

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Thank you - your ongoing membership makes Leonardo English possible.
If you have questions we'd love to hear from you: hi@leonardoenglish.com

Episode #338

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

3rd Feb, 2023

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today is the start of another mini-series on queens.

[00:00:27] But not just any queens, we are going to look at three [remarkable](#)¹ women who became queen [against all the odds](#)², unlikely queens.

¹ amazing, worthy of attention

² although it seemed impossible or very unlikely

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:00:37] Women who fought against [misogyny](#)³ and [manipulative](#)⁴ men, men who were often far less [capable](#)⁵ than the brave and intelligent female subjects of this mini-series.

[00:00:47] So, who are these women then?

[00:00:50] First up, in today's episode, it's Anne Boleyn, the unfortunate second wife to the English King, Henry VIII.

[00:00:58] In part two, we'll talk about her daughter, Elizabeth I of England.

[00:01:03] And then in part three we'll move over to Russia and talk about Catherine the Great.

[00:01:09] But first, Anne Boleyn.

[00:01:11] There are few women in British history who have a more divisive reputation.

[00:01:16] To some, she was a [scheming](#)⁶, [manipulative](#) power-hungry [temptress](#)⁷ who bears responsibility for Britain breaking with the Catholic Church.

³ hate against women

⁴ trying to control people to their advantage

⁵ having the ability to achieve things

⁶ making secret plans

⁷ a woman who tried to sexually attract men

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:01:26] To others, she was an innocent victim of powerful men, someone whose only crime was her beauty, [wit](#)⁸ and [intellect](#)⁹.

[00:01:35] And in this episode, we'll tell her story and you can decide for yourself.

[00:01:40] OK then, Anne Boleyn.

[00:01:45] On the 19th of May 1536, a young woman was led to Tower Green, in the grounds of the famous Tower of London.

[00:01:55] She wore a red dress, a symbol of [martyrdom](#)¹⁰ and innocence.

[00:02:01] She spoke, her voice strong and proud: “Good Christian people, I am come [hither](#)¹¹ to die, for according to the law, and by the law I am judged to die, and therefore I will speak nothing against it. I pray God save the King ... for a gentler nor a more [merciful](#)¹² prince was there never.”

[00:02:24] She knelt down on two knees.

⁸ cleverness

⁹ brain, understanding

¹⁰ a situation of someone's suffering or death because of their beliefs

¹¹ to this place

¹² forgiving, kind

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:02:27] Moments later, the French swordsman standing behind her brought his [blade](#)¹³ swinging through the air, the cold steel [detaching](#)¹⁴ the young woman's head from her body.

[00:02:39] The “king”, the [merciful](#) prince, the woman had prayed for was no stranger to her.

[00:02:46] Not only was this king the man who had ordered her [execution](#)¹⁵, but he had also been her husband.

[00:02:54] The King's name was Henry, Henry VIII, and the young woman's name was, of course, Anne Boleyn.

[00:03:02] So, how did it come to this?

[00:03:05] What could possibly cause a man to order his wife's public [execution](#), and how much responsibility, if any, does Anne Boleyn have for her own [fate](#)¹⁶?

[00:03:18] Let's start by [digging](#)¹⁷ into her early life.

¹³ the flat cutting edge of a weapon

¹⁴ separating

¹⁵ death as legal punishment

¹⁶ the course of her life

¹⁷ looking, searching

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:03:21] She was born sometime between 1500 and 1507, and by 1513, following the tradition for [noble¹⁸](#) families at the time, she was sent overseas to complete her education and turn her into an [eligible¹⁹](#) wife for a [nobleman²⁰](#).

[00:03:41] Originally, Anne was [destined²¹](#) for Austria, the most celebrated court in Europe, but she was quickly moved to France, where she became good friends with the French Queen, who was a similar age to her.

[00:03:54] After almost 10 years of learning languages, mathematics, fashion, dance and how to play the [lute²²](#), and turning her into a young woman with a [wide array²³](#) of [enviable²⁴](#) talents, in 1522 Anne returned to England, and joined the royal court.

[00:04:13] At court, she became an attendant, a so-called [lady-in-waiting²⁵](#), to Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon.

