

# ROBERT BOLT'S *A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS*

## CURRICULUM UNIT

© CTMS

NOTE: The following material was created by Dr. Ellen Carney, literature teacher at Bronxville High School, New York.

### *Contents*

- I. Essay Topics for A Man for All Seasons
- II. Preparation for Essay Test
- III. Review Questions, by act and scene
- IV. Background on the Renaissance
- V. Renaissance Project

### **I. Essay topics for A Man for all Seasons**

- It is difficult for an author to portray a good character, yet Robert Bolt in his play, *A Man for All Seasons*, presents Thomas More as a hero who is at once larger than life yet truly human. Using specific references to the text, show how Bolt's More attracts the audience's admiration.
- The title of Robert Bolt's play indicates Thomas More's constancy. In the play, More is faced with not just one but several characters who challenge his viewpoint. Illustrate what aspects of More's character each of these challenges highlight while at the same time he remains faithful to his convictions.
- One of the most interesting characters in *A Man for All Seasons* is the common man. Called the "master statesman of us all," his functions in the play are manifold. Discuss his perspicacious and tantalizing character.

### **II. Preparation for essay test on A Man for All Seasons**

1. Common Man

- Give two examples of the Common Man according to these 5 functions: 1-to give historical background to the story; 2-to foretell events that were to come later; 3-to introduce comic relief into a serious drama; 4-to comment on the character involved; 5-to give advice to the audience.
2. Explain the significance of the title as it refers to Sir Thomas More.
  3. Define “a fair weather friend.” List 5 characters from the play whom you would characterize as a “fair weather friend.” (cite examples from the play)
  4. Qualities of Sir Thomas More. Identify as many qualities as you can which describe Sir Thomas More. Give an example to illustrate each one (at least 10).
  5. More’s wit is evidenced throughout the play as is his philosophy, humor, irony, sympathy, prudence, etc. Find examples of the versatility and richness of his character as reflected in the dialogue of the play (witty; philosophical; humorous; poetic—using images and metaphors; logical—using reasoned arguments; ironic; accurate or true; satirical; sympathetic; insightful, penetrating—reading character; prudent; steady—nonplussed, controlled, unruffled.)
  6. Tests and Trials. Many characters in the play try to change More’s opinion. What types of trials does More undergo (from Wolsey, Rich, Cromwell, Norfolk, Margaret, Alice, Henry, etc). List below the various people who test More and explain the appeal each makes.
  7. Trial Scene. How is More’s skill as a lawyer apparent in the “mock trial” he is subjected to? How does this skill contrast with Cromwell’s line of reasoning when he wants to implicate More? Find and list examples from the play.

### III. A Man for All Seasons -- Review Questions

#### ACT ONE

##### I. pp. 3-17 - Home of Sir Thomas More

1. What does the minor incident of the steward drinking More’s wine and More’s reaction to him show the audience about Sir Thomas More?
2. Richard Rich says “every man has his price.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What does More think of this idea? (base your answer on the text, p.5)
3. What does More advise Rich to do with his life as his profession? Why does Rich not like this idea?
4. What is the symbolic point of the falcon/heron incident Norfolk and Alice discuss?
5. How is it that the Steward knows Rich (this early in the play) is a contemptible character?

##### II. pp. 17-24 - Wolsey and More

1. What is the basic irony prevalent in this scene?

2. Wolsey says to More that he would be successful if More “could just see facts flat on, without that horrible moral squint, with just a little common sense.” What does he really object to and what does he really mean by “horrible moral squint” and “common sense?”
3. What is the political problem the two are discussing? What is the Cardinal’s proposal as a solution and what is More’s?
4. More states: “I believe, when statesmen forsake their own private conscience for the sake of their public duties...they lead their country by a short route to chaos.” Do you agree?
5. Wolsey tells More he “should have been a cleric.,” to which More replies “Like yourself, Your Grace.” What does More mean?

### III. pp. 24-29 - More, Cromwell, Chapuys, Boatman

1. What do both Cromwell and Chapuys want from More?
2. Who is Chapuys?
3. What is the point of telling the audience of the discrepancy in fees for rowing the boat from Richmond to Chelsea and vice versa?

### IV. pp. 24-35 - More’s home

1. Why doesn’t More give permission for his daughter Margaret to marry Will Roper?
2. How do Lady Alice and her daughter Margaret get along?

