

The Reformation

PLAY 3:

The Wives of Henry VIII

An ensemble of monologues: Henry VIII and all 6 of his wives stand next to each other on stage (with Henry first and then the wives, in the order that they appear in the play). Each actor holds a mask (of the character that he/she plays) in front of his/her face. Each actor takes the mask away when it is his/her turn to speak.

Characters:

Henry VIII
Catherine of Aragon
Anne Boleyn
Jane Seymour
Anne of Cleves
Catherine Howard
Catherine Parr



Henry's wives:

(Together they say this rhyme:)

*“King Henry the Eighth,
to six wives he was wedded.
One died, one survived,
two divorced, two beheaded.”*

(Then Henry VIII speaks.)

Henry VIII: Hi, I am Henry VIII and these were my wives. Between 1509 and 1547 I married 6 wives. They were Catherine of Aragon; Anne Boleyn; Jane Seymour; Anne of Cleves; Catherine Howard, and Catherine Parr. (Point at each wife to introduce her.)

Catherine Parr and Anne of Cleves survived me. In other words, I died before them. In fact, Anne of Cleves was the last of my queens to die. Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour each gave me one child. Catherine of Aragon gave birth to Mary, Anne Boleyn gave birth to Elizabeth, and Jane

Seymour gave birth to Edward, my only son! All 3 of my children eventually ascended to the throne. They were King Edward VI, Queen Mary I and Queen Elizabeth I.

Now, Catherine Howard and Anne Boleyn were actually cousins! And there is another fate that they share: I had both of them beheaded!

Something else that you will find interesting, is that some of my wives worked for some of my other wives. (Some of them were formerly ladies-in-waiting to one of my previous queens.) Anne Boleyn, for example, worked in Catherine of Aragon's service. And Jane Seymour also worked in Catherine of Aragon's service. After my divorce to Catherine of Aragon, Jane Seymour continued to work in Anne Boleyn's service. And Catherine Howard used to work in Anne of Cleves' service! That is how I met these lovely ladies!

Now don't tell anyone, but actually, I am distantly related to all six of my wives through our common ancestor, King Edward I of England!

Catherine of Aragon: Hi, I am Catherine of Aragon, or in Spanish: *Catalina de Aragón*. I was Henry's first wife. I married Henry after the death of my first husband, Arthur. (He was Henry's brother.)

Henry and I had 6 children, but sadly only 1 baby survived. In 1516 I gave birth to a healthy girl and we called her Mary. (Henry really wanted a boy, though!) Henry truly loved me. He wrote many songs and love letters to me. But then he began an affair with my lady-in-waiting, Anne Boleyn. He thought that maybe she could give him a healthy son. So, he asked the Pope to give him a divorce from me! The Pope said "definitely not"! The Roman Catholic Church does not allow people to get divorced!

Despite the Pope's refusal, Henry separated from me in 1531. Henry then ordered the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, to rule that Henry's marriage to me, Catherine, is over. Henry ordered Cranmer to marry him to Anne! (The Archbishop had to obey the king!) However, the Roman Catholic Church never recognized his marriage to Anne Boleyn. In the eyes of the Pope, Henry and I were still married. By ignoring the Pope, Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. He then established his own church. The Pope was no longer the head of the Christian Church in England, but Henry VIII made himself the head of the Church in England! However, I continued to worship like a Roman Catholic, and I also taught Mary how to be a good Roman Catholic!

Anne Boleyn: Hi, I am Anne Boleyn. I was Henry's second wife and the mother of Elizabeth I. I was an important figure in the English Reformation, because of the problems with the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope, when Henry insisted on getting a divorce from Catherine of Aragon! It became clear that the Pope was not going to give Henry a divorce from Catherine. At this point

it became clear that Henry was going to break away from the power of the Roman Catholic Church. Henry did not want the Pope to tell him what he can and cannot do. So, he broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and formed his own church!

