

## Contemporary United Kingdom Text Set

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## Young Adult Literature

### I. *Ordinary Jack* by Helen Cresswell

#### APA Reference

Cresswell, H. (1977). *Ordinary jack*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

#### Summary

Jack Bagthorpe sees himself as an ordinary child in a family filled with talented members. Early in book, Jack, his sister Daisy, and his dog Zero accidentally set off a box of fireworks in the kitchen. To help him gain notoriety amongst the clan, his eccentric Uncle Parker helps him develop a plan where Jack will become a prophet. They decide that the first “prophecy” Jack makes will be about Uncle Parker wearing a lavender suit, and Jack returns home to begin acting strangely and laying the groundwork for his initial prediction. Later, his father breaks an arm doing a handstand and Jack uses this opportunity to make the prediction and allow Uncle Parker to confirm it.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bagthorpe is unable to make his living as a screenwriter due to the broken arm and Zero chewing the microphones on which he records dialogue. While Jack continues to get attention with his predictions, further chaos ensues as the younger children compete for the Danish nanny’s attention and Daisy develops a slight interest in pyromania. Everything builds towards a big party where Daisy nearly burns down the house and Mr. Bagthorpe reveals Jack’s ruse after finding his journal. In the end, Jack gains the recognition he sought as his family recognizes the creativity and theatricality of his prophecies.

#### Commentary

This book provides a good resource to introduce students to British ideas about the modern family structure. Students who might feel they lack their own special talent might

identify for Jack's struggle to feel special and admired. A teacher could introduce this one into a literature circle or teach it by itself. Students could make a chart of the various Bagthorpe family members and the talents that each of them display, while another option is for the class to list each of Jack's predictions and how they come to pass. Students could also make a graphic map of the family members and their interactions with one another to understand the family relations better. Throughout the reading of the novel, students would write text-to-text, text-to-self, or text-to-world reactions in each class in order to make schema connections to relate the books examples of British culture to students' knowledge of American culture.

## II. *Indigo's Star* by Hilary McKay

### APA Reference

McKay, H. (2006). *Indigo's star*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

### Summary

As the book opens, Indigo Casson is returning to school after recovering from a case of mononucleosis. He is fearful of returning to school, as he knows that bullies are just waiting to pick on him once again. Indigo has been a constant target for the school bullies who love dunking his head in the toilet, though everything changes when he meets Tom Levin. Tom, an American staying with his grandmother, helps Indigo battle the bullies and reclaim the school.

The book also presents a wide cast of characters in the Casson family. Rose Casson helps Indigo and Tom become friends, all the while fretting over having to wear a new pair of glasses. Caddy, the oldest of the siblings, obsesses over her many suitors and Saffy Casson constantly labors to protect Indigo from the bullies along with her friend Sarah. Amidst all these issues, their father is away working in London and their mother is busy keeping it all together, forcing the Casson children to come together in order to solve their problems.

### Commentary

*Indigo's Star* provides students with another example of family relations, this time focusing on absent parents and sibling bonding. Opportunities for literature circles and independent reading are possible with this work. Once again, the idea of using a family relations maps works, and students could put both parents on the outer edges to display the lack of interaction they have with their kids. A possible activity is to have students draw a Venn diagram analyzing Indigo and Tom as a prewriting strategy and then ask them to write a comparative essay on these two characters. Character comparisons could expand to a chart

comparing the various Casson children, their interests, and their role in the story. Another comparison assignment is to ask students to research the British educational system and UK schools to see how they differ from American public schools.

### III. *Naughts & Crosses* by Malorie Blackman

#### APA Reference

Blackman, M. (2005). *Naughts and crosses*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

#### Summary

Taking its title from the British name for tic-tac-toe, *Naughts and Crosses* tells the story of two teenagers from different social classes who fall in love. These protagonists are Sephy, a member of the dark-skinned ruling Cross class, and Callum, a “colorless” member of the class of Naughts who once served as slaves to the Crosses, who have been friends since childhood. Amidst the love story brews a class struggle as terrorist Naughts who are tired of being socially repressed respond with violent bombings that nearly kill Sephy and her mother. Complicating things further is that Callum’s family is linked to the terrorists while Sephy’s father is soon to become the Prime Minister who seeks to end the terrorist’s actions.

