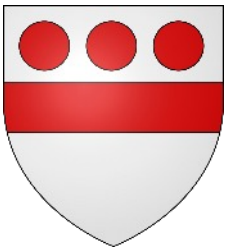
The Story of the Wars of the Roses
Walter Devereux's Decisions



Walter Devereux was about 23 years old when the wars began at the Battle of St Albans in 1455. Over the next 30 years Walter fought in at least three battles and possibly six. During the Wars Walter and his family had to make many important and difficult decisions. This story of the Wars of the Roses is built around Walter's decisions to help you understand some of the dilemmas that many people faced during the Wars.

We don't know what Walter Devereux looked like – there are very few pictures of people from the 15th century. There are no descriptions of what he looked like either. This picture does show his family's coat of arms which would have been carved on the walls of his home at Weobley castle, painted onto stained glass windows and embroidered on cushions, tapestries and other decorations.



The Devereux family coat of arms

Who was Walter Devereux?

Walter lived at Weobley castle on the border between England and Wales. His family had been important landowners in the area for many years and they must have been proud of fighting for the kings of England. Walter's great-grandfather had helped defend the border against Welsh rebels before he was killed in battle. Walter's father, Sir Walter, had fought in France. Now he was one of the councillors of Richard, Duke of York, the most powerful nobleman in England and King Henry VI's cousin. If King Henry died without a son then York might well be the next king.



Walter's decisions

There's a box like this on each of the following pages, setting out an important decision Walter had to take. Your task is to choose what you think is the best decision – you score points for good decisions and lose points for bad ones.

Walter's aims are:

a) to build up his family's lands, wealth and power.

b) to increase other people's respect for him and his family. People respect loyalty and hard work that helps the king.

c) to help make England powerful, united and peaceful.

You begin with 10 points because the Devereux family is already well-respected, wealthy and has fought to defend the king's lands many times.

Good luck!

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1455: The first battle



In 1450 Henry VI was 28 years old, young and strong but a disastrous king. Everyone had hoped he would be a great king but Henry was a failure. His father had conquered northern France but those lands were lost while Henry was king. His father had stopped his nobles quarrelling and made England peaceful – but violence and quarrelling increased while Henry was king.

The problems were so bad that a huge protest called Cade's rebellion broke out in 1450. King Henry was expected to stop the rebels – instead he ran away to the Midlands. Jack Cade and his supporters took control of London and executed some of the King's advisers. They blamed the advisers for the problems, not King Henry. They swore they were loyal to Henry because he'd been their king for 30 years and chosen by God to be king.



Henry V (1413-1422) one of the greatest English kings. His successes made his son's failures seem even worse.

It was the people of London who fought back and cleared Cade's men out of London, not King Henry. With Cade's rebellion over, people wanted the nobles to unite together to help Henry govern the country peacefully. Instead Duke of Somerset and the Duke of York quarrelled over who should be Henry's chief adviser. At first Henry chose Somerset and the rest of the nobles supported Somerset because he was the King's choice. York was angry and for three years was left out of all the important decision-making.

Everything changed in 1453. Henry fell into a coma and couldn't speak or recognise anyone. Soon afterwards, Queen Margaret (Henry's French wife) gave birth to a boy, Prince Edward, but Henry didn't speak even when was given the baby to hold.



Henry VI – the only son of Henry V and Princess Katherine of France.

Who was to lead the country? The nobles chose the Duke of York because he was the King's nearest relative. York had Somerset put in prison but when Henry recovered he made Somerset his chief adviser again. This was the worst thing Henry could have done.

York and Somerset were now deeply afraid the other would attack him. It was York who acted first, marching 3000 men to attack Somerset who wasn't expecting a battle and was out-numbered. The battle of St. Albans lasted little more than an hour. Somerset and his ally, the Earl of Northumberland, were killed. Even more horrifying was that King Henry, who had been with Somerset's army, was wounded in the neck by an arrow.

What should Walter and his father advise the Duke of York to do after the battle?

a) York should have Henry executed and become king himself

b) York should put Henry in prison and become king himself

c) Kneel in front of King Henry and ask for his forgiveness for fighting, then become his chief councillor

Think about: How the rest of the nobles would react – The family's loyalty to the King and to York – Can York make himself king now the Prince has been born?



