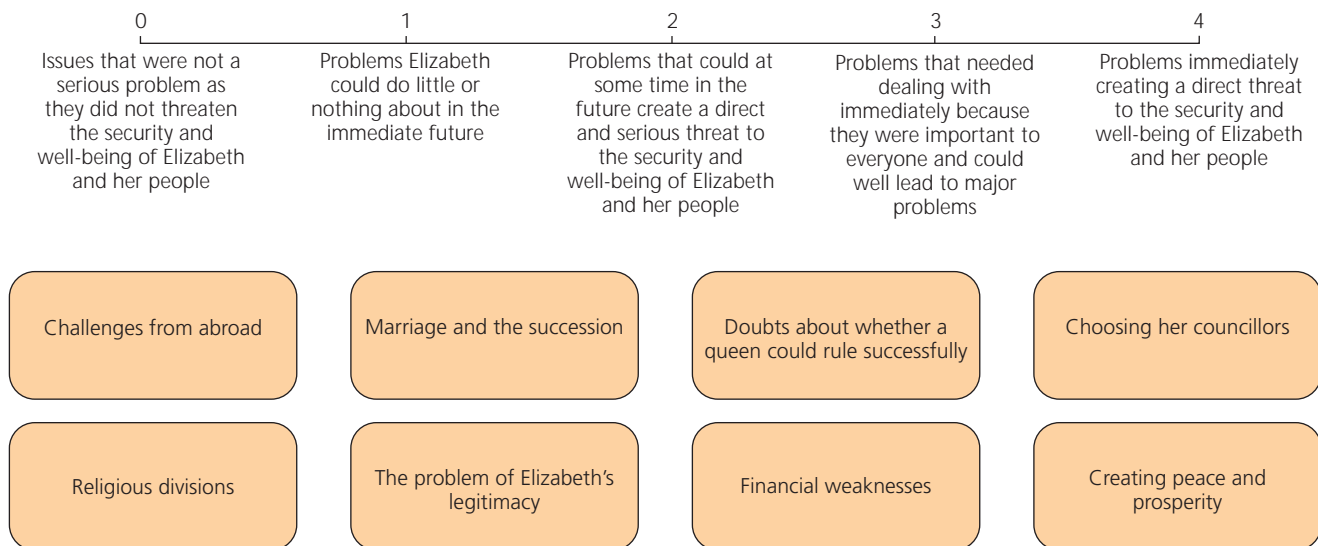
A hypothesis is your first answer to a question. Having a hypothesis in your mind establishes a clear line of argument, though you may change your mind later on. It helps you to keep the question in mind throughout the enquiry and stops you getting lost in too much information.

We will begin by suggesting a hypothesis:

**Elizabeth's greatest problem in 1558 was the threat of invasion.**

The first thing for you to do is decide whether you agree that this is a good hypothesis or if you would prefer to start with a different one.

1. Draw a continuum line like the one below and then place the 'problem cards' on it where you think they should go. This helps you to decide which problem or problems were the greatest in 1558.
2. Look at the position of the cards on your completed line. Write a paragraph summing up what you think the answer to the question is. This paragraph is now your hypothesis to develop as you work through this enquiry.



### Stage 3: researching the topic

Pages 20–28 explore Elizabeth's problems in depth. Your task is to collect evidence so that you can decide how great each problem was and which was the greatest problem.

3. Use a new piece of paper for each problem and draw a table on each one, as shown in the diagram below. After you have read about each problem, make notes under the headings in your table.

Challenges from abroad	
What was the problem in 1558?	
What were the choices facing Elizabeth?	
How great was the problem? (To answer this, use the criteria on the continuum line to guide you.)	

### Visible learning

#### Knowledge Organisers

The continuum line and table are the first examples of Knowledge Organisers in this book. On page 8 we said we would help you avoid common mistakes, and one mistake is to make lots of notes so full of detail that you cannot see the main points you need. Knowledge Organisers focus on recording the key points you need. They will help a lot with revision later too.



## 2.4 Choosing her councillors

### CHOOSING HER COUNCILLORS

1. Read these pages (20–21) and then answer the three questions in the table on page 19.
2. What does this statement by Elizabeth tell you about what she expected from her Privy Councillors?  
My meaning is to require of you nothing more but faithful hearts ... for counsel and advice I shall accept you of my nobility, and such other of you the rest as in consultation I shall think meet [necessary] and shortly appoint ... and they which I shall not appoint, let them not think the same for any disability in them, but for that I do consider that a multitude does rather make discord and confusion than good counsel.
3. If necessary, change the place of 'Choosing her councillors' on your continuum line and revise your hypothesis from page 19 after you have studied this topic.