Their friendship endures many tests as Callum’s brother joins the Liberation Militia and Sephy becomes an alcoholic. They are separated for a time when Callum joins the LM and are reunited when the terrorists capture Sephy. While imprisoned, Sephy and Callum’s friendship deepens into love and she escapes. After discovering she is pregnant with Callum’s child, Callum goes to see her and the Crosses capture and execute him. Sephy arrives at the hanging just in time to tell him she loves him, and the book ends with the announcement of their daughter Callie Rose’s birth.

#### Commentary

This book draws some clear parallels to race and class relations, and so a teacher can use it alongside works like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *Brave New World*. Its star-crossed lovers theme parallels *Romeo and Juliet* and so a teacher could connect it easily to Shakespeare. As this is the

first book in a trilogy, one could also teach it on its own and introduce subsequent titles in the series in literature circles or the classroom library. Later books delve deeper into issues of racial identity and terrorism, as Callum's brother Jude attempts to persuade Callie Rose to become a suicide bomber. A student could develop a good essay from any of these themes, and a teacher might develop an excellent writing prompt for each class. Students could also find newspaper articles past or present that connect to the story, write an abstract about the article, and explain how it relates to the novel.

#### IV. *Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging* by Louise Rennison

##### APA Reference

Rennison, L. (2001). *Angus, thongs, and full-frontal snogging*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

##### Summary

Louise Rennison's protagonist, Georgia Nicholson, suffers from typical teenage girl afflictions of pimples and boys. In addition to this, Georgia must also deal with an annoying sister who may have peed in her room (among other annoying acts) and a crazy, mix-breed Scottish cat who is the size of a Labrador and has attempted to hunt down the neighbor's poodle. Georgia refers to her school as a "stalag" and compares her head teacher and other faculty members to Nazis. As for her other family members, Georgia describes her father as "having the intelligence of a Teletubby," who moves to New Zealand for work and wants the family to come with him. Meanwhile, Georgia falls in love with a boy and learns all about snogging, developing her own rating scale for different physical activities. This scale is elaborate and goes from ½ or "Sticky Eyes" to 10 or "The Full Monty" (Georgia's euphemism for sex).

##### Commentary

This book presents fascinating insight into the life of a British teenage girl. Like the other YAL novels for this text set, a teacher could use it successfully on its own or offer it in a literature circle format. The book's diary format is certainly different from a standard work and allows students to explore a different style of writing than that to which classes usually offer. One potential activity is to have students keep personal journals over the course of reading the work, then on the last day have them review their journal entries and see how they form a non-traditional linear narrative. Another idea is to create a chart, whether individually, in pairs, in small groups, or as a class, that keeps track of Georgia's snogs and what type of snog they are.

## V. *London Calling* by Edward Bloor

### APA Reference

Bloor, E. (2006). *London calling*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers.

### Summary

Martin Conway's family possesses both heroes and failures. His grandfather was an American diplomat working in the US Embassy in London during World War II, his father is an alcoholic who abandoned the family, and his sister is a successful Ivy League student. Martin does not know on which side of the family he belongs, and he stalling in life. One night, Martin begins to have strange dreams where a British boy named Jimmy appears to him, desperately asking for help. As the boy continues to appear to Martin, he begins to lead the American through increasingly vivid dreams of the London Blitz, where Martin encounters his own grandfather and wakes up every morning with strange knowledge of the war. The line between fantasy and reality blurs as Martin's dreams persist, and he eventually decides that he must help Jimmy, if for no other reason than his reason and logic argue against it.

### Commentary

I wanted to include this book after I found it at Barnes and Noble for several reasons. The first being that it fit perfectly into my theme as a work that partly takes place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century United Kingdom. Not many American students know about the effects of the German bombing of London, and this novel serves to convey an understanding by asking readers to see the war through Martin's eyes. One plan for this lesson is to have groups of students do mini-reports on the British during World War II, exploring different aspects of war and its effects in the UK. They could also write reviews of other pieces of British and American media that touch upon the war's effects in Britain, such as *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis,

the HBO series *Band of Brothers*, the film *Patton*, or the *Doctor Who* episodes “The Empty Child” and “The Doctor Dances.”



