



CATHERINE HOWARD

WATCH-ALONG GUIDE

Key themes

✚ Women's power

In the Tudor period, society was controlled by men. Young women were often guided, controlled or used by male family members to increase their family's power and position at court.

✚ Interpreting Sources

Sources must be interpreted carefully to understand about the past. For Catherine Howard, sources are limited and sometimes unclear, meaning we cannot be certain about her actions, motives or relationships without more evidence.

✚ Tudor daily life

Life in Tudor England varied greatly depending on wealth. Wealthy families had access to education and opportunities at court, while poorer families experienced hard work, short childhoods and difficult living conditions.



BEFORE WATCHING

Who was she?

Catherine Howard grew up with many brothers and sisters while living with her grandmother. She had very good etiquette, but sadly did not have much control over her life and was around 17 years old when she was executed.

She was Henry VIII's fifth wife, and they were married for less than two years. They had no children together.

SIX the Musical

A modern musical that retells the stories of the wives of Henry VIII's. In this video, an actor from the show explores the real history behind her character with a historian.



Source used in the video

A letter written by Catherine Howard

Vocab

✚ Etiquette

The rules for polite behaviour in society that people were expected to follow

✚ Treason

The crime of acting against your own country, especially by trying to kill the king or queen, or overthrow the government

Warning

Catherine's story can be difficult to discuss with students.

She was likely influenced or pressured by men from a young age and later executed after it was revealed she had relationships before her marriage and an alleged affair while she was queen. Care should be taken when discussing her 'guilt', ensuring students consider the context of power, age and limited choice in Tudor society.

WHILE WATCHING

01:01 Why is Catherine Howard often remembered only as “beheaded”?
What’s missing?

Talking points: oversimplification; male-focused narratives; ignores character and influence

01:15 What problems do historians face when studying Catherine Howard when even basic facts (like her appearance) are uncertain?

Talking points: limited evidence; uncertain portraits; gaps in knowledge

03:20 How was childhood different for wealthy and poorer Tudor children?

Talking points: education vs labour; etiquette vs survival; privilege vs hardship; short childhood for poorer children

04:25 How common was Catherine’s lack of choice for girls and women in the Tudor period?

Talking points: many women had limited choice; male control (family/husbands); marriages often arranged; especially for noblewomen

05:31 What evidence would help us understand what Catherine really felt?

Talking points: letters/diaries; firsthand accounts; multiple sources to compare

06:53 How do you think Catherine Howard should be remembered today, and why?

AFTER WATCHING

How do we know?

Use the Source Bank to explore a portrait and a letter written by Catherine Howard.

Key events

c.1518-1524 – born into a large noble family

c.1528 – lives with her step-grandmother in a large household

c.1536- 1540 – has relationships (before marriage)

1539 – arrives at court as lady-in-waiting to Anne of Cleves

1540 – marries Henry VIII

Summer 1541 – writes letter to Thomas Culpepper

1541 – arrested and charged with treason

1542 – executed at the Tower of London

