



0. CHARLES I LOSES HIS HEAD - Story Preface

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During the English Civil War, when Royalists (supporting the Monarch) and Parliamentarians (supporting Oliver Cromwell) were at odds, even children could be swept into the political upheaval (which lasted between 1642-1646). In this painting—by William Frederick Yeames (in 1879)—we see the young son of a Royalist being questioned by a Parliamentarian. The child is asked this frightening question: “And When Did You Last See Your Father?” The painting is maintained at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool.

When he became king, Charles I continued to use the Duke of Buckingham as his advisor. Bad judgment, disastrous decisions and flagrant royal spending led to increasing conflict between the king and Parliament.

Whenever Charles I didn't like what Parliament did, he would dissolve it. After all ... the divine right of kings gave him the authority to do whatever he wanted. Or ... so he thought.

Happily for future generations, Charles I spent a great deal on fine art even while his relationship with Parliament deteriorated. Members of the royal family were frequent subjects of famous painters. The Royal Collection today contains many wonderful portraits of the king, his wife Queen Henrietta Marie (sister of the king of France) and their children. (The paintings depicted in these links were created by Anthony van Dyck in 1635.)

In 1649, after the authority of Parliament was continually challenged by the power of the King, the country fought a Civil War. Charles I was arrested and charged with high treason.

This development presented an interesting issue: No English law dealt with a trial of the sovereign. Finally, using a Roman law allowing the military to overthrow a tyrant, a court was convened to try Charles I.

The king, of course, viewed the whole process as completely illegal. Although forced to attend the proceedings, he viewed the trial with contempt. The public, squarely in favor of Charles I, was not allowed into the hall until the charge of treason had been read.

Found guilty, Charles I was condemned to death on January 26, 1649. (Follow this link to the order condemning him.) Sentence would be carried out at the Royal Banqueting House in Whitehall.

Four days later, the executioner assigned to swing the axe could not be found. A substitute was located; his identity is not known to this day. Unlike the tortuous death his grandmother (Mary, Queen of Scots) endured, it took just one swing of the axe to sever the king's head. He was 48 years old.

Forces loyal to the Crown ultimately defeated Parliamentary forces, led by the Puritan Oliver Cromwell. Charles II, son of Charles I and grandson of James I/VI, was invited back as monarch in 1660.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CHARLES-I-LOSES-HIS-HEAD-King-James-I>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/CHARLES-I-LOSES-HIS-HEAD-King-James-I>



Charles I Becomes King

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Portrait of Charles I

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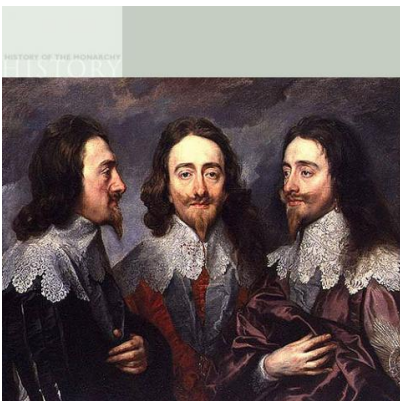


Queen Henrietta Marie

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Charles I was Arrested

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Carrying Out the Sentence

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Royal Banqueting House

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Oliver Cromwell

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