¹⁸ of high social rank

¹⁹ suitable

²⁰ a man of high social rank

²¹ intended, planned to be in

²² a stringed musical instrument

²³ large number or wide range

²⁴ desired or wanted by others

²⁵ a woman who attended or served the queen

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:04:22] From the historical records that do exist, it seems that Anne Boleyn was an intelligent, funny and [witty²⁶](#) young woman.

[00:04:32] Clearly, she was someone that people liked to be around, she was not only fun and entertaining, but she had all of the qualities that a [nobleman](#) might look for in a wife.

[00:04:44] As you might expect, she [turned heads²⁷](#) at court, there were plenty of young men who [took note of²⁸](#) her, thinking that she was indeed, high quality marriage material.

[00:04:56] Initially, though, these did not include the King, Henry.

[00:05:00] In fact, at this time Henry had a romantic relationship with Anne's older sister Mary, "the - so called - other Boleyn girl".

[00:05:10] Mary, as far as historians believe, was a very different person to her sister.

[00:05:17] She was more beautiful, or so the theory goes, but she wasn't as smart as Anne, her sister.

²⁶ clever

²⁷ drew attention

²⁸ noticed

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:05:25] As such, some historians [hypothesise](#)²⁹ that Mary had quickly fallen into bed with Henry without fully understanding the [ramifications](#)³⁰, the consequences, of doing so.

[00:05:37] Anne wouldn't make the same mistake. Or at least, she wouldn't make the same mistake as quickly as her sister.

[00:05:45] In any case, she had plenty of potential [suitors](#)³¹ at court, plenty of other men who were interested in her, but only one really caught her eye.

[00:05:56] His name was Henry Percy.

[00:05:59] Going against tradition, which would have meant that their parents and the king had to give their permission and [blessing](#)³², Anne and Henry Percy secretly [got engaged](#)³³ without asking anyone.

[00:06:12] When Henry VIII found out about their secret engagement he ordered his trusted [statesman](#)³⁴ Thomas Wolsey to put an end to it.

²⁹ suggest, think

³⁰ consequences

³¹ people who wanted to marry her

³² support, approval

³³ agreed formally to marry

³⁴ experienced politician

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:06:21] Some have speculated that Henry may have stopped the marriage as he began to see Anne as another potential mistress, yet another girl at court to add to his list of lovers.

[00:06:34] And sometime in around 1526, after he had lost interest in Mary Boleyn, historians believe that Henry started to become [infatuated with](#)³⁵, obsessed with, her sister, Anne.

[00:06:50] Now, was this true love, or did he simply wanted to take her to his bed and add her to his long list of mistresses?

[00:06:59] He certainly declared [undying](#)³⁶ love for her, writing love letters and sending her expensive gifts.

[00:07:07] But Anne wasn't like her sister, and she wasn't like the other women at court.

[00:07:13] She said "no", or at least, "not until we're married".

[00:07:18] Anne would not become the King's lover.

[00:07:21] As you might imagine, this came as quite a shock to Henry; he was king of England, he was not a man used to rejection.

[00:07:31] And, resolving this for Henry wasn't quite as easy as simply marrying Anne.

³⁵ obsessed with

³⁶ lasting forever

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:07:37] In case you had forgotten, during this very public declaration of love for Anne and [affair](#)³⁷ with Anne's sister, Henry was still married to his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, Anne's boss, essentially.

[00:07:52] But he had grown tired of this marriage.

[00:07:55] Catherine had [borne](#)³⁸ him a daughter, Mary, but had failed to produce a son.

[00:08:01] A son was [crucial](#)³⁹ for Henry, as a male [heir](#)⁴⁰ would secure the future of England and prevent future wars over the [succession](#)⁴¹ – the type of war that had won his father the crown but left him in a dangerous position.

[00:08:17] So, Henry needed a son, and for that to happen, he needed a wife [capable](#) of giving him one.

[00:08:25] Catherine, so Henry believed, was not the woman to do so.

[00:08:30] So he needed a new one, a new mother to this dreamed-of son.

[00:08:35] Of course, back in the 16th century, at least before 1534, England was Catholic, you couldn't simply divorce someone if you'd grown tired of them.

³⁷ sexual relationship

³⁸ given birth to

³⁹ extremely important

⁴⁰ a son who would have his position or title after his death

⁴¹ the right of receiving the title or position of the previous king

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:08:46] Henry might have been the King of England, the most powerful man in the country and therefore one of the most powerful men in the world, but there was something even more powerful: the Catholic church.