### V. pp. 35-43 - Cromwell, Rich, Chapuys, Steward

1. What is it, exactly, that Cromwell does for King Henry VIII?
2. How have Rich’s fortunes “improved”?
3. Why does Chapuys correct Cromwell on the number of guns and where King Henry is going?
4. When Chapuys says “Sir Thomas is a good son of the Church!,” Cromwell replies: “Sir Thomas is a man.” What does he mean?
5. The Steward gets money from several people in this scene. Who are they and why do they give him money? What does the Steward mean when he says “The great thing’s not to get out of your depth”?

### VI. pp. 43-89 - King Henry’s visit to Chelsea

1. Alice and Margaret can’t find More at the beginning of this scene. Where is he? What do we learn about him?
2. What does the audience learn about King Henry from his interview of Margaret?

3. What is the relationship between the King and More at the beginning of their conversation? What does the King think of More? Why does he get angry? What do you think of More's answers to the King? What character traits does More show here?
4. Why does the King leave so abruptly?
5. What does More mean when he says "there's a little.. little area.. where I must rule myself?"
6. Will Roper's views on religion have changed since his previous scene. What does he now believe?
7. Roper and More argue over the role of the law. What does Roper think should be done and what is More's opinion of the law?
8. Why is Rich not trusted?

## VII. pp. 69-77 - The Pub scene

1. What post is Rich offered by Cromwell? What does he give Cromwell in return for this position?
2. Cromwell tells Rich he lost his innocence "some time ago.. you've only just noticed..." What does this tell you about both Cromwell and Rich?
3. Is it odd that both Cromwell and Rich call More "innocent" and mean that word as a true evaluation of More's character? What does this assessment tell you about both these men?
4. What does Cromwell's action with the candle at the end of the scene tell you about the man?

## ACT TWO

### I. pp. 81-98 More's household

1. What does The Act of Supremacy state?
2. What is the "legal quibble" Roper speaks of in regard to The Act? (p. 83)
3. Why doesn't More like being called a saint by Chapuys?
4. What does Chapuys discuss with More? How does More treat Chapuys?
5. Norfolk accuses More of cowardice for resigning the Chancellorship. What answer does More give to him?
6. To what is Norfolk referring when he says to More (p. 91) "This isn't Spain, you know."
7. Why is More afraid?
8. What was "The Pilgrimage of Grace"?
9. What is Lady Alice afraid of in this scene? (p. 95)
10. Why doesn't More simply tell his family what his opinions are? (p. 95ff)
11. How does More treat his Steward? Is he sincere when he says "I shall miss you, Matthew"?
12. What does the Steward mean when he says "I nearly fell for it"?

II. pp. 98-105 - Cromwell, Rich, Norfolk

1. How is it that, as Cromwell says, “This ‘silence’ of his is bellowing up and down Europe!”?
2. Norfolk states his opinion of Thomas More as a judge. What is it? (p. 99)
3. Cromwell and Rich discuss the Italian cup More gave to Rich. What are they trying to do and what does Norfolk discover about the situation?
4. Cromwell says: “My dear Norfolk.. .This isn’t Spain.” What does he mean? What does the audience think of?
5. What does Matthew the Steward mean when he says of Rich “Oh, I can manage this one! He’s just my size!”

III. pp. 105-113 More’s family in penury

1. What is life like now at Sir Thomas More’s home?
2. What does Chapuys want and how does Sir Thomas treat him?
3. Why can’t More accept money from the Bishops?
4. Why is he confident even though in the next scene he is going to see Cromwell?

IV. pp. 113-129 Interrogation of More by Cromwell

1. How does Cromwell treat More in this scene? How does More treat Cromwell?
2. There are many references to “conscience” in this scene. What, according to Cromwell, is the King’s concern with “conscience”? What is More’s relationship to conscience?

V. pp. 120-126 - More, Norfolk

1. Why does More break off his friendship with Norfolk?
2. What does More say friendship?
3. The real key to More’s character lies in his answer to Norfolk which begins “Affection goes as deep in me. ..self.” What is More’s “real self” and to whom does he hold the strongest allegiance?
4. More gives some strong arguments to Norfolk on the laziness and cowardice of the nobility in England at this time. Find two quotes in particular on p. 123 which show More’s argument.
5. At the end of the scene, More meets Margaret and Roper. Why does he want to know the specific wording of the Act of Supremacy? What is the Act of Supremacy?
6. More says (p. 126) that “God made the angels to show him splendor.. .animals for innocence and plants for their simplicity. But Man he made to serve him wittily in the tangle of his mind.” What is More planning?

