

The National Archives
Education Service

God Blew and they were Scattered

Did God really help
the English defeat the
Spanish Armada?

Court of King's Bench
Coram Rege Rolls 1589
(KB27/1309/2)

Introduction

Lesson at a Glance

Suitable For: KS3

Time Period:

Early Modern 1485-1750

Curriculum Link:

The development of Church, state and society in Britain 1509-1745

- The Elizabethan religious settlement and conflict with Catholics (including Scotland, Spain and Ireland)

Learning Objective:

To closely examine a document in order to discover information.

To consider how documents were used to shape public opinion in the 1500s.

Resources needed:

Printed sources and questions

Preparing for the Armada

In 1588, King Philip II of Spain sent an armada (a fleet of ships) to collect his army from the Netherlands, where they were fighting, and take them to invade England. This was done in the name of religion, because England had become Protestant and no longer accepted the Pope as the head of the Church; Spain was Catholic and the Pope had encouraged Philip to try to make England become Catholic again. He also had a political reason to go to war with England because Spain ruled the Netherlands, but the people there were rebelling against Spanish control and England had been helping them.

The English were worried about the threat of invasion and they attacked the Spanish ships as they sailed along the Channel, but the Armada was so strong that most of the ships reached Calais safely.

The Armada was difficult to attack because it sailed in a 'crescent' shape. While the Armada tried to get in touch with the Spanish army, the English ships attacked fiercely. However, an important reason why the English were able to defeat the Armada was that the wind blew the Spanish ships northwards. To many English people this proved that God wanted them to win and there were pictures and medals made to celebrate this fact.

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Useful links:

[The face of Royalty](http://www.pinterest.com/uknatarchives/the-face-of-royalty/)

(<http://www.pinterest.com/uknatarchives/the-face-of-royalty/>)
View a selection of Royal Seals and plea rolls held by The National Archives on our Pinterest board.

Teacher's notes

It is hoped that some of this work will be accessible for key stage 2 work and 'The Terrible Tudors' in the Horrible History series has some good additional details that most children will appreciate. Some of the suggested activities have obvious links with art and craft work while the use of maps to study the route of the Armada could lead into geography, map coordinates, mathematics. An interactive, problem solving approach is needed for the 'Council Discussions' and there are also lots of opportunities for different styles of writing – stories based on English/Spanish sailors, formal reports, 'newspaper' accounts, diaries and letters, 'televised' news and interviews.

At key stage 3 this work could be used as a straight account of events, illustrating English foreign relations but it could also be used to explore the role of propaganda in Elizabeth's reign, linking with work on portraits and another lesson on the Great Seal.

Background

When Mary I died in 1558, England and Spain were allies in a war against France. As the war ended, Philip II of Spain wanted to stay on good terms with the new queen, Elizabeth I, and even suggested that they marry but Elizabeth politely refused. However, Elizabeth also wanted to stay friends with Spain because there was an alliance between Scotland and France – a situation which was very dangerous for her. Until Elizabeth married and had children, the next in line for the throne was her relative, Mary Stuart, the Queen of Scotland. Many Catholics believed Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn had not been lawful, which meant Elizabeth should not be queen at all and Mary, Queen of Scots, should take over immediately. To make matters worse, Mary was going to marry the French prince, so it was possible that French and Scottish armies would invade England to make Mary queen. Luckily for Elizabeth, Philip did not want to see France becoming so powerful and he was willing to protect her, even though she made England Protestant again.

When Philip had to deal with a rebellion in the Netherlands, it was even more important to him to be on good terms with England because his ships had to sail along the English Channel. However, England felt some sympathy with the people in the Netherlands because one of the reasons they were rebelling against Spain was that some of them wanted to be Protestant. On top of this, there was a lot of anger among English sailors and traders because Philip would not let other countries share in the wealth that had been found in the areas Spain controlled in Central and South America. Meanwhile, England was less threatened because Mary, Queen of Scots' husband had died, which ended the link with France and she had returned to Scotland. Also, two groups in France were fighting for control, which meant there was far less danger to England.

By the 1580s, the two countries were clearly enemies and Spain was supporting attempts to make England Catholic again. Plans for an invasion began in 1585 but had to be delayed when Francis Drake burned some ships and destroyed lots of water barrels. Drake called this 'singeing the King of Spain's beard' (burning the edges), but it wasn't enough to prevent the Armada which was ready to sail in 1588.

Transcript

This extract has been translated into modern English with line numbers added.

