



Debate: Claim to the Throne

This activity can be used before viewing *Henry V* or at pause point 00:11:55.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explore dynamics of power in *Henry V*
- Identify the political background of *Henry V*
- Conduct research on the Hundred Years' War
- Build arguments around the ideas of lineage and nationalism
- Debate the different sides in the conflict between England and France
- Reflect on the implications of Henry's claim to France

MATERIALS

- Henry's Claim to the Throne Handout (page 3)
- Phases of the Hundred Years' War Handout (page 4)

INSTRUCTIONS

Step One: Have the class read the paragraphs about the French and English claims to the throne in the Henry's Claim to the Throne handout. You can do this individually or as a group.

Step Two: After reading, divide the class into thirds, with one third representing England, one third representing France and one third serving as judges.

Step Three: Allow the groups representing England and France time to write an argument in defense of their claim to the French throne. Have the students serving as judges create a "Pros and Cons" list for granting either country the throne. Judges can predict what arguments both countries might make. If time allows, invite students to use the Phases of the Hundred Years' War handout to research the war and develop more nuanced arguments.

Step Four (Optional): Watch Part One of the *Henry V* film. Using the pause points, ask students to note moments in the production that support the English or the French claim. Consider how stage movement, lighting, costuming and music create a specific point of view.

Step Five: Once the allotted time has passed, ask the groups representing England and France to elect a representative to present their arguments to the judges.

Step Six: After both sides have made their arguments, the judges will deliberate together to reach a majority decision. By show of hands, ask the judges who rules in favor of England and who rules in favor of France. Judges should explain how they came to their individual decisions.

Step Seven: As time allows, use the questions below to discuss the implications of this activity as a class.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you think Henry had a legitimate claim to the throne? What flaws do you find in his logic?
- How would you define “nationalism” in Henry’s time?
- How would you define “patriotism” in Henry’s time? What makes someone “patriotic” in this play?
- What role does nationalism play in determining who has the right to land ownership in this play?
- How do you think this logic compares to present-day claims to rule a country?
- Optional: How do you think Henry’s claim compares to the way leaders are chosen today? Consider the difference between a constitutional monarchy (like the United Kingdom) versus a democracy.

RESOURCES

The Edwardian Phase. Historic UK.

[historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Hundred-Years-War-Edwardian-Phase](https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Hundred-Years-War-Edwardian-Phase)



The Caroline Phase. Historic UK.

[historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Hundred-Years-War-Caroline-Phase](https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Hundred-Years-War-Caroline-Phase)



The Lancastrian Phase. Historic UK.

[historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Hundred-Years-War-Lancastrian-Phase](https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Hundred-Years-War-Lancastrian-Phase)



Henry's Claim to the Throne



DEBATE: CLAIM TO THE THRONE

BACKGROUND

In 1328, Charles IV of France died without a male heir. Two men vied for the title of King of France: Philip, who was Charles' cousin, and Edward, who was Charles' nephew. The Hundred Years' War is the result of that dispute.

THE ENGLISH CLAIM

Henry V's claim to the French throne was rooted in a lineage extending back to his great-grandfather, Edward III (1312–1377), who also sought the crown of France. Edward III asserted his right to the French throne through his mother, Isabella of France (the sister of King Charles IV of France). When Charles IV died without a son, Edward laid claim to the throne, arguing that as Charles' nephew he was the next male heir. This move sparked the Hundred Years' War (inaccurately named, as it extended from 1337–1453). Although Edward's attempts to become King of France were ultimately unsuccessful, his ambitions lingered within the English monarchy. Edward's son John of Gaunt (1340–1399) continued to assert English interests in Europe, marrying a Spanish noblewoman and fortifying his family's claim to power. Gaunt's son, Henry IV (1367–1413), seized the English throne, founding the Lancastrian line, which Henry V inherited. With this legacy behind him, Henry V renewed England's quest for France. By doing so, he was also renewing the Hundred Years' War.

THE FRENCH CLAIM

When Charles IV died without a son, Edward III of England laid claim to the throne via his mother, who was Charles' sister. Yet, Philip of Valois was determined to be the next heir along the male line as Charles' first cousin. He was crowned in May 1328. Since Eleanor of Aquitaine married Henry II in 1152, the duchy of Aquitaine belonged to the English. However, as Duke of Aquitaine, Edward III was technically a vassal to Philip VI of France. However, he refused to vow homage to another king. Philip responded to this lack of duty by confiscating Aquitaine in 1337. In response, Edward declared the French Crown was in fact his, essentially starting the conflict. Despite plague and death, war continued until the Treaty of Brétigny, which gave England around three-quarters of France. In 1369, King Charles V renewed the war to take back the lands France lost. In 1389, the two countries signed the Truce of Leulinghem, establishing a 27-year armistice between the two kingdoms, which should have lasted until 1416. Henry V breaks that truce in 1415 when he invades Normandy.

Phases of the Hundred Years' War

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Explore the three phases of the Hundred Years' War. Each phase is separated by a truce, which did not last.



THE EDWARDIAN PHASE (1337-1360)

In this phase, the English are the aggressors. The Edwardian War was driven by Edward III's ambition to maintain sovereignty in Aquitaine and assert his claim as the rightful king of France by unseating his rival, Philip VI of France. It ended with the Treaty of Brétigny, which gave Edward about one-third of France in exchange for renouncing his claim to the French throne.



THE CAROLINE PHASE (1369-1389)

In this phase, the French take back what they lost in the Edwardian Phase. The Caroline War was named after Charles V of France, who resumed the war after the Treaty of Brétigny, which restored lands to Charles.



THE LANCASTRIAN PHASE (1415-1453)

In this phase (which we see in *Henry V*), Henry and the English are the aggressors. The Lancastrian War lasted from 1415, when Henry V of England invaded Normandy, to 1453, when the English failed to recover Bordeaux. Henry's quest was ultimately unsuccessful.