



Henry VII's legacy: a three-minute film - teachers' notes

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Watch the film here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp8JnvkZWdE>

Follow-up discussion questions

After watching this short film, your students could debate one of these questions verbally or provide a written response for homework.

- By 1503 Henry VII had successfully secured his right to the throne, so building the Lady Chapel at Westminster Abbey was unnecessary. How far do you agree or disagree?
- Henry VII was known to be careful with money, yet he spent £20,000 (about £15,830,000 today) building the Lady Chapel. What does this tell us about him?
- How successful was Henry VII in building a physical legacy in Westminster Abbey?
- This film explores how Henry VII used the Lady Chapel to help secure his legacy. He was buried alongside his wife Elizabeth of York; how significant was she in the establishment of the Tudor dynasty?
- As well as familiar Tudor symbols, the Lady Chapel is stamped with Welsh dragons. As the king of England, why do you think Henry VII used his Welsh heritage for propaganda purposes?
- The full Latin inscription around Henry VII's tomb reads:

Henry VII rests within this tomb, he who was the splendour of kings and light of the world, a wise and watchful monarch, a courteous lover of virtue, outstanding in beauty, vigorous and mighty; who brought peace to his kingdom, who waged very many wars, who always returned victorious from the enemy, who wedded both his daughters to kings, who was united to kings, indeed to all, by treaty, who built this holy temple, and erected this tomb for himself, his wife, and his children. He completed more than fifty three years, and bore the royal sceptre for twenty four. The fifteenth hundredth year of the Lord had passed, and the ninth after that was running its course, when dawned the black day, the twenty first dawn of April was shining, when this so great monarch ended his last day. No earlier ages gave thee so great a king, O England; hardly will ages to come give thee his like.

Using your understanding of the historical context, assess how convincing this description is in relation to Henry VII.

Transcript

Welcome to Henry VII's Lady Chapel. What impression does this space give you? The architectural style was radical at the time and the ceiling, designed to look like heaven, was described as 'the wonder of the world'.

It took over 13 years to finish and was hugely expensive. So why do you think Henry chose to build it? Think about his claim to the throne – it was tenuous and the crown was won in battle. It was vital for him to establish that the Tudors were here to stay.

And there are Tudor symbols everywhere, including Tudor roses, Beaufort portcullises and other emblems. Statues of saints and angels were to show that God had blessed the family. Think about the dynastic statement that would have made to anyone who saw it.

It was also built as a place of burial and at the end of the chapel lies the tomb of Henry himself. It's usually closed to the public, so we're really lucky to get the chance to take a closer look.

Now inside the screen, this feels like a much more private space. There used to be an altar here where monks were employed by Henry to pray constantly for his soul. And four large candles were kept constantly burning, with up to 100 lit on special feast days.

Henry's will, the instructions he left behind, and the building itself suggest a real concern for the salvation of his soul. He wanted to make sure he got into heaven after his death. Why do you think that might have worried him?

Take a close look at the tomb chest. Henry is buried with his wife, Elizabeth of York. Their marriage united two warring houses and gave their children an (arguably) indisputable claim to the throne.

Henry left some instructions for the design of his tomb: he wanted bronze effigies 'as good or better as any of the other kings and queens in the Abbey'. Why do you think that was the case? He also wanted a large marble tomb chest, although he and Elizabeth are actually buried in a crypt under the floor.

Henry hadn't quite decided on the final design by the time of his death. Its Italian Renaissance style was actually chosen by his son, Henry VIII. It probably says more about *his* ambitions than it does about his father. However these symbols, found all around the screen, tell us more about Henry VII. A Welsh dragon for a Welsh king, and a greyhound to show he was the Earl of Richmond. Records show that he spent money on jewelled collars for his favourite greyhound, Lancelot.

But how was Henry remembered? Part of this Latin inscription around his tomb declares him to be 'the splendour of kings ... who waged very many wars, who always returned victorious from the enemy'. Think about the statement that's making.

So if we consider the Lady Chapel here at Westminster Abbey, what was Henry trying to achieve? He wanted to establish his legacy: that his family were legitimate, closely bound to previous kings and here to stay. All of the Tudor monarchs, apart from Henry VIII, are buried here. And through constant prayers and the use of religious symbols, he wanted to ensure the salvation of his soul; that it would reach heaven after his death.