



# Elizabethan Propaganda

How did England try to show the Spanish were threatening invasion in 1588?

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## Introduction

In the 1580s, relations between England and Spain had been getting worse and worse. By May 1588, King Philip II of Spain had finished preparing a fleet, the Spanish Armada, to invade England. His plan was for the fleet of 130 ships, carrying 30,000 sailors and soldiers, to sail up the English Channel. They would link up with the Spanish army based in the Low Countries, and together they would invade England. The Protestant Queen Elizabeth I would be removed from the throne and replaced with a Catholic ruler. The Catholic religion would be restored in England.

The arrival of the Armada on 29th July 1588 was no surprise. The English had known about its preparation for several years and had been making their own preparations to face the attack. The government had been building new ships, forts and warning beacons. They made efforts to disrupt the Spanish preparations. Francis Drake attacked the Spanish fleet in Cadiz harbour in 1587. They had also been trying to win the war of words - the propaganda battle between the two countries.

## Tasks

Look at Source 1

1. This is an extract taken from a draft proclamation by the government of Elizabeth I. This was sent with a letter on 24th June 1588 by Lord Burghley, Elizabeth I's chief minister, to Sir Francis Walsingham. They were clearly discussing how to make their case most persuasive and to blame the war on others.
  - a) Elizabeth I had clearly been blamed by the Spanish for starting the war by building up her armed forces, her army and her navy. What reasons did the writer give to explain Elizabeth's actions?
  - b) Why were there more soldiers than sailors?
  - c) How did the writer try to appeal to as many English people as possible

Look at Source 2

2. Elizabeth's ministers accused Catholic English rebels of trying to make her 'honorable actions' look bad.
  - a) In this document they use the following writer's tricks:
    - strong adjectives
    - alliterationCan you find them?
  - b) What evidence can you find to support the view that the English knew about Philip II's preparations well in advance?

Look at Source 3

3. Elizabeth I's ministers tried to shift the blame for the war on to others. Again they used writer's tricks.
  - a) Can you find a strong adjective and a strong verb?
  - b) Which religious leader did the English Government blame for encouraging the invasion?
  - c) What did Elizabeth I's ministers say that leader's motive was?
  - d) What did they say would happen to ordinary English people?
  
4. Imagine that you are a minister of King Philip II of Spain. What would you advise him to write as a reply to Elizabeth I's proclamation? Don't forget that the Spanish Government would have used writer's tricks just as the English Government did.

## Background

The proclamation was part of the propaganda war between Elizabeth I and her Catholic enemies led by Philip II of Spain.

King Philip II of Spain was hostile to Queen Elizabeth's England for several reasons:

- England had become a Protestant country and as a devout Catholic himself Philip II wanted to change it back to a Catholic country;
- Elizabeth I was helping the rebels fighting against Philip II in the Low Countries;
- Elizabeth I had had the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots executed in 1587 and Philip wanted to avenge her death;
- English sailors were attacking Spanish ships and cities in the New World (in 1587 Drake had attacked Cadiz).

Queen Elizabeth I was unhappy with Philip II's Spain because:

- English ships were barred from trading with the Spanish Empire;
- Philip II was encouraging her Catholic subjects to plot and rebel against her and that is one reason why she had to execute Mary, Queen of Scots.
- The hostility between England and Spain can be traced back to much earlier in Elizabeth's reign.

1570 Pope Pius V ordered English Catholics not to obey Elizabeth I.

1571 The Ridolfi Plot intended to use a Spanish army to overthrow Elizabeth I.

1583 The Throckmorton Plot planned to put Mary, Queen of Scots on the English throne with Spanish support.

1585 Philip II put an embargo on all English goods in Spain.

An English army was sent to the Low Countries to help the Dutch rebels against the Spanish.

Drake occupied Spanish ports in Galicia for 10 days in October and then went on to sack islands in the Canaries and in the Caribbean.

Philip II began planning an invasion of England.

1586 The Babington Plot planned to assassinate Elizabeth I and put Mary, Queen of Scots on the throne.

Nine new warships were built for Elizabeth I's navy.

1587 Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots.

Drake's raid on Cadiz.

1588 Anglo-Spanish peace talks began in the Low Countries on 8th March.

Peace talks moved to Bourbourg 23rd May.

Armada sailed from Lisbon 28th May.

## Teachers Notes

The level of this activity is Key Stage 3.

This lesson is intended for use either as part of a study of the use of propaganda over time or within the context of some explicit work on Elizabethan England and the Spanish Armada.