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1455-1459: The beginnings of the Wars



The Battle of St Albans had been a great shock. Nobody wanted English soldiers to be fighting English soldiers in a civil war. Everyone wanted peace. However that battle had made the leaders even more afraid of each other - and angry too:

Somerset and Northumberland had been killed by York's men at St Albans. Their sons now wanted revenge on York and his supporters.



Queen Margaret

York and his allies, the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick, were afraid that they might be attacked so were on guard and ready to defend themselves. Perhaps it would be better to attack first again?

Queen Margaret was afraid that York wanted to be king and would try to take the crown from Henry and her son, Prince Edward. York said that he was loyal to King Henry but could the King and Queen trust York?

For four years England stayed peaceful. There was even a 'Loveday' in London 1458. This was a great ceremony in St Paul's Cathedral in London where York and his supporters walked hand in hand with Queen Margaret and her supporters and everyone swore to be loyal to King Henry.

Walter Devereux and his family still supported the Duke of York but life suddenly changed for Walter. In April 1459 his father died. Now Walter himself, aged about 27, had to make the decisions for his family.

Fighting started again soon afterwards. First there was a small battle at Blore Heath but then the two sides faced each other at Ludford, outside the town of Ludlow. York and his allies Salisbury and Warwick faced the royal army. Walter Devereux was in York's army. It looked as if there was going to be a major battle but then a big part of York's army refused to fight – they said they would not fight against the King.



Henry VI

York faced prison, probably execution. He fled, along with his eldest son, Edward and his allies the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick – but what would Walter Devereux do?

What should Walter do after Ludford?

a) Ride as fast as he can to the coast and join the Duke of York in exile abroad

b) Surrender to the king, go down on his knees and beg King Henry for mercy

c) Rally his men and fight the King's army to give York more time to escape

Think about: His family and lands – His loyalty to the Duke of York – His loyalty to the King



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1459-1461: Fighting for the crown



Walter surrendered to King Henry. Gregory's Chronicle tells us that 'many knights and squires came with Sir Walter Devereux, dressed only in their shirts, and fell down before the King and all were pardoned and their lives saved.'

Many people must have thought that King Henry was now safe on the throne and his son, Prince Edward, would grow up to be king. However York and his allies had other plans. They did not want to stay in exile abroad. They wanted to come home but to do that they had to choose – would they return and beg for mercy (and risk being executed) or return and fight the King? They decided to return and fight.



Henry VI

In summer 1460 the Yorkists returned and fought the King's army at the battle of Northampton. They won – and captured King Henry. A few months later the Duke of York did something he had not done before – he claimed the crown. He said he had a better right to be king than Henry. Now the nobles had a huge problem:

If they supported York, then the King's supporters would fight that decision

If they supported King Henry, then York's supporters would fight that decision



York's family coat of arms

The nobles were so desperate for peace that they agreed a compromise, called the Act of Accord. They said that Henry would stay king for his lifetime but, when he died, York or his son would become king. The nobles hoped everyone would be happy with this as both sides got some of what they wanted. It also meant everyone could stay loyal to Henry, who had been their king for forty years.

The Act of Accord did not work. The King's supporters and Queen Margaret hated it because her son, Prince Edward, would not become king. York hated it because if Henry stayed king, Henry's supporters would have York arrested and killed.

So the battles began again. York was killed at the battle of Wakefield in December 1460. Then, in February 1461, they beat another Yorkist army at the second battle of St Albans. The Lancastrians must have thought they had won the war. However there was bad news too. York's son, Edward, had taken over as Yorkist leader and had beaten a Lancastrian army at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross on the Welsh border. Now Edward, young, handsome and a brilliant soldier, was marching his army to fight the Lancastrians. The Wars were not over yet.

If this feels complicated - don't worry. It is!

You don't need to remember all the details to follow the broad story.

