



HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

# Wordless Stories

Historical Material  
*for Elizabeth Tudor*

**SPACE TO STIR AND BE STIRRED**

**TOWER OF LONDON • HAMPTON COURT PALACE • BANQUETING HOUSE  
KENSINGTON PALACE • KEW PALACE • HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE AND GARDENS**

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# Biography: Elizabeth Tudor (1533-1603)

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Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry VIII (Tudor) and his second wife, Anne Boleyn.

Henry fell in love with Anne while he was still married to Katherine of Aragon, with whom he had a daughter, Princess Mary, but no sons. After the Pope refused to grant Henry a divorce, Henry forced England to reject the Roman Catholic church and become Protestant. Henry created a new Church of England and made himself the head, so that he could declare his marriage to Katharine null and void. Henry also declared their 17-year-old daughter Mary illegitimate and no longer a princess.

Henry married Anne. However, Elizabeth's birth was a disappointment for her father. No woman had ever ruled England as the monarch. Women were considered too weak to be rulers. Henry wanted a male heir to ensure the future of the Tudor dynasty. Celebrations for Princess Elizabeth's birth were very muted.

After Anne failed to provide him with a son, Henry decided to get rid of her. He had Anne arrested and charged with adultery and treason. Princess Elizabeth was two years old when her mother was beheaded and buried at the Tower of London.

Henry married his third wife Jane Seymour only a few days after Anne's death. Jane had been one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting. The King announced that Elizabeth was now illegitimate and no longer a princess. Henry ordered his daughter kept out of his sight and away from the Royal Court. 'Lady' Elizabeth grew up at the manor of Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, looked after by a small group of servants.

Henry's new wife, Jane, gave birth to a boy, Prince Edward. Only four years old, Elizabeth played a small part in her baby brother's extravagant christening at Hampton Court Palace, carrying Edward's ceremonial baptism cloth. Queen Jane died of an infection only a few days after giving birth.

King Henry married his fourth, fifth and sixth wives after Jane's death but had no more children.

Henry's final marriage was to Katherine Parr. By this time the King's health was poor. Katherine encouraged him to reach out to his daughters Elizabeth and Mary. Henry made them both princesses again and added them to back into the royal line of succession. As the eldest, Mary was now first in line to the throne of England after their brother Edward. Elizabeth was second and last in line.

Princess Elizabeth now lived at Court with her father, stepmother Katherine, her half-brother Edward and half-sister Mary. Instantly recognisable by her father's red hair and her mother's dark eyes, Elizabeth was very popular. She was clever, lively, spoke several languages, loved dancing, could play various musical instruments and, unusually for a female in England at this time, was educated in maths, politics, history and philosophy.

Henry died in 1547 when Elizabeth was fourteen. Her nine-year-old brother Edward became King of England.

King Edward died of tuberculosis aged fifteen. Elizabeth rode into London with her sister for Mary's coronation as Mary I, Queen of England.

Mary was a passionate Roman Catholic. She blamed the Protestant Church of England for allowing her father to divorce her own mother to marry Elizabeth's mother Anne Boleyn. Mary used threats of torture and execution to force England back to the Roman Catholic faith. Most English people were Protestant, including Elizabeth. The Queen didn't trust her. Mary suspected her sister was involved with Protestant rebels who wanted Elizabeth to be queen.

In 1554 Mary had Elizabeth arrested for treason and taken to the Tower of London, where Anne Boleyn had been executed and buried. Elizabeth was convinced that she would never leave the Tower alive, so she tried some clever delaying tactics. Knowing that they had to travel by boat to the Tower, Elizabeth insisted on writing a letter to Mary, to plead her innocence. She deliberately took as long as she could to write it, until the Thames' tide had risen so high that sailing under London Bridge to reach the Tower was impossible that day. The next day she was taken by river to the Tower but, as soon as she stepped out of the boat at Traitor's Gate, Elizabeth sat down on the steps in the pouring rain and refused to enter.

