The Stuarts and Parliament

Two prominent members of the Tudor dynasty, Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth I, ruled during the time when absolutism was common on the European continent. In England, though, Parliament placed curbs on absolute monarchy. Both father and daughter had to learn how to work with Parliament to fulfill their goals for England, but the Tudors’ success with Parliament was not repeated by their successors. When Elizabeth I died in 1603, a relative of the Tudors from Scotland became king. James I was the first member of the Stuart dynasty to rule in England. His view of absolute monarchy caused conflict with Parliament.

James I Clashes with Parliament

James faced problems from the start. He believed firmly in the divine right of kings and wanted to rule as an absolute monarch. But wars waged by his predecessors, combined with his own spending, left him low on funds. In addition, because he was from Scotland, he was considered an outsider. For all of these reasons, he had difficulty getting along with Parliament. Although James called Parliament repeatedly during his reign, he was rarely able to get Parliament to approve all the money he wanted.

As Parliament increased its influence, another group was starting to make itself known. The Puritans, a group of strict Calvinists, demanded that the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church, be further reformed. They wanted to “purify” the English church of practices they thought were still too Catholic. For example, priests still dressed in elaborate robes, and worshippers knelt during services. Another of the Puritans’ goals was to take power away from church officials. James saw this stance as a threat to his power because the church leadership supported him. As a result, he refused to pass most of the Puritans’ requests for reform. One reform James agreed to was the publication of an English version of the Bible that became known as the King James Bible.

Charles I Defies Parliament

When James I died in 1625, his younger son was crowned king as Charles I. He was popular at first, but married a Catholic princess and involved England in military adventures overseas. In 1628 Charles summoned Parliament to request money. Parliament refused to grant it until Charles signed a document, called the Petition of Right, that placed limits on the king’s power. Among the document’s provisions was a statement that the king could not levy taxes without Parliament’s approval. Nor could he imprison anyone without legal justification, force citizens to house soldiers, or declare martial law in peacetime. The Petition of Right was a direct challenge to absolute monarchy. When Parliament refused to give him money again later, Charles taxed the English people on his own and forced bankers to loan him money. The members of Parliament were furious. In response, Charles dismissed Parliament and in 1629 decided to rule without consulting Parliament ever again.
The English Civil War
Conflict continued between a king who believed in absolute monarchy and a Parliament that saw itself as independent of the king. The conflict became so severe that it led to war and even the king’s death.
Parliament Reconvened In 1640 Charles I was badly in debt, thanks to a religious rebellion in Scotland. He finally had to reconvene Parliament so he could ask for more money. This session became known as the Long Parliament because it did not disband for many years. After being ignored for 11 years, the members of Parliament were in no mood to bow to the king’s wishes, and they took the opportunity to further limit the king’s powers. They demanded that Parliament must be called at least every three years, and the king could no longer dismiss Parliament. Charles I accepted these new rules, but he awaited the right moment to overturn them.

War with Parliament
That moment came when a radical Puritan group within Parliament moved to abolish the appointment of bishops in the Anglican Church. The king, whose power was connected to the power of the church, was outraged. For this insult, Charles decided to arrest the Puritan leaders for treason. He led troops into the House of Commons to make the arrest, but the men had already escaped. Now Charles had given away his intentions to take back power. Some members of Parliament decided to rise up against the king. Charles I called for the support of the English people. Within months, in 1642, the English Civil War began.

Without funding from Parliament, the king had to rely on contributions to pay for an army. His supporters, mainly wealthy nobles, were called Royalists for their allegiance to his royal person. On the other side, Parliament could back its army by voting for funding. Supporters of Parliament were called Roundheads, from their short, bowl-shaped haircuts, which contrasted with the Royalists’ long wigs. The Roundheads included Puritans, merchants, and some members of the upper classes.

Questions
Directions: Answer these questions in full, complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

1. How were the Stuarts different from the Tudors?
2. Why was James I disliked?
3. Who were the Puritans? How did they want to change the Anglican Church?
4. Why was Charles I disliked?
5. Why did the English Civil War start?
6. What were the two sides, and who was on each side?
7. The story of the war has intentionally been left without an ending. If you had lived at this time, which side would you have wanted to win, and why? (Answer this question in extra detail please!)