

# Who Should be King?

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## The Three Main Claims to the English Throne in 1066

Edward the Confessor died on 5 January 1066. Immediately there was a race in Europe for the crown of England because Edward had no children to succeed him. The three main people claiming the throne were Harold Godwinson (Earl of Wessex), William (Duke of Normandy), Harald Hardrada (king of Norway) who was helped by Harold Godwinson's brother Tostig. Each one believed that they had the best claim to the throne. Read through their arguments below.

**HAROLD GODWINSON:** I am the only true Englishman claiming the throne. I am also the most powerful man in England. I am a very good soldier and England needs a strong ruler right now. The English council, the witan, want me to be king. I belong to the most powerful family in the whole of England. We already control Wessex but are very ambitious and would like to control the whole of England. I have the best claim to the throne because I am also Edward's brother-in-law. William says I promised to help him become king. I only did this because he forced me to. He was holding my nephew hostage and said he would only be released if I swore to be loyal to him.

**WILLIAM OF NORMANDY:** I have the best claim to the throne because Edward himself promised it to me. When Edward was a boy in 1016, King Cnut invaded England and Edward ran away to Normandy for safety. Edward stayed in Normandy until he became King of England in 1042. It was important, at that time, for Edward to protect his throne from attack and rebellion. Edward turned to me for help. I sent Norman soldiers to live in England and protect Edward. In return, Edward promised the English throne. Harold of Wessex also said that I should become King of England when Edward died.

**HARALD HARDRADA:** I am King of Norway and have a good claim to the throne of Denmark. The Danes have conquered England in the past and so I think I should be King of England too. The Vikings invaded England long ago, in the 860s, and settled in the north. In 1016 the Viking King Cnut became King of England, Denmark and Norway. England was ruled by Norwegian kings right up until 1042 when the Saxon king Edward, stole the throne from us. I have the right to be King of England and want to rebuild Cnut's great Viking empire. There are a lot of Viking families still living in the North of England who would like me to be King of England and will help me with my invasion.

## Your Task

I imagine there is going to be an election to decide which of the claimants will become the next king of England. Divide yourselves into three groups. Each group will represent one of the claimants to the throne. In your groups you must produce a campaign to support your candidate and persuade others in your class to vote for him. Your group must produce the following items before the election next lesson:

1. An A3 poster supporting your candidate (two people);
2. An A5 leaflet explaining why your candidate should be king of England (two people);
3. Three A5 information fliers - one sided pieces of paper that can be handed to people giving short facts about your candidate (three people);
4. A speech that will be performed by one member of your group in front of the class next week (two people to write it and one person to perform it).

Your homework mark will be based on the effort that the whole group puts into the election campaign so you must support each other and work together.