

SELF-LED ACTIVITY

ROYALS, REBELS AND ROLE PLAY



KS3

Recommended for

KS3 (History, English, Drama)

Learning objectives

- Explore themes of power, loyalty, conflict and rebellion during the Norman period.
- Use role play to consider different options about who should succeed William I as king of England in the months and years following his death.

Time to complete

Approx. 60 minutes



An illustration of a Norman lord, the character this role-play activity is based on.

SUMMARY

During your visit, gather your class on a patch of grass in the inner or outer bailey. Use the historical information entitled 'William's Squabbling Sons' and '1088: A Six-Week Siege' (on page 11) as context for this activity.

Divide students into seven groups (of about four) and give each group one of the seven scenes provided on pages 39–45. Students should decide among themselves which character each will play. Groups of two or three can still do this by sharing out the extra lines. We recommend giving the longer scenes to students who are more confident with reading and performing.

Ask students to spend a few minutes with their group, reading their scene out loud, from start to finish. Answer any questions that arise from this read-through. Let students rehearse their scene, roaming and offering assistance where needed.

CHARACTER IDEAS

Students can use their imaginations to interpret the characters how they wish but here are a few suggestions, if they ask for help:

- **Loyal lords:** well-spoken, slightly nasal, hands on hips, feet wide apart, shoulders back, proud chest, upright posture, looking down nose, long strides, worried facial expression, defensive gestures (shrugging, hands up in defence).
- **Rebel lords:** well-spoken, posh accent, arms crossed, fists clenched, chest and chin lifted, restless feet, pacing back and forth, annoyed facial expression, aggressive gestures (pointing, punching the air).

Finally, get students to sit as an audience. If the grass is wet, students can stand and imagine they are castle crowds witnessing an argument. See the scenes in order, starting with Scene 1.

MORE LEARNING IDEAS

You could continue this work back in the classroom, giving students more time to develop their characters, learn their lines, find costumes and perform for an audience.



SCENE 1

CHARACTERS (4): Loyal lord 1, loyal lord 2, rebel lord 1, rebel lord 2

SETTING: Four Norman lords are standing in a cold castle in England, having an argument. It starts to become heated and a crowd gathers round them. They address the crowd.

Loyal lord 1: *(speaking to audience)* We are brave Norman lords.

Rebel lord 1: We are rich noblemen who fought alongside William the Conqueror and defeated the Anglo-Saxons in the Battle of Hastings.

Loyal lord 2: When we conquered England, King William took English land from the Saxon lords and shared it out among us Norman lords, as a reward for our good service.

Rebel lord 2: We have all been given English land by the king and we pay for it by offering him our services.

Loyal lord 1: *(pointing to rebel lord 1)* I was given more land than him.

Rebel lord 1: Well yes, but my land is better.

Loyal lord 1: No it isn't.

Rebel lord 1: Yes it is.

Loyal lord 1: No it isn't.

Rebel lord 1: *(shouting)* Yes it is!

Loyal lord 2: *(embarrassed, looking at audience)* Er, yes well, anyway... as decent, respectable lords, it is our duty and privilege to serve the king.

Rebel lord 2: We use the land to make money so that we can provide for ourselves and our family. We also support a number of knights.

Loyal lord 2: We do this by loaning bits of our land to other lords lower on the social ladder. Common people called peasants work on the land, looking after it, growing crops and raising animals.

SCENE 2

CHARACTERS (4): Loyal lord 1, loyal lord 2, rebel lord 1, rebel lord 2

SETTING: Four Norman lords are standing in a cold castle in England, having an argument. It starts to become heated and a crowd gathers round them. They address the crowd.

Rebel lord 1: (*speaking to audience*) Our society is like a pyramid, with the king at the top; noblemen like us, plus religious officials, in the middle; knights beneath us; and peasants right at the bottom.

Loyal lord 1: It's a bit unfair on the peasants but we don't care because we are filthy rich and we want to keep it that way.

Rebel lord 2: But enough about us. We've invited you here because we have some incredibly important news to share with you.

All: King William I is dead!

Loyal lord 2: (*upset*) The man who led the Normans to victory and bravely conquered England is gone for ever.

Rebel lord 1: England is in a state of confusion and chaos.

Loyal lord 1: William has three sons: Robert, Henry and William Rufus. He has given his inherited land, Normandy in France, to his eldest son, Robert.

Loyal lord 2: So that's Normandy sorted.

Rebel lord 2: But England is a mess. According to Orderic, an English monk, when he was dying, the king said 'I name no man as my heir to the kingdom of England, but entrust it to God alone.'

SCENE 3

CHARACTERS (4): Loyal lord 1, loyal lord 2, rebel lord 1, rebel lord 2

SETTING: Four Norman lords are standing in a cold castle in England, having an argument. It starts to become heated and a crowd gathers round them. They address the crowd.

Rebel lord 1: Well, you can imagine how confused we are! How on earth do we know what God wants?

Rebel lord 2: Rufus is younger than Robert, so he wouldn't normally stand a chance of being the next king of England.

Loyal lord 1: But he was William's favourite son. Before he died, William expressed a personal hope that Rufus would become the next king.

Rebel lord 1: So Rufus has acted quickly and taken the throne.

All: William Rufus is the new king of England!

Loyal lord 2: Rufus wants to stop his big brother, Robert, Duke of Normandy, from taking control of England too. He's worried because he knows that there are plenty of lords with land in Normandy and England who are on Robert's side.

Rebel lord 1: King William Rufus is very unpopular.

Rebel lord 2: England is restless. I feel anger in the air.

