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Tradition and change in UK politics and society

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Tradition and change in UK politics and society

by Paul Jenkinson

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In dieser Unterrichtseinheit beschäftigen sich die Schülerinnen und Schüler mit der aktuellen Situation in Großbritannien anhand von vier Themenkomplexen: *The UK in the European context*, *multicultural society*, *the monarchy* und *modern democracy*. Mittels vielfältiger Medien – Cartoon, Gedicht, Diagramme, Videos, Zeitungsartikel – erschließen die Lernenden die vier thematischen Bereiche und verschaffen sich so ein umfassendes Bild von einer Gesellschaft im Wandel.

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Competences and skills:

By working with several newspaper articles and two diagrams, students enhance their **reading and analysing competences**. Throughout the unit, they continually apply and improve their **writing skills**. Students also train their **listening and viewing skills** by engaging with a number of videos. Dealing with a cartoon and a poem, they also practise their **interpretative skills**.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

CT Creative Task	C Comment
D Discussion/debate	G Group work
L Language	LVC Listening/viewing comprehension
P Working with a picture/cartoon	PR Presentation
R Research	RC Reading comprehension
S Summary	T Working with a text
VI Working with a video	W Writing

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: The UK in the European context	M1–M4	C, G, P, R, RC, S, T, W
2: Multicultural society	M5–M9	C, CT, G, LVC, P, PR, R, T, VI
3: The monarchy	M10–M15	C, D, G, L, LVC, PR, R, RC, T, VI
4: Modern democracy	M16–M18	C, RC, T, VI

Tradition and change in UK politics and society

Facts

In the 1960s, Bob Dylan sang that “The times they are a-changin’”; today, those words would be a suitable signature tune for the UK. The UK’s relationship with the EU was often an uneasy one, never having been 100 percent committed to it. Brexit, however, damaged relations and created a lack of trust. Once the scars heal, a more neighbourly friendship needs to be established. In the meantime, politicians on both sides of the English Channel still must work together and agree on further terms. The break with the EU, though, is causing internal problems particularly regarding Scotland and the position of Northern Ireland.

The UK is multicultural. Multicultural, though, does not mean racially integrated nor without issues. Parallel societies are entrenched in major cities and discrimination does exist; however, one only needs to look at the NHS or television presenters to see that people with a different ethnic background have equal opportunities. The question arises whether race itself is a problem or the social groups are. After all, there are poor, uneducated and disadvantaged “white” sections of the population, too. The *Black Lives Matter* movement from the USA, plus Prince Harry and Meghan’s accusations of endemic racism, have brought the issue once more to the forefront. Many ethnic groups in the UK, though, dislike the terms “multiculturalism” and “BAME” (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) since they ignore culture differences.

The monarchy is colourful, traditional and very British. Queen Elizabeth (born 1926) has been on the throne since 1952 and, realistically, is coming to the end of her reign. She is respected and very well-liked in contrast to some members of the royal family. But, like all great-grandmothers, she is a leftover of a former era. The royal family needs to be brought into line with today’s society by slimming down and allowing non-essential royals to work and pursue normal lives. The crown is hereditary, and the wearer cannot retire. When it passes to Prince Charles (born 1948), though, he could streamline the royal family, and possibly change the succession rules enabling a monarch to retire. This would give Prince Charles, who lacks in popularity and can be controversial and meddling at times, an opportunity to be king for a short period before passing the crown on to Prince William.

Westminster is often referred to as “the mother of parliaments” but democracy there has been failing in recent years. The Brexit referendum could be seen as a pivotal point when the electorate became aware of the unfairness of the system and political untruths; but unaware that politicians use social media to influence and manipulate them. Boris Johnson’s method of governing has brought democracy into question where political

decision making has little to do with the electorate. The first-past-the-post voting system needs to be reformed since it is not representative; neither is the House of Lords, which many people feel is elitist and outdated.

Notes on the material

Four areas regarding tradition and change in the UK have been selected to study:

The UK in the European context (topic 1): Many students will be unaware of the turbulent political history between the UK and the EU. A timeline, therefore, is provided in M1 with an accompanying mediation worksheet. The future relationship between the UK and the EU is the topic of a newspaper article in M3, and M4 includes a cartoon which reflects the present “icy” situation.

Multicultural society (topic 2): British people with a different ethnic background carrying out normal lives are not newsworthy. Being disadvantaged and discriminated against grab headlines. M5 counters the belief that all ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in an article written by an immigrant explaining that it is up to the individual to achieve success. Britain has always been a land of mixed races: this is cleverly described in the poem in M7, which is reminiscent of a cooking recipe. The two diagrams in M6 reflect the opinions of BAMEs regarding issues relevant to them. Students are asked to analyse and comment upon what they reveal. Finally, and slightly controversial, Nigel Farage, the former leader of UKIP (UK Independence Party), talks about multicultural Britain and ethnic minorities in a 2:58-minute video interview.

The monarchy (topic 3): The royal family, with all their traditions and colourful ceremonies, are an integral part of the UK. The question is, though, once the Queen dies, what will happen to this old-fashioned and outdated institution? A fact sheet provides information on how the monarchy works and its future. This is supported and contrasted by a 4:34-minute video explaining the purpose of the monarchy. The departure of Prince Harry and Meghan from the royal family is dealt with in a newspaper article in M13. One of the two short video extracts relating to their Oprah Winfrey interview can be selected to discuss. The royal family need to be modernised but is Prince Charles capable of that and will he become a meddling monarch? M15 looks at this problem on the horizon.

