

Powerful Queens



Individual exercises

Group discussion

Variable length

What makes a good leader? These four historic leaders have made very different decisions. Do you think they acted in the best interests of their people?

Nzinga was Queen of two different areas, Ndongo and Matamba, which are both in what is now Angola on the south west coast of Africa. Slave traders were kidnapping her people and the Portuguese were seizing land — and her leadership was challenged on many sides at once. Nzinga faced constant fights and unequal negotiations with either the Portuguese government or with the slave traders. A famous example of her unwillingness to back down is a meeting where the Portuguese Governor refused to provide a seat for her, asking her to sit on the floor while he sat in a chair. Instead, Nzinga's attendant formed himself into a human bench, meaning that Queen Nzinga could speak and negotiate as an equal.

Discuss in pairs or small groups: Can negotiation with evil ever be justified? How much hardship (and what sort of hardship) can a leader reasonably expect people to suffer for the greater good?

Writing exercise: You are Nzinga's chief speechwriter. Write a speech for her to give to her people after she returns from the negotiations with the Portuguese. Use your imagination to explain what each side wanted and what was agreed. If you think she would have made some unpopular decisions, try to explain why. (Write in the first person as Nzinga, as she's the one giving the speech.)

Nzinga

Mwene Njinga Mbande, also known as Anna de Souza Nzingha

Queen of Ndongo and Matamba, in south west Africa

1583-1663



Amanirenas

Amnirense qore li kdwe li, also known as Candace

Queen of Kush, in the north east of Africa

Approximately 60-10 BCE

Amanirenas was the powerful Queen of Kush, an area which is now part of northern Sudan. She is almost certainly the Queen referred to as "Candace" in Roman records, a name which comes from her title of "Kandake". A fierce warrior, she lost an eye in battle. After early losses, she successfully defeated the invading Roman forces and captured cities in the south of Egypt (famously cutting off the head of a statue of the Roman Emperor), and eventually Rome agreed to a peace treaty. Her story is still partially untold, because nobody has yet deciphered the ancient language of Meroitic.

Discuss in pairs or small groups: As a ruling Queen, Amanirenas would have been making all the military decisions and leading the negotiations. Is it important that the person making the decisions also participates in the action? Why or why not?

Writing exercise: You are Amanirenas' chief strategist. Present a plan for the upcoming negotiations with the Romans. You are the person with the upper hand and the most power. What are the most important things to mention? You can format your plan as a speech, as a power point presentation, or as an infographic.

Zenobia

Also known as
Septimia Zenobia
Bat-Zabbai, or
Septimia Zenobia
Augusta

Queen of the
Palmyrene Empire

Approximately
240-274



Zenobia was Queen of the Palmyrene Empire in Syria and surrounding countries. She is famous for inviting intellectual scholars and philosophers to live in her court, and her empire prospered over many years. Zenobia held power on behalf of her young son, and was subject to the Roman Empire. However, in 270 she invaded the eastern part of the Roman Empire and declared her son as Emperor. The Romans eventually captured her, and Zenobia spent the last years of her life in captivity.

Discuss in pairs or small groups: How much should a good leader trust their own judgement, and how much should they rely on experts?

Writing exercise: Imagine that you are Zenobia, and you are looking for the most intelligent and interesting people to join your court. Write a job advert setting out the skills you would like to see.

Further discussion

How have the qualities and signs of “good leadership” changed over time? Do you think what counts as a good leader also changes between different cultures?

Which of these Queens do you think was the best leader, given their individual circumstances? Which do you least admire?

Do you think that any of the four Queens would do well in the 21st century? If so, which Queen and why?

None of the four people mentioned here were democratically elected. Instead, they were all in positions of power because of their birth. In an ideal world, how do you think a leader should be chosen?



Targatao

Also known as **Tirgutowiya**

Queen of the Sindi, and a Maetian princess
(both areas of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, to the north east of the Black Sea)

Approximately **390 BCE**

Targatao was a Queen of a tribe in the Bosphorus area of Eastern Europe over 2,400 years ago. Her story is one of revenge: her husband was asked by a more powerful neighbouring King to set her aside and marry someone more political advantageous. He divorced and imprisoned

Targatao. She escaped and returned to her own country — first urging her own people to fight for her, and then building an alliance of nearby tribes and countries. Her army successfully invaded the territory of her former husband, as well as the powerful King who had ordered her to be replaced.

Discuss in pairs or small groups: Is personal revenge ever a good motivation?

Writing exercise: You're Targatao and you need to persuade your neighbours to join your alliance. Write a letter to the leader of a neighbouring country explaining why they should help you.



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