In the sixteenth century, people believed that monarchs were chosen by God to rule the country. However, they needed the support and loyalty of the politically powerful classes. Each new monarch had to choose their own new councillors to help them rule.

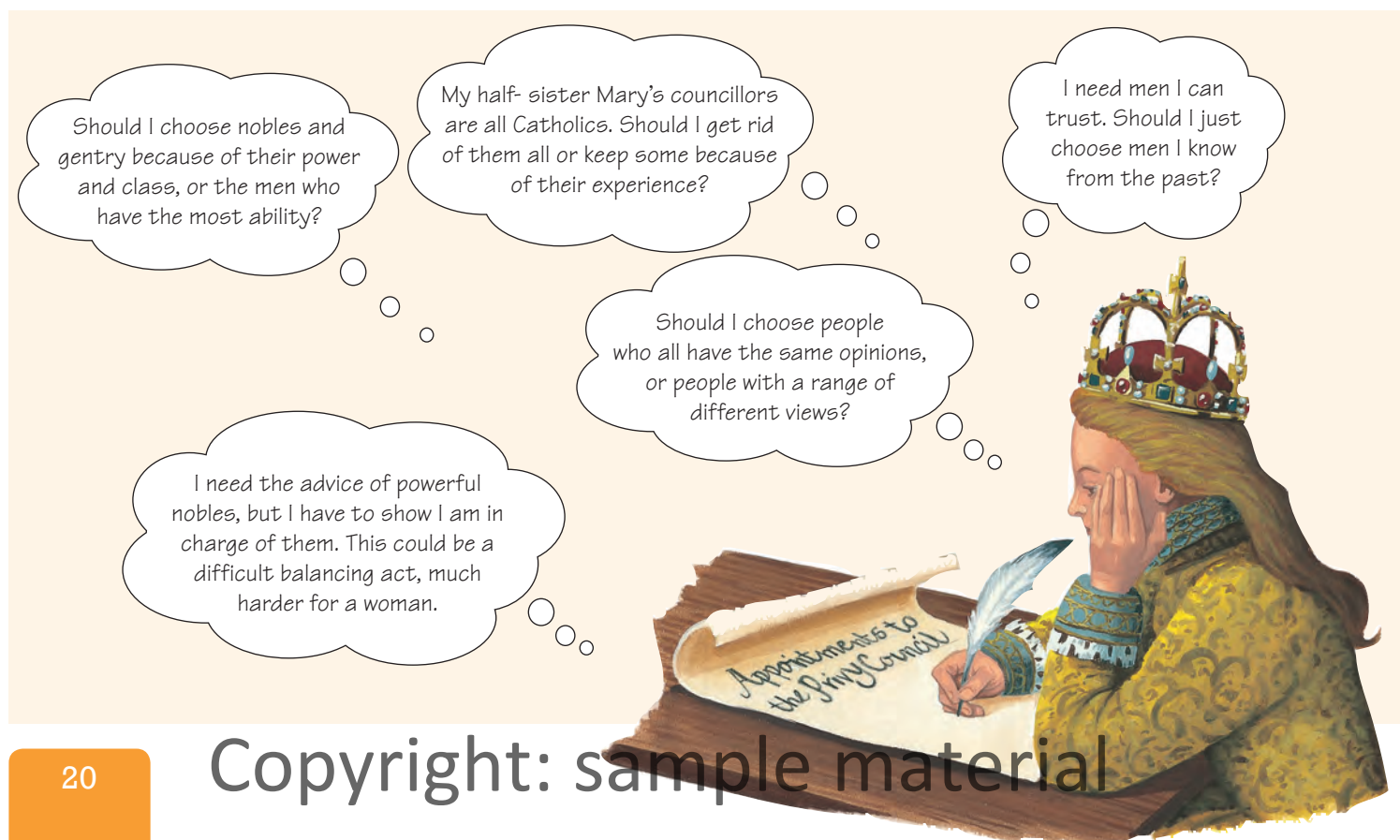
### The importance of the Privy Council

The **Privy Council** was the most important part of Elizabeth's government because it:

- contained men chosen as advisers and heads of government departments, such as the **Lord Treasurer**, who was responsible for the crown's finances and spending
- met frequently, sometimes daily, and advised on big decisions of state, such as war, religion and marriage
- was responsible for administration, such as overseeing finances, meeting foreign ambassadors, drafting correspondence and controlling the business of **Parliament**.