[00:09:01] For a marriage to be [annulled⁴²](#), an [annulment⁴³](#), a [nullification⁴⁴](#), needed to be given by the Pope himself.

[00:09:10] Henry wrote to the pope, protesting that his marriage to Catherine was wrong in the eyes of God because she had been married to Henry's brother.

[00:09:20] But the pope did not accept, telling Henry that he would be [excommunicated⁴⁵](#), he would be kicked out, of the Catholic Church if he remarried.

[00:09:31] Now, this process, of Henry and his advisors trying to find theological reasons for him to get out of the marriage, went on for almost a decade, with no hope in sight.

[00:09:44] [Suffice it to say⁴⁶](#) that,

⁴² announced officially that was illegal or invalid

⁴³ official announcement that it was not legal or valid

⁴⁴ the act of making it illegal or non-existent

⁴⁵ kicked out

⁴⁶ it is enough to say

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:09:46] By the starts of start of 1533, 9 years after Henry had first lost interest in his wife, something important had happened.

[00:09:56] Anne was pregnant, but the pair still weren't married.

[00:10:02] Some historians think that Anne must have got [nervous](#)⁴⁷ about Henry losing interest in her, others that this was her way of speeding up the process.

[00:10:12] In any case, pregnant she was, there was no going back now.

[00:10:17] The clock was ticking, and Henry needed to move fast to make sure that the child she was carrying would become his legal son and [heir](#).

[00:10:27] And there was no doubt in Henry's mind that this was a son.

[00:10:32] After all, God had [cursed](#)⁴⁸ him for marrying Catherine, God would now reward him with a son from his new wife.

[00:10:40] That was the way things worked, at least in Henry's mind.

[00:10:45] But, first things first, Anne needed to become his wife, so the pair married in a secret ceremony in January of 1533.

⁴⁷ worried, anxious

⁴⁸ brought bad luck to him, damned him

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:10:56] There was, however, the complication over what to do with his current wife. He had been effectively separated from Catherine for several years, but she was still legally his wife in the eyes of the law and the church.

[00:11:12] Fortunately, in the almost decade since Henry had grown tired of her, he had started the process of separating from Rome, from the Catholic Church, and Henry was the head of his own church by now, the Church of England.

[00:11:28] So, in May of 1533, he ordered his own [archbishop](#)⁴⁹ to declare his first marriage to be null and void.

[00:11:37] [Ta-da](#)⁵⁰, Anne was his wife, Catherine was not, so Anne could become his queen, their child would be his [heir](#), everything was all [lining up](#)⁵¹ very nicely.

[00:11:49] Except...it wasn't.

[00:11:51] On June the 1st, 1533, the pregnant Anne was crowned queen.

[00:11:57] She might have been happy, Henry too might have finally been happy, but the crowd at her [coronation](#)⁵² was not [cheering](#)⁵³ but deadly silent.

⁴⁹ a member of the Church with a very high rank

⁵⁰ used to call attention to something important

⁵¹ coming together

⁵² a ceremony or celebration at which she was made queen

⁵³ shouting in excitement

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:12:08] It was not only the Pope and Catherine that were against Henry's new marriage.

[00:12:13] Catherine had been a popular queen, and many people saw Anne as [snatching⁵⁴](#) the King away, and what's more, forcing a break with Rome in the process.

[00:12:25] As a result, Anne Boleyn was a deeply unpopular queen.

[00:12:31] And it would not be long before Henry himself would become even more disappointed than his [subjects⁵⁵](#).

[00:12:39] In September Anne gave birth to a baby.

[00:12:43] No doubt Henry was waiting outside [with bated breath⁵⁶](#), ready to announce the birth of a baby boy, a prince, the [heir](#) he had [craved⁵⁷](#) so desperately.

[00:12:55] This child would grow up to be an intelligent, brave and powerful leader, and indeed one of the greatest [monarchs⁵⁸](#) in British history.

[00:13:05] But the child was not the son he was hoping for.

[00:13:09] It was a baby girl.