## **Nonfiction**

I. *Everywhere Faces Everywhere* by James Berry

### **APA Reference**

Berry, J. (1997). *Everywhere faces everywhere*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

### **Summary**

James Berry is a poet and recipient of the Order of the British Empire who originally hails from Jamaica. Berry represents the black voice in British writing and has spends his life promoting other black British writers. His own writing focuses on representing those peoples who migrated to Britain from the Caribbean. His collection of poetry, *Everywhere Faces Everywhere*, exists mainly for children and displays the diversity of the contemporary United Kingdom. Specifically, the title poem touches on the various ethnic and religious groups from blacks to Indians and Buddhists to Muslims with a symbol representing each group in the poem. Other works in the collection relate to Berry's childhood growing up in Jamaica and his adult life and work in Britain.

### **Commentary**

One idea for this book, more specifically the title poem, is to start with a mini- research project. The teacher could begin with a read-aloud of the poem with students. Then, the teacher would assign students to groups or pairs and give each group a symbol that Berry uses for each minority. Then, each group or pair would research some basic facts about the minority group, such as their history in Britain, basic elements of their culture, prominent people, etc. Besides this, students could analyze the poem for its meter, rhyme scheme, word choice, and themes. The symbols also represent an opportunity to study the imagery of the poem. Another option is for students to select several of Berry's poems and compare/contrast them for the same elements.

## II. *Roald Dahl (My Favorite Writer)* by Rennay Craats

### APA Reference

Craats, R. (2002). *Roald dahl (my favorite writer)*. New York: Weigl Publishers.

### Summary

This biography by Rennay Craats covers different aspects of Dahl's life, each in roughly 1-2 pages. It starts with a brief timeline and introduction to the author, and then proceeds into his early childhood. The book thus follows by describing his experiences between his adolescence and career as a writer, specifically going into detail about his time as a pilot during World War II. The reader learns that it was during his time at the U.S. Embassy that Dahl became inspired to write, and provides a narrative for his writing career as well as descriptions of his most successful stories. One of the book's highlights is the depth at which it describes the writing process and publishing industry. The book provides notes about Dahl's various inspirations and includes quotes from the author about his craft. Furthermore, the book adds a glossary of writing terms as well as website links for further research.

### Commentary

This book is absolutely wonderful as an introduction to the writing craft. Many of the students will have read one of Dahl's books at some point in their lives, so the author's background provides a rich context and explains the origin for some of his titles. Students will also be amazed at how much tragedy Dahl suffered in his personal life, with a divorce, one child with brain damage, and another that died after contracting measles encephalitis. A teacher could use the quotes and notes in a chart to model inspiration. The section on "Creative Writing Tips" provides good writing strategies for students, and the teacher could break the class into group to have them research this strategy and give a brief presentation on it. The book provides an

activity for students by showing them how to write a biography review, offering its own prewriting strategy in a graphic organizer.

### III. *Cooking the English Way* by Barbara W. Hill

#### APA Reference

Hill, B.W. (2002). *Cooking the english way*. New York: Lerner Publishing Group.

#### Summary

Barbara Hill's book begins with a brief cultural introduction to the land, the food, and holidays and festivals of the United Kingdom. A map shows where various materials for foods are most prominent, displaying the locations where sheep, cattle, apples, carrots, and potatoes are most in abundance. Hill provides a reminder to readers that before they begin cooking, they should be certain to use the proper utensils and follow instructions carefully to ensure safety. To this extent, she provides pointers, cooking terms, a conversion chart, and a list of special ingredients. The book further explains the concept of what goes on an English table and menus for various meals as well as shopping items. The content of the book breaks the recipes down into Breakfast, Sunday lunch, Afternoon Tea, Supper, and Holiday and Festival Food.

#### Commentary

This book provides a great introduction to culture through food, and students could study how it influences British society. The map would allow students to speculate which dishes might dominate particular regions of the country, and then research the backgrounds of the meals to prove if they are correct. For a larger activity, students could plan a party celebrating a Contemporary UK Unit. Students would collaborate to create a different dish for the party based on the recipes from this book. They would take their individual recipe, go shopping together for the materials, and then work together to cook the dish. On a particular day (or days if there is a lot of food), students would bring their dish to class and permit their classmates to chow down as

they discussed their cooking experience. Students would also write an individual reflection to turn into the teacher as a part of their grade.

