A Man For All Seasons Teacher’s Guide

For this play Continual Assessment Test marks can include: attendance, homework, quiz from Act 1, Composition (any discussion question can be given for homework or made into a Composition), Class Debate, and

Historical Context for A Man For All Seasons:

* Ask students: What is the War of the Roses? Who is Henry VII?
* When Henry VII died his son henry VIII became king and married his deceased brother’s widow.
  + To marry your brother’s wife, even if he has died, was against the catholic church then.
* When his wife, Catherine, could not have a male son Henry VIII wanted to get a divorce, also forbidden.
* Other catholics were not happy with all these corrupt changes for the king and other problems so people began to break away from the church, like Martin Luther creating Protestantism. Called The Reformation.
* While King Henry VIII is trying to get his divorce Thomas More gets the job of Lord Chancellor (like advisor to the King) and he tries to advise and obey the king but in his mind he disagrees with the actions of the king.

Discussion Question: Have you ever been in a similar situation where you disagree with someone but you feel unable to tell them what you really think? What is preventing Thomas More from telling the King how he really feels?

Homework: Have students read the character descriptions.

Poems:

1. Wit: intelligence or cleverness
2. Singular: the best ; the only
3. Lowliness: to be humble (kwicisha bugufi)
4. Affability: friendly; easy to talk to
5. Marvelous: wonderful; great
6. Mirth: a sense of humor; willing to laugh
7. Pastimes: hobbies
8. Gravity: seriousness
9. Virtue: high morals umugenzo mwiza cyangwa imanzi

Student Activity: Read the 2 poems together in groups of four and discuss the character and personality described. Make a list together as a class of adjectives or qualities describing Thomas More. Have students copy in their notebooks, leaving space.

Ex: Very Smart:

Likes to joke and laugh:

Serious:

At the end of the play you can return to this section of the notes and students can write examples from the play showing these qualities to be true of Thomas More.

Act One

What is a prologue?

Definitions[[1]](#footnote-1):

1. Perverse: strange or wrong
2. Majestic: done with grace or royally; comes from majesty nyiricyubahiro (wizihirwa)
3. Steward: like a servant

Discussion Question: In Romeo and Juliet the prologue, or the chorus, told us about the plot of the play. What does this prologue tell us?

1. Contemptuous: to look down on someone. agasuzuguro
2. Impatience: to not have patience for something. ukutihangana
3. Title: a name of importance like Lord. It is not always a job but sometimes there are responsibilities.
4. Bricks-and-mortar: this is called a synecdoche and it means houses, or physical materials.

Discussion Question: What do you think he means, “Every man has his price”? Why does More disagree?

1. Affable: well-liked or charming. Happy.
2. Inflicted: to inflict is to do something to someone else, usually a bad thing like an injury or a bad situation.
3. Fancy: to like someone or something

Discussion Question: The Steward/Common Man thinks it’s not good that Thomas More would give anything to anyone. How can that be a bad thing?

1. Cardinal: A Catholic leader who works for the pope; they lead a diocese (collection of churches). They also vote for a new pope when he dies.

* The Council: group of other cardinals

1. Common Sense: to be practical or realistic
2. Statesman: a politician
3. Plod: to go slowly Gusodoka
4. Fertile: able to make a baby

Discussion Question: “to play in the muck” means what?

Muck = mud/dirt but Wolsey is not saying the king went outside to play in the dirt like a child. He is using muck to mean a woman named Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII’s mistress.

That “thing” out there is fertile. Who is the thing? Why do you think Cardinal Wolsey dislikes and doesn’t respect Anne Boleyn, but he thinks it is a good thing that the King is having sex with her?

1. Barren: opposite of fertile. Not able to make a baby.

Discussion Question: “But in addition to Prayer there is Effort” Do you agree with this statement or do you disagree? (teacher can also assign this as a composition for homework)

1. Influence: able to cause or change a decision or action.
2. Conscience: how you feel in your heart. The part of your brain that tells you something is right or wrong. Umutima nama
3. Private: silent, yourself only; in private: mu muhezo
4. Obstruct: to stop; to be in the way
5. Miracles: ibitangaza

Key Quote: “When statesmen forsake their own private conscience for the sake of their public duties they lead their country by a short route to chaos”

1. Forsake: to throw away or betray
2. For the sake of : because of
3. Duties: jobs/responsibilities
4. Chaos: everything goes bad, destruction, confusion, lack of order

Homework: Do you agree with Thomas More that private conscience should never be separate with how a politician leads the country and does their job? Give an example to explain why you agree or disagree.

