

# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction.....                                     | 5  |
| 1. (Not your average) childhood and adolescence...13  |    |
| 2. Getting the throne.....                            | 21 |
| 3. Ruling the kingdoms.....                           | 29 |
| 4. The conquest of Granada.....                       | 35 |
| 5. Putting the Catholic into ‘Catholic Monarchs’...47 |    |
| 6. Becoming a global power .....                      | 49 |
| 7. The (not so) happy couple.....                     | 55 |
| 8. The final years .....                              | 61 |
| Glossary .....  | 65 |
| Before reading activities.....                        | 67 |
| While reading activities.....                         | 68 |
| After reading activities .....                        | 72 |

# Introduction

On a cold October morning in 1469, a royal wedding **\*took place** in the city of Valladolid. The **bride** was a light-haired, 18-year-old princess. The **groom** was a pale-skinned prince with a high voice and long, straight hair. But the preparations for the big day had been a bit unusual.

Like today, most royal weddings were extravagant public occasions, but this one was small and took place in secret. The princess had come to the city under armed guard because her **half-brother**, King Henry IV of Castile, wanted to arrest her. The prince had travelled to the wedding **disguised** as a merchant. He was almost killed when a guard threw a rock at him as he passed by a castle on his way from Zaragoza. The ‘happy couple’ had met for the first time just four days before the wedding. They were so poor they had to **borrow** money to pay for the celebrations! Not exactly the glamour you’d expect of a royal wedding.

The ceremony itself was also, well, a bit weird. Officially, the wedding wasn’t even legal because the princess had promised not to marry without her half-brother Henry IV’s permission. She didn’t have his permission – that’s why he wanted to arrest her. To complicate things even more, the bride and groom were second cousins. This meant they need special permission

\* Words that look like **this** appear in the glossary at the end of the book.

from the Pope to get married. This could take a long time, so the **Archbishop** of Toledo (who conducted the ceremony), decided to use the **signature** and **seal** of a dead pope instead. Ingenious!...but this didn't really help to make the wedding look more legal, did it?!

A secret ceremony between a bride and groom who didn't really know each other had taken place, without proper permission and using false papers...it sounds more like a **soap opera** than a royal wedding! But these two teenagers became two of Spain's most famous rulers, two people whose names were forever associated with each other: **FERDINAND** and **ISABELLA**.

This is the story of the lives of these two monarchs who became famous for, well, doing quite a lot of important things.

## Ferdinand and Isabella to do list Nov 1469

- have illegal secret wedding ✓
- unite the crowns of CASTILE AND ARAGON
- bring law and order to the land
- conquer the Muslim Kingdom of Granada?
- achieve religious unity
- find a new route to Asia?
- ~~buy potatoes~~ ← haven't been discovered yet!

But before we find out about all that, we need to know what Spain was really like in the mid-15th century.

The first thing that might surprise you is that there was no such thing as the Kingdom of Spain, it just didn't exist! Most people didn't even use the word 'Spain'! Instead they referred to the five kingdoms on the Iberian Peninsula: Portugal, Castile, Aragon, Navarre and Granada. In fact, the only time in history that the Iberian Peninsula had been a single unit was when it was Hispania, part of the Roman Empire. It had been conquered by the Muslims in the 8th century. Two centuries later, the Christians **recovered** part of the north of Spain and began to move south in a slow advance known as the Reconquest. By Ferdinand and Isabella's time, only the Kingdom of Granada was under Muslim rule.

Isabella was Princess of Castile, a wild and warlike kingdom dominated by powerful nobles. These nobles had **led** the fight against the Muslims and took large areas of land from them as they moved south. Ferdinand's Aragon looked east towards the Mediterranean. It had established a trading empire which included the Balearic Islands, Sicily, Sardinia and Naples, as well as some fortified towns in North Africa.

But by the middle of the 15th century, its neighbour Castile was growing in importance. Castile was four times bigger than Aragon, it had five times the population, it had the largest cities and it was more unified than its neighbour.

Aragon had a more developed economy, but the dreaded **Black Death, civil wars** and economic crisis had **weakened** it. Also, Castile's economy was beginning to grow fast. Why? The reason was simple: sheep – the humble sheep, or to be exact, the merino sheep. The merino produced a soft white wool that rich merchants in Flanders, Italy and England loved. The sheep trade was run by a powerful group of producers called the Mesta. They controlled the great **flocks** of sheep that migrated across the peninsula in summer and winter, and made lots and lots and lots of money.