#### IV. *Cultures of the World: Great Britain* by Barbara Fuller

##### APA Reference

Fuller, B. (1996). *Cultures of the world: great britain*. Tarrytown, NY: Marshal Cavendish Benchmark

##### Summary

This reference book covers a great many areas about British culture in several chapters, including geography, history, government, economy, environment, the British, lifestyle, religion, language, the arts, leisure, festivals, and food, among other things. Each chapter gives detailed information on its topic. Geography covers the various regions, rivers, as well as flora and fauna of Britain. History gives a brief narration beginning with the Germanic tribes that settled the island through the election of Tony Blair as Prime Minister. Government covers the basic structure of British parliamentary government and the legal system. The section entitled “The British” covers the composition of the British people, covering the earliest inhabitants, invaders, and immigrants, as well as class divisions. Other chapters deal with social programs, various religious beliefs, and the development of the British-English language. The last section of the book gives basic graphic presentation based on information from the previous chapters.

##### Commentary

This book provides a wonderful, in-depth resource for students as they conduct research in the class. Though the text is roughly ten years old, it provides thorough coverage for each aspect of contemporary British culture. Students could study Fuller’s nonfiction work on its own to determine how she uses formal writing conventions to convey information. They could analyze the syntax and word choice, topics covered and how, as well as determine whether there is any evidence of author bias. Furthermore, during the unit of study, this book would be one of two provided in the classroom as a research tool for students. Another option is to ask students

to study individual chapters and make a graphic organizer for the information for their group's topic. Each one could use chart paper to make a chart or some other graphic representation, and the class could display these on the walls for reference during the unit.

## V. *United Kingdom in Pictures* by Kumari Campbell

### APA Reference

Campbell, K. (2004). *United kingdom in pictures*. Minneapolis, MN: Learner Publishing Company.

### Summary

This cultural examination of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has a very computerized tone and with the internet to act as a supplement to the text. The website, vgsbooks.com, provides additional, updated material to account for information that has changed since the book's publication. Many things are covered in the text such as the geography of the country, including topography, water systems, natural resources, major cities, as well as plant and animal life. Another section deals with the history and government of the UK, while another handles the various peoples of Britain in addition to social services and education services. The section on "Cultural Life" includes information about religion, media, festivals and holidays, food, and sports and recreation. Fun facts and pictures pepper the text, providing nice tidbits for readers. The book also helps to explain various cultural terms unique to Britain, such as the concept of "pensioners" and the "NHS" or National Health System.

### Commentary

For the Contemporary UK Unit, this book serves as a major resource. This is due to not only the substantial material in the book, but also the supplemental material on the VGS website. The website provides many different research tools for students, including maps and pictures for reports, as well as website links for each section of the book. This book would be massively helpful to students as they conduct research projects during the unit of study. In addition, having a second nonfiction book on culture allows students to gain another perspective and helps prevent students from fighting over classroom resources, especially when they can access the

same material online. Students can thus use the online material with the text or on its own, allowing students some research independence. This full work covers many aspects of the culture and can help students understand it better thanks to its breadth.



## **Picture Books**

I. *John's Secret Dreams: the Life of John Lennon* by Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier

### **APA Reference**

Rappaport, D, & Collier, B. (2004). *John's secret dreams: the life of john lennon*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children.

### **Summary**

This picture book acts as both a biography and a visual interpretation of John Lennon's songs as Rappaport and Collier represent both the musician's life and his creativity. The creators work from Lennon's birth at the beginning of World War II through his mother's abandonment, time with the Beatles, life with Yoko, and finally, his tragic death. They pair each significant moment of his life with one of his songs. Rappaport's prose combines with Collier's art on each page to present the life moment as well as song lyrics and images. Collier's art presents circles as a symbol for life's recurring nature and the eternal quality of Lennon's songs along with the randomness of images to represent diverse life elements that occur in unison. Altogether, the book tells the story of a lonely young boy who became one of the world's premier musicians, always the advocate for love and peace.