### Elizabeth's choices

Choosing the Privy Councillors was a crucial task for Elizabeth. If she got it right, she would have a loyal team to help her run the country. If she got it wrong, she would have alienated some of the most powerful men in the country. The diagram below shows some of the issues she had to consider.





## Elizabeth's decisions

As soon as she became Queen, Elizabeth made William Cecil her **Secretary of State**, the monarch's principal adviser who supervised all government business, telling him:

*This judgement I have of you that you will not be corrupted by any manner of gift, and that you will be faithful to the state, and that without respect of my private will, you will give me that counsel that you think best ...*

Elizabeth appointed the rest of her Council quickly in the first three months of her reign, aiming for about 20 councillors rather than the 50 of Mary's reign. She was cautious and sensitive in her choices. She also thanked all the past councillors for their work, aiming to keep their support. Her caution is shown by the fact that she did not make her closest friend, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, a councillor for another four years, realising the jealousies this might create.

Elizabeth was careful not to offend powerful men, and kept on the new Council about ten who had served under Mary, including high-ranking and powerful nobles with considerable experience and influence, some of whom had also served her father and brother. She chose her new councillors largely from her relatives and trusted colleagues, particularly supporters who had stood by her during Mary's Catholic rule. The full Council did not always meet. Much of the business of government was carried out by a small inner ring of Elizabeth's most trusted, inevitably Protestant, advisers, who worked closely with her.

Choosing the Council was the first issue Elizabeth had to handle. However she had had time to think about and plan who she would choose before she became Queen, in the months when Mary was ill. She acted cautiously and tactfully, but also decisively. She knew which people and what sort of Council she wanted, and she achieved this, apparently without any great upset. It could have turned into a problem, but it was to become one of the successes of her reign.

## 2.5 Financial weaknesses

The Privy Council, with the Queen, was responsible for every decision on financial expenditure, no matter how small, and was in constant touch with the **Exchequer**, which looked after the crown's money. In the sixteenth century, the monarch was expected to pay for all the costs of running the country, including the court and royal household, out of their own sources of revenue. These came from the rent or sale of crown lands, fines given by judges, **customs duties** on imports and **feudal dues**. If the crown needed extra money, usually to finance a war, it had to ask Parliament to approve taxation. Monarchs did not like calling meetings of Parliament to ask for money because it gave Parliament too much power.

In 1558, the royal finances had been severely strained by the war with France (see page 16) and Elizabeth inherited a debt of £300,000. In addition, most of the crown's wealth came from land ownership, and the monarchy had suffered from the same problems as other landowners in the sixteenth century. The rise in prices made it difficult for the crown, which could not easily increase its sources of revenue, mainly rents which were fixed, to keep up with this new expenditure (see page 19). Edward and Mary, however, had both introduced reforms to improve the running of the Exchequer and Elizabeth was able to build on these.

To strengthen the royal finances, Elizabeth severely cut back government spending right from the beginning of the reign, and strictly monitored the costs of her household. Exchequer officials were ordered to balance the accounts and make sure all debts were called in. Crown lands were sold off throughout the next twenty years, bringing £600,000 into the Exchequer. This approach took time to work, but by 1585, Elizabeth had not only paid off Mary's debt, but had built up a reserve of £300,000. The drain on finances and need for increased taxes approved by Parliament after that date was the result of war with Spain.

### WILLIAM CECIL, 1520–98

William Cecil became an MP during Henry VIII's reign. His hard work and attention to detail earned him promotion to a principal secretary of the Council under Edward VI. As a moderate Protestant, he lost that post in Mary's reign, but instead worked with the then Princess Elizabeth. Like Elizabeth, he wanted to unite the country and avoid war, and tended to be cautious. As Elizabeth's Secretary of State, the most important position on the Council, Cecil made sure he knew everything that was going on. He controlled all government business, including the meetings of Parliament. He was not afraid to disagree with Elizabeth, but he was completely loyal and she trusted him totally. Between them, they ran the country for 40 years.



### HOW GREAT WAS THE PROBLEM OF FINANCIAL WEAKNESSES?

1. Complete your table from page 19.
2. If necessary, change the place of 'Financial weaknesses' on your continuum line and revise your hypothesis from page 19 now that you have studied this topic.