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1. Cleric: member of the church like a priest.
2. Multitudinous: a very great number of; many
3. Plain: to speak honestly
4. Amicably: friendly
5. Deduce: to understand; to come to an answer

Discussion Question: Why does everyone ask or somehow know that Thomas More has been with the Cardinal?

* Henry VIII and many other powerful political people employed spies. Why do you think it was so important to spy on others at that time?

1. Heretic: someone who does not believe or follow the catholic church
2. Excommunicate: when a catholic is forced out of the church and isolated from it.
3. Pensive: thoughtful; thinking about many things or one thing deeply

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Thomas More doesn’t want Margaret to marry Will Roper because he is a Lutheran. The Lutheran Church broke away from the Catholic church because there were some disagreements about rules and how to practice their faith. King Henry VIII wasn’t the only person to disagree with the rules of the Catholic Church during the 16th century. Martin Luther (the founder of the Lutheran Church) and many others organized into sects of Catholicism. This break in the Catholic church is called The Reformation.

Class Activity: Make a character list for the first 20 pages of the play.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. The Common Man |  |
| 1. Thomas More |  |
| 1. Rich |  |
| 1. Norfolk |  |
| 1. Alice |  |
| 1. Margaret |  |
| 1. Cardinal Wolsey |  |
| 1. Cromwell |  |
| 1. Chapuys |  |
| 1. Roper |  |

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1. The Tower: the place where enemies of the king were put as punishment. Like a jail but many people were also tortured there.
2. Backwater: opposite of city or modern. Like a village where there is little activity or anything to do.
3. Sly: smart and clever in a deceitful or lying way. Good at keeping secrets and planning things. umunyamayeri

Discussion Question: “Sir Thomas is a good son of the church! Sir Thomas is a man.” What do you think this means? Why is it not possible for Thomas More to be both?

1. Conspiratorial: Adjective for people who are making secret plans. A conspiracy is a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful or bad.
2. Beckons: motions with hand to ask someone to come forward.
3. Distressed: worried or anxious
4. Fanfare: trumpets or music to announce a visitor
5. Cassock: a long piece of clothing worn by members of the church.
6. Vespers: evening prayers
7. Dowdy: not well dressed, not having very good style
8. Spindly: skinny like spiders legs
9. Hose: like stockings isogisi rirerire

Student Activity: Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 and have them read pages 27 to 29 (from the entrance of Henry VIII to when King Henry says “A great experience…a great experience, Thomas” What are your impressions of the King? How would you describe his personality?

Discussion Question: Why does King Henry show Thomas More the mud on his shoes?

Why does the King want to give a surprise visit to the More family?

1. Superlatively: very good or the best.

Discussion Question: Why does King Henry ask Thomas More if he is his friend?

1. Incomparable: he cannot be compared to anyone because he is the best.
2. Endeavor: my struggle (try hard to do something)
3. To hold out against someone/something: to resist or to continue to disagree or refuse.
4. Crave: a powerful desire for something. To want something very badly.
5. Offend: to insult
6. Peril: serious danger

King Henry believes he sinned when he married Catherine, because she was his dead brother’s wife before his, and now he believes he is being punished by God. What is the punishment he believes God is giving him?

1. Sincere: to not just be saying words but to really mean what you are saying. Uvugisha ukuri
2. Hypocritical: to say one thing and to do the opposite. Uburyarya
3. Unjust: not morally right or fair kidakoranywe ubutabera
4. Loyal: giving or showing a powerful and constant support; like fidelity indahemuka
5. Traitors: a person who betrays someone or something.
6. Stubborn: determination not to change one’s attitude or ideas about something. Kugira umutwe munini
7. Flatter: to say things to make others feel good. Kunoza

Discussion Question: Why is it so important for Thomas More to know how to flatter

1. Martyr: someone who dies because of their beliefs
2. Convenient: easy to do ; not difficult gikwiye
3. Recollecting: remembering something
4. Hostile: angry ; unfriendly
5. Steadfast: continuing without changing. Loyal
6. Subtle: the opposite of obvious; difficult to describe; gikomeye kumvikana
7. Prominent: important

Secretary to the Council: Advisors to the King. He will hear everything the King will hear.