At first Henry VIII was crazy about me, but I was never really sure if marrying him would be a good thing! I gave birth to a healthy girl, called Elizabeth. But Henry wanted a boy. Later, I also gave birth to a boy, but he died soon after his birth. Now Henry grew tired of me, because I failed to produce a male heir. So, he and one of his advisers, Thomas Cromwell, hatched a plot to execute me!

They accused me of having an affair and of trying to betray the king! These were all lies. Their evidence against me was not even convincing! But Henry VIII was a powerful king and therefore, in May 1536 I was beheaded! For nothing! I knew I should not have become involved with Henry!!!

I did not even see my daughter Elizabeth growing up! Many, many years later, when Elizabeth was crowned as queen, it was made clear that I was innocent. My name was cleared as a heroine of the English Reformation.

Jane Seymour: Hi, I am Jane Seymour and I was Henry's third wife. I worked for both Catherine of Aragon and for Anne Boleyn, as lady-in-waiting. People think that Henry and I had an affair while he was still married to Anne Boleyn. The king and I got married only 10 days after Anne Boleyn's execution! Makes you think, hmm?

I gave birth to a healthy, legitimate male heir, called Edward. But so so sadly, I died twelve days later, presumably because of complications of childbirth. This apparently caused Henry genuine grief. I think he was really very sad about my death, because I was the only queen that received a proper Queen's burial. And, when Henry died, 10 years later, he was buried next to me.

Our son, Edward, became king, when Henry VIII died. Poor little Edward was only 9 years old. And he himself died from ill health when he was 15 years old.

Anne of Cleves: Hi, I am Anne of Cleves. I was Henry's fourth wife, for only six months in 1540, from 6 January to 9 July. I am a German princess. Henry and I were never really in love. Our marriage was an arranged marriage to improve relations between England and Germany. Henry did not find me attractive at all and soon wanted to divorce me. I agreed and in return he kindly gave me a castle, called Hever Castle. (It actually belonged to the family of Anne Boleyn!) He also gave Richmond Palace to me as a gift. I got on very well with Henry. The only problem was that we were not in love. I was almost like a sister to him. That is why I was given the name "The King's Sister". I was a good friend to him and his children until his death. I outlived both the King and his last two wives. So, I was the last of Henry's six wives to die.

Catherine Howard: Hi, I am Catherine Howard and I was Henry's fifth wife. My uncle found me a job at Court in the household of the King's fourth wife, the German, Anne of Cleves. I was a young and attractive lady-in-waiting, so I quickly caught the eye of King Henry, who had displayed little interest in his new wife Anne. Within months of my arrival at Court, Henry bestowed gifts of land and expensive cloth upon me! Then, in July 1540, we got married. But, in 1541, I embarked upon a romance with an attractive young man... His name was Thomas Culpeper and he was Henry's favourite male courtier. (Already during my time as a lady-in-waiting to Anne of Cleves, I had considered marrying Thomas!) Soon I was accused of having an affair and of betraying the king. Consequently, Henry VIII had me beheaded in the same year!

Catherine Parr: Hi, I am Catherine Parr. I was the sixth and last wife of Henry VIII. I have truly been a good wife to Henry. I restored Henry's court as a family home for his children. I was determined to present the royal household as a close-knit one. Perhaps my most significant achievement was convincing Henry to pass an act that confirmed both Mary's and Elizabeth's line in succession for the throne. This means that even though Mary and Elizabeth had both been seen as illegitimate, they could still succeed Henry and become queens of England. (Illegitimate means illegal. Mary did not really have the right to claim the throne, because Henry divorced her mother, Catherine of Aragon. And Elizabeth did not really have the right to claim the throne, because Henry should not have married Anne Boleyn while still being married to Catherine.)

Henry really trusted me. He even allowed me to rule England, as Regent, while he was travelling in Europe. And he asked me to rule as Regent, should he die while his son, Edward, was still a little boy. Unfortunately Henry did die when Edward was only 9 years old! I became a widow and little Edward became a king.

☞ the end ☞



- LGW. Irvine -