



From Accession to the Abbey teachers' notes

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Follow-up tasks

Ask pupils to look closer at this image.

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you think is going on here?
3. What does it make you wonder?

For your reference, this is a photograph of a painting of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953 by Terence Cuneo, who was the official artist for the coronation. This task is not about giving "right" answers to the questions above, but instead encouraging students to look slowly and closely at an image, taking time to discuss their interpretations and the meaning behind the image in relation to coronations.



Ask pupils to discuss in pairs or in a small group:

- Queen Elizabeth II ascended the throne on the 6th February 1952, immediately after the death of her father King George VI. How do you think she felt on hearing the news that she was now Queen?
- Can you think of any events in your own life that have been filled with both sadness and joy? For example, it could be the event of moving schools or classes – you might be sad to leave your old classroom, but excited for the new term and a new teacher. Talk to a partner about this event in your life, and think about how you felt during that time. What emotions did you feel?
- There was an 18-month gap between the Queen’s ascension and coronation, and the Abbey was closed for six months to prepare for the ceremony. Why do you think it took so long to prepare the Abbey for the Coronation?

Ask pupils to complete one or more of these writing tasks:

1) Imagine you are a reporter:

Write a newspaper article to announce the ascension of the new Queen, Elizabeth II. In your article, you could include:

- The death of George VI on 6th February, 1952
- A description the new Queen Elizabeth II
- An explanation that it will be many months before Elizabeth’s coronation, due to a period of mourning that follows after the death of a previous monarch
- A description of Westminster Abbey: the coronation church of Kings & Queens since 1066
- A list of some of the jobs that will take place in the Abbey to prepare for the Coronation

2) Imagine you are the Earl Marshal, the Duke of Norfolk, whose job it is to organise the coronation of the new monarch:

Write a list of all the jobs that you think might need to be done at Westminster Abbey to prepare for a coronation. In your list, you could include answers to:

- What music will be used, and who will sing or play the music?
- How many people will you invite to the coronation, and how will they all be seated?
- What robes will the new monarch and the royal family wear, and how will they be made?
- What special objects might you need for a coronation ceremony? (Hint: the Crown Jewels)
- How will you let people know about the date of the coronation and whether they are invited?
- For the first time, this coronation will be filmed. Where will you put the cameras?
- What workers will you need to help set up the Abbey for a coronation?

3) Imagine you are a chorister (member of the choir) at Westminster Abbey, and you have just been asked to sing for the coronation of the new Queen Elizabeth II.

Write a diary entry to explain how you are feeling. You could include:

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- How you felt when you heard the former King, George VI had died
 - How you are feeling about the new Queen – what do you think she will be like?
 - What do you think the Coronation will be like?
 - What is happening in the Abbey to prepare for the coronation?
 - Which part of the coronation are you most looking forward to? It could be seeing the Queen enter the Abbey for the first time or seeing the crown being placed on her head.
 - How are you feeling about singing in front of over 8000 people at the service, and 21 million people watching on TV?

One of the choristers shared his experience, which you can read here: <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/teaching-resources/my-experience-as-a-coronation-choirboy>

Transcript

In 2022 we celebrate the 70-year reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as we join together to mark the Platinum Jubilee. Queen Elizabeth II became Queen when her father King George VI died on 6th February 1952. However she wasn't crowned in Westminster Abbey until 2nd June 1953. So what happened between taking the throne, or accession, and when The Queen was crowned?

Accession is both a beginning and an end. We might think that having a new king or queen would be really exciting, but at that moment, the new monarch would be mourning the loss of their relative. It was a sad time for the Royal Family, the country and the Commonwealth.

While this wasn't a time for celebration, the duties of the new monarch began straight away. The Accession Council gathered at St James' Palace to proclaim a new monarch, who makes various religious promises. The proclamation was read publicly in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, as well as in countries across the Commonwealth including Australia, Pakistan and South Africa.

A period of mourning followed for the late King. Seasons changed and thoughts turned to preparing for the coronation. In 1953, Westminster Abbey had to be closed to the public for six months. Over two hundred people worked on building seating for 8,251 guests – they even brought in railway tracks to move materials around the Abbey. Across the country, dressmakers and weavers, musicians and choristers all played their part. By the middle of May, daily rehearsals had been introduced to make sure everything ran smoothly.

2nd June 1953 – Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation Day. The Coronation takes place within a Holy Communion service, during which there is the oath, the anointing and the investing. In front of The Queen's subjects in the Abbey, in front of over 20 million people watching the service for the first time on television and before God, Queen Elizabeth II was crowned in what has been Britain's coronation church since 1066.