

# SELF-LED ACTIVITY

## CONTROL THE REBELS



KS3

### Recommended for

KS3 (History)

### Learning objectives

- Understand the climate of political unrest in England during Henry II's reign.
- Imagine being Henry II and make decisions about how to regain control of the rebels.
- Begin to explore the balance of power between Church and State in medieval Britain.

### Time to complete

20 minutes



An illustration of Henry II, the king who built Orford Castle.

### SUMMARY

Start by discussing the struggle for control between the Church and the Crown in medieval Britain. In a deeply religious society, bad relations with the Church would likely damage the king's popularity and ability to make decisions.

Print and hand out enough activity sheets (on the next page) for your class; we suggest students do this as a paired activity.

### TEACHER ANSWERS

Ask students to count up how many As, Bs and Cs they selected. Share the following outcomes with them:

- **Mostly As** – you're too cautious and wouldn't have lasted long as a medieval king! Henry II was more concerned about keeping power than keeping people happy. To be a long-standing king you would have to make unpopular decisions, taking strong action against your enemies (and even friends). Abdication was NOT an option.
- **Mostly Bs** – you and Henry II made very similar decisions! Despite unrest, Henry reigned for an impressive 35 years. He was known as a strong, energetic and sometimes ruthless ruler. Thomas Becket's murder was very controversial and caused widespread outrage. Henry was mostly successful in controlling the rebels but his own family eventually turned against him.
- **Mostly Cs** – you're too reckless and wouldn't have lasted long as a medieval king! Henry II wanted to show his strength but he had to be careful not to make too many enemies. Medieval kings needed to keep the Church on side, so it's best not to upset the archbishop or the pope. To stay in power, you had to be decisive without being too outrageous.

Explain that, in 1173, Henry II's actions led to unrest in England and Europe, causing a great rebellion, led by his own wife and sons. Orford Castle was built just in time to help protect Suffolk from rebel attacks.

### MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Discuss the true level of authority of a medieval king; e.g. Who had the most influence in medieval England: the Crown or the Church?

# CONTROL THE REBELS



How long would you last as a medieval king?

Imagine you are Henry II. Choose one answer for each problem below.



King Henry II.

**1** Your land-holding men (barons) are out of control, claiming royal castles as their own and building new ones.

- a) Let them keep their castles and hope things calm down.
- b) Demand that all royal castles are returned to you and that all new castles be destroyed.
- c) Destroy all the castles so that no one can use them.

**2** You have a problem with a rebel baron called Hugh Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, who has five castles in the local area.

- a) Get a royal army together and attack Hugh Bigod's castles.
- b) Confiscate all of his castles and make him pay a massive fine.
- c) Meet up with him and order him not to cause any more trouble.

**Discuss:** how might Hugh Bigod react to your decision?

**3** You accuse Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, of breaking the law. He escapes to France to avoid you. You remember that he owns land in Suffolk, including Orford, where Hugh Bigod is causing trouble.

- a) Get a message to the archbishop in France, asking for permission to build a castle on his land at Orford.
- b) Do nothing.
- c) Take the archbishop's land while he's out of the country and build a castle at Orford.

**4** Your enemies in Europe threaten to invade, joining forces with rebel barons like Hugh Bigod, to remove you from the throne.

- a) Abdicate (step down as king) to avoid any fighting.
- b) Prepare your castles for war, including Orford, by sending more soldiers and supplies.
- c) Gather an army and attack your enemies in Europe before they get a chance to invade England.



The rebel baron Hugh Bigod.

**Discuss:** why have you chosen this answer?

**5** The pope threatens to exclude you from the Church because of how you've treated the archbishop.

- a) Ignore the pope's threats and carry on as you were.
- b) Let the archbishop return to England.
- c) Apologise and do whatever the pope tells you to.

### HINT

Medieval kings believed they were chosen by God, so being excluded from the Church was a serious problem.

**6** The Archbishop, Thomas Becket, excommunicates (expels) three bishops who support you, which limits your power.

- a) Admit defeat and step down as king.
- b) Put the archbishop in prison.
- c) Complain about the archbishop to as many people as possible.

### DID YOU KNOW?



In 1164, some knights overheard the king moaning about the archbishop and thought they could impress him by murdering Becket. People were shocked and blamed the king for Becket's murder.

**7** A serious revolt is about to break out.

- a) Hide and hope that it dies down.
- b) Spend money on troops and supplies to prepare your castles for war.
- c) Run away to another country.

**Discuss:** what might happen next?