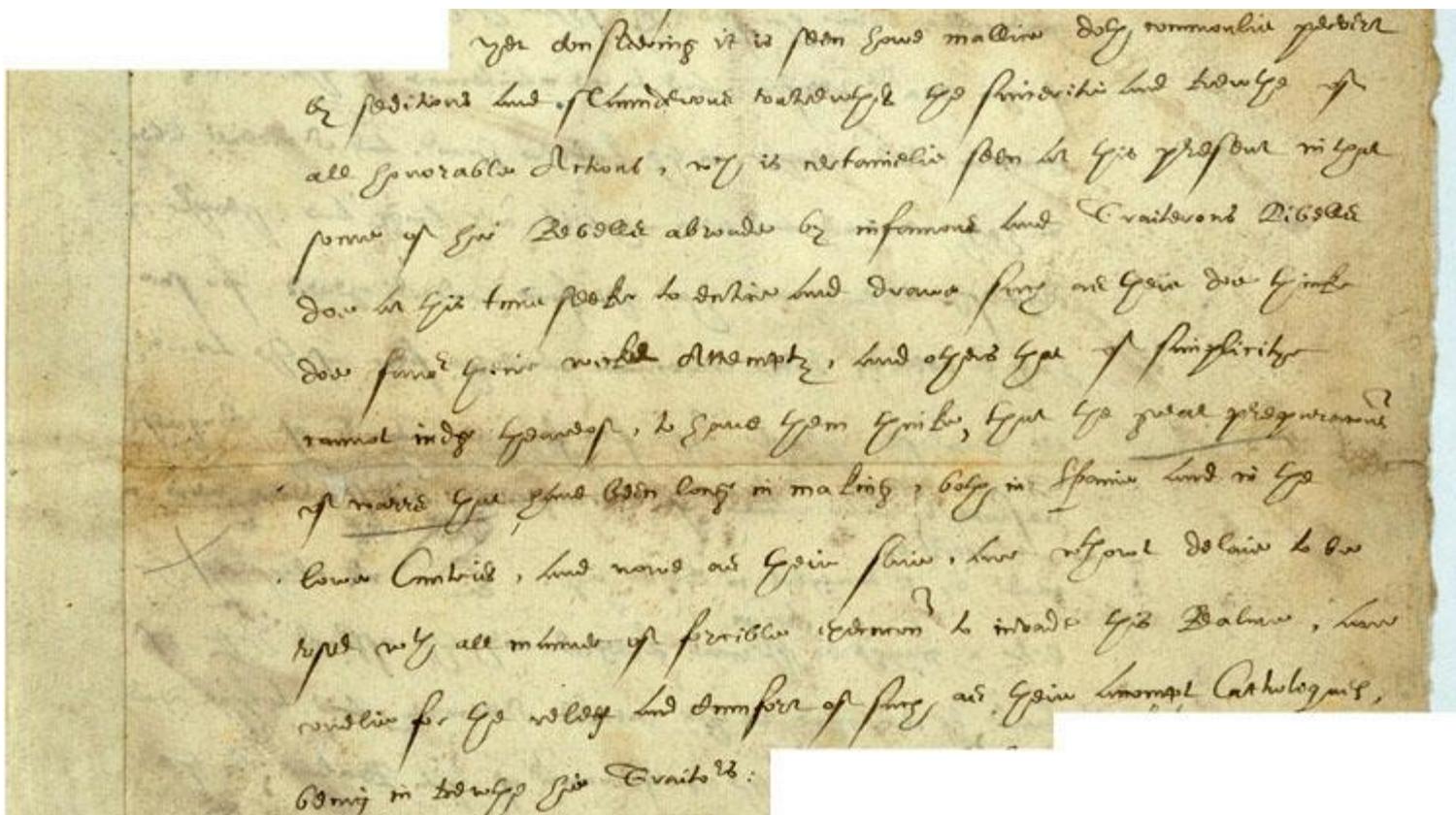
- Line 1 Although the Queen's Majesty does assure herself, that the greatest number of her good and faithful subjects specially such as are endowed with knowledge to discern of her Majesty's intentions and actions in public causes, do truly condone, allow and
- Line 5 embrace as most necessary, those her actions, which have been put in execution of late years for the reducing of her people into warlike order, through her whole realm, for defence of the same, as a matter most necessary, to conserve all her good subjects, from the highest to the lowest in surety against all attempts of enemies and
- Line 10 rebels: ...

Simplified Transcript

- Line 1 Her Majesty the Queen assures herself that the majority of her good and faithful subjects, especially those who know about Her Majesty's intentions and actions in public causes, truly excuse, allow and
- Line 5 hold as necessary her actions. These have been done recently to get her people ready for war, through her whole realm, for its defence. This is necessary to save all her good subjects, from the highest to the lowest, against all attempts of enemies and
- Line 10 rebels: ...

Source Two - Draft government proclamation, 1588

Draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)



Transcript

This extract has been translated into modern English with line numbers added.

