Elizabeth’s treatment of Mary, Queen of Scots

The trial
- In October 1586, Mary was put on trial before a court of 36 noblemen including Sir Francis Walsingham and Sir William Cecil, two of Elizabeth’s closest advisors.
- Mary defended herself strongly. She criticised the fact that she had not been allowed to see evidence against her and claimed that as she was not English, she could not be guilty of treason. She refused to accept that the court had any right to pass sentence on her.
- She was found guilty and sentenced to death on 25 October.

The execution
- Elizabeth was reluctant to sign Mary’s death warrant. She feared that executing a fellow monarch might inspire her enemies, or that Mary’s son James might want revenge.
- She was also concerned about the reaction of the Catholic powers: France and Spain.
- Despite this, she signed the death warrant on 1 February 1587.
- Mary was executed, in private, seven days later at Fotheringhay Castle. The Earls of Shrewsbury and Kent were the official witnesses.

The impact
- Without Mary, Catholics had no clear alternative monarch. The new heir to the English throne was Mary’s son James – a Protestant.
- Even in death, Mary remained an important figure. Many saw her as a martyr to her faith and her execution as proof that Elizabeth was a wicked heretic.
- Elizabeth’s concern about the reaction abroad was unwarranted – there was outrage but no action from France or Spain. King James of Scotland accepted Elizabeth’s apology for the death of his mother.

SUMMARY
- Mary, Queen of Scots, arrived in England in 1567 and was immediately seen as a threat to Elizabeth’s throne and the religious settlement.
- She was not directly involved in plots but was a clear inspiration for the Northern Rebellion, the Ridolfi Plot and others.
- After agreeing to take part in the Babington Plot she was put on trial, and executed in 1587.
- Her death removed the direct threat to Elizabeth, but she remained a symbol to Catholics as a martyr to their faith.
**APPLY**

**INTERPRETATION ANALYSIS**

a Look at this interpretation about Mary, Queen of Scots:

► **INTERPRETATION A** *Adapted from Elizabeth in Danger by S. M. Harrison, 1984:*

Mary’s presence in England created grave problems, and Elizabeth’s worst fears about Mary soon proved to be real. Francis Walsingham wanted to end the danger posed by Mary once and for all. However, he realised that Elizabeth would not consent to execution until she was convinced by positive proof that Mary was actually involved in a plot against her life. To this day historians argue about Mary’s guilt or innocence.

In London the news of Mary’s death was greeted with joy. Elizabeth, however, seemed furious. She said the execution was a mistake. Possibly this was true, but with Mary, Queen of Scots was dead, the Catholic threat was now even greater. Philip of Spain had never been enthusiastic about invading England on Mary’s behalf but in her will, Mary gave Philip her title to the English throne.

• Why did Mary’s arrival pose problems for Queen Elizabeth?
  
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• What positive proof did Walsingham supply?
  
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• Why might Elizabeth have seen the execution as a mistake?
  
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b How convincing is Interpretation A about Mary, Queen of Scots? Explain your answer using the interpretation and your contextual knowledge.

**EXPLAIN**

a Create a storyboard showing the key events of Mary’s life between her arrival in England and her death.

b Explain the importance of the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots.