

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

A Man for All Seasons

by Robert Bolt

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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 river as a repeated image.
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.

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Background

The historical events on which this play is based cover a turbulent period in sixteenth century English history. Before Henry VIII was crowned as 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, since religious law of the time prevented a marriage to a dead 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 had offended God through this marriage and wanted to divorce Catherine in order to marry Anne Boleyn. He ordered Cardinal Wolsey to approach the papacy in Rome to have the Pope declare that the marriage to Catherine was not valid so that Henry would be free to marry.

When Wolsey was unsuccessful, Henry enlisted the aid of a new chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, who recommended that England make a break with the Church of Rome 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 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 of the King. He rose to the position of Lord Chancellor but was later charged with 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, stands as a representative of the greatness that man can achieve by remaining faithful to himself and to his beliefs.

Note: All page references come from the Vintage International Edition of *A Man for All Seasons*, copyright 1990.

A Man for All Seasons

Questions for Essay or Discussion

1. Develop an essay in which you discuss the actions of King Henry VIII that lead to the Act of Supremacy; discuss the reasons Sir Thomas More could not support this Act.
2. Develop an essay that contrasts the characters of Thomas More and Richard Rich.
3. Write an essay in which you analyze the character of William Roper and Thomas More's feelings about Roper.
4. Write an essay that shows Margaret More as a woman whose thinking was before her time.
5. Develop an essay that compares the roles of Chapuys, the Common Man, and Richard Rich.
6. Write an essay that discusses the role of the Common Man in the play, including the various parts he plays and the effectiveness of this element in the play.
7. Write an essay citing examples of More's wittiness and sense of humor, particularly the use of verbal humor under difficult circumstances.
8. Write an essay that explains how Thomas More fits the title.
9. Write an essay in which you analyze the strategy and legal arguments during More's trial by Cromwell.

A Man for All Seasons

Act One

1. What does the Common Man say about this play beginning with his appearance on stage?

2. What role does he 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?

6. What does More give him? What might the reader assume about his gift?

7. What are the Duke of Norfolk and Alice More talking about as they enter?

Act Two

1. What role does the Common Man play in this scene? How is the water/river image used here?

2. What remarks do Roper and More make concerning each other's dress?

3. What are they waiting for?

4. What is the Act of Supremacy?

5. What does More say is the crux of his position at this time in relationship to this matter? Why is Roper not to express any opinion?

6. What does Chapuys say is his reason for coming to More's home?

7. How does More respond?
