Westminster Abbey
Learning

Coronation ceremony assembly – teachers' notes

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Overview:
Explore what happens during a coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey. This assembly explains what a coronation is and what happens during a coronation ceremony through the means of re-enactment. Pupils will learn about the different stages of the coronation service, and hear about the importance of its religious elements throughout.

Props:
(or could just mime it all)
2 crowns or headbands, to represent the St. Edward's crown and the Imperial State Crown
2 sceptres (sticks could be used) One to represent the Sovereign's Sceptre with Cross, and the other to represent the Sovereign's Sceptre with Dove
A round object to represent the orb (could use a ball)
A cloak, or large sheet to represent a cloak
A Bible
A table to represent the high altar
A jug
A spoon
3 chairs: One to represent the Coronation Chair, one to represent the Chair of Estate, and the other to act as a throne
A sword (or another stick could be used)
Script cards for the Archbishop of Canterbury (included in this pack)

You will need 5 pupils:
1 king or queen
1 Archbishop of Canterbury
1 Dean of Westminster
2 footmen/ladies in waiting

Introduction:

Play the music Zadok the Priest as the pupils are coming into assembly.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiXgOQ9_-RI

Slide 3: Can anyone tell me what this famous building is?

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Slide 4: It's Westminster Abbey, a large church in London. There has been a church on this site for over a thousand years, and the current building is around 750 years old. There is something very special about Westminster Abbey.

Slide 5: Westminster Abbey is the coronation church. Can anyone tell me what a coronation is?

Slide 6: A coronation is a ceremony where the new king or queen of this country is crowned. The crowning isn't the only part of a coronation though. The coronation is very important religious ceremony that focuses on the duty of the monarch towards God and the people. The new king or queen must make promises before God, then is anointed with holy oil – just as kings from the Old Testament in the Bible were, and then receives Holy Communion. We're going to explore what happens at Westminster Abbey when a new king or queen is crowned.

Slide 7: Elizabeth II became Queen on 6th February 1952, but wasn't crowned until 2nd June 1953 – over a year later. This follows the tradition of allowing some time to pass after the death of a former monarch as a sign of respect. A coronation also takes a long time to plan.

Slide 8: The essential elements of the coronation have remained largely unchanged for the past 1000 years. In the 14th century, the instructions for how to do a coronation were written down in a manuscript called the Liber Regalis (image on left hand of the screen). The coronation ceremony has not changed much since then, although now takes place in English instead of Latin. Since 1066, all coronations have taken place at Westminster Abbey. 38 kings and queens have been crowned there.

Slide 9: Click to play the film. This film can be used as a brief introduction before the pupils start to re-enact what happens at a coronation ceremony.

Slide 10: We're going to re-enact what happens at a coronation ceremony. I will need 5 volunteers.

The monarch should stand at the back of the hall with the cloak on. The ladies-in-waiting/footmen can stand behind the monarch, carrying the train of the cloak. The pupils seated for assembly could create a gap through which the monarch can walk through towards the front of the hall.

At the front of the hall is the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Dean of Westminster, standing behind the altar. On top of the altar are the props to represent the Crown Jewels (two sceptres, the orb, the sword, a spoon, a jug, a ring, a chalice).

Slide 11: First, the monarch arrives at the Abbey in a golden carriage. As they enter the Abbey and walk through the church to the high altar, the choir sing. There were 480 musicians at Queen Elizabeth II's coronation and around 8,000 people seated in the Abbey to watch the coronation. How do you think the king or queen might feel as they enter?

Make all the pupils stand. Play Hubert Parry's 'I was Glad' anthem (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2FBBb14em8) as the monarch walks from the back of the school hall and goes to stand next to the coronation chair. The ladies-in-waiting/footmen can let go of the cloak, and move to one side. The archbishop moves to stand next to the monarch. Once the monarch and Archbishop are in place, pupils in the hall can be seated.

Slide 12: Recognition and oath. The first stage of the coronation is for the new monarch to be presented to the people, and then to swear an oath to uphold the law and the church. The Archbishop and the monarch must turn to all four corners of the Abbey for all to see their new king or queen.

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The monarch and Archbishop turn to each corner of the hall, and at each direction, the Archbishop exclaims (CARD 1), "Sirs, I here present unto you [name], your undoubted King/Queen". All pupils in the hall to respond with "God save King/Queen [name]."

Once the monarch has been presented, they must take the coronation oath where they pledge to rule with justice and mercy, maintaining the laws of God.