Some of this money was used to build the great Gothic cathedrals in Burgos, Segovia and León. But most of it went into making a number of aristocratic families fabulously super rich. Some of these aristocrats became even more powerful than the royal family itself!

Not only did Castile and Aragon have very different economies, the two kingdoms were also **ruled** in very different ways. Aragon was made up of three separate kingdoms: Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia, each with its own laws and own *cortes*. The *cortes* were advisory councils that helped the monarch rule each area. All laws had to be approved by each *cortes*. Castile also had a *cortes*, but it was much weaker than those in Aragon.

The number one religion in both Castile and Aragon was Christianity, but there were large communities of Muslims and Jews in both kingdoms. Jews were often involved in trade, finance and professions such as medicine. Muslims usually lived in the countryside. The three religions had existed side by side in relative peace, but this situation was beginning to go downhill. With the advance of the Reconquest, the Christians were becoming increasingly intolerant. Religion became one of the most important influences in Ferdinand and Isabella's **reign**: they weren't called the Catholic Monarchs for nothing!

The marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella brought the two kingdoms of Castile and Aragon together. But this wasn't a smooth or easy process...as we're going to find out!

## STRANGE, BUT TRUE!



Richard III

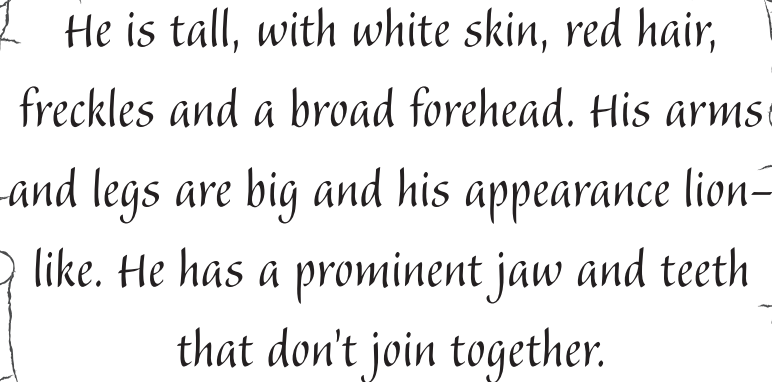
**D**id you know that one of the original candidates to marry Isabella was the Duke of Gloucester, who later became King Richard III of England? Richard's body was recently found in a very glamorous location: a car park in the English city of Leicester. Hmm..

Richard III has traditionally been represented as an ugly, evil murderer. He became king after imprisoning and probably **murdering** his **nephews** (who were 12 and 9 years old). So, it's not difficult to understand why nobody liked him very much. Lucky escape, Isabella!

Richard III certainly met a humiliating end when he was killed at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. His skeleton showed that he had been stabbed 10 times, including twice in the head and once in the backside. Richard was not the only foreign royal to be linked with Isabella. Both the Portuguese King Afonso V and the brother of Louis XI of France were also considered as potential husbands for her.

# 1. (Not your average) childhood and adolescence

Isabella was the daughter of a king, but she wasn't born to be queen. She was the product of John II of Castile's second marriage, to Isabella of Portugal. Nobody ever thought she would **\*rule** the kingdom. After all, Isabella was a girl: in those days, girls weren't considered to make good rulers (sorry girls!). Isabella's father already had a son, Henry, from his first marriage, to Maria of Aragon. Here's what the chronicler Enríquez del Castillo said about Isabella's **half brother** Henry:



He is tall, with white skin, red hair, freckles and a broad forehead. His arms and legs are big and his appearance lion-like. He has a prominent jaw and teeth that don't join together.

In fact, people were so uninterested in Isabella's birth that we aren't even sure about the exact place or date! She was probably born on 22 April 1451, just before

\* Words that look like **this** appear in the glossary at the end of the book.

 Aurelio Sanchez Martin ed., *Cronica de Enrique IV de Diego Enriquez del Castillo* Universidad de Valladolid (Translated and adapted)



Easter, in the little town of Madrigal de las Altas Torres in Ávila. As a princess, her education would focus on her role as a potential wife and mother, rather than as a queen.

