

Why was it such a surprise to have a Tudor king?

This resource provides an introduction for KS3 students to the Tudors. It doesn't cover the Wars of the Roses as a whole (see below for material on Thinking History that does that) but explains why the Tudors were such an unlikely dynasty and so tackles the idea that what happened need not have happened. The arrival of the Tudors on the throne is a particularly good example of this because

- a) the Tudors are so well-known that it's hard to believe they were such an unlikely dynasty
- b) they wouldn't have gained the crown but for a series of very unexpected events.

And if you wish you can also discuss the even more surprising information that the name 'Tudor' was very rarely used while they were on the throne.

Objectives

After covering the material students should understand that:

- a) The arrival of a Tudor king was a very unexpected and unlikely event
- b) It is a good example of the many occasions when events could have developed differently

You may also wish to build in the understandings that:

- c) Richard III's seizure of the crown changed events dramatically in 1483, making it possible for Henry Tudor to become a possible rival for the crown.
- d) the Tudor hold on the throne was fragile because they were such an unexpected dynasty and there was no depth of support for them at first
- e) The Tudor name was very rarely used at the time and only became widely used in the 1700s.

Resources

1. A set of PowerPoint slides – the core resource
2. Text for students to read after the activity, also headed 'Why was it such a surprise to have a Tudor king?'

The Activity

The core activity is to build up a living graph which explains why the arrival of a Tudor king in 1485 was so unlikely. One thing the resource can't do however is inject that initial element of surprise, puzzlement and curiosity – that has to be up to the teacher in the classroom! The first 4 slides attempt to get the theme of surprise underway – but I'm sure you can find other ways (maybe burst into the classroom and announce some really surprising news, there's news from the battlefield that there's a new king and you can't believe who it is ... etc etc).

Here's a summary of slides 1-4 and some possible prompts:

Slide 1 – a mix of 'surprise' words – what do you think today's lesson is about?

Slide 2 – Do you know who this is – and what could be the connections with the last slide?

Slide 3 – who are they – and what could be so surprising about them?

Slide 4 – today's question and theme

Slides 5 and 6 provide the graph and the 'levels' on the graph to help students build it up.

Slides 7-11 provide the information with which students can build up their graph – either individually, in small groups or as a whole class, depending on how you work with them.

Slide 12 underlines the surprise – it's simply a transition slide from the completion of the graph to discussing wider issues.

Slide 13 – What's so amazing about ... here you can ask students to pick out some reasons why having a Tudor monarch was so unlikely. A second click reveals some of the possible answers.

Slide 14 – This brings us to the wider issue that events could often have worked out differently. The slide asks for examples – what can students come up with from their own knowledge? 1066 is always a good example to begin with.

There are also opportunities while using the slides to revisit topics that students have already studied – Edward I's conquest of Wales, Glyndwr's rebellion, Henry V and the conquest of France,

the Wars of the Roses. I didn't add in any details about these events as only you know what's relevant and how much time you have.

In addition you could introduce the idea that the Tudors were not known as the Tudors at the time – which comes as even more of a surprise. If you'd like to read about this, see the attached article (link below) by the late CSL Davies. I've also attached Richard III's proclamation against Henry which makes great use of the name Tudor or 'Tydder' in order to make him appear an outsider from a very insignificant family. Henry himself always used Henry, earl of Richmond, not Tudor, to emphasise his status amongst the nobility.

Finally the two pages of text provide a summing up of these issues – which could be used as a homework for consolidation.

Debriefing

It's always important to identify explicitly what has been learned – if students can explicitly identify this it clearly has a beneficial impact on retention.

What have you learned? Or What are your takeaways? Is a worrying question to ask (what if they don't say anything?!) but it's very important.

Why are these points valuable to remember? – think about re-using these ideas later in your history course.

Linked resources for teachers which may help provide context

CSL Davies, *Tudor: What's in a name?* – an article from *History*

Richard III's proclamation against Henry Tydder, June 1485

Two chapters on Richard III from my A level book on The Wars of the Roses

Other material on the Wars of the Roses for KS3 can be found here:

<https://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/WarsofRosesKS3.html>

and here – scroll to the 1450-1700 section for resources on Richard III

<https://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityKS/ActivityKS3All.html#p1066>

Other reading:

Adam Chapman, The Rise of the Tudors, BBC History Magazine, March 2021.

Sean Cunningham, *Henry VII* (Routledge), 2007

(Sean's book *Henry VII: Treason and Trust* in the Penguin Monarchs series is due in April 2022)

R A Griffiths and R S Thomas, The Making of the Tudor Dynasty