Modern democracy (topic 4): Democracy is being abused by politicians and the government is no longer acting in the interests of the people. Political parties are using social media, for example, to target the electorate and manipulate them almost on an individual level. M16 looks at what has gone wrong with British democracy and how it needs to be improved. This is supported by a 2:25-minute video from the House of

Lords select committee in M18, explaining how digital technology and the electoral system need to be brought into line.

Note: the UK = the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland)
Great Britain = England Scotland and Wales
Britain, today, is often used as a synonym for the UK:
<https://raabe.click/en/britain> [last access: 05/08/2021]

Topic 1: The UK in the European context

M1 A timeline of the relationship

1946: Winston Churchill befürwortet in seiner Züricher Rede eine „Europäische Familie“ oder „Vereinigte Staaten von Europa“.

1951	Der Vertrag von Paris: BRD, Frankreich, Italien, Belgien, Luxemburg und die Niederlande bilden die Europäische Gemeinschaft für Kohle und Stahl (EGKS). <i>Großbritannien zur Mitgliedschaft eingeladen, lehnt jedoch ab</i>
1957	Die EGKS-Länder unterzeichnen die Römischen Verträge zur Bildung der Europäischen Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft (EWG).
1961 1967	Großbritannien beantragt den Beitritt zur EWG: Der französische Präsident de Gaulle blockiert dies – und auch den zweiten Versuch Großbritanniens. 1965: Vereinigung von EWG, EURATOM (Europäische Atomgemeinschaft) und EGKS zur EG.
1973	Der dritte Antrag Großbritanniens auf Beitritt zur EG wird angenommen. <i>1974: Labour Partei gewinnt Unterhauswahlen</i>
1975	Großbritannien hält ein Referendum über die Fortsetzung der Mitgliedschaft ab: 67,2% stimmen dafür. <i>1979: Margaret Thatcher (Konservative Partei) zur Premierministerin gewählt</i>
1983	Die Wahlkampagne der Labour Partei zum Verlassen der EG führt zu ihrer Niederlage.
1984	Thatcher erhält eine Rückerstattung für die Beiträge Großbritanniens zum EG-Haushalt: „Britten-Rabatt“. Ihre Ideen zu einem europäischen Binnenmarkt werden begrüßt.
1988	Thatchers Brügger Rede gegen die zentralisierte EG-Macht löst die Euroskepsis ihrer Partei aus. Labour will jetzt in der EG bleiben. <i>Großbritannien ratifiziert den Vertrag mit dem Recht, Teile nicht umzusetzen</i>
1992	Der Vertrag von Maastricht schafft die EU: eine Europäische Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion und ein Sozialabkommen werden angestrebt.

1995	Das Schengen Abkommen tritt in Kraft: Abbau der Grenzkontrollen. <i>Großbritannien tritt dem Schengen Abkommen nicht bei.</i> <i>1997: Tony Blair (Labour Partei) zum Premierminister gewählt</i>
2002	Der Euro wird in den meisten Staaten der EU eingeführt.
2004	Zehn ost- und mitteleuropäische Länder treten der EU bei, unterstützt von der britischen Regierung.
2007	Bulgarien und Rumänien treten der EU bei, unterstützt von der britischen Regierung.
2009	Der Vertrag von Lissabon stärkt die Macht des europäischen Parlaments. <i>2010: David Cameron (Konservative Partei) zum Premierminister gewählt</i>
2013	Anti-EU-Gefühle nehmen zu: Cameron verspricht, bei seinem Wahlsieg die Beziehungen zur EU neu zu verhandeln und darüber ein Referendum abzuhalten. <i>2015: Cameron wiedergewählt</i>
2016	Das Brexit-Referendum: 51,9% stimmen für einen Austritt.
2016 – 2020	Es finden erbitterte Austrittsverhandlungen zwischen Großbritannien und der EU statt. Am 31. Januar 2020 verlässt Großbritannien die EU. <i>Wachsende Polarisierung zwischen Befürwortern u. Gegnern des Brexits: Rücktritt Camerons; Wahl Mays – Rücktritt; Wahl Boris Johnsons (Konservative Partei)</i>

M2 Worksheet – A timeline of the relationship

Internet research



1. Work in small groups. Divide the research and combine findings. Give the English equivalent for each of the following German terms from the timeline with its abbreviation if used, and a brief explanation of it or its importance.



1 Züricher Rede – 2 Europäische Gemeinschaft für Kohle und Stahl (EGKS) –
3 Europäische Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft (EWG) – 4 Briten-Rabatt –
5 europäischer Binnenmarkt – 6 Brügger Rede – 7 Vertrag von Maastricht –
8 Europäische Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion – 9 Sozialabkommen –
10 Schengen Abkommen – 11 Vertrag von Lissabon

Mediation



2. Provide an introduction for an English fact sheet concerning the relationship the UK has had with the EU and its predecessors. Use the information in the timeline as the source material and include a suitable heading.

Comment



3. Give your own assessment of this relationship in less than 100 words.

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