## 2.6 Challenges from abroad

### Key

- 1 Mary I persuaded the Privy Council to commit English forces to the war her Spanish husband was fighting against France.
- 2 The French retaliated by strengthening their forces in Scotland along England's vulnerable northern border.
- 3 In January 1558, Calais, the last English fortress in France, was captured by France. This was a national humiliation, but Mary's government made no effort to win it back.

0 200 400  
km



Which countries were a threat to England in 1558, and why?



### Scotland

When Elizabeth became Queen, Scotland was ruled by her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots. However, Mary was living in France because she was married to the heir to the French throne. This strong link between France and Scotland, both Catholic countries, was a real threat to England. There were French soldiers stationed in Scotland, so England was in danger of a joint attack from across the Channel and her northern border.

### France

In 1558, France was at war with both England and Spain. During Mary's reign, England had allied with Spain because Mary was married to the King of Spain. France also had a direct interest in the English crown. Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth's cousin and heir, was married to the eldest son of the French king. France was a Catholic country and many Catholics thought Mary should be Queen of England. This gave France a motive for invading England on her behalf.

### Spain

Spain was the most powerful and wealthy country in Europe. The Spanish Empire was made up of territories in Europe and conquests in Central and South America. Spain was a devoutly Catholic country, committed to preventing the spread of Protestantism. However, Spain and England had been friendly for most of the Tudor period, and King Philip II of Spain had married Queen Mary I, Elizabeth's half-sister.



## The choices facing Elizabeth

The immediate problem facing Elizabeth was how to deal with the possibility of a French invasion. She had two options: to continue the war with France or to make peace. The table below shows you the arguments supporting each option.

Continue the war against France	Make peace with France
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A military victory would be popular and get the reign off to a good start.</li> <li>• Calais might be regained (page 3), which would restore English pride.</li> <li>• Victory would end the danger of invasion from France and Scotland.</li> <li>• Making peace might make Elizabeth look weak.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• England was only fighting because Mary had wanted to support her Spanish husband. Elizabeth and her councillors had no interest in continuing the war.</li> <li>• There was nothing to suggest that England could win. The Council did not believe England had the resources to recapture Calais.</li> <li>• England could not afford to continue sending aid to Philip II. In addition, the famine and epidemics of 1557 onwards had killed over 200,000 people. Farming communities were unable to spare men for fighting.</li> <li>• Defeat would get the reign off to a disastrous start and preoccupy a government which had other problems to deal with.</li> </ul>

## The decision

Elizabeth made her decision quickly. Peace was signed with France in January 1559, just three months after she became Queen, in the Treaty of Cateau-Cambr sis, and Calais was lost forever.

What does the speed with which Elizabeth made peace with France tell you?

## How great was the problem?

Elizabeth spent over £100,000 at the start of her reign on military arms and munitions such as guns, pike-heads, bows and gunpowder. Restocking the realm's armouries required taking out massive loans, but is perhaps the clearest example that Elizabeth herself saw invasion as the greatest problem in 1558.

Despite the peace, fear of invasion continued. When Elizabeth decided that England would have a Protestant Church (see page 30), this increased the likelihood of a European **religious crusade** against England to restore Catholicism.

In fact, Philip II was more worried about the growing influence of France than Elizabeth's religion, so at first he kept on good terms, even though Elizabeth rejected his proposal of marriage. This did not stop the English believing that an attack from Catholic Europe was imminent and inevitable.

### HOW GREAT WAS THE PROBLEM OF CHALLENGES FROM ABROAD?

1. Complete your table from page 19.
2. If necessary, change the place of 'Challenges from abroad' on your continuum line and revise your hypothesis from page 19 now that you have studied this topic.

## 2.7 Religious divisions

The diagram opposite shows the choices facing Elizabeth in deciding which religion everyone would follow in 1558. Monarchs, including Elizabeth, believed that everyone had to follow the same religion to make their country united. Differences in religion would lead to **civil war** and make a country too divided to fight back against a foreign invader.

### 1. Warnings from the past

Elizabeth had a great many issues to think about in deciding the country's religion. Firstly, she knew that religious changes in the past had led to protests and rebellions. The three paragraphs below show you how strongly people felt about religious change, as does the story of Margaret Ward on page 9.

Henry VIII made himself Head of the English Church. Some Catholics did not believe that Henry could replace the authority of the Pope, including his friend, Sir Thomas More, whom Henry had executed. In 1536, when Henry closed down the monasteries, there was a major rebellion in the north, the Pilgrimage of Grace.