Should Walter fight for Edward of York?

a) Fight for Edward of York against King Henry

b) Fight for King Henry – he will have the larger army as most nobles still support the King

c) Stay at home and see what happens

Think about: The rewards he might get from Edward – the danger of losing and being punished – His family's loyalties to the House of York and to the king in the past – Will his choice increase people's respect for him?



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1461-1470: Warwick the Kingmaker



The decisive battle was fought at Towton in Yorkshire. Walter fought for Edward of York, alongside his brother-in-law William Herbert. It was by far the largest battle of the Wars – the Lancastrians had about 25,000 men and the Yorkists around 20,000 – and lasted all one snowy day in March 1461. The Yorkists won, maybe thanks to the late arrival of reinforcements. King Henry, Queen Margaret and Prince Edward fled.

Edward of York became King Edward IV. He rewarded Walter and William by making them Lords. Walter became Lord Ferrers (his wife's name) and William became Lord Herbert. However fighting wasn't over. Many nobles were still loyal to Henry VI. It took until 1464 before Edward defeated the last Lancastrian army at the battle of Hexham. Henry VI was captured but not executed . A lot of people would have been angry if their ex-king had been killed.



Edward IV

In the 1460s Walter met a young boy who was distantly related to Henry VI. The boy was Henry Tudor, earl of Richmond who was living at Raglan castle with William Herbert and his wife Anne, who was Walter's sister.

Edward IV seemed to be on the way to being a highly successful king – until he fell out with his most powerful supporter, the Earl of Warwick. Warwick's soldiers, money and ambition had played a huge part in Edward winning the crown. In 1469 Warwick shocked everyone by rebelling against Edward. We will never know exactly why Warwick rebelled but the most likely reason is that Edward wasn't giving Warwick as much power as he wanted.



Warwick's family coat of arms

One victim of the rebellion was Walter's brother-in-law, William Herbert, who was executed by the rebels after the Battle of Edgecote in 1469. Despite this, Warwick rebellion was not successful and so he fled to France where he did something that shocked everyone. He joined forces with his old Lancastrian enemy, Queen Margaret, aiming to make Henry VI king again. The King of France also helped them because he did not want Edward IV, a great soldier, as king of England.

The plan worked. Warwick invaded England and Edward had to escape abroad. Warwick 'the Kingmaker' made Henry VI king again. Henry's son, Prince Edward, was now 18 and would follow him as king. The Wars seemed over and the Yorkists had lost.

What should Walter do next?

a) Plot a rebellion and lead a rebellion of other Yorkists against Warwick and Henry VI

b) Escape abroad to join Edward IV in exile

c) Look after your lands in peace – but hope that Edward comes back

Think about: The good of his family – What would Edward need to have a chance of becoming king again?



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1471-1483: The Princes in the Tower



Walter stayed in England. He knew that Edward would not give up his crown. He only had to wait a few months. The Duke of Burgundy helped Edward with soldiers and ships and in 1471 Edward invaded England. His own bravery inspired his men to victory in two battles. He killed Warwick at the Battle of Barnet and then beat the Lancastrians at Tewkesbury where Henry's heir, 17-year-old Prince Edward, was killed. Henry VI was then murdered in the Tower of London though Edward claimed that Henry died of melancholy after hearing of his son's death.

After 1471 England was peaceful for twelve years. There was no danger of another Lancastrian army causing trouble. The Yorkists had won. Edward and his queen, Elizabeth, also had a large family, with his eldest son (also called Edward) as his heir.



Edward IV

So no-one expected what happened next.

When King Edward died suddenly in April 1483 everyone assumed that his 12-year-old son would become king as Edward V. Planning for his coronation began – but it never took place. Instead, young Edward's uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester arrested and executed Edward's strongest supporters and then became king himself as Richard III. Richard said that Edward IV hadn't been legally married to Queen Elizabeth so young Edward (and his siblings) was illegitimate and couldn't be king.

Note: By now Walter had a son and three daughters.

He wanted his son to inherit his lands and his daughters to marry wealthy young men

Worse was to come. Edward V and his brother (who became known as the Princes in the Tower) disappeared. There is no evidence of anyone ever seeing them again. Did Richard have them murdered? Many people thought he had and they were deeply angry. Killing children was just as terrible then as it is now. A rebellion broke out against Richard that autumn in 1483.



