

Britain: Country and people

Britain consists of four separate nations which were gradually unified over a period of several hundred years. Those nations were once very different in character with the culture of Ireland, Wales and Scotland being mainly Celtic and the culture of England being mainly Germanic. However, as time passed the English culture came to dominate the islands due to England's military and economic power so that many aspects of life in Britain are now organized according to English tradition and practice. Although some aspects are still organized separately or differently for the other nations, with Scotland having its own legal system for example, the dominance of England has reached the point where today people confuse it with Britain, often to the annoyance of the people of the other three nations.

The ambiguity between the use of the terms England and Britain has entered the language in a number of areas. For example, the Bank of England is the institution which controls the supply of money in the British Isles, while the term Anglo has come to mean both "relating to England and the English" and "relating to Britain and the British." There is also the tendency to not mention England when something pertains to England and to specifically mention Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland when the same thing pertains to those nations. This has the effect of making the other nations appear to be different or lesser than England in some way.

The dominance of the term England in the language may therefore have some negative consequences for Britain as a whole. Welsh, Scottish and Irish people have very strong identities and would never describe themselves as English so that the use of the term England instead of Britain only contributes to a feeling of division between the nations. These divisions are most obviously seen in sporting activities. An English football fan may well support Scotland when Scotland plays against a foreign team but a Scottish football fan normally supports Scotland and anyone playing against England.

Text based upon chapter 1 of *Britain for learners of English* by James O'Driscoll Oxford University Press

1. Answer the questions in your own words.

- a) Why might the dominance of England be bad for Britain?
- b) What do you infer from the text about English attitudes to the other nations? What do you infer about the other nations attitudes to the English?

2. Choose one, two, three or four correct answers for each question.

1. Why is England the dominant nation in the British Isles?
 - a) Because it had the strongest economy in the past.
 - b) Because it is the biggest nation.
 - c) Because all four nations speak English.
 - d) Because of its army and navy.

2. Why do people confuse England and Britain?

- a) Because England is the dominant nation.
- b) Because the confusion forms part of the language.
- c) Because the culture of Britain is mainly English culture.
- d) Because they have the same money supply.

3. The use of the term England instead of Britain...

- a) is evident in sports.
- b) brings the four nations together.
- c) is normal.
- d) is irritating for the other nations.

3. Find a synonym in the text for the following words or phrases.

- a) is related to.
- b) at one time.
- c) propensity.
- d) characterize.

4. Match the phrases 1–8 with a–h.

- 1) The part of Ireland which is included in the UK.
- 2) Islands that are “ruled” by the UK but not officially part of Britain.
- 3) Another name for The Republic of Ireland.
- 4) The country whose capital is Cardiff.
- 5) Another name for The United Kingdom.
- 6) An alternative name for the island of Eire and Northern Ireland.
- 7) The country where whisky comes from.
- 8) The country whose patron saint is St. George.

- a) Eire
- b) Britain
- c) Northern Ireland
- d) England
- e) Scotland
- f) Wales
- g) The Emerald Isle
- h) Channel Isles

5. What is the difference between the adjectives *Scottish*, *Scot* and *Scotch*? Use a dictionary or the internet to find out and give examples of how they are used.

6. Talking points:

Is there always a dominant nation in a country?

Which is more important for you: your culture or your country? Why?

Do you think some people in your country feel excluded? Which people?

For more detail see *Britain for Learners of English* by James O'Driscoll
Oxford University Press

Teacher's tips:

1.

Students read the text through and answer the two comprehension questions either individually on paper or discussing in small groups. Vocabulary in the text can be checked with dictionaries or with the teacher. The text can be exploited later as the teacher wishes.

2.

Students answer the three multiple-choice questions and compare answers. Make sure that students understand that more than one answer is possible in these three questions.

3.

Students search the text for synonyms of the given words. Dictionaries can be used. Many other tasks of this type can be given to the students: finding antonyms of words, writing definitions of words, writing example sentences which use words in the text, searching for words which contain certain sounds, etc.

4.

Students match the phrases with the geographical place and compare answers.

5.

Students should give examples or write example sentences to illustrate use. Good dictionaries or the internet may be needed for this task.

6.

These questions can be discussed by the whole class together or by students in small groups. The groups can report back to the class about their discussions. Students can then write up their answers after the class.

Alternatively, students can first write their answers, either in class or at home, and discuss afterwards.

Follow up:

What do students know about their own country and the different people that live there?

Answers:

1.

Students' own answers.

2.

1. a, d

2. a, b, c

3. d

3.

a. pertains

b. once

c. tendency

d. describe

4.

1. c

2. h

3. a

4. f

5. b

6. g

7. e

8. d

5.

Scottish is the normal everyday adjective used to mean "relating to Scotland and its people" as in *the Scottish Highlands*, or *she's English, not Scottish*.

Scot is used to refer to a person from Scotland; *a person born in Edinburgh is a Scot*.

Scotch is an old-fashioned adjective meaning "relating to Scotland and its people" which is now only used in certain fixed phrases such as *Scotch whisky*.

6.

Students' own answers.