1. sinister: evil or with bad intention
2. Lament: to be very sad about something; grieve or mourn.
3. Innocence: free from moral wrong; not guilty. Indacumura
4. Litigant: a person who has a lawsuit; going to court.
5. Tidbits: small pieces

Student Activity: DEBATE TOPIC : Henry’s divorce half the class agrees; the other half disagrees.

Opening Statements: One student for each team speaks for 2 minutes in general about why they agree or disagree with King Henry’s divorce of his wife Catherine.

Rebuttal: one student on each team has an opportunity to reply to the opening statement of the other team. (5 minutes and if one student does not use all the time then another from their team can continue).

Questions: Here any student can ask their opponents a question. You want to have students participating who did not speak in the opening statement or the rebuttal.

Closing Statements: one student on each team has an opportunity to sum up their arguments. 2 minutes.

Quiz for Act One

1. Match the characters with their descriptions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Cardinal Wolsey | 1. The King of England |
| 1. Margaret | 1. First he works for Cardinal Wolsey and after Wolsey dies he becomes Secretary to the Council. He does many jobs for the King. |
| 1. Lady Alice | 1. Thomas More’s daughter |
| 1. Henry VIII | 1. Thomas More’s wife |
| 1. Rich | 1. The Spanish diplomat/politician. |
| 1. Chapuys | 1. The King’s wife; she is Spanish and barren. |
| 1. Thomas More | 1. He first becomes a friend of Thomas More but begins spying against him for Cromwell. |
| 1. Cromwell | 1. A cardinal who works for the King and is trying to write a letter to the Pope asking him to give the King a dispensation so he can divorce his wife. |
| 1. Catherine of Aragon | 1. An advisor to the King and a very religious man. When Cardinal Wolsey dies he becomes Lord Chancellor. He does not agree with the King’s wish to get a divorce. |
| 1. Will Roper | 1. A young man who wants to marry Margaret. He believes in the Reformation and has many ideas about the catholic church. |

II. Multiple Choice Questions

1. What did a woman use to attempt to bribe More?

(A) An Italian silver cup

(B) Cash

(C) A silver tea service

(D) A fine, single malt scotch

2. What is the name of the boat King Henry sails down the Thames to meet Sir Thomas?

(A) The QE2

(B) The Fast and the Furious

(C) The Great Harry

(D) Mary, Queen of Scots

3. Where does the family find Thomas when he should be getting ready for the king’s arrival?

(A) In the house

(B) At the track

(C) At vespers

(D) Sleeping

4. What is Roper’s religion at the beginning of the play?

(A) Jewish

(B) Catholic

(C) Lutheran

(D) Quaker

5. What job does More recommend that Rich take at the very beginning of the play?

(A) Lord Chancellor

(B) Attorney general of Wales

(C) Schoolteacher

(D) Stripper

6. What does Rich say he will do with the money he gains from selling the silver cup?

(A) Buy new clothes

(B) Buy papal indulgences

(C) Buy More’s friendship

(D) Buy a ticket out of England

7. Henry’s first queen is named

(A) Anne

(B) Meg

(C) Elizabeth

(D) Catherine

8. Who is the King’s mistress?

(A) Anne Boleyn

(B) Margaret

(C) Alice

(D) Catherine

1. Who is the author of A Man For All Seasons?
   1. Shakespeare
   2. Ngugi Wa Thiongo
   3. Robert Bolt
   4. Charles Dickens
2. Thomas More refuses to let Roper marry Margaret because he is:
   1. Too old
   2. Too young
   3. Poor
   4. Not a true Catholic
3. Vocabulary

Give a definition for the words below. Choose 5

1. Barren
2. Conscience
3. Spy
4. Innocent
5. Traitor
6. Fertile
7. Influence
8. Chaos:
9. Sincere:
10. Hypocritical:

Act Two

Two years have passed between the end of Act One and the beginning of Act Two

1. Declare: to say powerfully
2. Allegiance: loyalty or commitment to a person, a group, or a cause.
3. Convocation: a large formal assembly or conference of people.
4. The Act of Supremacy: This act declared King Henry VIII the highest leader of the Church in England “so far as the law of God allows”. This means that England was not dependent on the Pope in Rome to make decisions concerning the church in England; those decisions and that job now was with King Henry alone.

Discussion Question: Why is Thomas More happy that the Act of Supremacy includes “in so far as the law of God allows”.