Under Edward VI, the Church of England became strongly Protestant. There were outbreaks of violence across the country. When Elizabeth's government introduced a new Prayer Book in 1549, Catholics in Devon and Cornwall rebelled.

Mary I married King Philip of Spain and restored the Catholic religion. This led to a rebellion led by Sir Thomas Wyatt. Many Protestants could not accept the Catholic Church. Mary burnt over 300 '**martyrs**' who refused to change their beliefs.

### 2. Warnings from abroad

Elizabeth also had to weigh the effects each choice would have on England's relations with other countries. France, Spain and Scotland were all Catholic in 1558. Foreign princes who were candidates for Elizabeth to marry would most likely be Catholic. In addition, the Pope, as Head of the Catholic Church, could excommunicate Elizabeth. If he excluded her from the Church, this meant he released her Catholic subjects from obeying her. He could also call on the Catholic powers in Europe to lead a religious crusade to overthrow Elizabeth and restore the Catholic faith under a Catholic monarch.

### 3. Divisions among the English people

#### Support for Catholicism

The majority of people in the country were traditional and did not like religious change. They were most likely to be Catholic, especially in the north, preferring decorated churches and priests' gowns, and services in Latin. To many people, the appearance of the Church (images, crosses, the priests' gowns, and so on) was as important as the Church **doctrine**.

As a result of Mary's reintroduction of Catholicism the clergy, the bishops, the Church doctrine and organisation were all Catholic. In weekly sermons for the last five years, the clergy had urged the people to resist Protestantism. It would be difficult to change all the clergy to Protestant.





## Support for Protestantism

Elizabeth herself was a Protestant. In an age when religion and belief in eternal souls was so important, this was significant. Elizabeth appointed advisers who were mainly Protestant – they accepted positions on the Council in the belief that the new Church would be Protestant. Many devout English Protestants who had fled abroad during Mary's reign were also returning home, expecting Elizabeth to return to Protestantism.

In addition, the burning of Protestants in Mary's reign had made the foreign Pope and King of Spain really unpopular. A change in religion could signal a break with the past, allowing Elizabeth to be portrayed as the inspiration for a new English Church.

## 4. Elizabeth's dilemma

### The difficulty of a compromise

It may seem that a compromise was the obvious and easy solution. However, a compromise ran the risk of pleasing no one. There was no toleration of other religions, so there would still be penalties for people who did not accept even a compromise Church. Elizabeth's options for a compromise were very limited. As a committed Protestant, she could not

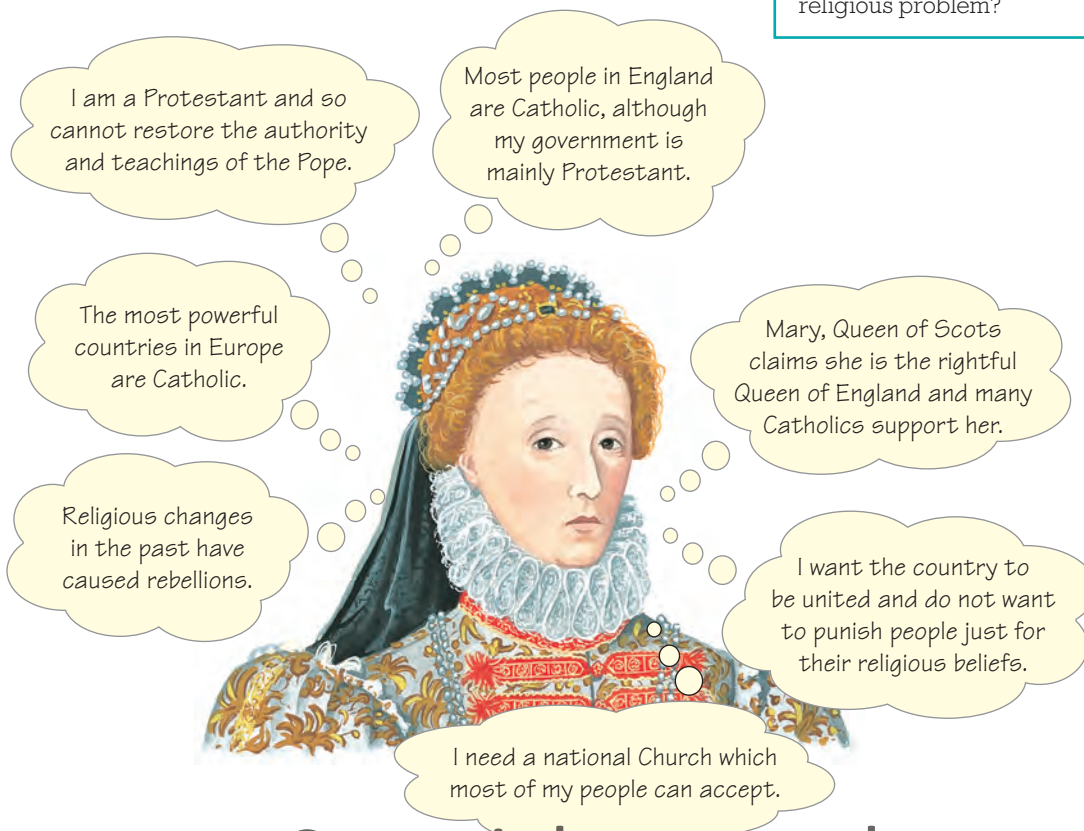
accept Catholic doctrine and beliefs, or the Pope as Head of the Church of England. Catholics could not accept a woman, even a queen, as Head of the Church. Puritans did not want a Church which had any signs of Catholicism. That left church decoration, music and the clergy where there might be some room for more flexibility. Finding a compromise would not be easy, but could mean a Church that was acceptable to the majority in England and less offensive to foreign powers. How many of these thoughts must have gone round Elizabeth's head while she tried to work out the solution to these religious divisions? The diagram below illustrates her dilemma.