Edward V

This rebellion was not simply Lancaster versus York. Now it was York versus York because many of the rebels were Yorkists who had supported Edward IV and would not forgive Richard III for taking his nephew's throne – even though in the past they had fought alongside Richard in battle. These rebels were putting their lives, their wealth and their families at risk to rebel against Richard.

However the rebels had a problem. If young Edward V was dead who would be the new king? They were so angry with Richard III that they turned to a Lancastrian, a young man who was distantly related to Henry VI, the Lancastrian king. They chose Henry Earl of Richmond, also known as Henry Tudor, the young man who had been looked after by Walter's sister, Anne, back in the 1460s. Was he about to become the new king?



Richard III

Should Walter support Richard III or rebel against him?

a) Join the rebellion – Walter had been a loyal servant of Edward IV

b) Join King Richard and help him defeat the rebels – Richard is an experienced soldier and leader

c) stay at home and wait to see what happens

Think about: His own family's future – Who will make the best king for England? – Who he has fought for in the past



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1483-1485: Richard III or Henry Tudor?



Walter did not join the rebellion though he may have thought of doing so. He did not help Richard III either. Walter must have been shocked that Richard had taken the crown from young Edward V. He knew the boy and must have wanted him to follow his father as king. There are clues that Richard III suspected Walter of being involved in the rebellion but there was no proof – and Richard needed experienced men like Walter on his side.

The rebellion failed but many rebels fled to Brittany where Henry Tudor was living. For the next eighteen months there were rumours that Henry was about to invade England. Richard tried to have Henry captured in Brittany but Henry was warned and he rode through the night to escape over the border into France where he got help from the French king. France and Scotland were both eager to help Henry because they were afraid that Richard, an aggressive soldier, would lead armies to invade them if he got the chance. If Richard was busy defending himself against Henry then he couldn't invade France or Scotland.



Richard III

in August 1485, Henry Tudor and his allies landed in Wales, ready to fight Richard for the crown. This was no longer a war between the families of York and Lancaster. Richard III had split the Yorkists when he took the crown so the sides looked like this:

Yorkist supporters of Richard III	**AGAINST**	Yorkist supporters of Henry Tudor plus a handful of Lancastrians plus French and Scottish soldiers.



Henry Tudor (Henry VII)

The Yorkist rebels supported Henry partly because of the way Richard has seized the crown and partly because Henry had promised to marry Elizabeth of York, the sister of young Edward V. This marriage would unite York (Elizabeth) and Lancaster (Henry).

As Henry's army marched through Wales, Richard summoned his army. He threatened anyone who did not fight for him that they would lose all their lands and wealth. Walter Devereux was now 53 – getting old to ride into battle – but once again he had to make a decision. Should he fight for Richard III?

Should Walter fight for Richard III or Henry Tudor?

a) Fight for Richard

b) Fight for Henry

c) stay at home and wait to see what happens

Think about: Richard is an excellent soldier and has lots of support in the north. Richard did a good job of ruling the north while his brother was king.

Many people believe Richard killed his nephews and executed lords who might have stopped him becoming king.

Walter has known Richard III since Richard was a boy.

Walter had always been loyal to Richard, Duke of York and King Edward IV – the grandfather and father of young Edward V who had disappeared

Walter knew Henry when he was a boy living with Walter's sister, Anne

Nobody knows whether Henry will make a good king.

In 1485 Walter had recently remarried after the death of his first wife.



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The Battle of Bosworth and the slow end of the Wars



22 August 1485 – early morning. Cannonballs hurtled through the air. Arrows arced into the sky, then screamed down into armour, flesh, bone. Foot-soldiers advanced, killing with sword or poll-axe.

Suddenly, audible above the screeching clash of weapons, came the sound of hooves drumming on sun-hardened ground, the rush of highly-trained horses and armoured knights at full gallop. At their head rode King Richard III, determined to kill his enemy, Henry Tudor, with his own sword.