1. High Treason: the crime of betraying one’s country, especially by trying to kill or overthrow the sovereign (king or other ruler) or government. Punishments for treason could be imprisonment, torture, or death.
2. Discreet: careful with what someone says or does.
3. Poker-faced: showing no emotions on the face, like when one is playing cards and doesn’t want their opponents to know if they have good cards or bad cards.
4. Coming to brass tacks: getting to the business. Usually in the beginning of a conversation it is polite to talk about health, family, etc before beginning to talk business.
5. Willy-nilly: whether one likes it or not; without direction or planning. Ibigwirira
6. Corrupted: come to act dishonestly; changed or made worse through errors; infected.

Student Activity: This page contains many idioms. An idiom is when a group of words come to have a meaning which is different from the meaning of the individual words. Split class into groups and ask them to try to find 3 different idioms.

Discussion Question: Chapuys says that if Thomas More resigns his job as Lord Chancellor then it would be seen as a “signal”. What would that signal say? And why does Thomas More seem to be upset that people would see his resignation as a signal?

1. Resistance: the refusal to accept or agree with something.
2. Knuckled under: to give in; to submit; gushyikiriza
3. Severed: to cut off; to separate
4. Cowardice: to be like a coward, afraid.
5. Tenuous: fragile; weak, not strong; easily broken
6. Obscure: uncertain; not clearly said; not easily understood
7. Absolute: total, 100 percent
8. Reputation: the beliefs or opinions that are in general about a person (or a thing)
9. Bellowing: shouting
10. Let sleeping dogs lie: avoid acting on a situation that right now is not causing any problems but maybe in the future if you try to do something about it.
11. Corroborate: confirm or give support to
12. Persecution: oppression or unjust punishment especially because of race, or political or religious beliefs. Itotezwa
13. Slippery: difficult to hold (sometimes because it is wet).
14. Weave: form or create by connecting long threads.

Homework: Here Thomas More is described as a fish that Cromwell is trying to catch. Do you believe Thomas More has done anything wrong? Make a prediction: How do you think Cromwell with catch More and what will be the consequences for More when he is caught?

1. Bracken: a type of fern, which has small branches
2. Seal: When sending letters people would close them with wax. If the wax was broken then the receiver would know the letter had been opened.
3. Luxury: great comfort or elegance, especially if it is expensive
4. Charges: formal accusations against someone (legal definition). Offenses for breaking the law.
5. Prophesy: to say that something will happen in the future.
6. Notorious: famous or well-known usually for a bad quality or action
7. Abstain: to stop oneself from doing something.
8. Meddling: to interfere in something that is not one’s own business or concern.
9. Canon Law: laws of the church, especially the Roman Catholic Church, stated by papal (from the Pope) announcements.
10. Instigated: to bring about or to start something
11. Trivial: a small thing, little value; not important.
12. Perjure: to tell a lie or untruth or make a misrepresentation of something while under oath ( a promise to tell the truth in a court of law)

Student Activity: best done in groups. Read Cromwell’s questioning of Thomas More (pages 67 to 69) and make a list of the different “charges” or offences that Cromwell accuses Thomas More of doing.

1. Ravenous: very very hungry.

Student Activity: Split the class into two groups and read Thomas More’s speech about human nature, Page 74 from “God made the Angels to show him splendor…our natural business lies in escaping”. Each group tries to translate this short speech into Kinyarwanda. Help with certain technical words like tackle. Then they switch and compare.

1. Splendor: magnificent and wonderful in appearance or action
2. Tangle: twist together in a confused mass or group.
3. Stand to our tackle: this is a comparison of a boat in a storm trying to go through difficult or dangerous waters. Tackle is the equipment or materials used on a boat.
4. Clamor: a loud continuous noise.
5. Champions: someone or something who has won a contest or competition.

Discussion Question: do you agree with Thomas More about using our ability to think cleverly to escape?

Some time has passed since Cromwell questioned More and the Common Man, working as the jailor, reads a long list of people who have been killed by order of the King. Why does the class think they were killed?

1. Iniquitous: very unfair and morally wrong
2. Limping: to walk with difficulty, usually because the leg or foot is damaged or injured.
3. Sanction: official permission or approval for an action.
4. Assumption: to think something or accept/agree with something as true with no proof or evidence that it is. To assume: kwiyemeza ingaruka

Discussion Question: Why do you think it’s so important to the King that Thomas More agrees to take the oath? Or, if he disagrees why does the King need a lawful reason to kill him? Why cannot he kill him?

