

# Two Queens Teacher's Notes **B1** **B2**

This article explores the fates of two queens who reigned in neighbouring kingdoms in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Both linked and opposed, they had to rule in a man's world, in a conflict-ridden society, where religious and political unrest were rife and conspiracy and treason were the norm.

Through the new biopic, *Mary Queen of Scots*, we ask pupils to think about how, and why, we remember historic figures, and how we reinvent them for our own needs.

## Vocabulary and structures

- royal power: *throne, crown, heir, to reign, rule, take up the throne, regent, court, monarch...*
- family: *sister, half-brother, half-sister, uncle, father, cousin...*
- living and dying: *widow, death, execution, birth, be engaged to, childhood..*
- link words: *comparison and contrast (whereas, yet, unlike...)*
- past perfect vs preterite / passive voice
- personality: *cold-hearted, emotional, sensitive, manipulative...*
- conflict: *conspiracy, strife, conflict, unrest....*

## Listening

- understanding an authentic promotional video

### ■ Background information

Queen Mary I of Scotland became known as Mary Queen of Scots to distinguish her from Mary I of England (or Mary Tudor), Elizabeth's half-sister, who reigned from 1553 to 1558.

## Reading, listening, speaking, writing

- We suggest starting with the historical portraits of the two queens. We've provided them with no text at the end of this supplement. Have the students describe what/who they can see. The portrait of Elizabeth I is quite famous and that may ring a bell. Have the students describe the Queens themselves and guess the possible period/century and the Queens' names.
- Then, have the students read the introduction to the article so that they can find out the names of these queens and make sure they get how linked they were/ how intertwined their lives were.
- We have also provided two portraits of the queens from the film – you may want to have pupils try to work out the connection (they may have seen posters and trailers), and decide which of the actresses is playing which queen.
- The students can then start reading the article and do the activities (timelines, questions...)
- We have provided two different final tasks, depending on whether you want to focus more on the film and the historical context, or on the issue of how we represent historical/famous figures in biopics.

■ The first task involves written interaction. It consists of writing a letter from Mary to Elizabeth explaining the situation, and then Elizabeth's reply. This task can be completed simply using the article.

The second requires watching the video we've provided, where the cast and filmmakers discuss their motivations. This activity will help the students get a bigger picture of the situation and get ready for the second task: role-playing an interview with the cast. We recommend starting with the article as some names (Knox, Darnley...) are introduced in the article, making it easier for the students to understand this "Game of Thrones" and everyone's role in the video. The interview can be with one member of the filmmaking team, or several.

■ **Note:** There are a lot of different accents in the video, as several actors speak with their own accent, but act with their character's. (Saoirse Ronan is Irish but acts with a Scottish accent. Margot Robbie and Guy Pearce are Australian playing English characters...) After watching it, lower-level pupils may need some help from the script to grasp the details.

## Transcript

■ Queen Elizabeth, your cousin Mary has returned to take up her throne, in Scotland.

**Josie Rourke, Director:** Mary Queen of Scots decided that she was going to go and live in Scotland and rule it as its Queen. She also had a claim to the throne of England.

**Queen Elizabeth:** My dear cousin let our nations cherish each other as we would. Two kingdoms united.

**Saoirse Ronan (Queen Mary):** These women were ruling when men called the shots.

**Margot Robbie (Queen Elizabeth):** Men

constantly in the way, conspiring to keep them apart. For Elizabeth, particularly Cecil.

**William Cecil:** You must confront the truth, Madam. She has acclaimed your throne.

**Guy Pearce (William Cecil):** His main objective, I think, was to maintain her position as Queen.

**William Cecil:** Implore her to marry Lord Dudley!

**Queen Elizabeth:** She is not our subject!

**Joe Alwyn (Robert Dudley):** Robert Dudley, the favourite of the Queen, is loyal to Elizabeth, and has love for her.

**Queen Elizabeth:** Marry the beautiful Queen of Scots.

**Robert Dudley:** Do not ask this of me.

**David Tennant (John Knox):** I play John Knox, who is the leader of the Protestant church in Scotland

**John Knox:** We have a scourge upon our land, 'tis a woman with a crown!

**David Tennant:** He wasn't a fan of women in power a modern eye might call it misogyny.

**Jack Lowden (Lord Darnley):** The English Court thought it a good idea to send up an Englishman but Darnley has got ambitions of his own.

**Lord Darnley:** You'll be my queen?

**Queen Mary:** Yes.

**Lord Darnley:** And I your King?

**Queen Mary:** Yes.

**Lord Darnley:** And your master?

**Queen Mary:** My husband.

**Josie Rourke:** What is amazing is that you can hold up a story that is about two women who are trying to lead.

**Saoirse Ronan:** That's obviously a great message to send out in any film.

**Queen Mary:** Many times you have said I cannot do what I have done. I shall meet force with force.

## Solutions

**1. Queen Mary:** **a.** Birth/Born **b.** Father dies/ She becomes Queen. **c.** Engaged to Dauphin of France. **d.** Marries Dauphin François. **e.** François becomes King. **f., g., h.:** François dies. Mary's mother dies. Mary returns to Scotland. **i.** Dies/is executed. **j.** James becomes King of England.

**Queen Elizabeth:** **a.** Mother dies/is executed. **b.** Father dies. **c.** Becomes Queen. **d.** Dies.

### 2. Examples of answers:

**Their childhoods:** Like Elizabeth, Mary had a sad/ miserable / unhappy childhood

**Their parents:** Both Mary and Elizabeth lost a parent when they were very young. Mary lost her father whereas Elizabeth's father had her mother executed.

**Their reigns:** Contrary to Elizabeth, whose reign lasted 45 years, Mary was Queen for only 6 years

**Marital lives / husbands:** Unlike Mary, who married 3 times, and had a child, Elizabeth decided not to marry or have children.

**Religion:** Mary was a Catholic Queen whereas Elizabeth was a Protestant one

**Their vision of reign/ heirs:** Mary thought having heirs could help her strengthen her power while Elizabeth saw a child as a possible threat to her crown

**Personalities:** Mary was considered a sensitive yet stubborn woman while her cousin Elizabeth was seen as a cold-hearted and calculating Queen.

### 3. Example:

Both women had a claim to the English throne. They were distant cousins. Mary was imprisoned in England, that is to say in Elizabeth's country, and Elizabeth had her executed. Conversely, as if to avenge his mother, James succeeded Elizabeth on the English throne after her death.

### Going further

**Ruling:** men were in power at that time

**Conspiring:** to divide them / to "keep them apart"

**Knox:** denouncing her / debasing her / challenging her authority / power (→misogyny/ male chauvinism)

**Darnley:** loyal to Elizabeth/ conspiracy when marrying Mary?

**Cecil:** "maintain her as a Queen"/ supportive of Elizabeth