Westminster Abbey
Learning

Elizabeth I coronation story – teachers' notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool in your classroom.

As we continue to grow our free catalogue of teaching resources, we'd really appreciate a few minutes of your time to let us know what you liked and what could be improved. Please complete this five-question survey.

This resource has been designed to explore the coronation of Elizabeth I in a story format with audio and animated illustrations. We recommend that you present the PPT in the app version.

As you click through to each slide, the narration will begin playing automatically. Each audio file is between 18 and 41 seconds long. Please ensure you have the volume turned up on your computer.

Animations have been timed in relation to the story on the audio, so please wait for them to finish before moving onto the next slide. You might also wish to spend some time talking over the questions asked, or what you can see in each image, before continuing the presentation.

These teachers' notes provide further information and context for some of the slides.

SLIDE 4:

Almost 500 years ago, in 1558, Elizabeth I became the queen. She was the daughter of Henry VIII and had never expected to be on the throne, as her brother and sister had to rule before her. In fact, she was only the second queen EVER to reign in her own right. At the time it was unusual for the country to only have a queen, and many people didn't think women made good leaders. Do you think Elizabeth proved them wrong?

SLIDE 5:

To show everyone she was the new queen, Elizabeth had a special ceremony called a coronation. It took place in Westminster Abbey, an ancient royal church in London where monarchs have been crowned since the year 1066. It was very important for Elizabeth to be crowned in the same place as the kings who came before her.

SLIDE 6:

The day before her coronation, Elizabeth travelled in a grand procession across the city all the way from the Tower of London to the Palace of Westminster. Large crowds lined the streets to see her. Imagine the statement that would have made! On her coronation day, Elizabeth walked from the Palace to Westminster Abbey. How do you think monarchs arrive at their coronations today?

© 2026 Dean and Chapter of Westminster

You might like to discuss with your students that the Palace of Westminster is today better known as the Houses of Parliament. It stopped being favoured as a palace during the reign of Henry VIII (Elizabeth I's father) when a fire broke out in the royal residences. In modern coronations monarchs still travel to the Abbey from a nearby palace – Buckingham Palace – but traditionally by coach rather than walking.

SLIDE 7:

Elizabeth was only 25 years old when she came to the throne. She was very young to be a queen. Look at how she dressed for her coronation. She wore a beautiful robe of gold cloth with a fur collar to represent her wealth, virtue and purity. Do you think she looks like a queen? She also wore her long hair loose, which was traditional for brides. Even though people expected her to, Elizabeth never married – maybe she was showing everyone she was 'marrying' England...

If you would like to explore more about images of Elizabeth I and what these visual sources can tell us about her, you might be interested in our Elizabeth I image comparison activity.

SLIDE 8:

She walked through the Abbey, with all eyes watching her, until she reached the space where coronations have taken place for hundreds of years... and still take place today. She stepped carefully onto the Cosmati Pavement, a mosaic floor made of thousands of pieces of stone in beautiful patterns, and towards the Coronation Chair placed right in the middle. The Coronation Chair is a very special chair – monarchs have sat on it during their coronations for over 700 years, including the Tudor monarchs that ruled before Elizabeth. She had never expected to sit in this special chair. How do you think she felt?

Please note that during a coronation the chair actually faces the golden screen of the High Altar, which is the opposite direction as seen on the slide. The monarch sits with their back to the congregation. This is because a coronation is a Christian service, where the monarch makes promises to God. You might like to talk to your class about this, comparing to fictional coronations they might be aware of.

SLIDE 9:

A coronation is a Christian service. It was important for Elizabeth to be anointed with holy oil, a special oil that had been blessed, to symbolise that she'd been chosen by God to be the queen. The oil was poured into the anointing spoon and used by the bishop to anoint the queen by putting oil on her head, heart and hands. This very holy part of the coronation was kept private – the people invited didn't get to see it happen.

The golden eagle on this slide is called the ampulla. It's a special flask that holds the consecrated oil.

The role of anointing and crowning a new monarch traditionally belongs to the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, for Elizabeth I's coronation the role was vacant and the Bishop of Carlisle agreed to step in, which is why a bishop is mentioned. If relevant to your learning, you could tell your class that the Archbishop of York and almost every other bishop refused to crown Elizabeth because, as a Protestant, she wouldn't agree to uphold the Catholic religion reestablished by her sister Mary I.

© 2026 Dean and Chapter of Westminster

SLIDE 10:

Elizabeth then received special objects called the Coronation Regalia, which are part of the Crown Jewels, to symbolise her role and responsibilities as queen. The round orb symbolises God's power over the world and the sceptre, a golden rod, is a symbol of the power and authority of the monarch. And of course, Elizabeth was crowned to show everyone she was the new queen.

SLIDE 11:

The Coronation Regalia look a bit different today to those used by Elizabeth I – what similarities and differences can you see? Although the designs have changed over 500 years, the symbolism of these objects remains the same. In fact, the sceptre and crown have been used in coronations for nearly 1,000 years! And no matter what they look like, they've always represented the power and responsibilities of the monarch.

If you're learning about change and continuity, you could mention to your students that although details have changed, the basic running order of coronations has remained the same for hundreds of years.

You can also find out more about some of the objects involved in coronations in these Coronation objects factsheets or this video exploring the Coronation Regalia.

SLIDE 12:

When the service ended, Elizabeth processed from the Abbey holding the orb and sceptre. People weren't used to seeing a queen being crowned, so her coronation was very important. She needed to look just as powerful and important as the kings who reigned before her - by how she travelled, what she wore, and the symbolism of the special objects she used. Elizabeth walked back to the Palace of Westminster to enjoy a coronation banquet. We don't know exactly what she ate, but it likely included roast meats, fish and even some sweet treats. Do you ever have a special meal to celebrate something?

SLIDE 13:

Elizabeth ruled for a long time, nearly 45 years, and her reign was known as the Golden Age. Why do you think having a long reign might be special or important? After her death in 1603 she was buried in Westminster Abbey, in the beautiful Lady Chapel built by her grandfather, Henry VII, as the final resting place for his Tudor family.

You might be interested in finding out more about the Lady Chapel, including Elizabeth I's tomb, which is shown briefly on the slide.

© 2026 Dean and Chapter of Westminster