Some of Queen Mary's Yeoman Warders (Beefeaters), who had been ordered to bring Elizabeth inside the Tower, stepped forward and bowed, showing their support and respect for her. Finally, Elizabeth entered the Tower of London.

As an important prisoner, Elizabeth was kept in simple comfort. She was surrounded by female attendants chosen by Queen Mary to spy on her. Elizabeth wasn't allowed to write or receive letters, or to have visitors. The Lieutenant of the Tower, John Brydges, was a soldier who had served under her father Henry VIII. Brydges invited Elizabeth to meals in his private house at the Tower and allowed her to exercise by walking along the castle's battlements. Elizabeth was interrogated by Queen Mary's officials about her role in a Protestant rebellion against Mary, but they couldn't prove she was involved. After two months, Elizabeth was released from the Tower of London. However, she lived in constant fear of assassination.

Queen Mary died of cancer in 1558. She had no children. According to legend, 25-year-old Elizabeth had been out riding and was sitting under an ancient oak tree at her home at Hatfield House when she received the news that she was now the Queen of England.

Following tradition, she had to return to the Tower of London to prepare for her coronation as Queen Elizabeth I. Dressed in a purple velvet gown (by law in England only royalty could wear purple), Elizabeth rode through London to the Tower and insisted on entering it through Traitor's Gate.

Elizabeth I refused to marry and had no children. Instead, she pledged her life and body to England. She is known as 'the Virgin Queen' and 'Good Queen Bess'. Elizabeth ruled England for 45 years and is considered one of the greatest monarchs in history.

When she died aged 69, Elizabeth was wearing an unusual ring. This ring still exists today. It contains two tiny secret portraits hidden under a jewelled letter E. One portrait is of Elizabeth. The identity of the woman in the portrait opposite Elizabeth's is unknown, but this ring was created around the same time that the most famous portrait of Anne Boleyn was painted.

Elizabeth was the last monarch of the Tudor dynasty. Her reign is known as the 'Elizabethan period'.

# The Tide Letter

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On 17 March 1554, Princess Elizabeth, daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, was accused by her sister Queen Mary I of involvement in Wyatt's Rebellion, which aimed to overthrow the queen and replace her with Elizabeth. Mary ordered Elizabeth to be taken under armed guard by boat down the River Thames to the Tower of London for interrogation.

In a desperate attempt to speak with her sister, Elizabeth wrote a letter pleading her innocence. This was one of the most important letters Elizabeth ever wrote. It is known as the 'Tide Letter' because Elizabeth deliberately wrote it so slowly that the Thames' daylight low tide (that enabled boats to pass safely under the narrow arches of London Bridge) had turned and risen, delaying her imprisonment in the Tower for an extra night.

Afraid that her enemies might add more text to the letter to make her look guilty of treason, Elizabeth drew lines to fill the blank space above her signature.

Mary ignored the letter and Elizabeth was a prisoner in the Tower of London for two months.

This letter appears in the wordless story *Elizabeth Tudor*, in the scene of Elizabeth's arrest. A photo of the original letter is provided in the *Original Source Material* resource.

## Transcript

To hear an audio recording of the letter being read by an actor, please go to:

**The Tide Letter - The National Archives**

If any ever did try this old saying, 'that a king's word was more than another man's oath', I most humbly beseech your majesty to verify it to me, and to remember your last promise and my last demand, that I be not condemned without answer and due proof, which it seems that I now am; for without cause proved, I am by your Council from you commanded to go to the Tower, a place more wanted for a false traitor than a true subject, which though I know I desire it not, yet in the face of all this realm it appears proved.

I pray to God I may die the shamefullest death that any ever died, if I may mean any such thing; and to this present hour I protest before God (Who shall judge my truth, whatsoever malice shall devise), that I never practised, counselled, nor consented to anything that might be prejudicial to your person any way, or dangerous to the state by any means. And therefore I humbly beseech your majesty to let me answer afore yourself, and not suffer me to trust to your councillors, yea, and that afore I go to the Tower, if it be possible; if not, before I be further condemned. Howbeit, I trust assuredly your highness will give me leave to do it afore I go, that thus shamefully I may not be cried out on, as I now shall be; yea, and that without cause.

