



Student  
Notes

## **Key topic 3: Elizabethan society in the Age of Exploration, 1558–88**

### **1 Education and leisure**

- Education in the home, schools and universities.
- Sport, pastimes and the theatre.

### **2 The problem of the poor**

- The reasons for the increase in poverty and vagabondage during these years.
- The changing attitudes and policies towards the poor.

### **3 Exploration and voyages of discovery**

- Factors prompting exploration, including the impact of new technology on ships and sailing and the drive to expand trade.
- The reasons for, and significance of, Drake's circumnavigation of the globe.

### **4 Raleigh and Virginia**

- The significance of Raleigh and the attempted colonisation of Virginia.
- Reasons for the failure of Virginia.

# What was education like?

New thinkers called humanists began to think that more people should be educated because learning was important.

Protestants thought that people should be able to read the Bible themselves, and so encouraged reading.

Nobles wanted boys and girls to be well educated, learning languages, government, history and philosophy, horse riding and dancing.

They would often sent to live with another noble for a number of years to finish learning.

Noble boys would also learn more “manly” sports such as wrestling and archery , while girls would learn “feminine” needlework and music.

The development of the printing press also made education and the circulation of ideas easier. It also meant more people had access to reading material.

Grammar schools were developed for middle class boys and became the largest provider of education, overtaking the basic education provided by the Church.

Subjects in Grammar schools included Languages, History, Philosophy, Morals and Sport. Debating was also seen as essential for an English Gentleman.

Grammar schools mainly taught boys who were considered bright from the local well-off families in the town and fees were based on income. Some poor boys got to attend for free.

# What was education like?

For most middle class boys, their education depended on whether their families wanted to send them to school at all and whether they could afford to.

A few grammar schools also ran courses for the sons of merchants, craftsmen and even yeoman farmers.

They would learn more practical subjects such as Reading, Writing, Maths and Geography. This might be combined with an apprenticeship.

Before grammar school, boys would attend a Petty School in a teacher's house, learning the basics of English and Maths.

By 1577, every town in England had a grammar school.

Girls were not allowed to attend grammar schools.

Middle class girls would attend Dame School if their parents wanted and could afford it. This was a female version of a Petty School.

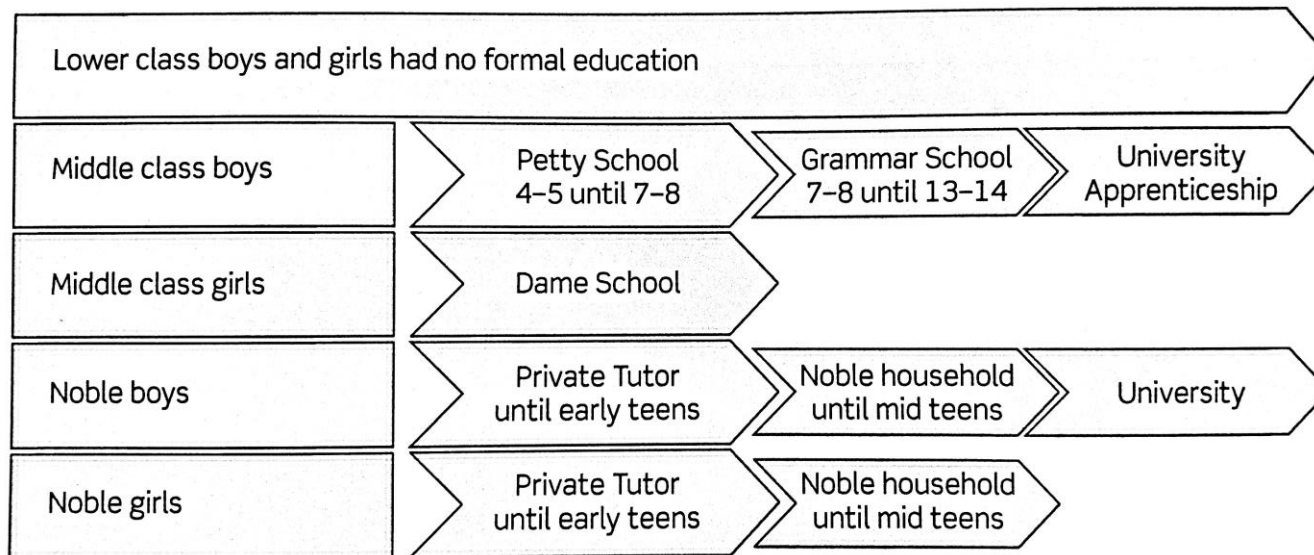
Girls were mostly expected to learn at home after Dame School. How to be a wife and mother involved learning how to preserve food, bake, sew, brew and treat injuries and illnesses.

# What was the impact of Elizabethan schools?

By 1603, 30% of men could read and write, compared to 20% in the 1530s. Women stayed at 10%.

As more boys were educated, there started to be a change in what jobs they could get, although this was still usually within their “class”.