## 5. Elizabeth's early moves

For the first few months, Elizabeth made few public pronouncements. She continued to worship privately following Protestant beliefs, but she kept some things linked to Catholicism – she had **crucifixes** and candles in her chapel, and liked the clergy to wear more ornate gowns.

Behind the scenes, Elizabeth and the Privy Council were drawing up a new Religious Settlement for the Church of England. Within just four months, they were ready to call a meeting of Parliament to pass the laws to establish the new religion.

Elizabeth and her Council worked on the problem of religion immediately after she became Queen, and had a settlement ready to take to Parliament within four months. What does this suggest about the importance of the religious problem?



## HOW GREAT WAS THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS?

1. Complete the questions in your table from page 19 for this problem.
2. If necessary, change the place of 'Religious divisions' on your continuum line and revise your hypothesis from page 19.

## 2.8 Doubts about whether a queen could rule successfully

A woman should be a wife and she should be silent, obedient and domestic. A woman might rule her own kitchen but surely not her own kingdom; outside the kitchen she should be under the authority of a man, because she was physically, intellectually and emotionally inferior to men.

Women rulers in the sixteenth century were seen as both unnatural and a liability; they did not fit with the ideal of womanhood described above. Even the Queen's closest adviser, William Cecil, writing two years into the reign, told an ambassador off for discussing with Elizabeth, 'a matter of such weight, being too much for a woman's knowledge'.

Monarchs needed to keep their powerful nobles under control, to dispense justice and take harsh decisions, and to declare war and lead armies into battle. Women were seen as too weak to do this. The disastrous reign of Elizabeth's half-sister, Mary I, seemed to confirm these beliefs. She had dragged England into an unpopular war, in support of her equally unpopular husband.

There was nothing that Elizabeth could do to solve this problem in 1558, unless she married immediately and handed power over to her husband so that England had a male ruler; even her Council did not believe that Elizabeth would do this. Elizabeth could only solve the problem of her gender by proving that she was as good a ruler as any man and winning over her critics. This would take time.

## 2.9 The problem of Elizabeth's legitimacy

The problem of having a female ruler was made worse by the fact that some people did not believe that Elizabeth had a legitimate claim to the throne. Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, had made himself Head of the English Church, and his Archbishop of Canterbury approved a divorce from his first wife. Henry then married Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth was their daughter. However, some Catholics believed that only the Pope could authorise the divorce of a monarch. Therefore, to them, Henry's marriage to Anne was not valid, Elizabeth was illegitimate and could not be Queen. The diagram below shows the logic of Catholic beliefs about Elizabeth.



Realistically, there was very little Elizabeth could do about this. Even marriage and children would not change this view of her legitimacy. She could only go ahead, celebrate her coronation as the anointed Queen of England, and hope that in time she would win these people over. In her favour was the fact that she was the daughter of the much loved and admired Henry VIII, while Mary, Queen of Scots, was very closely linked to France, England's greatest enemy.