Let conscience move your highness to pardon this my boldness, which innocency procures me to do, together with hope of your natural kindness, which I trust will not see me cast away without desert, which what it is I would desire no more of God but that you truly knew. Which thing I think and believe you shall never by report know, unless by yourself you hear. I have heard in my time of many cast away for want of coming to the presence of their prince; and in late days I heard my Lord of Somerset say that if his brother had been suffered to speak with him he had never suffered; but persuasions were made to him so great that he was brought in belief that he could not live safely if the Admiral lived, and that made him give consent to his death. Though these persons are not to be compared to your majesty, yet I pray God the like evil persuasions persuade not one sister against the other, and all for that they have heard false report, and the truth not known.

Therefore, once again, kneeling with humbleness of heart, because I am not suffered to blow the knees of my body, I humbly crave to speak with your highness, which I would not be so bold as to desire if I knew not myself most clear, as I know myself most true. And as for the traitor Wyatt, he might peradventure write me a letter, but on my faith I never received any from him. And as for the copy of the letter sent to the French king, I pray God confound me eternally if ever I sent him word, message, token, or letter, by any means, and to this truth I will stand in till my death.

I humbly crave but only one word of answer from yourself.

Your highness's most faithful subject, that hath been from the beginning, and will be to my end,  
Elizabeth.

# Character List

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The wordless story *Elizabeth Tudor* is a true story from UK history. It features several people of historical relevance that you may wish to point out or discuss with students.

This resource provides a short description of each person, as well as a link to more in-depth information.

Names are listed in first name alphabetical order.

## Anne Boleyn (Queen Anne)

**Page 1, 2, 3, 7 (thought bubble), 11 (ring portrait)**

Anne came from a powerful, ambitious family, who managed to have her employed as a lady-in-waiting to Henry VIII's first wife Katherine of Aragon. Anne was clever, witty and sophisticated. Henry fell in love with her and tried to make Anne his mistress. Anne refused to get involved with Henry unless he married her. Henry broke England from the Roman Catholic Church so he could divorce Katherine and marry Anne. Anne had three pregnancies but only a daughter survived (Elizabeth). Henry blamed Anne for not giving him a son and decided to get rid of her by accusing her of adultery and treason. Anne was imprisoned, beheaded and buried at the Tower of London.



For more information about Anne, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[Anne Boleyn | Tower of London | Historic Royal Palaces](#)

## Edward Tudor (Edward VI)

**Page 4, 5 (portrait)**

Edward was the only legitimate son of Henry VIII. His mother was Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife. His mother died a few days after his birth. Edward had two older half-sisters: Mary and Elizabeth. Edward became King of England at the age of nine and died aged only 15 from measles and tuberculosis. Before he died, Edward named his cousin, Lady Jane Grey, as his successor, deliberately cutting out his sisters. However, Mary did succeed him after arresting and executing Lady Jane for treason.



For more information about Edward, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[Edward VI: The Lost Tudor King | Hampton Court Palace | Historic Royal Palaces](#)

## Elizabeth Tudor (Elizabeth I)

Page 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 (portrait), 10, 11

Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn. She had an older half-sister, Mary, and a younger half-brother, Edward. Although rejected by her father for not being the male heir he craved, she outlived her brother and sister to become Queen Elizabeth I aged 25. She reigned for 45 years and died aged 69. Known as the 'Virgin Queen', she never married or had children. Elizabeth was the last Tudor monarch, and her reign is the 'Elizabethan period'.