Those who could afford it became more likely to go to university, as the Elizabethans set up more colleges at Oxford and Cambridge in order to educate more students.



*It is important not to exaggerate these changes. For most people, education was still limited to training them for their place in life. In the countryside, where most people were still farming as a way of life, very little changed.*



# What did people do for fun?

	Sport	Pastimes
Nobility and Gentry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hunting on horseback, with hounds</li> <li>• Hawking</li> <li>• Fishing</li> <li>• Fencing (men only)</li> <li>• Real tennis (men only)</li> <li>• Bowls (men only)</li> <li>• Wrestling in private (men only)</li> <li>• Watching and betting on wrestling matches by working people</li> <li>• Watching and betting on tennis.</li> <li>• Watching and betting on bear or bull baiting or cock-fighting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading and writing books was popular among the educated. Religion and History were popular subjects.</li> <li>• Going to the new theatres to see this new literature performed. Elizabeth had banned the old “mystery plays” which meant non-religious theatre flourished.</li> <li>• There were expensive seats to be seen from in the new, purpose built theatres in places like Southwark, London.</li> <li>• Because of this new demand to build theatres and create plays, the nobility sponsored acting companies. The Earl of Leicester even had his own company, Leicester’s men.</li> <li>• Playing music and dancing. Expensive instruments such as lutes (like guitars) and harpsichords (like pianos) were available and new instruments were being invented.</li> <li>• Listening to music. Some rich people employed musicians for their houses.</li> </ul>
Working people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playing football: although the aim (to score a goal) was the same as today there were practically no other rules. Death was common. (men only)</li> <li>• Wrestling in public (men only)</li> <li>• Watching and betting on wrestling matches.</li> <li>• Watching and betting on bear or bull baiting or cock-fighting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going to the news theatres to see this new literature performed. Elizabeth had banned the old “mystery plays” which meant secular theatre flourished. There were cheap tickets available to stand in the “pit”.</li> <li>• Playing music and dancing. Cheaper instruments like bagpipes and fiddles were popular.</li> <li>• Listening to music at fairs, public events, church, taverns and even in the streets. Troubadours learnt the new songs written for the new plays.</li> </ul>

In a society where everyone knew their “place”, beggars or vagabonds wandering around towns were dangerous. If they got too unhappy, they might rebel.

People worried that vagabonds spread diseases like the Plague.

Puritans thought that idleness was the work of the Devil and that hard work helped get people in to Heaven.

## Why were Elizabethans worried about Poverty?

Vagabonds often turned to crime. This made people unhappy and worried, and Elizabeth worried this made her country a bad place to live.

Someone like Mary, Queen of Scots, might promise to help the poor to get them on side during a rebellion to get rid of Elizabeth.

Some began to think that the deserving poor needed help, and the idle poor should be punished.

The rich had a duty to control and care for those who fell on hard times. Many did, but by Elizabeth’s reign there were so many poor people that they simply could not help them all.

Unfortunately, we do not know what the poor themselves thought.

# Why were people poor?

## **Long-term factors:**

- Rural enclosure – this meant that farmers got rid of the old system of having men farm “strips” of land and put hedges around new fields. These new fields also closed off the old “common land”
- The value of the wool industry meant that farmers replaced crop farming with sheep. This made more money and required less workers.
- Because sheep farmers made more money, land lords put the rent on their farms up.
- Price inflation caused by Henry VIII replacing gold coins with coins made from cheaper metals. This meant merchants put the prices up so that they felt they were getting the right amount of money for their products.
- For most people, wages did not go up.
- A rising population. The population finally began to get back up to “normal” after the Black Death of 1348.
- Monasteries closing under Henry VIII meant people had no where to go for help.

## **Short-term factors:**

- High levels of taxation to help deal with problems such as war, including ship building.
- Bad harvests of the 1550s and 1560s.
- Elizabeth’s trade embargo with Spain and the Netherlands hit England’s economy, as England had to stop selling some products.

# What were the solutions?

## **The Vagabonds Act 1572:**

- Any found guilty whipped and burnt through right ear.
- Second offence, sent to prison.
- Persistent offenders executed.
- Children of vagabonds to be put in to domestic service.
- Local Justices of the Peace were ordered to keep a register of the poor in their parish and set up a tax to help people in need,

## **Act for the Relief of the Poor 1576:**

- Towns must find work for the able poor.
- Anyone refusing the work sent to prison.