- Line 10 yet considering it is seen how malice doth commonly pervert as seditious and slanderous untruths the sincerity and truth of all honourable actions, which is certainly seen at this present in that some of her rebels abroad by infamous and traitorous libels do at this time seek to entice and draw forth as they do think
- Line 15 do favour their weak attempts, and others that of simplicity cannot judge thereof, to have them think, that the great preparations of war that have been long in making, both in Spain, and in the Low Countries, and now as they say, are without delay to be used with all manner of forcible execution to invade this realm, are
- Line 20 only for the relief and comfort of such as their account Catholics,
- Line 21 being in truth her traitors: ...

Simplified Transcript

- Line 10 Yet it is seen how nastiness often misrepresents as disloyal and slanderous lies the sincerity and truth of all honourable actions. This is certainly seen at the present. Some of her rebels abroad now seek by wicked and traitorous lies to persuade and draw forth those they think
- Line 15 support their weak attempts, and others too simple to judge, and to have them think that the great preparations of war that have long been in the making, both in Spain and in the Low Countries, and they now say are without delay to be used with force to invade this realm, are
- Line 20 only for the relief and comfort of Catholics,
- Line 21 being in truth traitors: ...

Source Three - Transcripts

Transcript

This extract has been translated into modern English with line numbers added.

- Line 21 whose profession is certainly known in favour of the Pope whom they make their God on the earth, to deny their allegiance to her Majesty their sovereign natural Lady and Queen, and to change and subvert the happy state of the realm, and
- Line 25 to make the same subject to the Popes will, and the Crown to be translated to such a foreign potentate as he shall thereto name to usurp the same, for so by therein writing they do directly pronounce the intentions of the Pope to be, in procuring of the
- King of Spain, and other potentates vasselled to the Pope, to invade
- Line 30 this Realm, and to gain the Crown and the realm with the wealth thereof to therein devour, which cannot be imagined to be done without a full tyrannical conquest of the same, by depriving of her Majesty, and by slaughter of all such her subjects of all degrees both noble and others, as shall for their conscience towards Almighty
- Line 35 God, persist in the true profession of Christian Religion, and for their allegiance towards her Majesty (according to their bond of nature, being naturally born her subjects: (shall hazard their lives, both in defence of her Majesty's person, and to the maintenance of this Crown, Kingdom Country, and people, in the Kingly honour, and ancient liberty wherein
- Line 40 it hath remained and been inhabited with kings and people of mean
- Line 41 English blood, more than this five hundred years: ...

Simplified Transcript

- Line 21 They are certainly known to be in favour of the Pope whom they make their God on the earth, denying their loyalty to Her Majesty their natural sovereign Lady and Queen, and changing and threatening the happy state of the realm,
- Line 25 making it subject to the Pope's will, with the Crown given to a foreign ruler named by him to take over. In writing they openly say the intentions of the Pope are, in getting hold of the
- King of Spain and other rulers who are the Pope's vassals, to invade
- Line 30 this realm, and to gain the Crown and the realm with its wealth to devour it. This cannot be done without a full and cruel takeover of the country, depriving Her Majesty, and the murder of all her subjects of all levels, both noble and others, who for their conscience towards Almighty
- Line 35 God continue in the true Christian Religion, and for their loyalty towards Her Majesty (according to their bond of nature, being naturally born her subjects) risk their lives, both in defence of Her Majesty's person, and in keeping this Crown, kingdom country, and people in the kingly honour and ancient liberty in which
- Line 40 it has remained, and been inhabited with kings and people of ordinary
- Line 41 English blood, for more than 500 years: ...

Source One - Questions

This is an extract taken from a draft proclamation by the government of Elizabeth I. This was sent with a letter on 24th June 1588 by Lord Burghley, Elizabeth I's chief minister, to Sir Francis Walsingham. They were clearly discussing how to make their case most persuasive and to blame the war on others.

1. Elizabeth I had clearly been blamed by the Spanish for starting the war by building up her armed forces, her army and her navy. What reasons did the writer give to explain Elizabeth's actions?
2. Why were there more soldiers than sailors?
3. How did the writer try to appeal to as many English people as possible?

Source Two - Questions

Elizabeth's ministers accused Catholic English rebels of trying to make her 'honorable actions' look bad.

1. In this document they use the following writer's tricks, can you find them?
 - strong adjectives
 - alliteration
2. What evidence can you find to support the view that the English knew about Philip II's preparations well in advance?

Source Three - Questions

Elizabeth I's ministers tried to shift the blame for the war on to others. Again they used writer's tricks.

1. Can you find a strong adjective and a strong verb?
2. Which religious leader did the English Government blame for encouraging the invasion?
3. What did Elizabeth I's ministers say that leader's motive was?
4. What did they say would happen to ordinary English people?