This activity...

Supports:
KS3 History, Unit 5
Elizabeth I: how successfully did she tackle the problems of her reign?

Helps pupils to:
Evaluate Elizabeth I’s decisions and effectiveness as a monarch.

Analyse Elizabeth I’s response to the crisis caused by the debasement of England’s coinage.

Investigate what caused Elizabeth I’s currency troubles and how they affected the economy and society.

Develop speaking and listening skills and write or argue persuasively using causal factors and historical vocabulary.

Requires:
PowerPoint projector or interactive whiteboard.

Print outs of card sort activity (included below).

Suggestions for use

Pupils step into the role of the Queen’s advisers in this activity. They help Elizabeth I analyse, understand and respond to the currency troubles facing England in 1560.

A card-sort activity and decision-making task are included in the PowerPoint resource.

Use this activity to:

Introduce or brainstorm some of the aims or qualities a monarch might want (for example, to appear strong and powerful). You may also consider the monarch’s responsibilities such as the economy, military, religious policy etc.

Ask pupils to sort, analyse and prioritise evidence and information about the crisis facing Elizabeth I in 1560.

Explain aspects of Elizabethan society during the queen’s reign to help contextualise the pupils’ research.

Ask pupils to write (or give orally) a report describing England’s currency problems and an analysis of what caused them.
Ask pupils to work in teams in the decision-making activity as they consider the pros and cons of each possible response to a range of dilemmas faced by Elizabeth I during the crisis. Pupils learn how closely their advice matches against the Queen’s decisions and actions (could be adapted into a game).

Encourage pupils to reflect on what they have learned about Elizabeth I’s reign and her qualities as a monarch, including her effectiveness in dealing with the problems caused by the Great Debasement.

**Background and notes**

**Elizabeth I and the Great Debasement**

Background books and articles:


**More useful links**

A teacher’s guide to visiting the Tower

History at the Tower

Royal Mint Museum education & learning

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**Go further with the Mint...**

**Monarchs and the Mint: Making the nation’s coins at the Tower**

**Introduction resource**

This PowerPoint resource helps you tell the story of the Mint at the Tower so your pupils have a good understanding before they arrive.

**More Key Stage 3 case studies:**

- **Edward I’s coinage crisis**
  
  **Unit 2**
  
  Pupils help the King bring England’s currency problems under control.

- **Kings on Coins: Images from the Mint at the Tower of London**
  
  **Unit 7**
  
  Pupils consider how monarchs from Henry VIII to William III have been depicted.

- **More than money?**
  
  **Unit 8**
  
  How far were coins used as propaganda in the aftermath of England’s civil wars?

Find all resources at hrp.org.uk/towerlearning

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**Coins & Kings**

Schools resources

© Historic Royal Palaces and the Royal Mint Museum
**‘Debasing’ coins means making coins made of little gold or silver mixed with more and more base (cheaper) metals such as copper.**

Some monarchs debase their countries’ coins to raise funds. Mixing in greater amounts of cheaper metal means more coins can be made for less precious gold and silver.

During his reign Henry VIII (1509-47) instructed the Mint to debase new coins with cheaper metals such as copper. He used the money to fund wars and an extravagant lifestyle.

People called Henry VIII ‘Old Coppernose’. As coins made during his reign wore down, their thin silver surfaces faded and cheaper copper would shine through Henry’s portrait.

When people bring silver, gold or foreign coins to the Mint to be turned into English coins, a certain amount is kept as a profit for the monarch. The profit is called ‘seigniorage’.

Edward VI (1547-53) improved the purity of some of his coins, but few were spent. Instead people hoarded the good coins and kept spending the debased ones.

Edward VI (1547-53) declared the face value of debased coins to be worth less so they would match their precious metal content more closely. The public lost over £1 million.

After attempting to reform the currency early in her reign, Mary I (1553-8) resorted to minting more debased coins once she ran out of money.

Tradesmen and farmers are afraid of receiving ‘bad’ money for their goods. They are ignoring laws that regulate prices and are charging high prices to guard against losses.

Life is uncertain for workers. Artisans and labourers get their wages in coins that vary in purity and impurity - which means their true value varies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debased coins have made it easier for poor quality foreign coins to make their way into England’s circulation, as people pass off the foreign coins as English ones.</th>
<th>England’s coins vary in degrees of purity and impurity causing much confusion and distrust. It is making the process of buying and selling very difficult.</th>
<th>Foreign merchants and bankers refuse to accept English coins. Instead they insist on being paid in gold, which has contributed to a gold shortage in England.</th>
<th>The reputation of England’s monarchy is suffering as a result of the Great Debasement.</th>
<th>Some of the Queen’s financial experts believe people will always spend impure, debased coins before they spend coins of pure gold or silver.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public distrust in England’s coins is likely to continue as long as the worth of a penny is artificially greater than the worth of the precious metal of which it is made.</td>
<td>There is a lot of ‘bad’ money being used in England. Realising the coins were debased, people are hoarding older coins with a higher content of precious metal.</td>
<td>Trade relations with other countries have been damaged because of England’s debased currency.</td>
<td>Prices are rising and people have lost faith in England’s coins. Many are finding more advantage in melting down or exporting their debased coins.</td>
<td>Making new coins for the country would be expensive. However, if a recoinage is done efficiently, the Mint could restore the currency and make a profit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>