### **Commentary**

This book would provide a great read-aloud for a classroom, as it allows students to envisage the songs through Collier's images. With the musical element of the book, students can participate in a Lyric Elements activity (Milner and Milner) that ask students to ignore the content of the songs and look at their formal elements. The teacher could place the students into groups and have each one use this activity with a different song in the book. Another group activity permits students to choose each song in the book and compare the content of the lyrics with that moment in Lennon's personal history. This would require a small amount of research

on the students' part beyond what is in the picture book. A third option is to ask students to analyze Collier's images and write a short prompt concerning how the images relate to Lennon's songs and life.

## II. *The English Roses* by Madonna

### APA Reference

Madonna. (2003). *The english roses*. New York: Callaway Editions, Incorporated.

### Summary

Madonna's picture book focuses on the lives of four teenage girls named Nicole, Amy, Charlotte, and Grace who spend all their time together reading, obsessing about boys, and dancing. When a new girl, Binah, unintentionally intimidates the group with her beauty, talent, and generosity, the four friends turn their resentful energies on her and constantly ridicule the lonely girl. During a sleepover at one friend's house, a fairy godmother appears to the Roses and shows them the side of Binah that they have not witnessed. The fairy renders the girls invisible and permits them to see how Binah's mother has died and that she lives with her father, where she performs all the household duties and spends hours alone while her father works. After seeing this, the Roses reconsider her as a friend and invite Binah to become one of them.

### Commentary

As a picture book, this work provides a great read-aloud for a class, and that a famous celebrity wrote it might peak their interest. Other than standard text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections that students can make, inference can be the focus of a classroom activity. Before the teacher reads about the fairy godmother's visit to the Roses, he or she could stop and ask students to write a short piece predicting Binah's life. Students could also write a piece reflect a time when they were either the instigator or the victim of teasing and exclusion, allowing them to relate their own feelings to Binah's experience. Overall, this book allows students to see that there are common adolescent problems between American and British teenagers, though girls may find its story more relevant than boys would.

### III. *The Jolly Postman: Or, Other People's Letters* by Allan and Janet Ahlberg

#### APA Reference

Ahlberg, A. & Ahlberg, J. (1999). *The jolly postman: or, other people's letters*. New York: Viking's Children's Books.

#### Summary

This epistolary picture book is full of letters from and to various fairy tale characters. It presents a different and interesting take on the original stories, such as a postcard from Jack to the Giant, thanking for an island vacation courtesy of the Goose Who Lays the Golden Eggs. Another letter from Goldilocks to the Three Bears is appropriately addressed, "Three Bears Cottage, the Woods," and serves as an apology for her behavior and an invitation for Baby Bear to come to her birthday party. The Postman also delivers a flyer to the Wicked Witch of "Hansel and Gretel" advertising, among other things, "Little Boy Pie Mix." Meanwhile, Little Red Riding Hood sends the Big Bad Wolf a letter from her attorney, in which the reader learns that not only is she suing the Wolf, but the Three Little Pigs are as well. Largely, this book offers new insight to classic characters and their hilarious antics.

#### Summary

As a picture book told in letters, this title provides a great resource for a read-aloud introduction into epistolary novels or a study of classic fairy tales. For an activity, students could write their own letters either to or between fictional characters, specifically with a work they are studying. For my own Contemporary United Kingdom Unit, I would ask students to read two novels, *Bridget Jones' Diary* by Helen Fielding and *High Fidelity* by Nick Hornby, then have the students write letters to the protagonist of the other novel. Student could also study the language of the fairy tale letters for their various formal elements, noting the more casual tone the various

tones that characters take depending on their letter's content. This book could also provide a good model for writing letters when students need to focus on improving this skill.

#### IV. *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* by Judith Kerr

##### APA Reference

Kerr, J. (2002). *The tiger who came to tea*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

##### Summary

While Sophie and her mother are preparing to have tea one afternoon, a great tiger pays them a visit. First, he drinks the tea, and then proceeds to eat the sandwiches, the buns, and the biscuits. Eventually, he manages to eat all of the food in the house until there is nothing left for Sophie and her mother to use for dinner. He even manages to drink all of the water from the tap, leaving not one drop for the family. However, the tiger is a gentleman, and before leaving, he manages to thank Sophie and her mother for the “lovely tea”. As Daddy returns home for dinner, the other two tell him everything that happened and he just shrugs it off and suggests the family eat out for dinner. At the restaurant, Sophie gets ice cream, and then next day when they go grocery shopping, the family buys a large case of tiger food to prevent it from happening again.