1. Accusatory: suggesting that you believe a person has done something wrong
2. Bitter: feeling or showing anger, hurt, or resentment because of bad experiences or a feeling of unjust treatment.

Discussion Question or Homework Question: Who is Alice angry with? Why is Alice accusatory and bitter?

Group work page 83 Thomas More’s speech about heroes (“if we lived in a state where virtue…even at the risk of being heroes”). Have groups discuss the meaning of More’s words. Why is it more important for him to be an honest man loyal to his conscience here in England?

Why do he and Margaret speak of being heroes like it is a bad thing?

1. Avarice: greed for wealth or material gain. ubugugu
2. Envy: the desire or want to have a quality, object, or something else that belongs to another person.
3. Pride: a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction because of one’s own achievements of objects. ubwirasi
4. Sloth: laziness; not wanting to work or even try to do something.
5. Lust: strong sexual desire
6. Humility: having a modest or low opinion of one’s own importance. The opposite of pride.
7. Chastity: refraining from sexual intercourse. The opposite of lust.
8. Fortitude: courage even when you are in pain or have very many struggles.

Thomas More’s Final Trial (page 89)

1. Execute: to carry out a sentence of death against someone who has broken a law.
2. Rigged: to manage something in a way so that you will always win. By cheating.
3. Repent: to feel, say, or show sincere regret about one’s wrongdoing or sin. kwicuza
4. Obstinate: stubborn
5. Pardon: a forgiveness (from a King it could release More from prison)
6. Deny (denial): to say that one refuses to admit or agree the truth about something. Guhakana

Discussion Question: Why do you think More makes his speech about death? What is he trying to say to the King?

1. Betokened: be a sign of (to symbolize)
2. Construe: to interpret or to analyze in a specific way
3. Peril: immediate and serious danger

Discussion Question or Homework Question: Why does Thomas More stop Richard Rich to ask him to see his chain of office?

1. Flummoxed: bewildered or perplexed ,urujijo
2. Repugnant:
3. Immunity:

Group work: Read Thomas More’s confession of his true opinion about the King’s action on page 96 and 97 (“The indictment is grounded in an Act of Parliament…-but because I would not bend to the marriage”) Why does Thomas More not accept the King as the Supreme head of the church in England? Why does he believe he has not committed treason in disagreeing with his King? And lastly, why does Thomas More believe he is being executed?

If you have only a short amount of time left you can choose to do a quiz on Act 2 OR recitations where students (in groups or individually depending on the number of characters in the scene) choose a part of the play to present or act out in front of the class. High marks are given for good pronunciation, gesticulating or use of props, acting out the emotions of the characters while speaking so that it is clear the students understand what they are saying and not just memorizing.

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Types of Moral Guides

In his preface, Robert Bolt addresses the apparent contradiction between Thomas More’s upright moral sense and his periodic attempts to find legal and moral loopholes. More strongly opposes Henry’s divorce, yet he hopes to avoid rather than speak out against the Oath of Supremacy. More explains his actions when he says to Will Roper, “God’s my god. . . . But I find him rather too . . . subtle.” More respects God’s law above all else, but he also does not pretend to understand it. Therefore, he sees man’s law as the best available guide to action, even if it occasionally contradicts God’s law or lets some evildoers off the hook.

In his approach to moral action, More is thoroughly pragmatic, but not, like Cromwell or Rich, at the expense of his beliefs. If More sometimes seems hypocritical, it is because he is trying to balance his respect for the law and society with his deep-rooted sense of self. He obeys the law fully, and, in the end, the prosecution has to come up with false charges to execute him.

More’s pragmatic maneuvering through society contrasts with what More calls Roper’s “seagoing” principles. Roper follows ideals instead of his conscience or the law, and More argues that attempting to navigate high-minded ideals is akin to being lost at sea. Roper switches willy-nilly from Catholicism to Lutheranism and back again, each time utterly convinced of his own righteousness. Bolt implies that because we cannot comprehend the moral alignment of the universe, much less wrap it up in a tidy theory, we should focus our energy on improving ourselves and our society.

