

**Warmer – Talking about capital punishment**



*Look at the painting and discuss the questions with a partner.*

- a)** What do you think is happening here?
- b)** What crimes do you think were punishable by death in Shakespeare's times? Make a list.

**Task 1 – Types of capital punishment in Shakespeare's time**

*Match the types of capital punishment with their description.*

Being beheaded	Being burnt at the stake	Being hanged, drawn and quartered	Being hanged
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- a.** This was often used to punish witches. The accused was placed underneath the gallows on a horse-drawn cart. A noose was then tied around his/her neck. The horse was then ridden away and the person was left hanging. They died of strangulation – it was a slow and horrible death.
- b.** This punishment chopped the person's head off their body with an axe. It was usually kept for people from the nobility, e.g. kings and queens. This kind of execution was not usually public. If you were very unlucky you might get an executioner who was not very good at his job: it might take a few tries to remove your head.
- c.** A long wooden pole was placed on top of a fire and the accused was tied to the stick. The person would usually suffocate from the smoke. This punishment symbolised the hell fires which were waiting for the 'criminal'.
- d.** This was your punishment if you were convicted of plotting to kill the king or queen. The person was hanged until nearly dead. Next, their insides were pulled (drawn) from them and thrown on the fire. After that, they were beheaded. Finally the body was cut into four pieces (quartered) and these body parts were publically displayed as a warning to others.

**Task 2 – Read all about it!**

Look at the first page of this newspaper from November 1583. Read the main article and choose the best headline for it.

- a. Plot to kill Queen a “one-off” incident
- b. Crazy Catholic gang “asking for trouble”
- c. “No need to panic” say police

**The Olde Worlde News****November 22, 1583****Long live Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth**

Officials have been working around the clock to ensure our Queen’s safety, after a dangerous gunman and known lunatic publicly plotted to assassinate Her Majesty. The alarm was raised after several villagers near Stratford upon Avon saw John Somerville armed with a gun and making violent and treasonous threats in the village square. Somerville has since been moved to the high security prison at the Tower of London with his wife, Mary. Both have been tried on charges of treason and will soon be sentenced to a slow and painful death.

A senior official is leading the criminal investigation and believes that this is not an isolated incident. “This is not just a one-off: it’s a Catholic plot to kill the Queen and put Mary Queen of Scots on the throne. Well, if these Catholics want to ask for trouble, they’ve got it.”

Operation “Catholic Clean-up” has already started, and several Catholic families have already been arrested. The Arden family is currently being questioned in connection with the incident.

Edward Arden’s neighbour, Edward Greene, witnessed the raid on the Arden family home. “It was a bit of a shock to tell you the truth,” he said. “They took Edward in the middle of the night, then a day or so later they came back for his wife and his daughter, Margaret. The family priest got frightened and dressed up as a gardener, but they saw right through that and arrested him as well. They’re at the Tower of London now; I’d be surprised if I saw them again.”

Greene’s wife, Mrs Anne Greene, sees things differently. “These are terrible days for the Catholic folk,” she says. “It’s not safe for them. Catholic families everywhere are being arrested, tortured and killed. You don’t need to have done anything wrong – it’s enough just to be Catholic.”

**Task 3 – Words and phrases which mean the same**

Match the underlined words and phrases with the definitions below.

- a. planned to kill
- b. saw the police come and break into the Arden's house
- c. accused of saying or doing something against the king or queen
- d. badly hurt by someone so that they would confess to something they had done
- e. this is not an isolated incident
- f. an old-fashioned and offensive term for a person with a mental illness

**Task 4 – Checking understanding**

Read the article again and discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Do you think John Somerville was a danger to Queen Elizabeth? Why/Why not?
2. What reason was given for the arrest of John Somerville's wife?
3. What does the senior official leading the investigation think that the Catholics want?
4. Why is the Arden family being questioned?
5. Why do you think the priest disguised himself as a gardener?
6. Why does Mr Greene not expect to see his neighbours again?

**Task 5 – Talking about capital punishment**

Discuss the following in small groups.

- Your teacher will give you information about different people. Decide which of these people would have been criminals in Shakespeare's times and how they would have been punished.
- Do you think that there is ever any justification for capital punishment?
- Is our society much less violent than the society Shakespeare lived in? Why/Why not?