For more information about Elizabeth, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[Elizabeth , the Last Tudor | Hampton Court Palace | Historic Royal Palaces](#)

## Henry VIII

Page 1, 2, 3 (portrait), 4, 5 (portrait), 9 (portrait)

Henry became heir to the throne after his older brother Prince Arthur died unexpectedly. He became king aged 17. Henry married six times and had three legitimate children by different mothers: Mary, Elizabeth and Edward. To divorce his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, Henry separated England from the Roman Catholic Church and made himself Head of a new Church of England, making England a Protestant nation. He had two of his wives executed for treason and adultery, including Elizabeth's mother Anne Boleyn. Henry died aged 55, and was succeeded by his son Edward.



For more information about Henry, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[Henry VIII, Terrible Tudor? | Hampton Court Palace | Historic Royal Palaces](#)

## Jane Seymour (Queen Jane)

Page 1, 2, 3, 4

Jane was a lady-in-waiting to Henry VIII's second wife Anne Boleyn. Henry fell out of love with Anne because she hadn't given him a son. Jane caught Henry's eye and he secretly courted her behind Anne's back. Jane became Henry's third wife only days after Anne was executed for treason. Jane gave birth to Edward, Henry's long-awaited son and heir. The labour took two days and three nights, and Jane died of an infection 12 days later aged 29.



For more information about Jane, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[Jane Seymour | Hampton Court Palace | Historic Royal Palaces](#)



## John Blanke

### Page 1

John was a royal trumpeter in the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII. He is the only Black Tudor for whom there is an identifiable image. His birth and death dates are unknown and very little is known about him. John may have arrived in England in 1501, in the entourage of Katherine of Aragon. John was part of a long medieval and renaissance tradition of Black musicians serving at European royal courts. He bore witness to some of the great moments in England's history, including the coronation of Henry VIII.



For more information about John, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[John Blanke | Tower of London | Historic Royal Palaces](#)

## Sir John Brydges

### Page 7

As well as being a landowner and soldier, Brydges was a prominent courtier in the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I. He was Lieutenant of the Tower of London and is famous for helping the teenaged Lady Jane Grey to the scaffold for her execution. Brydges also felt sympathy for Elizabeth Tudor when she was imprisoned at the Tower by her sister Queen Mary. Mary accused Brydges of being too lenient with his prisoner, because he had let Elizabeth walk in the Tower's gardens and eat in his house. Mary had Brydges replaced as Lieutenant.



For more information about John, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[BRYDGES, Sir John \(1492-1557\), of Coberley, Glos. | History of Parliament Online](#)

## Katherine of Aragon (Queen Katherine)

### Page 1, 2, 4, 9 (portraits only)

Katherine of Aragon, daughter of the King and Queen of Spain, was the first wife of Henry VIII. As a teenager, Katherine had been briefly married to Prince Arthur, Henry's older brother. Arthur died young and Henry married Katherine after he became king. She had six children, but only Mary survived. Henry was desperate for a male heir. He had fallen in love with Katherine's lady-in-waiting Anne Boleyn and wanted to marry her. Henry claimed his marriage to Katherine was incestuous because she had been his brother's wife. To divorce her, Henry broke England away from the Roman Catholic Church and established the Church of England. Katherine was stripped of her title and spent her final years in poverty, forbidden by Henry from seeing their daughter Mary.



For more information about Katherine, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[Katherine of Aragon | Hampton Court Palace | Historic Royal Palaces](#)

## Mark Smeaton

### Page 1

Smeaton was probably the son of a carpenter and a seamstress. Considered handsome, he was a talented musician, singer and dancer. Smeaton was noticed by Henry VIII's queen, Anne Boleyn, while he was employed as a musician and choral singer at the Chapel Royal at Hampton Court Palace. Anne had him promoted to musician at Henry's court. When Henry decided to get rid of Anne, Smeaton was arrested for being her lover (which was probably not true). He was imprisoned at the Tower of London, tortured into making a confession and beheaded. Years later, Henry's daughter Mary tried unsuccessfully to convince people that her sister Elizabeth was the product of the alleged affair between Smeaton and Anne Boleyn.