Isabella's father died when she was only three years old, and her half-brother Henry became King. Isabella was sent to live with her mother and her brother Alfonso in a gloomy castle in city of Arévalo. Conditions there were pretty horrible, and unlike most royals, they didn't have much money. To make things worse, Isabella's mother was **sinking** into a deep depression. Back in 1451, she had persuaded her husband John II to order the execution of his friend and **favourite** Álvaro de Luna. Maybe she felt bad about this afterwards, and that's why she got depressed.

Isabella and Alfonso were then taken away from their mother by King Henry and brought to the court in Segovia. This was so that he could control them and supervise the rest of their education. Isabella's mother stayed in Arévalo and gradually went madder and madder. In the end, she didn't recognise anybody and didn't even remember who she was! People said that Isabella's mother ended her days running up and down the stairs of the castle tower, chased by ghostly voices calling out De Luna's name. The possible moral of this story is: don't persuade your husband to execute people! It may come back to **haunt** you (literally).

In the **fairy-tale** castle in Segovia, Isabella continued her education under the watchful eye of Henry's wife, Queen Joan. Although Isabella lived in more comfort than in Arévalo, she didn't **get on** with Queen Joan, and even compared her to a **wicked stepmother**.

**Meanwhile**, outside Segovia, things were getting difficult for King Henry. As usual, rival groups of nobles were competing for power. Some were trying to damage Henry's reputation by saying he was incapable of having children. This **gossip** wasn't completely invented. Henry's first marriage, to Blanche of Navarre, had been **annulled** for this reason, although Henry **blamed** his problems on an evil **spell** (?!). The fact that he had no children with his second wife Joan seemed to confirm the rumours.

But to everybody's surprise, the queen became pregnant in 1461. She gave birth to a baby girl called Joanna the following year. The birth didn't stop the gossip, though. Henry's enemies called baby Joanna 'la Beltraneja' because they said she was really the daughter of the king's favourite, the handsome Beltrán de la Cueva.

# The Segovia Star

15 April 1462

**ROYAL EXCLUSIVE**

## Doubts over 'miracle' baby

The Kingdom of Castile was **overjoyed** earlier this year when King Henry announced the birth of his first child Joanna. 'She's a gift from God', said the king, whose childless marriage to his first wife Blanche was annulled because it had been **cursed** by an evil spell. After seven years of marriage, Henry's second

wife Joan had finally given birth to a bouncing baby girl, Princess Joanna.



But the **Segovia Star** can **EXCLUSIVELY** reveal that there are serious doubts about the identity of baby Joanna's father.

Un-named nobles close to the royal couple have told the **Star** that the **REAL** father could be the handsome young royal favourite Beltrán de la Cueva, aged 19.

Sources close to the queen deny the rumours, though. 'They don't look like one another at all', these sources said. 'Beltrán is tall, la Beltraneja, oops, I mean Princess Joanna, is short, he wears armour, she doesn't, he carries a sword, she doesn't. There is absolutely no **resemblance**, except for the eyes, nose, hair, face shape and chin.'

**See page 4 for more details about miracle baby Joanna!**

One group of nobles used baby Joanna's birth as a way to try to increase their power and influence. First they insisted that Isabella's brother Prince Alfonso should be named as the **heir** to the throne. They then went a step further, and demanded that Alfonso should replace Henry as king. The dispute provided the perfect excuse for the start of a **civil war** between Alfonso and his supporters, and those who **sided** with King Henry.