Loyal lord 1: I fear we may have a rebellion on our hands.

Loyal lord 2: *(standing beside the other loyal lord)* We are loyal lords and we believe the king has been chosen by God.

Loyal lords 1 & 2: We support William Rufus, king of England.

Rebel lord 1: *(standing beside the other rebel lord)* We are rebel lords and we believe the eldest brother deserves to rule over England as well as Normandy.

Rebel lords 1 & 2: We support Robert, Duke of Normandy.

SCENE 4

CHARACTERS (4): Loyal lord 1, loyal lord 2, rebel lord 1, rebel lord 2

SETTING: Four Norman lords are standing in a cold castle in England, having an argument. It starts to become heated and a crowd gathers round them. They address the crowd.

Loyal lord 1: *(to the rebel lords)* You brainless buffoons! How could you be so stupid? William the Conqueror made a fair decision when he gave Normandy to his eldest son and entrusted the rest to God.

Loyal lord 2: It must have been God's will for Rufus to take the throne and become the next king of England.

Rebel lord 1: *(offended)* How dare you call me a buffoon? I will not stand here and be insulted by two clueless clowns! In the words of Orderic the monk: 'How can we serve two brothers who are so different and so distant from each other?'

Rebel lord 2: I agree. It doesn't make sense to divide the land between Robert and Rufus. Normandy and England should be united and given to the eldest brother.

Loyal lord 1: But William loved Rufus and he wanted him to succeed as king of England. Doesn't that mean anything to you? We should honour the dying wishes of King William 1.

Rebel lord 2: Why should anyone care about William's dying wishes? He should've been clearer and named Rufus as his heir to the throne, if that's what he wanted. He had his chance and now he's dead.

Rebel lords 1 & 2: *(arrogant)* We can do what we want!

SCENE 5

CHARACTERS (4): Loyal lord 1, loyal lord 2, rebel lord 1, rebel lord 2

SETTING: Four Norman lords are standing in a cold castle in England, having an argument. It starts to become heated and a crowd gathers round them. They address the crowd.

Loyal lord 1: (*calm*) My good lords, let's be reasonable. You have to admit, King Rufus is very generous to his followers. He has promised us as much land and money as we want, as long as we stay loyal. That's an offer we can't refuse.

Rebel lord 1: (*dismissive*) Rubbish! King Rufus has only promised us land and money because he's desperate! He knows that he doesn't deserve to be on the throne and he is desperately trying to bribe us with gifts.

Loyal lord 2: Well sir, even if you are right, we still get gifts out of it! King Rufus is a fine soldier and a generous lord. He sometimes comes across as rude but he has the vision of an expert politician!

Rebel lord 2: (*getting angry*) Then why is England in uproar? We can't just accept things the way they are. Robert is the eldest and deserves to be on the throne. Do you really want things to go on like this? Doing nothing is not an option.

Loyal lord 1: (*in disbelief*) Let me get this straight. Are you seriously suggesting that we kill the king?

SCENE 6

CHARACTERS (4): Loyal lord 1, loyal lord 2, rebel lord 1, rebel lord 2

SETTING: Four Norman lords are standing in a cold castle in England, having an argument. It starts to become heated and a crowd gathers round them. They address the crowd.

Rebel lord 1: We should kill the king. That's what it will take to create the change this country needs.

Rebel lord 2: (*in agreement*) Hear, hear!

Loyal lord 2: (*shocked*) You pompous idiots! We can't murder the king! It would be high treason. The king has threatened to execute rebels in really gruesome ways. God would never forgive us and we'd go to hell.

Rebel lord 2: If I'm going to hell, then so is the king. William Rufus doesn't care about religion or the Church. He uses God's name in vain. He has proved himself to be an immoral tyrant! He should never have been made king in the first place.

Rebel lord 1: We are doing the work of God by removing him from the throne and there are bishops up and down the country who agree with me.

Loyal lord 1: I can't believe what I'm hearing. This is a disgrace!

SCENE 7

CHARACTERS (4): Loyal lord 1, loyal lord 2, rebel lord 1, rebel lord 2

SETTING: Four Norman lords are standing in a cold castle in England, having an argument. It starts to become heated and a crowd gathers round them. They address the crowd.

Loyal lord 2: *(to rebel lords)* Explain something to me. How exactly do you propose to rebel against the most powerful man in England? The king has more money and power than you and your rebellious gaggle of lords.

Loyal lord 1: Well said! Even if you win one battle, you will eventually lose. The English have no sympathy for you. They don't want a French duke to be their king. They support King Rufus.

Rebel lord 1: *(annoyed)* You quivering cowards! You of all people should know! We all have strong, defensive castles.

Rebel lord 2: We built them on the land given to us by William the Conqueror.

Loyal lord 1: Don't be ridiculous. You can't hide away in your castles for ever.

Rebel lord 1: *(in control)* We are highly skilled in the art of attack and defence. Plus, we have the support of important members of the Church. We can work together to defeat the king and put Robert on the throne, where he belongs. You should join us!

Loyal lord 2: You fools! What are you going to do when you run out of supplies? When the cracks start to show, the king will capture you and torture you. Then you'll wish you'd listened to us.

Rebel lord 2: Nonsense! We aren't stupid. If we run out of supplies during a battle, we can live off the land and plunder the surrounding villages. Why don't you join us?

Loyal lord 1: I value my life too much.

Loyal lords 1 & 2: We will never join you.

Rebel lord 1: Well, gentlemen, each lord will have to make up his own mind.

Rebel lords 1 & 2: Good riddance to you and your lousy loyal lords.

Loyal lords 1 & 2: Good riddance!