## Mary Tudor (Mary I)

### Page 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 (portrait), 7 (portrait), 8, 9, 10 (portrait)

Mary was the eldest child of Henry VIII and his first queen, Katherine of Aragon. Although her father hoped for a son to succeed him, for the first 17 years of her life Mary was the sole heir to the Tudor dynasty. When Henry fell in love with Anne Boleyn and annulled his marriage to Mary's mother, Mary was declared illegitimate. She was replaced by Elizabeth, Henry's child with Anne Boleyn, and later by her half-brother Edward. Against all odds, Mary was crowned Queen after Edward died young. Distrustful and jealous, Mary convinced herself that Elizabeth, who she considered a rival for her throne, was the result of the alleged affair between court musician Mark Smeaton and Henry VIII's second wife Anne Boleyn. Elizabeth's resemblance to their father Henry was so obvious that Mary had little luck in convincing anyone else. A fervent Catholic, Mary tried to reverse her father's religious reforms by forcing England back to the Roman Catholic Church, earning her the nickname 'Bloody Mary'. Mary married the King of Spain but had no children. She died aged 42, probably of cancer.



For more information about Mary, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[Mary I: first crowned Queen of England | Hampton Court Palace | Historic Royal Palaces](#)

## Thomas Cromwell

### Page 3, 4

Cromwell was the son of a blacksmith. Clever and ruthless, he trained as a lawyer and became Henry VIII's chief minister. Cromwell helped Henry break England away from the Roman Catholic Church by managing the closure of England's powerful monasteries. As the most powerful man in England after Henry, he removed anyone who stood in the King's way, including Henry's second wife Anne Boleyn. He built a case against Anne accusing her of adultery with five men at the court, including musician Mark Smeaton and Anne's own brother. Cromwell witnessed Anne's execution at the Tower of London. He made many powerful enemies over the years, who finally convinced Henry that Cromwell was plotting a rebellion. He was imprisoned for treason at the Tower of London before being beheaded.



For more information about Thomas, scan the QR code or click on the weblink below:

[Thomas Cromwell | Tower of London | Historic Royal Palaces](#)

# Original Locations weblinks

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The locations listed here are connected with the wordless story *Elizabeth Tudor*.

## Hampton Court Palace

Site of the birth and christening of Henry VIII's only legitimate son, Edward.

[\*Chapel Royal / Hampton Court Palace / Historic Royal Palaces\*](#)

## The Tower of London

Execution site of Anne Boleyn:

[\*Tower Green and Scaffold site / Tower of London / Historic Royal Palaces\*](#)

Burial site of Anne Boleyn:

[\*Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula at the Tower of London.\*](#)

Site of Elizabeth Tudor's imprisonment:

[\*The Tower of London as a prison / Tower of London / Historic Royal Palaces\*](#)

## Hatfield House

Home of Elizabeth Tudor and site of the famous oak tree (still in existence) where she received news that she was Queen.

[\*Hatfield House / Visit Hatfield House, Park & Gardens In Hertfordshire, UK\*](#)

Images of these locations are provided separately for classroom use in the resource *Original Locations*, which is available to download from the Wordless Stories webpage.



# Wordless Stories: *Elizabeth Tudor*

## Original Locations

1. **The White Tower** (the Tower of London)
2. **The Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula** (the Tower of London)
3. **The Chapel Royal** (Hampton Court Palace)
4. **Elizabeth I's oak tree** (Hatfield House)
5. **Traitor's Gate** (the Tower of London)
6. **Hatfield House**