Sources

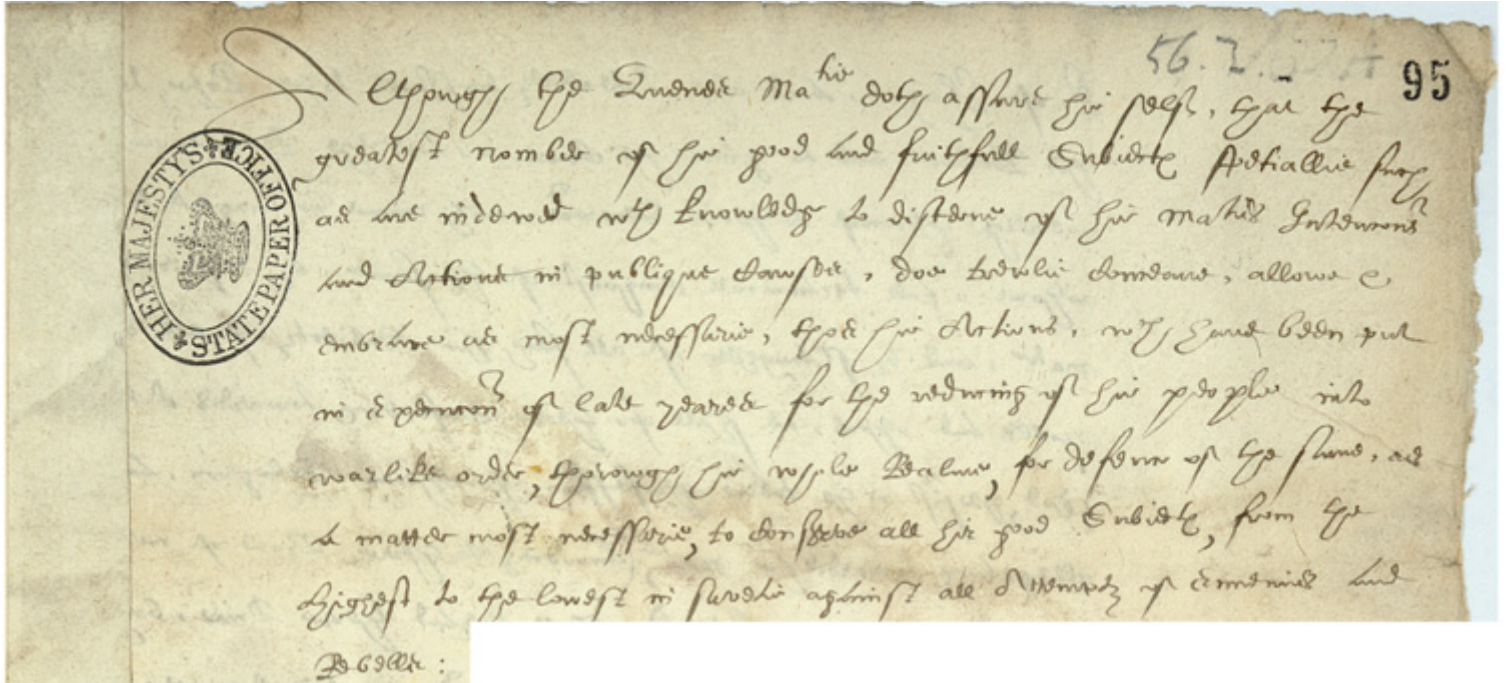
Illustration : KB 27/1309/2

Source 1 - 3 : SP 12/211

## Schemes of Work

**Elizabeth I : How successfully did she tackle the problems of her reign**  
Key Stage 3 Unit 5

## Source 1 : Draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)



## Source 1 : Transcript of draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)

This extract has been translated into modern English with line numbers added.

- Line 1 Although the Queen's Majesty does assure herself, that the greatest number of her good and faithful subjects specially such as are endowed with knowledge to discern of her Majesty's intentions and actions in public causes, do truly condone, allow and
- Line 5 embrace as most necessary, those her actions, which have been put in execution of late years for the reducing of her people into warlike order, through her whole realm, for defence of the same, as a matter most necessary, to conserve all her good subjects, from the highest to the lowest in surety against all attempts of enemies and
- Line 10 rebels: ...

