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Textual Evidence

The Six Wives of Henry VIII

Henry Tudor, known as Henry VIII, king of England in the 1500s, was the main instigator of the English Reformation but is generally better known for having had six wives. His first wife, Catherine of Aragon, was actually originally his brother Arthur's wife. But Arthur died at 15, paving the way for Henry, who was 10 at the time, to become king. Anxious to maintain his alliance with Spain, Henry VII, Henry VIII's father, offered his son Henry to be Catherine's husband instead. Spain accepted, but it was another seven years before the two were married in 1509. He divorced her 24 years later, because she was unable to bear a son who could inherit his throne. Catherine fought for her and her daughter to retain their titles, but Henry was eventually victorious.

Henry's second wife was Anne Boleyn, sister of one of Henry's other mistresses. When Anne became pregnant by him in 1533, he and Anne Boleyn were secretly married. Anne's child, too, was a girl. She miscarried two other children, and her inability to produce an heir soon caused Henry's attention to wander once again. He became interested in one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting, Jane Seymour. In order to get out of his second marriage, Henry claimed that Anne had committed adultery and that she was plotting to murder him. Of course Anne denied the false charges, but nonetheless Henry had their marriage annulled, and Anne Boleyn was beheaded. Within 24 hours of her death, Henry and Jane Seymour were married.

In 1537, Jane Seymour produced a son, whom they named Edward, but Jane died soon afterwards from an infection related to the pregnancy. Henry mourned her death, and considered her his only "true" wife. Three years later, though, he was ready to marry again, and began to consider available women. Anne, the sister of the Duke of Cleves, was suggested to him, and after seeing her portrait, Henry agreed to the union. Henry didn't like her in person, though, and the marriage lasted barely six months before he divorced her, giving her the title of "The King's Sister" and a large castle in which to live.

Weeks later, 49-year-old Henry married 19-year-old Catherine Howard, who was a cousin of Anne Boleyn. They were very happy at first, but the young and beautiful Catherine, stuck with an enormously overweight and nearly crippled husband, soon began to look for attention from men her own age. When she was discovered to have committed adultery, Henry had her beheaded in 1542 after less than two years of marriage.



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Henry's last wife was the independent and well-educated two-time widow, Catherine Parr, daughter of a lady-in-waiting to Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon. She and Henry were married in 1543.

Henry's health deteriorated after that. He became covered with pus-filled boils and is believed to have suffered from gout. A wound sustained while jousting ulcerated and left him unable to play sports. He also eventually became so obese that he had to be moved with mechanical inventions. He died in 1547 at the age of 55 and was succeeded on the throne by his son Edward VI.

DIRECTIONS: Answer the question. Use evidence from the text to support your answers.

1. Why did Henry VIII divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon?

2. Why did Henry VIII consider Jane Seymour his "one true wife?"

3. Why did Henry VIII divorce his fourth wife, Anne?

4. Why was his fifth wife, Catherine Howard, beheaded?

5. Why was Catherine Parr Henry VIII's last wife?