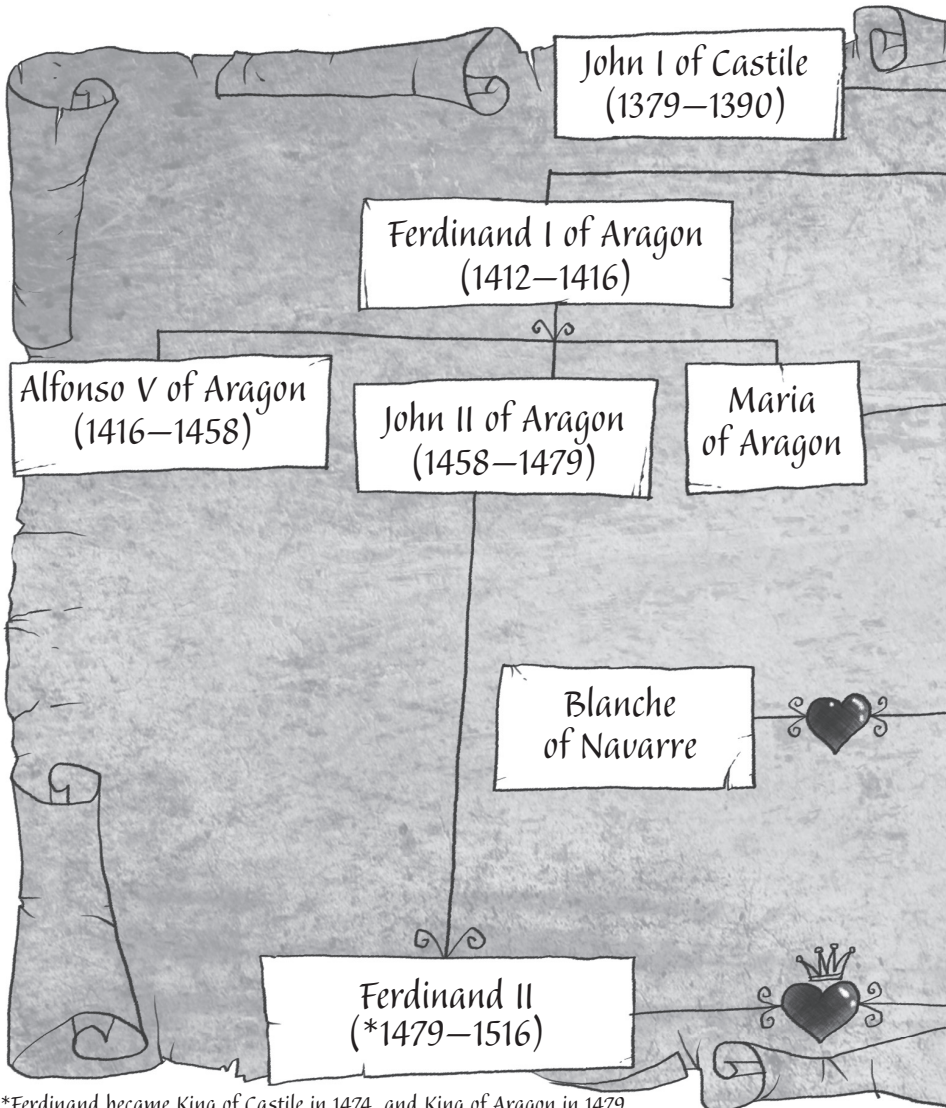
Isabella was now **facing** a difficult decision. Which brother should she support: her half-brother the king, or her younger brother Alfonso? In the end she chose to side with Alfonso.

The rebel nobles continued their campaign against Henry, which at times became a bit ridiculous. In an event known as the **FARCE OF ÁVILA** in 1465, they read out their accusations against Henry. Except the king wasn't actually there, so they read them out to an effigy of Henry instead. It wasn't called a farce for nothing! Then the Archbishop of Toledo (him again!) took the crown off the **effigy**. Another noble took the effigy's **sword**, the symbol of justice, and a third took the **sceptre**, the symbol of royal government. Just in case this wasn't clear enough, they then kicked over poor Henry's effigy.



