

A day in the life of Henry VIII

There were so many people working in Henry VIII's court that a set of rules, called the **Ordinances of Eltham**, was written to tell everyone what they should be doing and when. Below is an extract from the Rules.

The pages to rise at 7 o'clock to make the fire and warn the esquires of body to arise, that they may be ready dressed and in the king's chamber at 8 o'clock. None of the esquires' servants to come within the pallet chamber, but wait outside the door, the pages fetching in and out the nightgear of their esquires...

No dice or cards to be within the chamber after the king is served for all night except for the king's permission.

The gentlemen of the privy chamber to be ready by 7 o'clock to help to dress him, putting on his garments in reverent, discreet and sober manner.

None of the grooms or ushers to touch his person without special command or meddle with the dressing, except it be to warm the clothes and carry them to the gentlemen.

The persons of the privy chamber to be friendly to each other, and keep secret all things done there; not to enquire where the king is going or talk about his past-times.

The king's barber is to attend him at his rising in the morning in the privy chamber, having readiness his water, clothes, basin, knives, combs, scissors, etc, to trim his head and beard. He must take care to keep his own person and apparel clean and not go in company with vile persons or misguided women.

The first dinner begins at 10 o'clock and the supper at 4 on workdays...

To keep the king's bedroom pure and clean and to stop people disturbing the king, no one is allowed to enter it except the Marquis of Exeter, who is a relative of the king and was brought up with him from a child, six waiters, two ushers, four grooms, the barber and a page; in all 15 people...

Notes

1. Three rooms are mentioned. The 'pallet chamber' is the room where the king actually slept (a pallet is a bed). The 'privy chamber' is the private room next to the pallet room (privy means private). The king's chamber is the big room where he began the day's public life.

2. Some of those mentioned are commoners, e.g. servants, grooms, ushers and the barber. But the pages, esquires and gentlemen of the privy chamber were the sons of rich and powerful lords and knights and had servants of their own. The esquires of body would help the king get bathed and dressed and would sleep in rooms near the king's.

3. The dinner and supper times given here are for the castle staff – the king and his courtiers ate at different times.

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Age range

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

Resources

Copies of the worksheets.

Using the worksheet

The Ordinances of Eltham were drawn up in 1526 as a way to keep order – with more than 1,000 people working in the king's palaces, it became necessary to have tight rules and regulations to prevent chaos. The Ordinances also imposed a strict hierarchy of status within the court. For example, the Ordinances included provision about who could enter the king's bed chamber, who could keep dogs, when and who could play cards and what should be eaten each day by the king and different levels of courtiers.

By imposing such a detailed regimentation, the king was also strengthening his own position at the top of the hierarchy. You may want to point out the last sentence, where there is a list of the 'only' people who could enter the king's bedroom – there are 15 people on that list. The idea is that anyone who needs 15 people to help him get ready in the morning must be very important.

You may also like to discuss what purpose rules serve, in general. For example, the rules of your school help to keep order and help everyone to know what is expected of them. It was the same for the king's staff.

Younger students

The students could answer the questions on page 36 to test their comprehension of the text.

Answers

- (i) Rise at 7, get dressed, be in the king's chamber at 8, help the king dress.
 - (ii) Wait outside the door to the pallet chamber; assist the grooms.
 - (iii) Attend the king in the privy chamber with his things ready and trim the king's hair and beard.

2. Be friendly to each other; keep secrets, do not gossip or talk about the king.
3. Answers will vary.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Know that there were very specific rules that governed life at court.
- Understand a little of the hierarchy of life at court, and the roles of nobles and commoners.
- Extract information from a text.

Older students

The students may like to compare these jobs with the 'worst job' from activity 1A. You may like them to discuss how they would feel if they had to do any of these jobs.

The students could answer the questions on page 37 to test their comprehension of the text.

Answers

1. Answers will vary, but may include: these were prestigious jobs because they were with the king; they could be trusted.
2. Esquires and gentlemen of the chamber; the barber.
3. He must take care to keep his own person and apparel clean and not go in company with vile persons or misguided women.
4. Answers will vary.
5. Answers will vary.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Know that there were very specific rules that governed life at court.
- Understand a little of the hierarchy of life at court, and the roles of nobles and commoners.
- Extract information from a text.
- Give opinions based on a reading.

Questions (i): A day in the life of Henry VIII

1. What did each of these people do each morning and when?

(i) Pages, esquires and gentlemen of the privy chamber

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(ii) Servants, grooms, ushers

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(iii) Barber

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2. What rules were there to make sure everyone behaved well?

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3. What rules do you have at school or at home to make sure that your home runs smoothly – for example, what time do you eat dinner and who cleans up after dinner? Who is allowed in your parent or guardian's bedroom and when? Who is allowed in your room and when?

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Questions (ii): A day in the life of Henry VIII

1. Why do you think that most of the people who dressed and waited on the king were noblemen?



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2. Who is allowed to touch, or speak to, the king?



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3. How must the barber behave?




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4. Do you think that being a king's esquire was an easy job? Why or why not?



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5. What rules do you have at home to make sure that your home runs smoothly – for example, what time do you eat dinner and who cleans up after dinner? Who is allowed in your parent or guardian's bedroom and when? Who is allowed in your room and when?



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