

Grade Card Task Year 8 – Henry II Essay

'Henry II was a strong leader'. Write an essay where you give your views in relation to this statement.

I believe that King Henry II was both a good King and a strong Leader even though he did make mistakes. His good decisions outweighed his bad decisions. He was an energetic and sometimes cruel ruler; he had a wish to get back the lands and rights of his grandfather Henry I. He had an ambition to add Ireland to his powers and worked hard to achieve this. He also changed the legal system in England for the better. In my opinion this all showed the qualities of a good leader.

Henry II always had an ambition to add Ireland to his dominions. He had asked Pope (Adrian IV) to give him permission to go to Ireland this was because the Irish Church was not yet under control of the Pope. This would allow Henry II to enlarge the boundaries of his church. Strongbow was a very important Welsh Norman. He had lost his land, and Henry II had kind of promised that he could make up for this by getting him land in Ireland. In 1170 Strongbow arrived in Ireland he had quite a big army with him 1200 men and 200 of them knights. Dermott McMurrrough had gone to Ireland in 1169 with his men to capture lands in Ireland he had also gained permission from Henry II. Henry at this stage gained a foothold in Ireland by allowing Dermott to go to Ireland. Strongbow and Dermott McMurrrough captured Waterford and then moved to capture Dublin. Strongbow married Dermott's daughter and was promised the crown of King of Leinster after Dermott's death. Dermott had planned to defeat O'Connor the High King of Ireland but died before this happened, Strongbow declared himself King of Leinster and O'Connor became weary of him so he decided to recapture Dublin with what looked like a much stronger army. With a surprise attack Strongbow retained his position as King of Leinster. Henry realised what had happened he had allowed both McDermott and Strongbow to gain power in Ireland. With Strongbow now King of Leinster he himself knew he had gained too much power. Henry had made a mistake in letting this happen he was cross, but he stepped up as a leader and dealt with the situation. Henry II believed that Strongbow had gone against him. Strongbow hadn't consulted him, and he believed it was in defiance of him. Henry II believe he had gained too much and this conquest should have been left to him as a king. Henry stepped up to his job as King and leader he met Strongbow in Wales and gained power of all the lands he stripped Strongbow of his title as king. The Irish kings recognised him as their Lord. Henry had made mistakes, but he had turned things around showing his strength and leadership he had met the bishops in Ireland who had agreed to fall into line with rest of Europe and this pleased the Pope. So Henry showed his leadership by gaining Irish lands and respect of Pope.

The way that Henry tried to make reforms to the Church showed that he was a strong leader this was a major event with churches deciding on punishments for their clerics which was often none. In 1164 he introduced the Constitutions of Clarendon, a code of

16 rules designed to increase the king's influence over the bishops and the Church courts. Henry demanded that, if the Church courts found a cleric guilty, they had to hand him over to the king's court to be punished properly. He had made the decision to appoint Becket as Archbishop assured him of his aim. There could only be one lord on Earth in England. This was a brave decision and would not make him popular, but this showed his strength as a leader in the country. Leaders need to make big changes often they are not liked but this did deter Henry he had a job to do. He wanted to make the legal system fair a sign of a good leader.

Although I believe he showed his leadership in dealing with the church what happened during the Beckett time did define his reign. Beckett had fallen out with Henry and had fled. In 1170, the Pope threatened to excommunicate Henry, so Henry let Becket return to England. Becket had won. In his new role Becket excommunicated three bishops who supported Henry. In rage, Henry is said to have shouted: "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" Four knights heard this and, in a misplaced effort to please Henry, rode to Canterbury, and murdered Becket at the altar of the Cathedral on 29 December 1170. All the blame was put on Henry for this. Beckett was a very popular man in England, his death was a catastrophe for Henry. Immediately, people began to say that miracles had happened at Becket's tomb. In 1173 the Pope made Becket a saint. The Pope excommunicated the knights who killed Becket. Henry was disgraced but as a leader he was humble and in 1174, to show he was sorry, Henry walked barefoot to Canterbury Cathedral and allowed the monks to whip him. Henry had to give up on the Constitutions of Clarendon. He had failed to reduce the power of the Church. Although he had made mistakes in the Beckett situation it can be questioned what would have happened if the knights had not killed Beckett. He also showed remorse by taking a punishment same as others which I believe is a good quality in a leader.

It is said that a **strong leader** possesses a clear vision, is courageous, has integrity, honesty, humility and clear focus.... Overall, I believe that Henry II was a strong leader because he had a clear vision what he wanted to achieve from a young age and worked hard as a king and made changes. He was courageous he knew these changes would not please most people it was a tough job making the reforms. He had reformed the law. He set up the jury system and ordered that only royal judges, called Justices, could try criminal cases. Beckett to me was the troublemaker who made Henry look bad. Although the law for clergy had not worked he had made a statement of the unfairness. He had integrity, was honest and showed humility as he walked the streets barefoot and was whipped for his mistake. Finally he had a clear focus of expanding the lands and wealth within his empire by conquering Ireland in 1172. So all in all I believe Henry II was a strong leader.

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