

Grade Twelve: Theology
Course: Western Philosophy
Text: *A Man for All Seasons*
Author: Robert Bolt

Main Characters

The Common Man
Sir Thomas More
Richard Rich
The Duke of Norfolk
Alice More

Margaret More
Cardinal Wolsey
Thomas Cromwell
Signor Chapuys, the
Spanish Ambassador

William Roper
King Henry VIII
Cranmer, Archbishop of
Canterbury

Character Reflections

1. Who is the Common Man? What different roles does he play? What do they all have in common?
2. What is Thomas More's occupation? What virtues is he known for? Describe his relationship with King Henry at the beginning of the play.
3. Who is King Henry VIII? What is his predicament? Why does this present a problem for his ministers?
4. How does Thomas More's family look at him? What is his relationship with his daughter, Margaret, like?
5. What is the nature of Thomas More's friendship with the Duke of Norfolk? How are they different from each other? How does their friendship change by the end of the play?
6. Who is Richard Rich? What advice does Thomas give him? Why does he refuse to take this advice? How does he "lose his innocence"?
7. Why does King Henry so greatly desire Thomas's approval of his divorce from Catherine of Aragon?
8. Why does Thomas refuse to share with his family and friends his opinion about the King's actions?
9. Who is William Roper? Why does Thomas initially refuse to give his daughter to him in marriage? In what way are he and Thomas very different? How are they the same?
10. Why does More's steward react with surprise and perhaps bitterness when his master says he will miss him?
11. Who is Thomas Cromwell? How would you compare his service to the king with More's? How does he regard More?
12. How does Thomas regard the Spanish Ambassador? In what way does the Spanish Ambassador misunderstand him?

Key Themes

1. How does this play represent a conflict between political and spiritual power? What kind of power does More grant Henry? What power does he deny to him?
2. Why is the law so important to Thomas More? Why does he react so harshly when Roper condemns the law and encourages Thomas to break it?
3. Why does More value so highly the freedom of conscience? Why is it so important to him as a Christian? Why is it so important to him as a citizen of the realm? Why is it so important to him as a scholar?
4. Do you think Cromwell is right when he describes King Henry as a man “of conscience”? Why must Thomas give his consent to the King's actions or else be destroyed?
5. In prison, Thomas says, “But since in fact we see that avarice, anger, envy, pride, sloth, lust and stupidity commonly profit far beyond humility, chastity, fortitude, justice, and thought, and have to choose, to be human at all . . . why then perhaps we *must* stand fast a little—even at the risk of being heroes.” What does he mean by this?

Summary Questions

1. In what way is Thomas More a “man for all seasons”?
2. How does Thomas treat his family? Do you think they have any just complaints against him?
3. Do you think that Thomas is right to refuse to speak openly about his beliefs? Should he have taken a more active role in expressing his displeasure with the King? Was he acting cowardly by not speaking more directly about what he believes?
4. How does Thomas's persecution compare to Jesus's Passion?
5. Who deserves the blame for Thomas's unjust punishment?
6. Did Thomas More die in vain? Should he have made more of an effort to avoid imprisonment and execution?
7. To what extent does Henry VIII triumph in the play? To what extent do Rich and Cromwell triumph?