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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



A Man for All Seasons

by Robert Bolt

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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A Man for All Seasons

Note to the Teacher

The historical events on which this play is based cover a turbulent period in sixteenth century English history. Before Henry VIII was crowned king, following the death of his older brother, Prince Arthur, he married Catherine of Aragon, who had been Arthur's wife. In order to legitimize the new marriage, Henry had to receive special permission from the Catholic Church, since religious law of the time prevented a marriage to a brother's widow. However, permission was granted, and the marriage appeared to be a good one.

When Catherine did not produce a male heir to continue the Tudor line, however, Henry decided that he wanted to divorce Catherine in order to marry Anne Boleyn. He ordered Cardinal Wolsey to have the Pope declare that Henry's marriage to Catherine was not valid, which would allow Henry to marry.

When Wolsey was unsuccessful, Henry enlisted the aid of his new chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, who recommended that England break with the Church so that the Archbishop of Canterbury would be the highest officer of the English Church and could then grant the divorce. A Convocation met and approved the king's divorce. The Act of Supremacy was enacted, which required an oath in support of the king from all English citizens.

Sir Thomas More was a respected intellectual, statesman, and religious figure of this time. He remained a supporter of the Roman Catholic Church, but was not outspoken in his disapproval of the actions King Henry took. More rose to the position of Lord Chancellor, but was later charged with high treason against Henry VIII. In court, false testimony was given against More; he was found guilty, and he was beheaded on July 6, 1535.

Sir Thomas More, during this turbulent historical period, stood as a representative of the greatness that man can achieve by remaining faithful to himself and to his beliefs.

A Man for All Seasons

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. recognize how lighting and stage props are used as transitions between scenes in the play.
2. trace the use of water and rivers as repeated images.
3. understand the use of the “Common Man” in the play.
4. evaluate the fairness of the legal proceeding against More during this period of time.
5. relate historical events to characters and events in the play.
6. analyze personal and political motives behind characters’ actions.
7. recognize More’s sense of humor, even in the face of difficulties.
8. understand the effective use of foreshadowing in the play.
9. appreciate the relationship between More and his wife Alice, his daughter Margaret, and his son-in-law William Roper.
10. recognize the use of satire in speech and actions in the play.
11. define the term “heroic” as it applies to Sir Thomas More.
12. understand the expectations and societal norms of and for women in sixteenth century England.

A Man for All Seasons

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the actions of King Henry VIII that lead to the Act of Supremacy; make sure to deal with some of the reasons Sir Thomas More would not support this Act.
2. Contrast the characters of Thomas More and Richard Rich.
3. Analyze the character of William Roper, as well as Thomas More's feelings about Roper.
4. Is Margaret More a woman whose thinking and scholarliness was before her time? Back up your opinions with facts from the play.
5. Compare the roles of Chapuys, the Common Man, and Richard Rich.
6. Discusses the role of the Common Man in the play, including the various parts he portrays and the effectiveness of this element in the play.
7. Cite examples of More's wittiness and sense of humor, particularly the use of verbal humor under difficult circumstances.
8. Explain how Thomas More fits the title, *A Man for All Seasons*.
9. Analyze Cromwell's strategy and legal arguments during More's trial.
10. Compare the characters of Margaret and Alice. Using specific examples, explain the difference in how they are viewed by men outside of the More household, as well as how each is regarded by Sir Thomas.

repute – to believe
rheumatism – a medical issue that affects the joints
rosebay – a pink-flowered herb
sardonically – sarcastically, mockingly
shirking – avoiding, neglecting
soapy – slimy in nature; unctuous
soupçon – a small quantity
spiritu tuo [Latin] – and with your spirit
steadfast – unwavering
unremitting – constant, unrelenting
vespers – evening prayers

1. What does the Common Man say about this play when he first appears on stage?

2. What role does the Common Man take in the first scene?

3. How are lighting and stage props used in this scene?

4. What do Thomas More and Richard Rich discuss? What is the purpose of this discussion?

5. What is Rich's complaint? What is More's reply?

76. What must Rich do in return?

77. How does Cromwell explain their own jobs as administrators?

78. Why is Rich “depressed” by his own good fortune?

79. Why does Cromwell say More’s innocence is a problem?

80. What information about More does Cromwell get from Rich?

81. Why do you think he is so interested in this matter?

82. What does Cromwell think More will eventually do?