##### Summary

This book highlights one of the most well known British customs—afternoon tea. The book lays out this activity well and includes most of the traditional snacks that accompany tea. One activity for students is to have them conduct their own tea, assigning various responsibilities individual students, some making tea, others providing snacks, and remaining students bringing cups, plates, and napkins. With the story, students could analyze conflict and plot resolution. Students could write a reflective piece about how the conflict is largely unresolved, since the tiger just leaves and the father recommends they merely go out to dinner. Students could also

provide their own ending where Sophie and her mother confront the tiger and keep him from eating all of their food.

V. *Clarice Bean, That's Me!* by Lauren Child

APA Reference

Child, L. (1999). *Clarice bean, that's me!* Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Summary

This picture book introduces the reader to a pre-teen stream of consciousness narrative. Clarice Bean is your average girl, meaning that her family is just as crazy as everyone else's family. She has one older brother in the "dark tunnel of adolescence", a younger brother who drives her crazy, a boy-crazy sister who ignores Clarice (except to say, "Go away"), and a grandfather who likes to put pea soup on his corn flakes. In the middle of all this household insanity, Clarice just wants a little peace of mind. Dad runs off to his office, Mum relaxes in a scented bath, and granddad takes a nap with the cat. Unfortunately, she does not get any until she "accidentally on purpose" spills a bowl of Spaghetti-o's over her younger brother's head and is sent to her room for three hours. Thus, even though she is in "Big Trouble", Clarice finally gets the quiet she desires.

Commentary

This book makes an excellent read aloud for students and forces them to pay attention with its unconventional style. Lauren Child's format is in a stream-of-consciousness narrative where text and images are random, with text using different fonts depending on who is speaking and the emphasis placed on different phrases. This alone makes for an interesting study about the layout of text and could frontload YAL books by authors like Sharon Draper and Walter Dean Myers, among others. *Clarice Bean's* scrapbook style format also provides a great lead-in for a multigenre paper. The multiple ways of telling the story can introduce students to a model for this assignment. They could even create their own scrapbooks as an introductory activity,

allowing them to make the leap from no multigenre experience to writing a multigenre paper more easily.



## Websites

### I. The British Broadcasting Corporation

#### APA Reference

*British broadcasting corporation.* (n.d.) Retrieved November 7, 2006, from  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

#### Summary

The BBC serves as the largest broadcasting corporation in the world, with a UK staff of 26,000 without considering foreign correspondents and affiliates. It produces news and entertainment pieces for television, radio, and the internet. It has been the leading British media group since 1927, enjoying status as a state-owned, but independent corporation. The BBC website gives users the latest news headlines as well as allowing them to listen to radio broadcasts or view video footage. The front page of the website also offers resources to those learning English as well as making its content available in multiple languages. The website also provides sections for each of its programming groups including Sport, News, Children's BBC (or CBBC), Drama Entertainment, and Factual & Learning. In addition, schedules for BBC 1 and 2 are available, as well as a weather report for one's local area.

#### Commentary

This website provides a wealth of information to students as a possible research tool. It permits students to see what is happening in Britain on a daily basis, and this could develop into an opportunity for a student to present a news article each day. A teacher could do this in a read-aloud format, allowing the student to either use an article from the previous day, or come in early to find an article, review it with the teacher, and present it to the class. The options for English language learners would not only work for ESL students, but also help boost the class's

grammatical skills, as it provides graphic organizers of spoken English, new vocabulary words from news headlines, and quizzes that test both formal and informal English. Students could also do research on various BBC programs, allowing them to form groups for each programming group with each student researching an individual show.