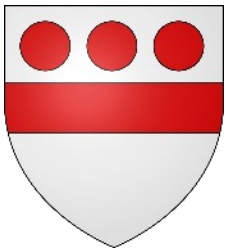
CRASH! Richard and his knights careered into the bodyguard surrounding Henry Tudor. Richard's own lance killed William Brandon. Then Henry's standard-bearer, John Cheney, 'a giant of a man', blocked Richard's path but was hurled to the ground. Now Henry himself was desperately parrying Richard's blows. A few seconds more and Henry would be dead or a prisoner and then ….

And then Richard and his knights too were under attack as another group of soldiers charged in to defend Henry. Suddenly Henry was out of reach of Richard's attack. Now it was Richard fighting for his life. Around him his knights were killed. Then Richard himself was dragged or knocked from his horse. No surrender. No mercy. The thrust of a dagger or a crushing blow from a poll-axe ended the life of Richard III.



And far away from the battlefield, families waited, wondering if they would ever see sons, husbands and fathers alive again. Battle were not just about those who took part in the fighting. They changed the lives of mothers, wives, sons and daughters, friends and lovers too.

One of the dead was Walter Devereux. His last decision to fight for King Richard was a disaster for his family, in the short-term anyway.



The Devereux family coat of arms

Walter's son John should have inherited the family lands but King Henry punished the Devereux family by taking most of their lands and this made them much less well-off. Two years later, however, in 1487, John, fought for Henry against rebels in the Battle of Stoke. Afterwards the King gave John the Devereux lands back. King Henry and John Devereux had known each other as boys anyway when young Henry lived at Raglan castle with Walter's sister, Anne Herbert. King Henry was fond of Anne too and made a special visit to see her not long after the battle at Bosworth.

Henry Tudor had become Henry VII, the first Tudor king. However this wasn't the end of the fighting. There were more plots, this time by supporters of the dead Richard III and even that one battle in 1487 but gradually the wars faded away. The nobles wanted to live peacefully. It was safer for them to support Henry VII than risk losing their lives and lands in battle.

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What do I most want to tell you about the Wars of the Roses?



I'm Ian Dawson

My name is Ian Dawson. I've written these pages on the Wars of the Roses. I've been fascinated by the Wars since I was your age – not so much by the battles but by the people. I want to understand more about why they fought for one side or the other (or didn't fight at all) and about their daily lives when they weren't worrying about wars.

I'd like to tell you about some of the most important – and surprising – things I've learned.

1. Life in the 1400s wasn't all about warfare at all. People carried on telling jokes, getting married, having fun, singing songs, playing games. Despite the battles, this was a good time to live. Workers on farms and in towns were paid much higher wages than their grandparents and great-grandparents and so felt well-off. They spent their money on better clothing and food and maybe built a larger house. However life for later generations was harder. It would be another 400 years - the late 1800s - before a worker's wages bought so much food and other things.

2. The armies did not do much damage to homes, villages and towns. Of course, some people were unlucky. Their crops were damaged by armies marching through their fields or their young workers were sent to fight so they couldn't do their work as farmers, saddlers or shoemakers. Many people were very worried about whether their menfolk would return from battles or were mourning for men who'd been killed.

Which of these points do you think is most important to remember?

Can you suggest why learning about these Wars might help understand history later or even today?

Now for some things that may be surprising!

3. Ordinary working people heard the news about the kings, nobles and fighting. Plenty of people travelled short and long distances and spread the news they heard. Wealthier families sent lots of letters which spread news that was passed onto workers and servants.

4. Kings and nobles were very good at creating propaganda which was written on sheets pinned to church doors or read out in towns. The Duke of York and Edward IV created lots of propaganda saying that Henry VI and especially Queen Margaret had caused all the country's problems. Richard III said that his own brother, Edward IV, had been a very poor king and gave lots of examples which he said proved he was right.

5. France, Burgundy and Scotland played a big part in deciding who won the crown in 1470-71 and again in 1485. They wanted England to be weak so the English king could not invade them.

6. Almost everyone wanted to be respected by friends and neighbours. They called this being of 'good worship'. This is easy to understand – we all like being respected too!

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Now back to some big topics!



7. Henry VI was a very unusual king. There had been poor kings before but they were poor because they were untrustworthy and dangerous. They threatened the lives of the nobles who disagreed with them and sometimes executed them.