## 2.10 Marriage and the succession

People expected that Elizabeth would marry quickly and have children to provide the next Tudor monarch, the **succession**, and so ensure political stability. Marriage did not, however, mean that Elizabeth's husband would take over the running of the country in her place. When Mary I had married Philip II of Spain, Parliament had drawn up a marriage treaty which limited the power and influence he had in England.

There is no evidence that in 1558 Elizabeth had already made up her mind to remain single. Everything depended on the right candidate or suitor. In the early weeks of her reign, the court buzzed as foreign princes put forward their claims for the young queen's hand. Two potential husbands, Philip II and Prince Eric of Sweden, were politely turned down early on, as Elizabeth and her Council focused on the immediate problems of the war with France and religious settlement.

What does the speed with which Elizabeth tackled war with France and religion, compared with the priority she gave her marriage, tell you about how great a problem she thought her marriage was?



### ROBERT DUDLEY, 1532–88

**Elizabeth to Dudley, 1566: 'I will have but one mistress and no master.'**

Robert Dudley was a younger son of the Duke of Northumberland and Elizabeth's closest friend. He was a leading English noble and a Protestant. In 1562, Elizabeth made him a Privy Councillor and, in 1564, he was created Earl of Leicester. They had such a close friendship that, by the 1560s, there were many rumours about their relationship, although he was already married. When his wife was found dead in suspicious circumstances, Elizabeth seems to have realised the impossibility of marrying Dudley, but their continuing closeness caused political and personal tension.



The real problem for Elizabeth was not whether to marry, but who she should marry. If she married an English nobleman, this might well cause anger and jealousy among other nobles. Marriage to a foreigner was at least as big a problem. Most of the princes of Europe were Catholic, and Elizabeth could not risk the hostility of her Protestant subjects. Her husband might also become the focal point for any Catholic discontent. All the time, Elizabeth had in front of her the example of Mary's marriage to Philip II, which had been so unpopular with the country. Perhaps if her Council and Parliament had united behind one candidate, she would have agreed, but they were usually divided. At some point during her reign, Elizabeth must have decided it was simply easier to remain single.

### Later marriage possibilities

The question of marriage continued until the 1570s. As the Council and Parliament reminded the Queen for the next twenty years, it was her duty to provide an heir to ensure a peaceful succession of an English Protestant to the throne when she died. Archduke Charles (son of the **Holy Roman Emperor**, Ferdinand) remained a possibility for several years, but he was a Catholic and his proposal was opposed by Protestants on the Privy Council and in Parliament. Francis, Duke of Alençon (later Anjou) was the most serious of Elizabeth's foreign suitors. The courtship with the King of France's younger brother lasted most of the 1570s. The Council and the country were divided about whether Elizabeth should marry a Catholic and French prince and, in the end, Elizabeth herself, although she knew this was probably her last chance of motherhood, decided she could not risk it.

### HOW GREAT WERE THE PROBLEMS OF GENDER, LEGITIMACY AND MARRIAGE?



1. Complete the questions in your table from page 19 for these three problems.
2. If necessary, change the places of 'Doubts about whether a queen could rule successfully', 'The problem of Elizabeth's legitimacy' and 'Marriage and the succession' on your continuum line and revise your hypothesis from page 19.

## 2.11 Creating peace and prosperity

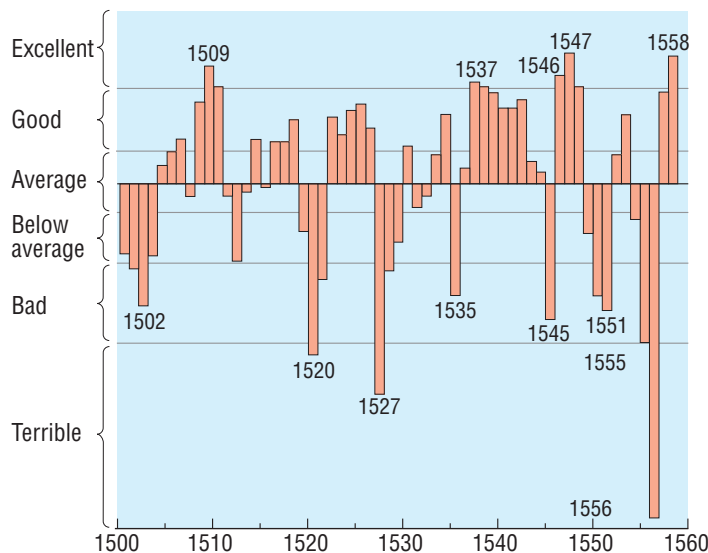
Unlike today, rulers in the sixteenth century did not have economic policies. They wanted their countries to be prosperous because this meant their people would be more content and less rebellious, and also that they could ask for more money in taxes. They did not have much understanding of how and why countries became wealthy (or not).