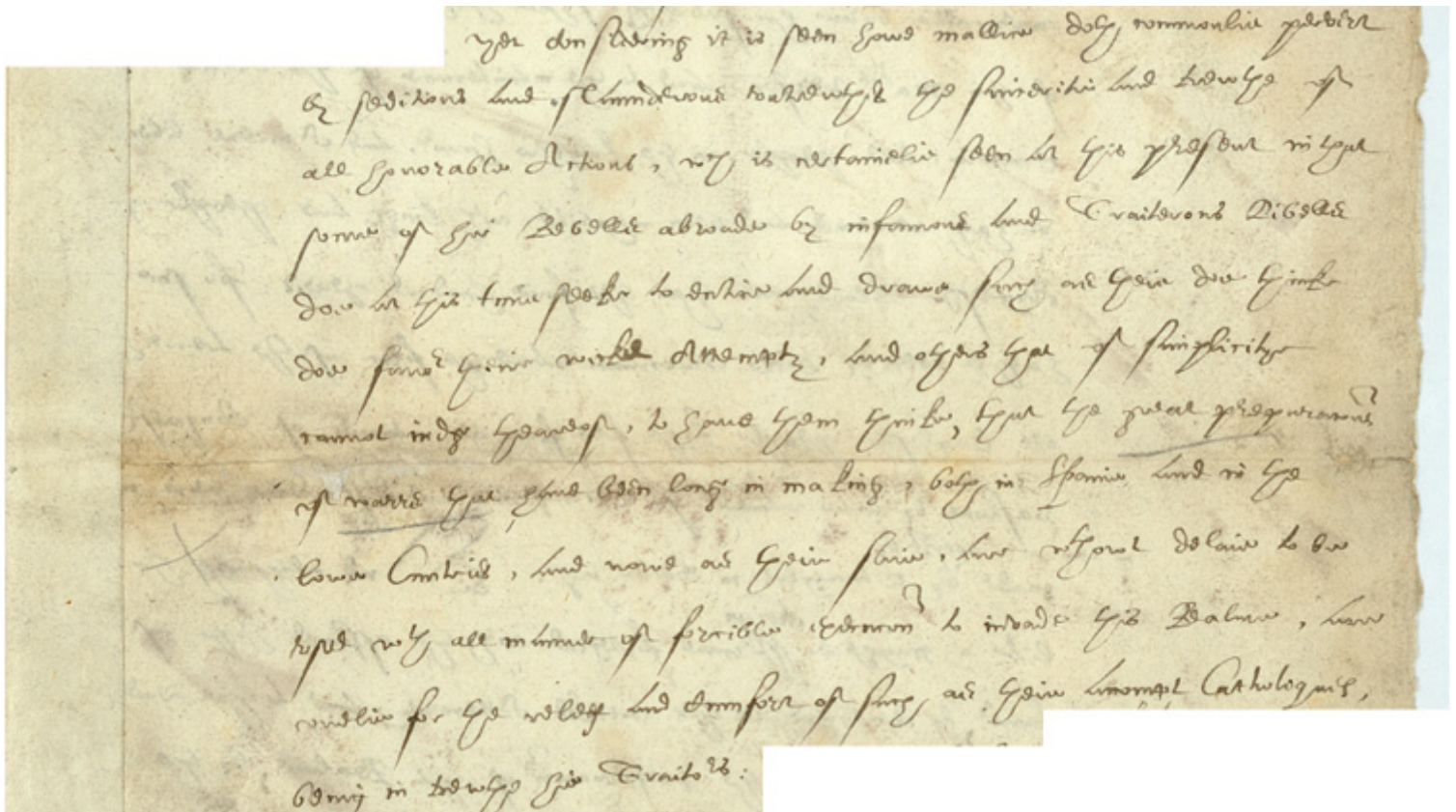
## Source 1 : Simplified transcript of draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)

- Line 1 Her Majesty the Queen assures herself that the majority of her good and faithful subjects, especially those who know about Her Majesty's intentions and actions in public causes, truly excuse, allow and
- Line 5 hold as necessary her actions. These have been

done recently to get her people ready for war, through her whole realm, for its defence. This is necessary to save all her good subjects, from the highest to the lowest, against all attempts of enemies and

Line 10 rebels: ...

## Source 2 : Draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)



## Source 2 : Transcript of draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)

This extract has been translated into modern English with line numbers added.

- Line 10 ... yet considering it is seen how malice doth commonly pervert as seditious and slanderous untruths the sincerity and truth of all honourable actions, which is certainly seen at this present in that some of her rebels abroad by infamous and traitorous libels do at this time seek to entice and draw forth as they do think
- Line 15 do favour their weak attempts, and others that of simplicity cannot judge thereof, to have them think, that the great preparations of war that have been long in making, both in Spain, and in the

Line 20 Low Countries, and now as they say, are without delay to be  
Line 21 used with all manner of forcible execution to invade this realm, are  
only for the relief and comfort of such as their account Catholics,  
being in truth her traitors: ...