In the 1200s the nobles had tried to make bad kings (such as King John) keep to 'rules' like those in Magna Carta but that was hard – the king was always the most powerful man in the country and could take his revenge on his opponents. That was why in the 1300s the nobles went further and deposed Edward II and Richard II when they threatened the lives of some nobles. No-one could feel safe even if these kings were in prison.

Henry VI was different. He was a poor king but a very religious man. He didn't threaten anybody so there was no reason to depose him. People just had to put up with problems such as losing lands in France and increasing violence. They couldn't have an election and choose another king! In the end the quarrels between the nobles started the Wars and eventually that led to Henry being deposed – but that wasn't what anyone wanted at the beginning.

Later, in the 1600s, Charles I was another king who caused problems and again it took many years to decide what to do with a king who seemed a danger to his people.



8. One of the main causes of fighting was fear of being attacked by your rivals. York attacked Somerset in 1455 because he was afraid of being attacked himself. Fear of being attacked triggered wars in later centuries too.



9. Completely unexpected things kept happening. No-one expected Warwick to rebel against Edward IV in 1469. No-one expected Richard III to take his nephew's crown. Many nobles fought because they hoped that one more victory would end the fighting – a little like people hoped the First World War was 'The War to End Wars'.



10. Their decisions were often very difficult – would they choose loyalty to the king or loyalty to their lord or loyalty to their family? You couldn't be loyal to everyone – however much you wanted to be.



11. The Queens got a lot of blame even though they made great efforts to stop war breaking out. It was easier to blame the Queen than the King.



12. If it hadn't been for two very powerful men, the Earl of Warwick (the Kingmaker) and Richard, Duke of Gloucester (Richard III), the Wars would have ended in 1464. These two men pushed everyone into war again – though we can't be certain why they did what they did.

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Walter Devereux's Decisions: Have you given Walter good advice?



You began with 10 points. How many will you have at the end of the Wars?

1455: What should the Duke of York to do after the battle?

Nobody would have supported York if he had tried to be king - even his closest allies. Choices a and b would almost certainly have led to the execution of York and anyone who supported him.

a) Execute Henry - Lose 5 points

b) Put Henry in prison - Lose 5 points

c) Become chief councillor - Gain 3 points

1459: What should Walter do after Ludford?

Choice c is treason and would lead to your death – very quickly. Choice b gives you a chance of keeping your lands and escaping sever punishment – but there's no good choice here.

a) Go into exile - Lose 5 points

b) Beg henry for mercy - Lose 2 points

c) Fight the King's army - Lose 10 points

1461: Should Walter fight for Edward of York?

Nobody will respect you if you choose choice c. Edward is a great soldier even if he is young and has a good chance of winning — and you have always been loyal to the family of the Duke of York even if you are not loyal to King Henry. You can't be loyal to both.

a) Fight for Edward of York - Gain 3 points

b) Fight for King Henry - Lose 1 point

c) Stay home - Lose 3 points

1470: What Should Walter do next?

Choice b means you stay loyal to Edward IV but what if Edward never regains the crown – your family will have lost all its lands and wealth. Choice a is unlikely to succeed – will anyone join you if Edward is abroad and looks defeated. You have to hope Edward returns.

a) Plot a rebellion - Lose 5 points

b) Escape abroad - Lose 3 points

c) Look after your lands - Gain 1 point

1483: Should Walter support Richard III or rebel against him?

This is difficult and historians are not sure what Walter planned to do. Choice a is the most dangerous and would have lead to losing the family wealth when the rebellion failed.

a) Join the rebellion - Lose 3 points

b) Fight for King Richard - Gain 1 point

c) Stay home - Gain 1 point

1485: Should Walter fight for Richard III or Henry Tudor?

Another difficult choice and we don't know for certain why Walter chose to fight for Richard when his family had close links with Henry. Richard lost so supporting him meant the family would lose all its land and wealth. Choice c means whoever wins won't trust you in future to support him but at least you'd have stayed alive!

a) Fight for Richard - Lose all your points

b) Fight for Henry - Gain 1 point

c) Stay home - Lose 1 point

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