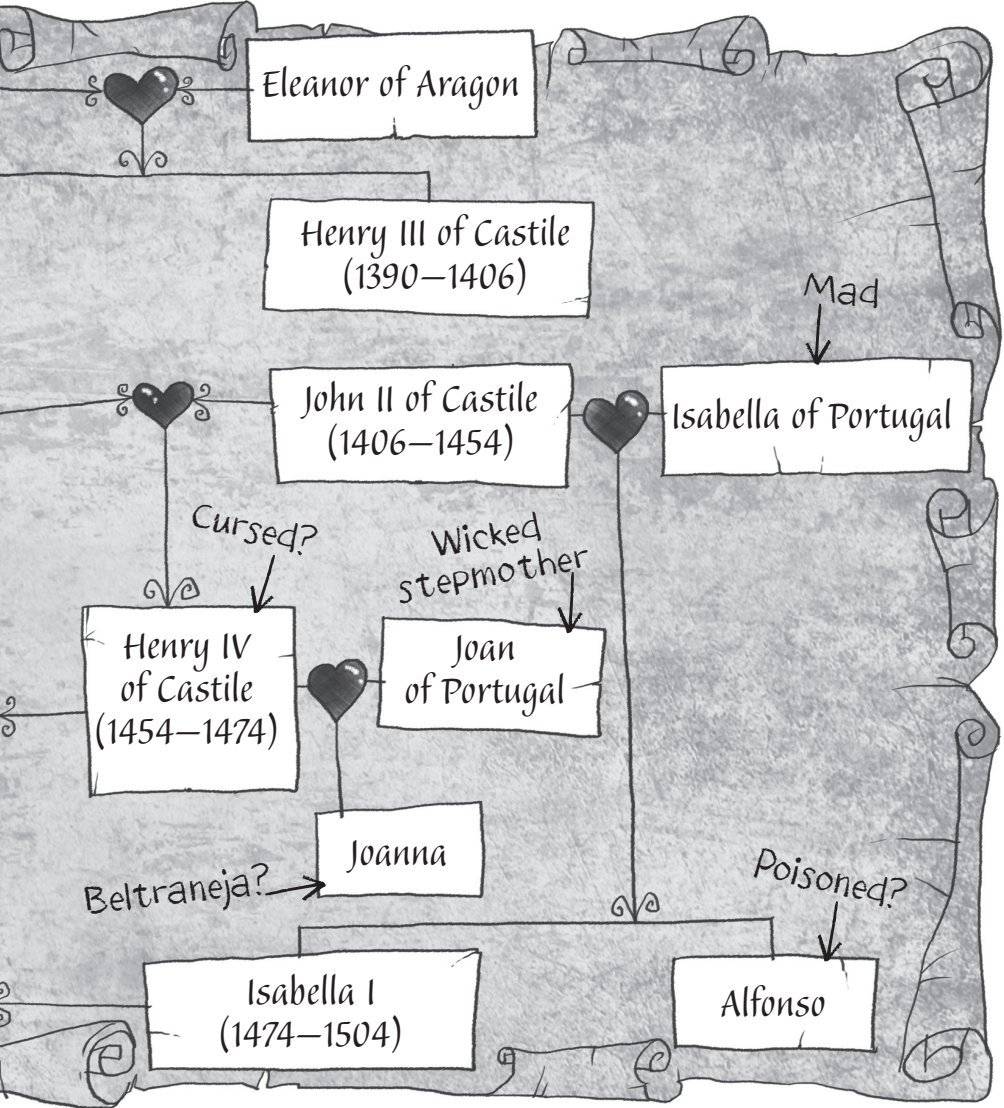
Alfonso was then proclaimed king, even though he was still only 11 years old!

Poor King Henry tried to negotiate with the rebels. He **reluctantly** agreed to accept Alfonso as his heir. But he also had a **cunning** plan: to organise a marriage between baby Joanna and Alfonso to ensure



\*Ferdinand became King of Castile in 1474, and King of Aragon in 1479.

his grandchildren would rule. The plan didn't work out. Inconveniently for Henry, Alfonso died suddenly in 1468, probably as a result of the plague. Alfonso's supporters didn't believe this though. They said that Alfonso had been **poisoned** or even had his throat cut.



They now **championed** Isabella as the rightful queen (even though she was a girl!).

While Isabella was now at the centre of a civil war in Castile, her future husband Ferdinand had been growing up in neighbouring Aragon. Almost a year younger than Isabella, the young Ferdinand was trained as a **warrior** prince. He was also given a basic education in the new Humanist learning that was becoming popular across Europe. But people said that he preferred riding and fighting to studying! Like Isabella, Ferdinand wasn't born to be king: he had an elder brother, Don Carlos, the Prince of Viana. But Don Carlos died in 1461, and Ferdinand became the heir to the throne of his father, John II of Aragon (not to be confused with Isabella's father, who was also John II, but of Castile!).

Ferdinand was a man of action and took part in a civil war in Catalonia in the 1460s. He got some experience in government and administration during these years. He also had time for some romantic interest, and fathered two children with a Catalan noblewoman. One of these children later became the Archbishop of Zaragoza. However, his father King John II was looking to Castile, and not to Catalonia, for a future wife for his son and heir. Isabella was the number one candidate.

