**Spartacus Educational Classroom Activity**

# Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (Questions & Answers)

<http://spartacus-educational.com/ExAnTEU24.htm>

**Q1**: Study sources 2, 3 and 4. One of these sources provides inaccurate information about Thomas Wolsey. Explain why the author might have made this mistake.

**A1**: In source 2 [Raphael Holinshed](http://spartacus-educational.com/Raphael_Holinshed.htm) claims that "Thomas Wolsey was a poor man's son". [Jasper Ridley](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1466429/Jasper-Ridley.html) points out in source 3 that his father was only a yeoman farmer but his mother, Joan Daundy came from a wealthy family. After his marriage he became a successful businessman. Wolsey's biographer, [Sybil M. Jack](http://sydney.edu.au/arts/about/deans/smjack.shtml) (source 4) reveals that Thomas Wolsey had an expensive education. She speculates that this was paid for by his mother's family.

It is possible that Holinshed just made a mistake. However, it is also possible that he knew that Wolsey was not a poor man's son. Sometimes historians are guilty of exaggerating an individual's poverty in an attempt to make their success in life seem more dramatic.

**Q2**: Historians have different views on why Thomas Wolsey became Henry VIII's most important advisor. Compare the different views of the historians who produced sources 6, 7, 8 and 9.

**A2**: Most historians agree that when Wolsey was first employed by Henry VIII he worked very hard and had a great deal of energy and stamina (source 6, 7, 8). Wolsey also made sure he did what Henry wanted. Jasper Ridley quotes George Cavendish that "whereas the other ministers advised Henry to do what they thought he ought to do, Wolsey found out what Henry wanted to do, and then advised him to do it." (source 8) Cavendish points out that Wolsey charmed Henry with his "special gift of natural eloquence" which enabled him "to persuade and allure all men to his purpose". (source 9)

**Q3**: Sources 8, 10 and 15 refer to the biography written by [George Cavendish](http://spartacus-educational.com/George_Cavendish.htm). Read about Cavendish and explain why historians rely heavily on the work. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using Cavendish's book as a source of information on Thomas Wolsey.

**A3**: George Cavendish worked for Thomas Wolsey for nearly ten years. After the death of Wolsey in 1530 he retired to Suffolk. Between 1554 and 1558 he wrote [The Life and Death of Thomas Wolsey](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B00NKMG1QC?ie=UTF8&tag=blogccasion&link_code=as2&camp=2486&creative=8946&creativeASIN=B00NKMG1QC). In his book Cavendish draws on his observations and experiences in the cardinal's household to offer a portrait that has been acclaimed as the first major English biography. [A. S. G. Edwards](http://www.kent.ac.uk/english/staff/tedwards.html) points out "It remains the most important single contemporary source for Wolsey's life, as well as offering a detailed picture of early sixteenth-century court life and of political events in the 1520s." The main disadvantage for the historian is that Cavendish considered Wolsey as his friend and is not very critical of him.

**Q4**: Use the information in sources 10, 11 and 12 to describe the good and bad qualities of Thomas Wolsey.

**A4**:

Good Qualities:

Wanted to help the poor: "As lord chancellor he sought better law enforcement (and) justice for the poor". (source 10)

Education: "He promoted education, and made his household a place where men of intelligence and ability learned how to serve the state." (source 12)

Tolerance: "He was also tolerant, preferring to burn heretical books rather than the heretics themselves." (source 12)

Bad Qualities:

Extravagant: "Wolsey's buildings, chapels, art collections, and projected tomb, as well as the style and size of his household, marked conscious attempts to rival Henry". (source 10)

Did not always finish off the job: "What he started, he rarely completed; he worked in fits and starts" (source 10)

Loyal to the Papacy: "In England, moreover, papal power had come to mean the power of the Legate Thomas Wolsey...His wars and diplomacy, which had been expensive and inglorious, had almost all been either pro-papal or else intended to further his own designs on the papacy." (source 11)

**Q5**: Give as many reasons as you can why Thomas Wolsey was removed from power in 1529.

**A5**: The main reason why Thomas Wolsey was removed from power was because he failed to persuade Pope [Clement VII](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Clement_VII) to give [Henry VIII](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDhenry8.htm) a divorce from [Catherine of Aragon](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDaragon.htm). (source 13) Wolsey was now charged with "Praemunire - the illegal exercise of papal authority in England - in his role as legate. (source 14) The problem for Thomas Wolsey is that he upset very important nobles, while holding office. (sources 11 and 15) According to Antonia Fraser he had also upset [Anne Boleyn](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDboleyn.htm) when he broke up her relationship with [Henry Percy](http://spartacus-educational.com/Henry_Percy.htm). Fraser comments that "many contemporaries attributed" the fall of Wolsey with Boleyn. (source 15)