⁵⁴ taking suddenly

⁵⁵ the people he was king of

⁵⁶ in a nervous and excited state

⁵⁷ wanted very much

⁵⁸ kings or queens

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:13:11] Her name was Elizabeth, she would go on to become Elizabeth the First, but Henry wouldn't know the queen she would become.

[00:13:20] For him, her gender alone was disappointment enough.

[00:13:25] Henry had been so sure he was having a son that all the [proclamations](#)⁵⁹, the royal announcements, had already been written to announce the arrival of the 'prince'.

[00:13:37] Two s's had to be quickly added to all the documents so they would correctly inform the country of the 'princess' instead.

[00:13:46] Now, Anne was still young when Elizabeth was born, likely in her late 20s or early 30s, so there was plenty of time for her to try to have another child, the [illusive](#)⁶⁰ male [heir](#).

[00:14:00] But the birth of Elizabeth was only the first of a series of disappointments.

[00:14:06] Indeed, some historians have suggested that, although this didn't [seal](#)⁶¹ her tragic [fate](#), it was the beginning of the end for Anne.

⁵⁹ royal announcements

⁶⁰ one that didn't exist yet

⁶¹ end, conclude

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:14:16] Once Henry had got what he couldn't have, once he had finally made Anne Boleyn his wife, taken her to his bed, and she had only provided him with a disappointing daughter, [his eyes began to wander](#)⁶².

[00:14:32] Within a year of their marriage, Henry had begun [affairs](#)⁶³ with not one but two of Anne's servants.

[00:14:40] For Henry, this was nothing new. Indeed, he had done exactly the same thing with Catherine when he started his affair with Anne.

[00:14:49] And what's more, Catherine, his first wife, [had turned a blind eye to it](#)⁶⁴, she had accepted that he was going to have mistresses and there was little she could do about it.

[00:15:01] But Anne Boleyn wasn't like Catherine.

[00:15:05] She was [furious](#)⁶⁵ with Henry, and grew jealous and insecure. She wasn't happy to be [embarrassed](#)⁶⁶ like that in front of everyone at Court.

⁶² he started looking at other women

⁶³ sexual relations

⁶⁴ ignored it, pretended not to have noticed

⁶⁵ extremely angry

⁶⁶ made to feel ashamed

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:15:15] Now, clearly this to us probably seems like perfectly reasonable behaviour - if your husband is having a poorly-hidden affair, it seems pretty acceptable to be angry with him.

[00:15:29] But 500 years ago, to state the obvious, men held the power.

[00:15:35] A woman, even the wife of the king, was expected to [tolerate](#)⁶⁷ this kind of behaviour.

[00:15:42] Now, why wasn't Anne?

[00:15:44] Some have suggested that it was because she was strong, independent and forward-thinking.

[00:15:51] She knew this wasn't right, and despite the uneven [power dynamic](#)⁶⁸, she did what she could to stop her husband's [infidelity](#)⁶⁹.

[00:15:59] Others have suggested that it was because of her strong religious faith; when they married, Henry had made a promise in front of God to be loyal, so Henry shouldn't do it.

⁶⁷ accept

⁶⁸ power balance between the two

⁶⁹ acts of having sexual relations with other women, disloyalty

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:16:12] And others have suggested that she didn't want to lose her position and Henry's [favour](#)⁷⁰ - she knew all too well what had happened to Henry's first wife, and she didn't want to meet the same [fate](#).

[00:16:26] Whatever the true reason, or combination of reasons, looking back on it, it's hard to deny that it reflects well on her character.

[00:16:36] And clearly, it reflects very badly on Henry, who tried to justify his [affairs](#) by blaming his wife for not giving him a son.

[00:16:46] But shortly after, good news, [a ray of hope](#)⁷¹!

[00:16:49] Anne was pregnant again, and in fact it's thought that she got pregnant again at least three times.

[00:16:57] But in two cases she had late-term [miscarriages](#)⁷², she lost two babies.

[00:17:03] And in 1536, Anne fell pregnant again.

[00:17:07] She gave birth, [miraculously](#)⁷³, to a boy.

[00:17:11] But tragically, the boy was [stillborn](#)⁷⁴, he was dead on arrival.

⁷⁰ approval, support

⁷¹ something promising or hopeful

⁷² unsuccessful pregnancies

⁷³ in a way that was very surprising or difficult to believe

⁷⁴ born dead

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:17:18] Now, these [miscarriages](#) and the birth of a [stillborn](#) baby must not only have been hugely [traumatic](#)⁷⁵ on an emotional level, but they would also be the [nail in the coffin](#)⁷⁶ for her fortune.