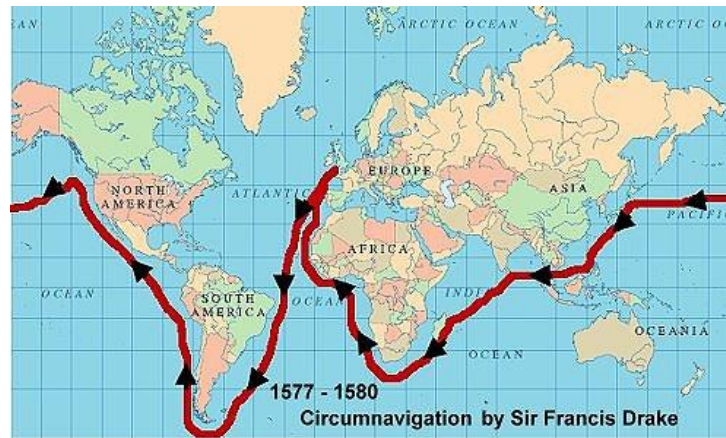
An English merchant who made his name and fortune trading in the New World. He made huge sums of money for people who invested in his voyages, including Elizabeth.

Much of what he did could be considered as piracy. For example, in 1570-71 he captured numerous Spanish ships and seized their cargo. In 1672 Elizabeth made him a privateer and he captured £40 000 of Spanish silver.

This was risky for Elizabeth as it could have provoked further conflict with Spain. This was only avoided on Drake's return in 1573 because Elizabeth and Philip were actively trying to improve relations, and so Elizabeth did not publicly welcome Drake home.

## Sir Francis Drake

Elizabeth publicly knighted Drake on the deck of the Golden Hind. Philip II was outraged by this public display. He considered Drake a pirate who had stolen £400 000 of Spanish treasure on this journey and conquered parts of North Carolina.



Drake 1577-80 voyage became very famous because his actual route home led him to **circumnavigate** (travel all the way around) the globe. This was very dangerous and he was only the second person to do it. His ship, the Golden Hind, was the only one of five ships to return.

In November 1577 Drake set off again, this time with secret orders from Elizabeth to attack Spanish colonies. Relations were getting worse with Spain and so Elizabeth was trying to get the upper hand by disrupting Spanish trade and at the same time making more money. It also sent a message of defiance to Philip II.

# Why did overseas exploration grow?

Spain was making lots of money and becoming even more powerful because of gold and silver mined in the New World. As relationships with Spain got worse, the English aimed to disrupt this and compete.

New technologies were making navigation far easier, including the new charts with latitude and longitude and an astrolabe to work them out with. Also, a new type of compass was making navigating the seas more accurate.

New ships such as galleons and caravels had been invented which were stronger, lighter, faster and could carry more. They also had better sails and artillery.

As more and more people visited the New World, they brought back maps and advice.

Many rich people were prepared to put money in to voyages in order to make more money, especially from attacking Spanish ships, even though this was technically piracy.

Once the wool trade collapsed, new trading partners and ideas had to be found, often in far away countries like India, leading to the East India Trading Company being set up. Also, the start of the triangular trade in slaves from Africa.

Converting natives of these new lands to Christianity.

An increasing understanding of the world led to a thirst for knowledge. This was helped by the printing press.

England had excellent and well trained seamen such as Drake and Hawkins who inspired their men.

# How did Sir Walter Raleigh try to colonise Virginia?

## The first attempt to colonise America.

- Raleigh was a favourite at court.
- Elizabeth gave him permission to explore the coast of North America in 1584.
- He said he would name this Virginia, and Elizabeth gave him rights to do what he liked in the area provided it was not already taken by other Europeans.
- In 1585, he sent Ralph Lane with 108 men to make a settlement on Roanoke Island.
- They built a fort but unfortunately clashed with the Native Americans.
- Lane was forced to abandon his fort in June 1586, when his starving men were rescued by Drake.

## The second attempt.

- The second time Raleigh sent men to Virginia, he tried to learn from problems of the first attempt: he sent families of farmers, not soldiers.
- They were lead by John White in 1587.
- They were heading to a better bay, Chesapeake, but hurricanes forced them to land at Roanoke.
- It was too late in the year to plant seeds, and the natives were hostile.
- White returned to England for more supplies, but was not allowed to return to Roanoke because his ship was needed for defence against the Armada.
- When he finally got back to Roanoke in 1590, the settlers had vanished.
- The colonists were never seen again. They are known as the “Lost Colonists”

# Was Raleigh's attempt to colonise Virginia a success?

No	Yes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Food supplies did not survive the journeys</li><li>2. Colonists depended on Native Americans for food.</li><li>3. Relationships with Native Americans got worse.</li><li>4. Many people faced starvation.</li><li>5. Seeds were sown at the wrong time of year.</li><li>6. Lack of a good harbour (which could have been build at Chesapeake Bay.)</li><li>7. Disease.</li><li>8. The Spanish Armada stopped fresh supplies and men from getting back.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The English learnt valuable lessons to help them colonise America in the future.</li><li>2. The expeditions had captured Spanish treasure ships.</li><li>3. They gave ideas for new trades, such as the potato.</li><li>4. Increased knowledge of the sea routes and the coastline of North America.</li><li>5. Thomas Hariot, who went on the 1585 expedition, wrote books describing the plants, animals and minerals available.</li><li>6. John White's paintings also helped people learn about the New World.</li></ol>