## Source 2 : Simplified transcript of draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)

Line 10 ... Yet it is seen how nastiness often misrepresents  
as disloyal and slanderous lies the sincerity and truth of  
all honourable actions. This is certainly seen at the present.  
Some of her rebels abroad now seek by wicked and traitorous lies  
to persuade and draw forth those they think  
Line 15 support their weak attempts, and others too simple  
to judge, and to have them think that the great preparations  
of war that have long been in the making, both in Spain and in the  
Low Countries, and they now say are without delay to be  
used with force to invade this realm, are  
Line 20 only for the relief and comfort of Catholics,  
Line 21 being in truth traitors: ...

### Source 3 : Draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)

*certific known*

Mye gracefullie  
 Pope myne your moste goode God in heaven, to whom your  
 allegaunce, to his maie youre divine and naturall Lord and Quene,  
 and to yourre and subiecte of yourre state of the Realme, and  
 to make the same subiect to the Popes will, and the Crowne to be  
 translatid to anye a forreine Potentor and the same yourre name  
 to be putte to the same, for so by your writinge your selfe directe  
 yourre the intentione of the Pope to be, in yourre of the

of Spayne, and of the Potentor he shall to the Pope, to invade  
 the Realme, and to take the Crowne, and the Realme with the  
 and all the goodes to youre devours, not to be imagined to be done  
 without a full firmitie conquest of the same, by depriving of your  
 maie, and by changinge of all your, your subiecte of all degrees both  
 noble and other, and shall for your confidence towards Almighty  
 God, your selfe in the true profession of your Religion, and for your  
 allegaunce towards his maie, according to your blood of nature, being  
 naturallie borne your subiecte, shall save your Queene, both in defence  
 of his maie person, and to the maintenance of the Crowne, Kingdome  
 and other, and people, in the English Realme, and a moste abominable  
 is ealy vermined and often negatid with Kinge and people of noble  
 English blood, more than your selfe founde hundred yeres



## Source 3 : Transcript of draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)

This extract has been translated into modern English with line numbers added.

Line 21 ... whose profession is certainly known in favour of the  
Pope whom they make their God on the earth, to deny their  
allegiance to her Majesty their sovereign natural Lady and Queen,  
and to change and subvert the happy state of the realm, and  
Line 25 to make the same subject to the Popes will, and the Crown to be  
translated to such a foreign potentate as he shall thereto name  
to usurp the same, for so by therein writing they do directly  
pronounce the intentions of the Pope to be, in procuring of the

King of Spain, and other potentates vasselled to the Pope, to invade  
Line 30 this Realm, and to gain the Crown and the realm with the  
wealth thereof to therein devours, which cannot be imagined to be done  
without a full tyrannical conquest of the same, by depriving of her  
Majesty, and by slaughter of all such her subjects of all degrees both  
noble and others, as shall for their conscience towards Almighty  
Line 35 God, persist in the true profession of Christian Religion, and for their  
allegiance towards her Majesty (according to their bond of nature, being  
naturally born her subjects: (shall hazard their lives, both in defence  
of her Majesty's person, and to the maintenance of this Crown, Kingdom  
Country, and people, in the Kingly honour, and ancient liberty wherein  
Line 40 it hath remained and been inhabited with kings and people of mean  
Line 41 English blood, more than this five hundred years: ...

## Source 3 : Simplified transcript of draft government proclamation, 1588 (SP 12/211)

Line 21 ... They are certainly known to be in favour of the  
Pope whom they make their God on the earth, denying their  
loyalty to Her Majesty their natural sovereign Lady and Queen,  
and changing and threatening the happy state of the realm,  
Line 25 making it subject to the Pope's will, with the Crown  
given to a foreign ruler named by him  
to take over. In writing they openly  
say the intentions of the Pope are, in getting hold of the

King of Spain and other rulers who are the Pope's vassals, to invade  
Line 30 this realm, and to gain the Crown and the realm with its

wealth to devour it. This cannot be done  
without a full and cruel takeover of the country, depriving Her  
Majesty, and the murder of all her subjects of all levels, both  
noble and others, who for their conscience towards Almighty  
Line 35 God continue in the true Christian Religion, and for their  
loyalty towards Her Majesty (according to their bond of nature, being  
naturally born her subjects) risk their lives, both in defence  
of Her Majesty's person, and in keeping this Crown, kingdom  
country, and people in the kingly honour and ancient liberty in which  
Line 40 it has remained, and been inhabited with kings and people of ordinary  
Line 41 English blood, for more than 500 years: ...