VI. pp. 126-137 More is interrogated in prison

1. What does iniquitous mean?
2. Outline the ways Cromwell tries to trap More in this scene.
3. How is Cranmer (the new Archbishop of Canterbury) shown to be as worldly a cleric as Wolsey?
4. What is More able to make Norfolk see that Cromwell couldn't make clear to the Duke?
5. Does More condemn Norfolk and the others? (see p. 132)
6. Why is More denied more books?
7. Why is the Jailer alarmed at the 50 guineas offered to him?

VII. pp. 137-147 More's family visit him in prison

1. Meg is under oath to persuade More to sign the Oath. By what clever arguments does she try to make him swear to the Oath? What are his replies?
2. More says "Well.. .finally. . .it isn't a matter of reason; finally it is a matter of love." What does he mean?
3. How is Meg crueler than King Henry in this scene?
4. More shows that he loves his wife Alice but doesn't know how to approach her. What does he say that makes her so upset?
5. At the end of this scene, Alice, who is bewildered and angry, yells at her husband but also shows she loves him. What does she say and do?
6. More, in his anguish, excoriates "These plain, simple men!" Why do the Jailer and those like him (the plain, simple men) stand condemned by More?

VIII. pp. 147-160 The trial scene

1. What are the ramifications of the word "silent" and "silence" in this scene?
2. More shows he knows the law very well in this scene. Cite several instances of his knowledge and his excellent verbal fencing.
3. Why (by what specific lines in the scene) is it so obvious that Rich is lying?
4. Finally, when all else has failed, More speaks his mind and gives his opinion on the Act of Parliament and on the marriage of King Henry to Queen Anne. What does he say?
5. More's own epitaph could be summed up in the lines he says "I do none harm, I say none harm, I think none harm." How is there evidence in this scene that he truly does what he says here?
6. What lines strike you in this scene as especially memorable? Cite several and explain them.

IX. pp. 160-161 More's execution

1. What three significant incidents does Robert Bolt relate about the execution of More in this scene? What are More's thoughts and feelings, do you think, about his death from the evidence of these incidents?
2. What does the Common Man mean when he says "If we should bump into one another, recognize me."?

#### IV. The Renaissance: Background for A Man For All Seasons

Characters and Events of the Renaissance:

Martin Luther	Thomas Cromwell	Wars of the Roses	Donatello
King Richard III	Oliver Cromwell (17th century)	Wyatt and Surrey	Leonardo da Vinci
King Henry VII	Mary Tudor	Mary Stuart	Columbus
King Henry VIII	Elizabeth I	Michelangelo	Raphael
Catherine of Aragon	Edward VI	John Milton (17th century)	John Donne
Anne Boleyn	Erasmus	Spanish Armada	Roger Ascham
Jane Seymour	William Cecil	Cardinal Wolsey	Edmund Spenser
Anne of Cleves	Boccaccio	Humanism	Hans Holbein
Catherine Howard	Edmund Spenser	Philip II of Spain	95 Theses
Catherine Parr	Machiavelli	Petrarch	More's Utopia
William Shakespeare	Lorenzo de Medici	Giotto	Protestant Reformation
Thomas More	Francis Drake		

#### V. Renaissance Project

You will prepare a 5 minute oral presentation on the character or event of your choice. You will need to consult at least three sources to get sufficient background. (You will hand in your notes for the presentation) and you will need to read at least one book on your topic.

Here is some of the information you will need to give your audience:

- a. Dates of the event or of the character's life
- b. The relationship between your character and either King Henry VIII, Thomas More, or the Renaissance in general
- c. The contributions or special concern of your character or event (e.g. did he write a noted book? If a king or queen, what are the dates of the reign and what historical events did he/she influence?)

d. Personal anecdotes—some interesting details of the life or some statistic, some unusual and memorable occurrence(s)

e. Why you chose the character/event and what you think after your research

Later, you will write a book report on the novel or non-fiction work you chose.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Person studied: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of book read: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher and date of publication: \_\_\_\_\_

### Book Report on a Biography from the Renaissance

You have been reading a biography of an interesting character who lived during the Renaissance, either in England or in Europe. Consider now several key points in the life. Your task is to choose seven examples from that person's life and explain both why those incidents were crucial and what you thought of them. Give enough background so your reader can understand the circumstances that influenced your person's decision or growth, and illustrate what he or she did that was so significant. Finally, explain in detail why you chose each example. Give dates and the age of the person at the time, note the significance of their actions (or others' actions upon them) and relate freely your reaction. Seven full and complete paragraphs are expected with appropriate headings.