## II. Wikipedia, “Culture of the United Kingdom”

### APA Reference

*Culture of the united kingdom*. (2006). Retrieved November 7, 2006, from

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture\\_of\\_the\\_united\\_kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_the_united_kingdom)

### Summary

This Wikipedia article covers the language arts, religion, food, education, housing, as well as science and technology of the United Kingdom. In addition to the information provided in the main article, each of these categories provides a link to its own separate piece that gives information that is more detailed. The arts section provides the basics of English artistic culture from Shakespeare to the Beatles, as well as art and architecture. Science and technology handles the discoveries of English scientists including Sir Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Charles Babbage, and Stephen Hawking. The section on religion is brief, referring mainly to Scottish Presbyterianism as well as the Anglican Church and the monarch’s authority over it. The article strongly covers education, referencing the state school structure, testing, and university system. Links at the bottom of the article provide further information about culture, television, and radio.

### Commentary

Many students are now using Wikipedia to do their research. While it provides a lot of information for an online encyclopedia, it has its drawbacks in that anyone can post or edit information. However, Wikipedia administrators monitor the website and correct inaccurate information. As a research tool, I would allow students to use this website, but limit the amount of times they can reference it. Instead, I would recommend that they follow the links to other websites that can provide information that is more reliable. As with the nonfiction cultural texts I included, Wikipedia can act as a supplement that will guide students to other information if

other students are using both books. Furthermore, when groups research different aspects of British culture, this article could assist them in preparing their presentations. At the very least, Wikipedia can point students in the right direction and help them find information on major websites or texts.

### III. Football Association

#### APA Reference

*Football association.* (n.d.) Retrieved on November 7, 2006, from <http://www.thefa.com/>

#### Summary

Football, or soccer as it is known in the United States, is the premier sport of the United Kingdom and the Football Association is the governing body for it in England. As such, its website provides all the news and information about English football, from various Premier League teams, to stats on players and information about the English national team. One section of the webpage provides facts about the organization itself, including refereeing, rules of the game, FA charities, and youth player development. The FA.com provides much in the way of explaining the breakdown of English teams including the many youth teams available for different age groups ranging from Under 17s (those players under 17 years-old), Under 19s, Under 20s, and Under 21s, in addition to the Women's teams and the Senior teams. The website also covers the FA Cup for English teams and manages a grassroots fan site, as well as provides links to other associations in the United Kingdom and across Europe.

#### Commentary

I thought one way to reach out to my male students would be through sports, and as soccer is one of the British nation's favorite pastimes, it made sense to utilize it. Students could have a great opportunity here not to learn just about the sport, but also the fan culture that at times is even more fanatical than the sport culture in the United States. In this regard, the Football Association website can serve as a backup resource to teaching the novel *Fever Pitch* by Nick Hornby, which details one fan's obsession with the London Arsenal team. Students may already be familiar with the American film of the same name, I could use that to frontload the

text and introduce students to British sport culture. Male students in the class may wish to research British sports, especially soccer, for a class presentation, and this website would be a great help to them.

#### IV. UKMusic.com

##### APA Reference

*UKmusic.com*. (n.d.) Retrieved on November 7, 2006, from <http://www.ukmusic.com/>

##### Summary

Ukmusic.com is one of the top British music websites, covering music news and sales charts within the United Kingdom. The website also provides podcasts, iTunes sales charts, and album reviews for various artists. The impact of American artists is immediately apparent to website viewers, as articles about Justin Timberlake and Kanye West appear on the front page; however, the website's content primarily dedicates itself to promoting British artists in all music genres. UKmusic.com provides easily accessed interviews with musicians and bands such as Razorlight, Kasabian, and Wiley, among others. The website also provides added benefits for registered members, including free ringtone downloads for mobile phones and access to discussion forums. Casual viewers, though, can still access many features such as music videos and online games.

##### Commentary

In the course of their research projects, this website allows students to experience the music tastes of contemporary British society, especially the preferences of young people such as themselves. Most students are only aware of American artists, and it may surprise many students that the United Kingdom has its own native Hi-Hop, R&B, and Rap artists. As part of a mini-research activity, students could find one British musician or band and write a review of their music, possibly including a sample of an appropriate song to play in class. They could also use this website as part of a larger class research project, asking students who research British music to include at least three current artists with which they are unfamiliar. I could also apply lessons

on lyrical structure and format to current artists, taking songs from each genre and looking at them for meter, rhyme scheme, word choice, imagery, etc.

