

Why did Henry VIII marry six times?

Learning Objective:

To find out about Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon and the reasons for their divorce.

NEXT



Catherine of Aragon was the daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. She married Henry's older brother Arthur in 1501 but he died a year later. She then married Henry who was five years younger than her.



BACK

NEXT



At the start of their marriage Henry and Catherine genuinely loved and cared for each other. Catherine had seven pregnancies in total although only a daughter, Mary, survived. But Henry was desperate for a son to be his heir.

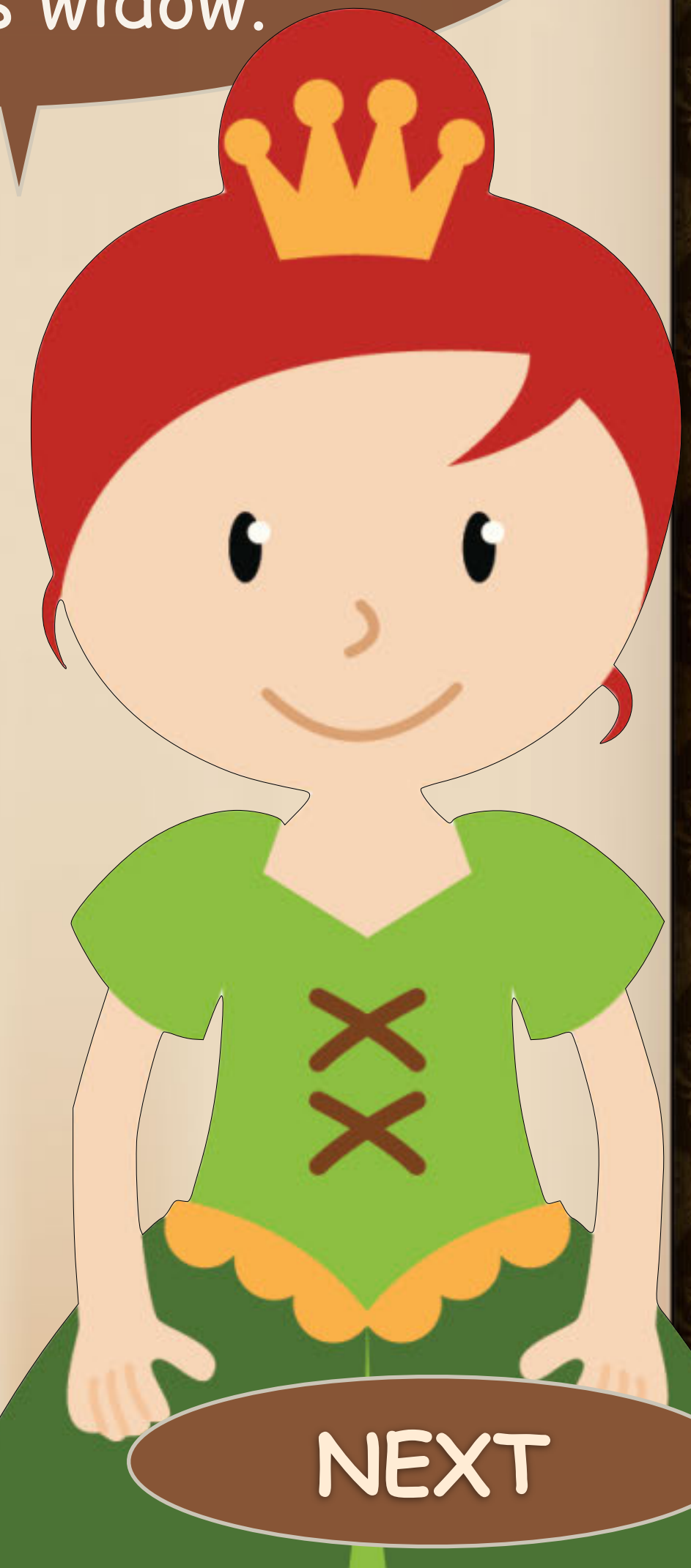


BACK

NEXT

After they
had been married for about 15 years, it
became clear to Henry that Catherine would not give
him the son he needed and he began to believe
that the marriage was cursed.

He started looking
for proof in the Bible that a
brother should not marry his
brother's widow.



Around this time, Henry also began to notice one of Catherine's ladies-in-waiting, Anne Boleyn. He fell in love with her and she tried to convince Henry that he should divorce Catherine.



BACK

Mine own sweetheart, these shall be to advertise you of the great loneliness that I find here since your departing, for I ensure you methinketh the time longer since your departing now last than I was wont to do a whole fortnight: I think your kindness and my fervents of love causeth it, for otherwise I would not have thought it possible that for so little a while it should have grieved me, but now that I am coming toward you methinketh my pains been half released.... Wishing myself (specially an evening) in my sweetheart's arms, whose pretty dukkys I trust shortly to kiss. Written with the hand of him that was, is, and shall be yours by his will.

H.R.

A love letter from Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn

NEXT

Henry now has some big problems to solve...

Problem 1:

I am married to a woman who is becoming too old to have children and I don't have a legitimate son yet.

Problem 2:

I don't love my wife anymore. I love Anne Boleyn.

Problem 3:

I think God is angry with me for marrying my brother's widow.

Problem 4:

A divorce from Catherine will be very unpopular with the people of England.

Help! What shall I do?



BACK

NEXT



Catherine of Aragon at her first trial

Henry tried to get a divorce granted from the Pope, the head of the Catholic church. When the Pope refused, Henry split from the Catholic church and started the Church of England. This now meant Henry was free to act as he wished. A divorce trial was started but Catherine refused to co-operate. She did not want to divorce Henry.



BACK

NEXT

Catherine of Aragon's famous divorce speech...

"Sir, I beseech you for all the love that hath been between us, let me have justice and right, take of me some pity and compassion, for I am a poor woman, and a stranger, born out of your dominion. I have here no friend and much less indifferent counsel. I flee to you, as to the head of justice within this realm . . . I take God and all the world to witness that I have been to you a true, humble and obedient wife, ever comfortable to your will and pleasure . . . being always well pleased and contented with all things wherein you had any delight or dalliance . . . I loved all those whom ye loved, only for your sake, whether I had cause or no, and whether they were my friends or enemies. This 20 years or more I have been your true wife and by me ye have had divers children, although it hath pleased God to call them from this world, which hath been no default in me. . . And when ye had me at first, I take God to my judge, I was a true maid, without touch of man. And whether this be true or no, I put it to your conscience . . . Therefore, I humbly require you to spare me the extremity of this new court . . . And if ye will not, to God I commit my cause".

BACK

NEXT



But the divorce was finalised and Catherine was sent away. She refused to give up her crown on separation from Henry and spent the rest of her life hoping Henry would reconsider. Divorce was rare in those days and it was seen as something very negative.

BACK



NEXT

How do you think
Catherine felt when Henry
told her they would be
getting divorced?

What were her
reasons for wanting
to stay married?



BACK

NEXT

I want a divorce because...

I don't want a divorce because...



How might
Henry and
Catherine
have finished
these
sentences?



BACK

NEXT