Corruption

A Man for All Seasons focuses on the rise of Richard Rich as much as it follows the fall of Sir Thomas More. As More’s steadfast selfhood earns him a spot on the chopping block, Rich acquires more and more wealth and greater status by selling out his friend and his own moral principles. Although Rich at first bemoans his loss of innocence, by the end of the play he has no qualms about perjuring himself in exchange for a high-ranking position.

In Act One, scene eight, Rich gives Cromwell information about the silver cup in exchange for a job. Rich laments that he has lost his innocence, and the scene suggests that Rich has sold his soul to the devil. Cromwell himself evokes the devil as he craftily cajoles Rich into selling out before cramming Rich’s hand into a candle flame.

Although Act One, scene eight recalls many cautionary religious tales about the seductive powers of the devil, Bolt does not depict Rich’s corruption to warn us that people like Rich go to hell. Rather, Rich’s corruption, set against More’s hard and fast sense of self, shows the damage Rich has done to his own life. Rich has sacrificed the goodness of his own self, which the play argues is the only thing for which life is worth living.

The Self and Friendship

Through its depiction of More’s personal relationships, the play examines the extent to which one can be true to oneself and a good friend to others. Above all, More looks inwardly for his strength and comfort. He appears to be more of a teacher than a friend or a lover. He relies on his own conscience as his guide, and through tests and through the example he sets, he attempts to teach others to do the same. However, More’s instructive instinct results in relationships that are not overtly heartfelt.

One could also argue that More shows his friendship and love by teaching others. The play shows that More’s self-reliance is not completely incompatible with friendship and love. In More’s conversations with Norfolk and Alice, he shows that he truly cares about them as his friend and wife, respectively. More tells Norfolk to “cease knowing him,” but More argues that he gives his instruction because of the friendship the two men share. He tells his wife that he could not die peacefully if he knew that she was still confused about why he remains silent and does not give in to King Henry. More also tells Matthew that he will miss him.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text’s major themes.

Satire and Wit

Throughout the play, the characters with ties to the court participate in confused and misinterpreted exchanges of dialogue. These exchanges both satirize the court and portray the way corrupt morals lead to corrupt and ambiguous speech. In Cromwell’s exchange with the innkeeper, Cromwell humorously states that he can never be quite sure whether he’s duping or being duped when he interacts with such a “tactful” person. Cromwell has a similar exchange with Rich, in which he tries to assess just how trustworthy and how bribable Rich might be. Chapuys wrongly assumes that More’s straightforward answers are double talk and gives him a knowing wink that is completely out of place.

Historically, More was as witty as he was saintly. Much to Alice’s chagrin, More spends most of his time joking about the dangerous situations he encounters. In the play, More’s wit establishes his humanity. In Act One, scene seven, More insists that man is born to serve God “wittily.” By this, he means that man must cleverly escape death for as long as he legitimately and lawfully can, but the statement also emphasizes the importance of a sense of humor.

Silence

More is remarkable as much for his silence as for his statements. He maintains that if he does not speak his opinion concerning his disapproval of the king’s intention to divorce his wife, then, according to the Bible, his silence will connote consent, not dissent. More uses silence to his advantage, refusing to incriminate himself in a way that resembles invoking the fifth amendment in a United States court of law. More also protects his family from legal persecution by staying silent about his opinions in their presence.

More is silent in other ways as well. He disparages people, like Roper, who clamor at all times about ideals. More prefers to listen to the voice within, his conscience. He does not criticize Norfolk until he is sure that Norfolk needs to be criticized and enraged.

At the trial, Cromwell’s argument to the jury equates More’s silence with complicity in a crime. Cromwell’s claim is ironic, for the play shows how many other characters— primarily those played by the Common Man—remain silent when they could tell More about the plot against him.

Guilt

Guilt receives much attention in the play, particularly in the characters of Rich, Norfolk, the jailer, Matthew, and even in More himself. Bolt shows how Rich constantly suffers under his own sense of guilt and yet cannot resist the temptation to improve his own prospects at the expense of others and his own conscience. When he is Matthew, the Common Man noticeably feels guilt on some level when More shows affection for him. As the jailer, the Common Man has a conscious understanding of his guilt and assuages his guilty conscience by convincing himself that it would be futile to set More free. Norfolk is obviously wracked with a sense of guilt when he tells More of Cromwell’s plot and his own association with it. More himself shows some guilt when he realizes that he might have to be executed with his family still unaware of why he acts the way he does.