The monarch (helped by ladies-in waiting/footmen) moves to the Chair of Estate, to the right of the altar. The Archbishop collects the Bible from the High Altar, and holds it out to the king or queen. They lay their hand on it and make the coronation oath.

The archbishop asks (CARD 2) "Do you swear to govern faithfully, with justice and mercy, to uphold the gospel, and to maintain the Church of England?"

The monarch responds, "I solemnly promise to do so".

Slide 13: Anointing. After the recognition and oath, the monarch moves to sit in the Coronation Chair. The chair dates to 1301, which means it is over 700 years old. The anointing is the most important and holy part of the ceremony. The Archbishop of Canterbury uses holy oil to make the sign of the cross on the monarch's forehead, hands, and heart. It's a sign to show that the monarch has been marked out for this sacred role and has been blessed by God. The tradition of anointing goes back to the Old Testament in the Bible, when King David and King Solomon were anointed. At Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, this part of the service was considered so holy and important that it wasn't filmed. The anthem 'Zadok the Priest' is played during this moment.

Play part of 'Zadok the Priest' by Handel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiXgOQ9_-RI) and re-enact the anointing. The Dean of Westminster takes the jug from the altar, and pretends to pour oil into the spoon. They hold out the spoon to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who dips their two fingers in to the spoon and makes the sign of the cross on the monarch's head, hands, and heart.

Slide 14: Investing. The monarch remains seated in the Coronation Chair and is presented with the regalia. The monarch is first presented with the Sword of State, a symbol of the monarch's role as Head of the Armed Forces, but also to remind them of their duty to preserve peace.

The Archbishop of Canterbury presents the sword to the monarch, who holds it, and then gives it back where it is placed on the altar again.

Then, the monarch is given the orb. The orb is a symbol of Jesus's power over the world.

The Dean of Westminster passes the orb/ball to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who presents it to the king/queen. The archbishop says (CARD 3) "Receive this orb, set under the cross and remember that the whole world is under the power of Jesus Christ" Once the monarch has held it for a moment, it is passed back to the Archbishop, and is returned to the altar.

Next, the monarch receives a ring representing his or her marriage to the nation.

The Archbishop puts a ring onto the king/queen's finger.

Then, the monarch is handed two sceptres: the Sovereign's Sceptre with Cross – a symbol of kingly power, and the Sovereign's Sceptre with Dove, a symbol of mercy.

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The Dean of Westminster passes the two sceptres to the Archbishop of Canterbury who delivers them to the monarch, saying, "Receive these royal sceptres".

Slide 15: Crowning. This is the St. Edward's crown, and is used to crown the monarch. The Archbishop of Canterbury lifts the crown high into the air and then places it onto the monarch's head. Those in the Abbey respond by saying three times "God Save the King/Queen."

The Dean of Westminster takes the St. Edward's Crown from the High Altar and passes it to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop lifts it high over the king/queen's head, and then places it down. All pupils in the hall to shout "God Save the King/Queen" three times.

Slide 16: Enthronement and Homage. The monarch rises from the coronation chair and goes to sit in the throne. Then the act of homage takes place. The monarch's subjects must kneel and promise to serve the king/queen faithfully.

The monarch moves from the coronation chair to the throne, situated in front of the chair. The Archbishop of Canterbury kneels before the monarch and says (CARD 4) "I the Archbishop of Canterbury, will be faithful and true unto you, so help me God". Ask any pupils if they would like to come to the front and kneel before the monarch and promise to serve them faithfully.

The monarch then receives Holy Communion – the consecrated bread and wine, which Christians believe become the body and blood of Christ. The monarch is called to follow in the example of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve.

The monarch moves to the High Altar, kneels, and the Archbishop of Canterbury hands a chalice for the monarch to drink from. Then the monarch processes behind the high altar, takes off the St. Edward's crown and replaces it with the Imperial State Crown.

Slide 17: Closing procession. The monarch replaces the St. Edward's crown with the Imperial State Crown, and then processes out of the Abbey carrying the orb and the sceptre. As the monarch leaves the Abbey, all stand and sing the National Anthem.

The monarch processes out, wearing the Imperial State Crown and carrying the orb and the sceptre. The ladies-in-waiting/footmen can assist carrying the cloak as the monarch makes their way to the back of the hall again. As they slowly process, play the National Anthem. Ask the pupils to stand and join in if they know the words.

Slide 18: 8000 people attended the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The coronation was filmed, and 27 million people in the UK watched it on television.

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