



### Designing Tudor tombs teachers' notes

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#### Follow-up questions

1. To what extent was Margaret Beaufort 'the power behind the throne' of her son Henry VII?
2. What were Henry VIII's intentions in selecting a non-English artist to design the tombs of his parents and grandmother at Westminster Abbey?
3. 'Henry VIII should be credited with introducing the Italian Renaissance style to England'. Discuss.
4. 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown'. Compare the actions of Henry VIII's early reign with those of his later years. To what extent does Shakespeare's quote apply to Henry VIII?

#### Transcript

What have been the greatest moments of change in your life up to now? For Henry VIII, life changed dramatically between the spring and the summer of the year 1509. In April of that year, Henry was a seventeen-year-old prince, and the heir to the throne of England. He was single, sporty and sociable. His father King Henry VII ruled the country with the support of his own mother, the influential Lady Margaret Beaufort, grandmother to Prince Henry. Together this formidable pair had managed the running of England for over 20 years. Everything changed when Henry VII died on the 21<sup>st</sup> April.

June 1509 would have been unforgettable for Henry. On the 11<sup>th</sup> June, Henry married the Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon, the widow of his older brother Arthur who had died a few years before. It is said that in doing so, he was following his father's wishes. Within two weeks he was crowned King of England with his new wife Catherine crowned beside him. On that day, Henry sat on the coronation chair used by all crowned monarchs since 1308. His grandmother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, looked on as he was anointed with holy oil in an ancient religious ceremony that people believed set him apart, blessed by God for this special role.

But what would that role look like? What kind of a ruler would he be? Well within days of the coronation, his grandmother took ill and died at the Abbot's house in Westminster Abbey. Henry had lost both his father and his grandmother in quick succession. He had a new wife and he would soon be having a child. This was a moment of reckoning. He would need to steer a path that both respected the past and his ancestry yet looked to the future and broke new ground too.

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Henry's choice of commission for the tombs of his father and grandmother at Westminster Abbey reveal a great deal about his intentions as king. A number of tomb designs had been submitted and rejected during Henry VII's lifetime and at his death, the matter had still not been decided.

Around this time, the Florentine sculptor, Pietro Torregiano had found his way to England after leaving Florence in a hurry. It is a great story but one for you to look up. Torregiano may have been invited to London by the new king, Henry VIII, who needed a new court artist. Henry liked Torregiano's work and in 1511 commissioned him to create the monument to his grandmother, Lady Margaret Beaufort. The work is very fine. Look closely at her hands. This monument has been described as the most beautiful in the Abbey. Torregiano did not have free rein with the style however, he had to follow pre-agreed designs and so the monument is quite traditional in style.

Almost immediately Henry commissioned Torregiano to design the monument to his own parents, Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. Here, the artist seems to have been given free licence and he used this opportunity to introduce the new Italian style into England. Everything about it is pure Renaissance: the roundels; the classical columns; the putti (or baby angels); and the incredibly life-like effigies. None of this had been seen in England before. The monument was completed in 1517. Listen to the words that Henry chose for the inscription around his parents' tomb. What do you think Henry's intention was in choosing these words?

'Here is situated Henry VII, the glory of all the kings who lived in his time by reason of his intellect, his riches, and the fame of his exploits, to which were added the gifts of bountiful nature, a distinguished brow, an august face, a heroic stature. Joined to him his sweet wife was very pretty, chaste and fruitful. They were parents happy in their offspring, to whom, land of England, you owe Henry VIII'.

Well in choosing Torregiano as his sculptor, Henry was placing himself firmly on the European stage as a Renaissance prince, a patron of the arts and embracing of the new style. No visiting dignitary could fail to notice that the new King Henry was modern and forward looking. A man to take seriously. A true propagandist. The personal changes that Henry experienced during the spring of 1509 were just a taster of the political and religious changes that he would enact throughout his reign.