[00:17:32] Within five months she would be dead.

[00:17:35] Henry believed that the reason for Anne's failure to give him a son was because God was unhappy with their marriage and so, much like he had with Catherine, he decided that this marriage too was a mistake.

[00:17:50] It's said that every time Anne lost a baby, Henry loved her less and less, and he finally convinced himself that she was physically unable to provide him with the son he so desperately wanted.

[00:18:04] He kicked Anne out of Court and moved in with his new [love interest](#)⁷⁷, Jane Seymour.

[00:18:11] By now, she had truly fallen from grace.

⁷⁵ painful, harmful

⁷⁶ something that would cause her end

⁷⁷ woman in whom he was interested romantically

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:18:15] She not only had to fight against those who [despised](#)⁷⁸ her because of Henry's divorce and saw her responsible for the break with Rome, but also against Henry, who was [plotting](#)⁷⁹ to remove all trace of her.

[00:18:29] But how would he get rid of her?

[00:18:32] There was no real [grounds](#)⁸⁰ for divorce, so he had to try something more [sneaky](#)⁸¹.

[00:18:38] And it's here that I need to introduce you to another character, a minister of Henry's called Thomas Cromwell.

[00:18:46] He was more than a minister, really, he was Lord Chancellor, a man Henry relied on to do his [dirty work](#)⁸².

⁷⁸ hated

⁷⁹ planning secretly

⁸⁰ reasons

⁸¹ tricky, dishonest

⁸² dishonest acts

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:18:54] Cromwell had been an old enemy of Anne's several years beforehand, as they had [clashed⁸³](#) over what to do with the money from the [monasteries⁸⁴](#) that Henry had [dissolved⁸⁵](#).

[00:19:05] In another episode that reflects well on Anne, she had suggested that the money go to the poor, and Cromwell had suggested that it go to the King.

[00:19:16] She also disagreed with Cromwell's foreign policy and she wanted to create peace with France, which was the opposite of his plans.

[00:19:25] Henry asked Cromwell to try to find some kind of crime that he could charge his wife with, and Cromwell, being both [cunning⁸⁶](#) and [ruthless⁸⁷](#), got to work.

[00:19:37] He instructed his network of spies to find anything [incriminating⁸⁸](#) about Anne that he could use to [bring her down⁸⁹](#).

[00:19:46] It did not take long to gather some information.

⁸³ fought or argued

⁸⁴ buildings in which monks lived

⁸⁵ closed down

⁸⁶ clever and good at using tricks

⁸⁷ showing no pity, cruel

⁸⁸ making her seem guilty

⁸⁹ make her lose her position, cause her failure

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:19:49] Apparently, someone had overheard Anne speaking in a way that [hinted at](#)⁹⁰ the king's death.

[00:19:57] Reportedly, she had imagined herself with another man if Henry happened to die.

[00:20:03] And this was highly illegal, it was a criminal offence to speak of, to even think of, the king's death.

[00:20:13] As a result, Cromwell arrested Anne's musician and brought him in for questioning.

[00:20:20] Except it wasn't questioning, it was [torture](#)⁹¹.

[00:20:24] Cromwell accused the musician of having sex with Anne and [tortured](#)⁹² him until he [confessed](#)⁹³.

[00:20:31] Cromwell then asked him to give him names of other men who had had [affairs](#) with Anne. He even accused Anne of [plotting](#) Henry's death with those men.

⁹⁰ suggested, indicated

⁹¹ an act of causing extreme pain in order to make him give information

⁹² caused him extreme pain

⁹³ admitted that he had done it

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:20:41] Exhausted and in [agony](#)⁹⁴, the [tortured](#) musician gave Cromwell a list of men who had reportedly slept with Anne.

[00:20:50] All five of these men, which even included her own brother George, just so happened to be serious political enemies of Cromwell's, which certainly suggests that Cromwell used this as an opportunity to advance his own political interests.

[00:21:07] Now, armed with this information, Cromwell began to put together evidence that he could use at a trial. This evidence was weak at best, it made little sense, and historians now believe it was all a [conspiracy](#)⁹⁵, a [set-up](#)⁹⁶ to provide an excuse to get rid of Anne.