More understands guilt as a personal judgment made by one’s own conscience, and, based upon one’s perspective, the same action could be guilty or innocent. He also seems to be able to eradicate the guilt he feels for taking the tainted goblet as a bribe by getting rid of it. This flexibility is particularly true with respect to Norfolk. More says that he and More could part as friends even if Norfolk were to remain in his office, which is associated with the plot against More.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Water and Dry Land

In his preface, Bolt announces that his play is rife with water and seafaring imagery, which symbolizes the uncertain moral territory of the great beyond, the unknowable realm of God and the devil. Characters who establish their actions on such an uncertain base include King Henry, whose shaky moral ground is symbolized by the way he sails down the Thames in order to visit More, and Roper, who holds what More calls “seagoing” principles.

Unlike Henry and Roper, More recognizes God’s will as impossible, and More therefore prefers to root his actions in his own conscience and in the law. When speaking with Roper, More compares the realm of human law to a forest filled with protective trees firmly rooted in the earth. To emphasize his belief in law as a guide to action, More tells Roper that removing all the laws in pursuit of the devil would be like cutting down all the trees in the land, letting the devil run amok like a fierce wind. In other words, More views society as a bulwark against the moral mysteries of the cosmos.

The Gilded Cup

In the first scene in Act One, More offers Rich a cup that More received as a bribe. Acknowledging that the cup is tainted, More tells Rich that he wishes to be rid of it. More tries to set an example by throwing away the cup, but Rich quickly shows that he does not share More’s intentions. Rich takes the cup from More and pawns it for money and a new set of fashionable clothes. The cup symbolizes corruption, and it also symbolizes More’s attempt to test Rich and teach him by example. More’s attempt to test Rich with the cup actually sets in motion the events that lead to More’s conviction at the end of the play—a conviction that Rich helps secure by lying under oath in court.

Possible Sections for your Exam

1. Plot
   1. True/False questions
   2. Matching questions
   3. Chronological Order (put the actions/events in the correct order they happened in the play)
2. Vocabulary
   1. Match the word with its definition
   2. Write a synonym
   3. Translation
3. Quotations

Example:

-----------: Then, clearly all we have to do is approach His Holiness and ask him.

-----------: I think we might influence his Holiness’s answer.

-----------: Like this? (The Dispatch)

-----------: Like that and in other ways.

-----------: I’ve already expressed my opinion on this.

-----------: then, good night! Oh your conscience is your own affair; but you’re a statesman;! Do you remember the Yorkist Wars?

-----------: Very clearly.

-----------: Let him die without an heir and we’ll have them back again. Let him die without an heir and this ‘peace’ you think so much of will go out like that! (extinguishes candle) Very well, then England needs an heir; certain measures, perhaps regrettable, perhaps not – (pompous) there is much in the Church that needs Reformation, Thomas – (More smiles.) Alright regrettable! But necessary, to get us an heir. Now explain how you as Councilor of England can obstruct those measures for the sake of your own , private, conscience.

----------: Well…I believe that when statesmen forsake their private conscience for the sake of their public duties…they lead their country by a short route to chaos.

1. Who are the two people speaking? When he/she says, “let him die without an heir…” who is the him he/she is talking about? What is an heir? Give a short explanation what they are arguing about?

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1. Composition

Possible essay questions. It’s important to make sure your students know how to write a convincing composition by assigning one as a homework or weekend assignment BEFORE giving one on the exam. A composition should have 5 paragraphs with at least 5 sentences in each paragraph. Some students might not be comfortable with how to write a full paragraph and its important to give them several examples and maybe teach a full unit on composition writing if your students need it. Assigning the composition for homework is a good way for you to see what level your students are at before the exam.

1. Compare what happens to Rich Richard and what happens to Thomas More in the play? Why does one succeed and the other end up being executed? What does this say about England’s society at the time?
2. Is Sir Thomas More a teacher? If so, describe the instances in the play in which he tries to teach others. How does he teach? What do his methods reveal about his character?
3. During the play Will Roper turns from a Catholic into a Lutheran and then switches back to Catholicism. Why do you think he switches so much? What do his many conversions and the persecution of Thomas More say about the author, Robert Frost’s, opinion about religion?

1. The definitions in this guide are for you the teacher, not notes for the students. If you have students copy definitions for all the words they do not know you can overwhelm them and they may become discouraged. It is better to choose some key words. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)