



Henry VIII – the Glory Trail, 1509-1547

An Introduction

When Henry VIII became king in 1509 he was 17 years old. Nowadays he would have been trying on his new crown while beginning the countdown to his A levels. What would a 17 year-old monarch want to achieve – and are you better-equipped to understand his early decisions than much older historians?!

The following pages introduce some of the major decisions Henry faced during his reign and offers a set of options for you to choose from. Which ones would you have chosen if, like Henry, your heart was set on achieving glory?

Your teacher will give you precise instructions. To help you build an overview of the reign you might find it useful to build a timeline of events and decisions on this sheet.



Decision 1. 1509 – Choosing Councillors

Your father died with a reputation for avarice. Some of his advisers are highly unpopular for their part in his 'extortions'.

Should you:

- a. make a clean start with a new council?
- b. keep most of your father's councillors but punish (perhaps even execute) the most unpopular individuals?
- c. keep all your father's councillors for you need their experience?



Decision 2. 1509 – France – War or Peace?

France is your country's oldest ancient enemy. You have been brought up to enjoy tournaments and jousting.

Will you:

- a. continue your father's policy of defensive isolation?
- b. lead a war of conquest immediately?
- c. lay plans for war when you have secured the right alliances?



Decision 3. 1516 – Wolsey's Status

Your chief minister, Thomas Wolsey, is the subject of much gossip and some opposition. Men say he is too powerful and that he diminishes your status in the eyes of your subjects and foreign rulers.

Should you:

- a. dismiss Wolsey to show who is truly king?
- b. ignore such talk because you know you are in control?



Decision 4. 1518 – Your Role in Europe?

Wolsey proposes that you act as intermediary between France and the Empire to produce a European peace treaty.

Should you:

- a. agree with this plan because it will enable you to pose as the key figure in Europe?
- b. dismiss the plan because there is nothing glorious in peace? An alliance with one or the other could lead to a glorious war.



Decision 5. 1527 – the Queen Catherine Problem

You have been married to Queen Catherine for 18 years. You have one daughter but no son.

Should you:

- a. accept the will of God and make plans for Princess Mary's marriage to secure the dynasty?
- b. change the succession to enable your illegitimate son, the Duke of Richmond, to inherit the crown?
- c. seek an annulment of your marriage from the Pope?



Decision 6. 1529 – The End for Wolsey?

Attempts to persuade the Pope have failed. Wolsey has enemies who say that he has not been working hard enough in your cause.

Should you:

- a. dismiss Wolsey as a warning to the Pope that you are still determined on a divorce
- b. ignore the talk? Wolsey has been your leading minister for 15 years.
- c. dismiss Wolsey from his leading position?



Decision 7. 1532 – a New Chief Minister?

Thomas Cromwell has emerged as a man with the talent and drive to take on Wolsey's former role.

Should you:

- a. refuse to accept Cromwell as chief minister as another such minister will diminish your status?
- b. refuse to accept Cromwell because he supported Wolsey to the last?
- c. use Cromwell as chief minister for it will free you of the tedium of detail but leave you in charge of overall strategies?



Decision 8. 1533 – the Greatest Decision of All?

Anne Boleyn is pregnant with your child.

Should you:

- a. make further representations to the Pope for a divorce?
- b. cut England off from the Roman Catholic church, declare yourself head of a new church and free to marry Anne? England has been part of the Roman church for nearly 1000 years.



Decision 9. 1536 – The Pilgrimage of Grace

The dissolution of some monasteries has helped to spark a major rising in the north. The rebels are describing themselves as pilgrims who are loyal to you but opposed to religious changes. They blame your ministers.

Should you:

- a. march north at once at the head of your army?
- b. send your leading general, the Duke of Norfolk, to command your forces although he has some sympathies with the Catholic religion?
- c. negotiate with the rebels and put an end to religious reform?



Decision 10. 1539 – Reverse Course on Religion?

You feel uncomfortable with the degree of religious reform. People, even women, are even said to be discussing religion at home and in taverns.

Should you:

- a. ignore your qualms and proceed with further reforms because it will allow you to act as leader of the Protestant cause in Europe?
- b. stop reform here and go no further back towards Catholicism in case it prejudices your role as supreme head of the church?
- c. return to the Catholic church you were brought up in now that you have a male heir and both Catherine and Anne are dead?



Decision 11. 1540 – the Cleves Alliance

You have married Anne of Cleves despite your dislike of the lady. Cromwell urged the match because of the dangers of a foreign crusade against England. Now the foreign policy situation has changed and the match is no longer needed.

Should you:

- a. retain the marriage in case the situation changes once more?
- b. end the marriage and dismiss Cromwell as his enemies are urging you to do? He has humiliated you.
- c. end the marriage but keep Cromwell in office?



Decision 12. 1542 – War with France ... and Scotland?

The prospect of war with France arises.

Should you:

- a. attack Scotland immediately as a forerunner for a lengthier campaign against France?
- b. attack France immediately?
- c. ignore war at your age [51]? It is costly and will cause suffering at home.