[00:21:29] But 500 years ago, justice consisted of whatever the King wanted, really.

[00:21:35] Anne was arrested on the 2nd of May 1536 and taken to the Tower of London.

[00:21:42] The charges against her were for [adultery](#)⁹⁷, [incest](#)⁹⁸ and [treason](#)⁹⁹.

⁹⁴ extreme pain

⁹⁵ secret plan

⁹⁶ a secret plan, trick

⁹⁷ having sex with someone other than her husband

⁹⁸ sexual activity between people who are closely related

⁹⁹ showing no loyalty to the king

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:21:48] Although she put up an admirable battle, it was a show-trial in effect, there was no way she would win.

[00:21:57] The jury, which even included her own uncle, could never go against the wishes of the king.

[00:22:03] Unsurprisingly, Anne was found guilty of all charges, and she was sentenced to death, along with all the men who were also accused.

[00:22:14] She was [distraught¹⁰⁰](#) and terrified.

[00:22:17] So terrified that she asked to be [executed¹⁰¹](#) with a sword, rather than an axe, because she was afraid the axe would not be quick enough.

[00:22:26] Henry did [grant¹⁰²](#) her this one wish.

[00:22:30] An expert [executioner¹⁰³](#) was brought over from France.

[00:22:35] As you heard at the start of the episode, the Frenchman was accurate, and the sword was quick.

¹⁰⁰ very worried and upset

¹⁰¹ put to death as a legal punishment

¹⁰² give, allow

¹⁰³ a person whose job was to kill people as legal punishment

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:22:42] He picked up her head and declared ‘God save the king!’ before the crowd reportedly [gasped¹⁰⁴](#) in horror as Anne’s eyes were still moving.

[00:22:53] It was a truly gruesome and inglorious end for a woman who Henry had once claimed to have been so in love with, so much so that he had caused the biggest religious [split¹⁰⁵](#) in his country’s history.

[00:23:07] And without anyone left to defend her reputation after her [execution](#), she increasingly was [portrayed¹⁰⁶](#) and described as an evil, [manipulative](#) woman.

[00:23:20] People began to spread [rumours¹⁰⁷](#) that Anne had been a witch, and one even claimed that she had eleven fingers and was covered in [warts¹⁰⁸](#).

[00:23:31] People proposed that she had used [spells¹⁰⁹](#) and magic to get Henry to fall so deeply in love with her, and that he killed her because the [spells](#) had [worn off¹¹⁰](#).

¹⁰⁴ took a short, quick breath

¹⁰⁵ separation, division

¹⁰⁶ represented

¹⁰⁷ information that wasn't based on facts

¹⁰⁸ small, hard growths on the skin

¹⁰⁹ magic forms of words

¹¹⁰ disappeared, lost effectiveness

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:23:42] Her charges of [adultery](#) and [incest](#), even though they were completely fake, were also taken as proof that she was a witch, as witches were believed to be overly sexual and have no self-control.

[00:23:57] And one of the reasons that our knowledge of the real Anne Boleyn is so unclear is that after her death her [critics](#)¹¹¹ did as much as they could to erase all [trace](#)¹¹² of her very existence.

[00:24:12] Her writing was destroyed, as were portraits of her.

[00:24:16] Her [detractors](#)¹¹³ wanted to make her as silent as the crowd at her [coronation](#)...and they succeeded.

[00:24:23] And as you'll have seen, the story of Anne Boleyn is principally told through the people around her, the men who [tricked](#)¹¹⁴ and [conspired](#)¹¹⁵ against her.

[00:24:35] Clearly, in this respect there is only one person who must bear responsibility for the tragically short life of his former lover and wife: Henry VIII, the king.

¹¹¹ the people who blamed her

¹¹² signs, marks

¹¹³ the people who unfairly didn't approve of her

¹¹⁴ made secret plans, deceived

¹¹⁵ planned secretly with other people

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:24:47] For some commentators, her **fate** was **sealed**¹¹⁶ the moment he set eyes on her and decided that he must make her his lover.

[00:24:56] Perhaps, you could say, her story would have been very different if she had **flat-out**¹¹⁷ refused him, if she had said no. Perhaps it would, but in that case she would never have been queen.

