

Jobs in Henry VIII's castle (i)

Here are some job advertisements for positions in the royal court.

Groom of the stool

A new groom of the stool is required by Henry VIII. The main duty of the groom is to see 'the house of easement be sweet and clear' or, to clean the royal rear end. You will also place the royal poo in a dish for examination by the royal physician. Job includes wiping the royal rear. Because you will be alone with the king several times a day, the job is a good chance to influence the king and rise in society. Only noblemen need apply.

Whipping boy

As we all know, the monarch rules by divine right. The king or queen is chosen by God to rule, and therefore any heir to the throne who will later become a king or queen must also be divine. Of course, this means that it would be highly illegal to spank a young prince or princess for breaking any rules. So, a post is available as royal whipping boy. You will be fed, housed and clothed – all you have to do is make yourself available to take the punishment of a royal caning on behalf of the heir. You know that you are protecting the royal backside. The secreting of a wad of parchment down the trousers whenever you hear the order, "Get me the whipping boy!" is not permitted. Open to commoners.

Jobs in Henry VIII's castle (ii)

Spitboy

The palace is looking for a new spitboy, or turnbrooch. You will roast meat for the king and his guests. You will be supervised by a team of 12 cooks and the head cook. You will spend the day next to the fire, where it is very hot. The hours are long, but you may have a chance for leftovers. Commoners may apply.

Royal taster

Do you have a taste for rich food and like to take a risk? A position has just opened up to be the king's official food taster. Your job is to taste everything before the king. You will take one bite and one sip of everything on the king's plate and in his cup. The risks are great, and death is a possibility, but you'll be protecting the king. Open to commoners.

Executioner

Your main duty is to sever heads using a large axe and a knife. You may also be required to perform other tasks, such as boiling the head and mounting it on a spike. This job often includes gifts from the condemned, who will try to get you to deal with them swiftly and cleanly. Commoners may apply. Must be strong.



Name:..... Form:.....

Based on **pages 4 and 5** of *In the Queen's words*

Jobs in Henry VIII's castle (iii)

Groom of the chamber

With a staff of several hundred, the successful candidate will be in charge of taking the king and up to 1,000 lords, ladies and staff on the road for the summer progress. You will have a budget of hundreds of thousands of crowns and will visit most of the finest houses in the land. You will be responsible for making sure the hosts spend a huge amount of money so that the king and his staff get a good night's entertainment and a bed for the night. You will also need to ensure the safe transport of the royal property, including furniture and artworks, using a fleet of tour wagons. Many of the hosts will not want the king to visit, so you will need to convince them. Only nobles need apply.

Royal washerwoman

As royal washerwoman you will need to be able to lift a heavy wooden yoke and two buckets, and carry all of the water needed for your task hundreds of yards from the moat or other water source. You will also be responsible for making a 'soap' solution by filtering the water through wood-ash. After piling the soiled linen into a vat of soapy water, you will pound away with a heavy stick to cleanse the cloth. Your access to highly private details of royal life makes you a target for possible beheading. Commoners welcome.

Jobs in Henry VIII's castle

Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Copies of the worksheets, dictionary.

Using the worksheet

You may wish to use this as a “fun” introduction to life in Tudor times, or you may wish to use it later, once the students have studied more about life in Henry's court.

Henry VIII employed a huge number of servants and staff – more than 1,000 people. This many people were necessary partly in order to keep such a huge operation moving smoothly, but also to lend an air of royalty to everything the king did. To be seen without attendants waiting on his every need would have made Henry seem less like a king, and people might begin to question his right to the throne. This worksheet is a chance for students to see some of the odder jobs in the king's court.

Of course, this is just a sample of the jobs that were available. Many of the positions were only available to nobility. This was how minor nobles and second, third, etc, sons made their way in the world – they came to court and took a position as the king's groom or page (noble women from poorer families took similar positions with the queen, although their goal was usually to meet an eligible man of high rank).

Other jobs, which did not involve access to the king or queen, were available to commoners. The nobles who worked for the king or queen would also live at the palace, while most of the commoners would live on the grounds nearby.

Younger students

The students could answer the questions on page 28 to test their comprehension of the text.

Answers

1. Groom of the stool, groom of the chamber.
2. Wiping the royal rear, cleaning the king's rear, placing the royal poo in a dish.
3. So he will do the job swiftly and cleanly.

4. If the food is poisoned, the taster will die.
5. Answers will vary.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Know that life at court involved some unpleasant jobs.
- Know that many nobles came to court as a type of job.
- Extract information from a text.

Older students

The students may like to discuss how they would feel doing some of these jobs, especially if they were from an upper class family and are used to being pampered. They may also like to discuss what it may have been like to live in Henry's court.

The students could answer the questions on page 29 to test their comprehension of the text.

Answers

1. The groom of the stool is alone with the king and can influence him.
2. The heat.
3. Because the prince and princess are divine, and it would be like spanking part of God.
4. The king travels with a huge staff and it is very expensive to feed and house all of these people, even for one night.
5. Answers will vary.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Know that life at court involved some unpleasant jobs.
- Know that many nobles came to court as a type of job.
- Extract information from a text.




Name:..... Form:.....

Based on **pages 4 and 5** of *In the Queen's words*


Questions (i): Jobs in Henry VIII's castle

1. Which jobs are open only to noblemen and women?




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2. What are the main duties of the groom of the stool?




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3. Why do the condemned often give gifts to the executioner?




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4. Why is the job of royal taster so dangerous?



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5. Would you choose to do any of these jobs? Why or why not?



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Use a dictionary to find out the meaning of words which you are not familiar with.



Name:..... Form:.....

Based on **pages 4 and 5** of *In the Queen's words*



Questions (ii): Jobs in Henry VIII's castle

1. Groom of the stool does not seem like a good job – why is it a chance to rise in society?



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2. What is the worst part of the job of spitboy?



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3. Why is it illegal to spank a prince or princess?



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4. The groom of the chamber often has to convince nobles that they want the king and his staff to visit them. Why do you think some nobles do not want the king to visit them?



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5. Which job sounds the worst to you? Why?



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Use a dictionary to find out the meaning of words with which you are not familiar.