# Wordless Stories: *Elizabeth Tudor*

## Original Source Material

1. **Henry VIII**, after Hans Holbein the Younger
2. **Henry VIII**, workshop of Hans Holbein the Younger
3. **Replica of Henry VIII's crown**
4. **Katherine of Aragon**, by Unknown Artist, c.1520
5. **Anne Boleyn**, by Unknown English Artist
6. **Anne Boleyn**, by Hans Holbein the Younger, 1532-36
7. **Queen Mary I**, by Master John, 1544
8. **Jane Seymour**, after Hans Holbein the Younger, c.1537
9. **Edward, Prince of Wales**, by Hans Holbein the Younger, c.1540-43
10. **Edward VI**, attributed to William Scrots, c.1546
11. **Elizabeth I when a Princess**, attributed to William Scrots, c.1546
12. **The Family of Henry VIII**, British School, c.1545
13. **Mary I**, after Anthonis Mor
14. **The 'Tide Letter'**, written by Elizabeth Tudor to Queen Mary during her arrest
15. **Queen Elizabeth I**, by Unknown English artist, c.1600
16. **Queen Elizabeth I ('The Ditchley portrait')**, by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, c.1592
17. **Queen Elizabeth I ('The Armada portrait')**, by Unknown English artist, c.1588
18. **Locket ring belonging to Elizabeth I**, c.1575
19. **Elizabeth I's gloves**
20. **Elizabeth I seated at Parliament**, attributed to Renold Elstrack, c.1608





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If any ever did me this olde wrong that a knyghtes word was more than  
 a nother mans othe, I most humbly beseeche your. M. to venge it in  
 me and to remember your last promys and my last denynge that I  
 be not condemned without answer, wiche it seems that now I am ffor  
 that without cause prouyd I am by your counsel from your commandment  
 to go vnto the towre a place more dynted for a false traitor, than a true  
 subiect wiche thooth I knowe I deserue it not, yet in the face of  
 all this realme apertis that it is prouyd wiche I pray god I may be  
 namefullist scthe that eny any dyen afore I may mene any wiche  
 thinge and to this present power I protest for God that I haue  
 my trouth in whatsoever matier that seems that I neuer practis  
 dyced nor consented to any thinge that might be prejudiciall  
 to your person any way or dangerous to the stat by any  
 mene and therfor I humbly beseeche your maiestie to let  
 me answer afore your selfe and not suffer me to trust your  
 counsellors yea and that afore I go to the towre (if it  
 be possible) if not afore I be further condemned howbeit  
 I trust assuredly your highnes wyl give me leue to do it as  
 I shal be thus humbly I may not be denyed out on as now I shal  
 be yea and without cause let counsellors move your highnes to  
 take some better way with me than to make me be condemn  
 in a matier I knowe not. Also I most humbly  
 beseeche your highnes to pardon this my boldnes wiche  
 innocency procure me to do together with hope of your natural  
 kindness wiche I trust wyl not se me cast away without helpe  
 wiche what it is I wold desier no more of God but that you  
 truly knowe wiche thinge I thinke and beleue you shal  
 neuer by report knowe vntil by your selfe you here I haue  
 hard in my time of many years as in late days I haue my  
 lord of Somerset say that if his brother had bene sufferd  
 to speke with him he had neuer sufferd but the  
 persuasions wer made to him so that he was brayn  
 in beleue that he coulde not lye safely if the admiral lynch  
 and that made him give his consent to his scthe thooth  
 the persons ar not to be comparid to your maiestie yet I  
 pray god that the persuasions perwiche not one man  
 the other and al for that the haue hard false report and  
 not hardene to the

therfor ons again with humbles of my hart because I am not  
 sufferd to bow the knees of my body I humbly craue to speke  
 with your highnes wiche I wold not be so bold to desier  
 if I knewe not my selfe most clere as I knowe my selfe most  
 true and as for the traitor wiche he moeth paraventur writ  
 me a lettur but on my <sup>part</sup> I neuer receied any from him and  
 as for the copie of my lettur sent to the freche knyge I pray  
 God contin<sup>ue</sup> eternally if ever I sent him word message  
 toke or lettur by any meanes and to this and my trouth  
 I am ffor. To my desier



I humbly craue but only one worde  
 of answer fro your selfe

Your highnes most faithful subiect that  
 haue bene from the beginning and wybe  
 to my ende.



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