[00:25:10] Or if she had given him a son, not a daughter. Now, to state the obvious, clearly she isn't at fault here. In fact, if we are to **assign**¹¹⁸ fault about the gender of the child, it's Henry's, as the gender comes from the father's **chromosomes**¹¹⁹.

[00:25:26] In any case, if Elizabeth had been a boy, the **fate** of Anne Boleyn, and the country, would have been very different.

[00:25:34] Perhaps Anne would have been able to write and control her own legacy in a way that she wasn't able to after her untimely death.

[00:25:43] Given her unpopularity during her life, the history books after her death were not kind to Anne Boleyn.

¹¹⁶ ended, concluded

¹¹⁷ completely and right away

¹¹⁸ give, allocate

¹¹⁹ structures in the body carrying genetic information

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:25:51] She is, by many, remembered as an [ambitious](#)¹²⁰, power-seeking young woman who would stop at nothing to become queen, [seducing](#)¹²¹ her boss' husband and [persuading](#)¹²² him to break with the Catholic Church.

[00:26:06] If this is your view, perhaps it's hard to have a huge amount of [sympathy](#)¹²³ for her when things came [crashing down](#)¹²⁴.

[00:26:14] But to others, and especially in more recent readings of her story, she is an innocent victim of a [misogynistic](#)¹²⁵ world, someone who was in the wrong place at the wrong time, someone whose only crime was failing to produce a male [heir](#), a victim of a cruel male-dominated society and an [sociopathic](#)¹²⁶ male ruler.

[00:26:38] Whatever your opinion of Anne Boleyn, perhaps her greatest legacy is in its literal sense, the greatest thing she left behind, was to be the baby girl that Henry didn't want.

[00:26:52] That baby girl would go on to become queen, and not just any queen.

¹²⁰ having a strong wish to be powerful

¹²¹ making him feel attracted to her

¹²² making him more likely to do it

¹²³ feelings of pity and sadness

¹²⁴ resulting in disaster

¹²⁵ showing hate against women

¹²⁶ behaving very badly towards others

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:26:58] This would be Elizabeth the First, one of the most loved and [influential](#)¹²⁷ monarchs in British history.

[00:27:06] And most importantly, this queen would manage to survive and [thrive](#)¹²⁸ in this male-dominated world, without a man by her side.

[00:27:18] Ok then, that is it for today's episode on Anne Boleyn.

[00:27:22] As a reminder, this is part one of this three-part mini-series on queens.

[00:27:28] Next up will be that baby girl Elizabeth the First, the daughter of Anne Boleyn, and then in our final part it will be Catherine the Great of Russia.

[00:27:38] As always I would love to know what you thought about this episode.

[00:27:41] What do you think of Anne Boleyn?

[00:27:43] [Ruthless](#) power-seeking [maniac](#)¹²⁹ or innocent young victim?

[00:27:48] How might her life have been different had Elizabeth been born a boy?

[00:27:52] Do you think she could have refused Henry's advances?

[00:27:55] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

¹²⁷ having a lot of effect

¹²⁸ be successful

¹²⁹ crazy, violent person

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #338
The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

[00:27:59] You can head right into our community forum, which is at
community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:28:07] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo
English.

[00:28:12] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

| Word | Definition |
|----------------------|--|
| Remarkable | amazing, worthy of attention |
| Against all the odds | although it seemed impossible or very unlikely |
| Misogyny | hate against women |
| Manipulative | trying to control people to their advantage |
| Capable | having the ability to achieve things |
| Scheming | making secret plans |
| Temptress | a woman who tried to sexually attract men |
| Wit | cleverness |
| Intellect | brain, understanding |
| Martyrdom | a situation of someone's suffering or death because of their beliefs |
| Hither | to this place |
| Merciful | forgiving, kind |

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Blade | the flat cutting edge of a weapon |
| Detaching | separating |
| Execution | death as legal punishment |
| Fate | the course of her life |
| Digging | looking, searching |
| Noble | of high social rank |
| Eligible | suitable |
| Nobleman | a man of high social rank |
| Destined | intended, planned to be in |
| Lute | a stringed musical instrument |
| Wide array | large number or wide range |
| Envable | desired or wanted by others |
| Lady-in-waiting | a woman who attended or served the queen |
| Witty | clever |
| Turned heads | drew attention |