# Glossary

**annul:** make invalid; cancel

**archbishop:** highest rank of bishop in the church

**Black Death:** popular name for the mid-14th century epidemic of bubonic plague

**blame:** attribute responsibility

**borrow:** get money or an object from someone with the understanding that it must be returned to that person

**bride:** woman who is getting married

**champion (vb.):** support with great enthusiasm

**civil war:** war between inhabitants of the same country

**curse:** say a magic word or phrase that makes bad things happen

**disguise (vb.):** dress as someone or something else to hide one's identity

**effigy:** doll or model that represents a real person and is used to ridicule them

**face (vb.):** confront

**fairy-tale:** related to traditional children's stories like Cinderella

**favourite:** person who is very close to the monarch and has great influence over him or her

**flock:** group of sheep, goats or birds that live or move around together

**gossip:** talk or rumours about people's private lives

**groom:** man who is getting married

**half-brother:** brother by only one parent

**haunt:** appear as a ghost; cause anxiety



**heir:** person with the legal right to someone's property or position after they die

**lead (vb.):** be in the front of something; be the leader

**meanwhile:** at the same time

**murder:** kill someone unlawfully

**nephew:** son of a person's brother or sister

**overjoyed:** very happy

**poison (vb.):** give someone a toxic substance that causes illness or death

**recover:** regain territory

**reign:** period of time during which a monarch or emperor rules

**reluctantly:** without enthusiasm, unwillingly

**resemblance:** fact of being similar

**rule (vb.):** govern, usually in the case of a monarch or emperor

**sceptre:** ornamental rod held by a monarch

**seal:** piece of wax with a personalised design used to authorise or agree to a document

**side (vb.):** support, join with

**signature:** a person's name written with the purpose of authorising or agreeing to something

**sink:** become submerged

**soap opera:** type of television series that usually focuses on domestic situations and is often very melodramatic and sensationalised

**spell:** word or phrase supposed to have magical powers

**stepmother:** wife of a person's father

**sword:** long weapon with a sharp blade, made of metal

**take place:** happen, occur

**warrior:** person who fights wars and is very brave

**weaken:** make something weaker (less strong)

**wicked:** very bad

# Before Reading Activities

## 1. Match the words to the correct descriptions.

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Reconquest         | Ecclesiastical tribunal that persecuted people that it believed to be false converts to Christianity            |
| Granada            | Kingdom that included much of the central part of the Iberian Peninsula   |
| Inquisition        | Representative assemblies made up of the clergy, nobility and the bourgeoisie                                   |
| New World          | Gradual advance of the Christians towards the south of the Iberian Peninsula between the 8th and 15th centuries |
| Cortes             | Institution created to keep law and order in rural areas  |
| Holy Brotherhood   | Name given to the lands in America that were discovered in the 15th and 16th centuries                          |
| Kingdom of Castile | Kingdom that was in the eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula whose economy was based on Mediterranean trade    |
| Kingdom of Aragon  | Muslim kingdom that was conquered by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492   |

## 2. Write sentences about these people.

- |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| a) Isabella I of Castile  | d) Christopher Columbus |
| b) Ferdinand II of Aragon | e) Boabdil              |
| c) The Pope               | f) The Jews             |

# While reading activities

**Read the introduction. Find the mistake in each sentence and correct it.**

- a) Isabella's half-brother Henry IV was very happy about her marriage to Ferdinand of Aragon.
- b) Ferdinand and Isabella needed the Pope's permission to get married because they were members of the royal family.
- c) In the 15th century there were four kingdoms on the Iberian Peninsula: Portugal, Aragon, Granada and Castile.
- d) Aragon was bigger than Castile and its population was five times greater than that of Castile.
- e) Muslims often worked in trade, finance and the professions.
- f) The Reconquest made Christians more tolerant.

**1. Read chapter 1. Then complete the sentences using these words (there are more words than you need!):** *cousin, Ferdinand I of Aragon, first, grandparents, great-grandparents, half-brother, Henry III of Castile, niece, second, sister-in-law,*

- a) Henry IV was Isabella and Alfonso's\_\_\_\_\_.
- b) Joan of Portugal was Henry IV's\_\_\_\_\_wife and Isabella's\_\_\_\_\_.
- c) Joanna of Castile was Isabella's\_\_\_\_\_.
- d) Henry IV's mother was Ferdinand's\_\_\_\_\_.
- e) Isabella's paternal grandfather was\_\_\_\_\_.  
His brother\_\_\_\_\_was Ferdinand II's paternal grandfather.
- f) John I of Castile and Eleanor of Aragon were\_\_\_\_\_to both Ferdinand and Isabella.