Even more importantly, two of the key issues affecting people's prosperity – the quality of the harvests and epidemics of disease – could not be controlled by the monarch. However, poverty was still a dangerous problem for monarchs. Previous reigns had shown that, if there was a rebellion, people were more likely to join it if they were hungry.

Elizabeth and her Council were therefore anxious about food riots and other social unrest arising from poverty. Prices had been rising since the beginning of the sixteenth century. They rose very fast indeed in the 1550s. Many people found that their wages were losing value.

Nevertheless, people did expect bad harvests from time to time. Problems arose when harvests failed for consecutive years, as had happened, as you can see from the graph below, for much of the 1550s – leading to severe shortages of food. In Mary's reign, bad harvests occurred at the same time as flu epidemics, resulting in the deaths of about 200,000 people, either from starvation or illness, or presumably both.

**Quality of harvest**



▲ Harvests, 1500–58

After several bad harvests in the 1550s, however, the harvest in 1558 was very good. This gave Elizabeth breathing space. Since bad weather was not under her control, she could only hope and presumably pray for good harvests; for the start of her reign at least, her prayers had been answered and there was no immediate problem.

### HOW GREAT A PROBLEM WAS CREATING STABILITY AND PROSPERITY?



1. Complete the questions in your table from page 19.
2. If necessary, change the place of 'Creating peace and prosperity' on your continuum line and revisit your hypothesis in answer to the enquiry question after completing your table.



## 2.12 Communicating your answer

Now it is time to write your answer and ...

**STOP!** We have forgotten something very important. Look back to page 18 and the stages of your enquiry.

**Revise your hypothesis and get your summary answer clear in your mind.**

This is a really vital stage because one of the biggest mistakes that students make is starting to write their answer without having the answer clear in their minds. These activities help you to do that and they will work better if you do them with a partner.

1. Return to the continuum line on page 19. Use your completed notes to make your final decisions about where each problem goes on the line.
2. Use the completed line to write a paragraph summarising your answer to the question:

**Which was the greatest problem facing Elizabeth in 1558?**

Now it is time to write your full answer!

This chapter has given you a good deal of help, but you will find more guidance in the Writing Guide on pages 114–123. However, the person who will give you the best advice is your teacher, because he or she knows exactly what help you need to improve your work in History.



**It's time to THINK about the answer**

### The Word Wall – language is power

Lots of classrooms have Word Walls for three reasons:

1. To help you understand the meaning of words and phrases that will help you understand Elizabethan England.
2. To help you communicate clearly and precisely, so you say exactly what you mean. This helps you do well in your exams.
3. To help you spell important words correctly. Marks are lost in exams for poor spelling.

You need to identify the words:

- whose meaning you are not sure of
- you cannot spell correctly every time.

Then make sure you find out their meaning and spelling. One way is to create your own Word Wall, on a piece of A3 paper, and add new words to it as you go through your course. Create a sense of achievement for yourself by showing them off and using them correctly!

### Starting your Word Wall

The words below begin your Word Wall. Look back through Chapter 2 and start building up your Word Wall by adding more key words to it. The words in red are to help you understand the meaning of technical words and phrases that are used in this chapter, the words in green will help you communicate this information more effectively.

### Practice questions

1. Describe two features of:
  - a) the Privy Council
  - b) Elizabeth's experiences before she became Queen
  - c) Elizabeth's education.
2. Explain why religion was so important in sixteenth-century England.
3. 'The threat of invasion was Elizabeth's main problem when she became Queen in 1558.' How far do you agree? Explain your answer.
4. 'Elizabeth I dealt with the problems of 1558 successfully.' How far do you agree? Explain your answer.

Some of your exam questions (such as questions 5(b), 5(c) (i) and 5(c) (ii) in the exam paper) will suggest two topics you could use in your answer. You can see examples on page 114. We have not included topics in the practice questions in this book to give teachers the opportunity to change these from year to year.