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Took note of | noticed |
| Hypothesise | suggest, think |
| Ramifications | consequences |
| Suitors | people who wanted to marry her |
| Blessing | support, approval |
| Got engaged | agreed formally to marry |
| Statesman | experienced politician |
| Infatuated with | obsessed with |
| Undying | lasting forever |
| Affair | sexual relationship |
| Borne | given birth to |
| Crucial | extremely important |
| Heir | a son who would have his position or title after his death |
| Succession | the right of receiving the title or position of the previous king |
| Annulled | announced officially that was illegal or invalid |

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Annulment | official announcement that it was not legal or valid |
| Nullification | the act of making it illegal or non-existent |
| Excommunicated | kicked out |
| Suffice it to say | it is enough to say |
| Nervous | worried, anxious |
| Cursed | brought bad luck to him, damned him |
| Archbishop | a member of the Church with a very high rank |
| Ta-da | used to call attention to something important |
| Lining up | coming together |
| Coronation | a ceremony or celebration at which she was made queen |
| Cheering | shouting in excitement |
| Snatching | taking suddenly |
| Subjects | the people he was king of |
| With bated breath | in a nervous and excited state |
| Craved | wanted very much |

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Monarchs | kings or queens |
| Proclamations | royal announcements |
| Illusive | one that didn't exist yet |
| Seal | end, conclude |
| His eyes began to wander | he started looking at other women |
| Affairs | sexual relations |
| Had turned a blind eye to it | ignored it, pretended not to have noticed |
| Furious | extremely angry |
| Embarrassed | made to feel ashamed |
| Tolerate | accept |
| Power dynamic | power balance between the two |
| Infidelity | acts of having sexual relations with other women, disloyalty |
| Favour | approval, support |
| A ray of hope | something promising or hopeful |

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Miscarriages | unsuccessful pregnancies |
| Miraculously | in a way that was very surprising or difficult to believe |
| Stillborn | born dead |
| Traumatic | painful, harmful |
| Nail in the coffin | something that would cause her end |
| Love interest | woman in whom he was interested romantically |
| Despised | hated |
| Plotting | planning secretly |
| Grounds | reasons |
| Sneaky | tricky, dishonest |
| Dirty work | dishonest acts |
| Clashed | fought or argued |
| Monasteries | buildings in which monks lived |
| Dissolved | closed down |
| Cunning | clever and good at using tricks |

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Ruthless | showing no pity, cruel |
| Incriminating | making her seem guilty |
| Bring her down | make her lose her position, cause her failure |
| Hinted at | suggested, indicated |
| Torture | an act of causing extreme pain in order to make him give information |
| Tortured | caused him extreme pain |
| Confessed | admitted that he had done it |
| Agony | extreme pain |
| Conspiracy | secret plan |
| Set-up | a secret plan, trick |
| Adultery | having sex with someone other than her husband |
| Incest | sexual activity between people who are closely related |
| Treason | showing no loyalty to the king |
| Distraught | very worried and upset |
| Executed | put to death as a legal punishment |

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Grant | give, allow |
| Executioner | a person whose job was to kill people as legal punishment |
| Gasped | took a short, quick breath |
| Split | separation, division |
| Portrayed | represented |
| Rumours | information that wasn't based on facts |
| Warts | small, hard growths on the skin |
| Spells | magic forms of words |
| Worn off | disappeared, lost effectiveness |
| Critics | the people who blamed her |
| Trace | signs, marks |
| Detractors | the people who unfairly didn't approve of her |
| Tricked | made secret plans, deceived |
| Conspired | planned secretly with other people |
| Sealed | ended, concluded |

The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Flat-out | completely and right away |
| Assign | give, allocate |
| Chromosomes | structures in the body carrying genetic information |
| Ambitious | having a strong wish to be powerful |
| Seducing | making him feel attracted to her |
| Persuading | making him more likely to do it |
| Sympathy | feelings of pity and sadness |
| Crashing down | resulting in disaster |
| Misogynistic | showing hate against women |
| Sociopathic | behaving very badly towards others |
| Influential | having a lot of effect |
| Thrive | be successful |
| Maniac | crazy, violent person |

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #338
The Tragic Life of Anne Boleyn

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com