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West Virginia University
EXTENSION SERVICE

From Britain with Love

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Educational Objectives

1. Examine America's fascination with Great Britain.
2. Learn about the British monarchy and the various royal titles.
3. Explore other popular aspects of British culture.

Great Britain

Great Britain (also known as the United Kingdom) is an island country located off the northwestern coast of mainland Europe. It consists of England, Wales, Scotland, and the northern six counties of the island of Ireland (known as Northern Ireland). Great Britain has a population of 64,229,000, and its monetary unit is the pound sterling (£). The official languages are English; English and Scots Gaelic in Scotland; and English and Welsh in Wales. The country's total area is 93,851 square miles, which is a little smaller than the state of Oregon. At its widest, Great Britain is 300 miles across and 600 miles long from the northern tip of Scotland to the southern coast of England. No location is more than 75 miles from the sea. The capital, London, is situated on the river Thames in southeastern England. Other major cities include Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Belfast, Londonderry, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Swansea, and Cardiff.

Their form of government is a constitutional monarchy and commonwealth realm, which means the country's head of state is the reigning king or queen. The head of government is the prime minister, and this is where the primary political power lies. Historically, the United Kingdom (UK) played a leading role in developing parliamentary democracy and in advancing literature and science. At its height of power in the 19th century, the British Empire stretched over one-fourth of the globe; however, its strength diminished after

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the first half of the 20th century due to World Wars I and II, as well as the Republic of Ireland's War of Independence. The UK rebuilt itself into a modern and prosperous European nation. Currently, it is a leading trading power, financial center, and the third largest economy in Europe.

The British Monarchy

Great Britain is based on a constitutional monarchy, which is a form of government where sovereignty is vested in a single person. The individual's right to rule is generally hereditary, and the person holds office (power) for life. Currently, Queen Elizabeth II is head of the British monarchy and has served in this capacity since 1952.

The line of succession to the British throne previously followed the system of male primogeniture, meaning that younger sons had precedence over their older sisters. While this may seem unfair, some of the longest and most successful British monarchs were women – Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Victoria, and Queen Elizabeth II. If there was no male heir, the succession allowed the female line. When Queen Victoria succeeded to the throne in 1837, there were no surviving legitimate male children in her family or that of her uncles.

When Prince William married, he was given the titles of Duke of Cambridge, Earl of Strathearn, and Baron of Carrickfergus. There is often confusion as to the significance and correct order of these royal titles. They are part of the British peerage, the legal system of hereditary titles. Traditionally, when men from the British royal family marry, they are granted at least one peerage; Prince William received three. Royal titles start with king and queen, followed by prince and princess.

The lesser known titles are explained below in order from most significant to least significant.

Duke/Duchess: Dukes are members of nobility. The word means "leader" in Latin and refers to a military commander without an official rank. It later came to mean the leading military commander of a province. The wife of a duke is called a duchess.

Marquess: This title, used for both males and females, is derived from the name "march," which stands for the land that borders another country. In other words, a marquess is a trusted member of the monarchy and needs the skills to defend his/her country against any hostile neighbors. In contrast, an earl's land is not located on or near the border; therefore, they do not carry the same significance to the monarchy.

Earl/Countess: Earl means "chieftain," particularly one set to rule a territory in a king's stead. Some earldoms use the family's last name, instead of the territory name. For example, Charles Spencer is the 9th Earl of Spencer, the brother of the late Princess of Wales. However, Prince William is Earl of Strathearn, which is named for the central Scotland location. The wife of an earl is called a countess.

Viscount/Viscountess: In 1440, the first viscount was appointed in Great Britain. The word means "non-nobility, deputy, or sheriff." Early viscounts were appointed and did not follow typical hereditary lines, until much later.

Baron/Baroness: The baron is the lowest rank in the British peerage. William I introduced the term to distinguish men who pledged their loyalty to the crown. Some dukes and earls used them to refer to their tenants who were loyal to the crown.

The festive celebrations of the 2012 Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the 2011 marriage of Catherine Middleton to Prince William, and the 2013 birth of their son, Prince George, are joyous milestones for the British monarchy.

America's Fascination with Great Britain

America's fascination with Britain extends beyond the royal family to include television shows, books, movies, and culture icons. It was the early 1960s when British culture first made its way to the United States. The *James*

Bond film series exposed American audiences to various aspects of British culture. British actresses Julie Andrews and Audrey Hepburn captured the hearts of Americans in their roles in *Mary Poppins* and *My Fair Lady*, respectively, which both debuted in 1964.

The fascination with Great Britain truly took off in America in 1964 with the "British Invasion." This was the music era when the British rock groups, such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Who, invaded American airwaves. Their music dominated the billboard charts through the late 1960s.

British literature also has strong appeal with Americans. In fact, the quality of the writing has landed some on the high school required reading list. Well-known British authors include William Shakespeare (*Romeo & Juliet*), Charles Dickens (*Great Expectations* and *Tale of Two Cities*), Emily Brönte (*Wuthering Heights*), Jane Austin (*Pride & Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*), J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit*), and more recently, J.K. Rollins (*Harry Potter* series). Adding to their appeal is the fact that all of the classics have been made into films.

British television has produced many shows that are popular among Americans, including *Mr. Bean*, *As Time Goes By*, *Keeping Up Appearances*, and most recently, the hugely popular *Downton Abbey*. This period drama depicts the lives of the aristocratic Crawley family during the early 1900s. The first episode of the fourth season of *Downton Abbey* was featured on PBS in January 2014. It had 10.2 million viewers, which was the highest-rated drama season premiere in the network's history.

Two other aspects of British culture that fascinate Americans are food and soccer. British cuisine, such as tea and scones or fish and chips, can be readily found throughout America. As for soccer, the English Premier League (EPL) is extremely popular among American soccer players and enthusiasts. British soccer star, David Beckham, played for Manchester United (one of the more popular soccer teams in England), as well as here in the United States for several years.

And what is the fascination with the famous red telephone booths that are such an iconic symbol? While on the decline given the advent of cell phones, the red telephone booths are still found across Great Britain. Since 1926, the telephone booths have been adorned with the crown to represent the British monarchy. The red color was chosen simply to make them stand out and be easy to find.

Finally, the expression "Keep Calm & Carry On" hails from a motivational poster produced by the British government in 1939 as part of a propaganda campaign to encourage the British public during war time. It was one of three posters produced. The "Keep Calm & Carry On" poster was only to be used in the event that Great Britain invaded Germany. Since this never happened, it was never publicly displayed. It was only in 2000, that the poster was found in a bookstore in Alnwick, Northumberland in northern England.

Activities

1. As an introductory activity, ask everyone where they were the day Princess Diana passed away on August 31, 1997.
2. Watch this short YouTube video on the story behind the "Keep Calm & Carry On": *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrHkKXFRbCI.*
3. Invite friends over and demonstrate how to make scones. Serve with tea and fresh jam.
4. Have some friends over to watch a Jane Austen film or a couple episodes of *Downton Abbey*. Don't forget the popcorn!

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