## V. Department for Culture, Media, and Sport

### APA Reference

*Department for culture, media, and sport.* (n.d.) Retrieved on November 7, 2006, from <http://www.culture.gov.uk/default.htm>

### Summary

The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport is an office of the British government that seeks to raise the standard of living for all people in the United Kingdom by sponsoring cultural and sports activities as well as the tourism and creative and leisure industries. This department is responsible for many museums across the country that the National Heritage, National Trust, or other private organizations do not manage. In addition, the website inspires people to get active in sports and creative economy programmes. Another section of the department's webpage is dedicated to the 2012 Olympics that will be held in London. Tourism news is also a part of the front page, providing helpful information about new tourism laws and explanations for how they affect people. The "features" section spotlights various cultural events, such as holidays, spotlighted works from the Government Art Collection, charity programs, and links to other websites.

### Commentary

This website provides students with a lot of information about current cultural movements in Britain. One idea is to introduce the department and its website to students and ask why the United Kingdom might need this and how it compares to American tourism organizations. It provides students with an opportunity to view another aspect of British government that exists on a national level, whereas the United States tends to handle tourism in the individual states. Like the other websites in this section, it also provides an invaluable resource for students as they perform research on contemporary British culture. The website also

gives students a chance to study various news articles, informative pieces, and press releases that they can study as English texts, evaluating the various formats for their effectiveness and analyzing syntax, word choice, and other conventions of format.

## Other Sources

### I. *Definite Article*—Eddie Izzard

#### APA Reference

Izzard, E. (1997). *Definite article* [CD]. New York: Anti (USA) (1996).

#### Summary

This album by British Comedian Eddie Izzard was recorded on two different nights at the Shaftesbury Theatre in London, England. He gave this performance at a time when his comedic star was beginning to rise and he starred in movies such as *Ocean's Twelve*. Some of the themes Izzard covers include “Thimbles and Animals,” “Supermarkets,” “Old Ladies,” “Dog Food,” “Being European,” and “James Bond.” As a self-described “executive transvestite,” Izzard combines his flamboyant performance style with intelligent criticism of British culture. Izzard analyzes the inherent comedy of James Bond’s gadgets, the growth of superstores, and the futility of “complaining to your MP” in Parliament. The laughs never stop as Eddie’s comedy successfully intermix<sup>es</sup> styles similar to Groucho Marx, Jerry Seinfeld, and Benny Hill.

#### Commentary

This comedy album does well to help students understand British culture through humor. Oftentimes, media portrays the British as a very tight-lipped, proper people, while Izzard’s humor blows that stereotype away altogether. His criticisms allow students to see some of the reasoning behind the culture, and thus the CD could introduce the unit. The teacher could ask students to make inferences about British culture in a written assignment, then listen to parts of the album and write a reaction that shows how their view has changed. Students could also analyze the oral performance for its clarity, quality, effectiveness, and general coherence of the points Izzard raises as well as how he represents his opinions through organization, delivery,

word choice, and syntax. The teacher could also use the inferences students made before listening to the album at the end of the unit to review how much they learned about British culture.

## II. *Doctor Who*

### APA Reference

Davies, R.T. (Producer). (2005). *Doctor who*. Cardiff, UK: BBC Wales.

### Summary

Doctor Who is a television program that concerns the adventures of an alien “Time Lord” known only as The Doctor as he travels through time and space with his human companions. Running for decades in the United Kingdom, the BBC cancelled the series in 1991 and revived it again with a new first series (or season) in 2005. This series introduces a new Doctor (played by Christopher Eccleston) and his companion Rose Tyler (Billie Piper), who partner together to face the threat of “living plastic.” After this adventure, Rose accompanies The Doctor for the remainder of the series, encountering the mutant Daleks, WWII zombies, greedy tycoons, skin suit-wearing aliens, and a massive conspiracy to keep humanity confined to Earth. At the very end of the series, the conspirators stand revealed and The Doctor gives his life to save Rose, after which he promptly “regenerates” into a new body (played by David Tennant).

### Commentary

This program provides an excellent introduction to British television as it stand as one of the longest-running shows on the BBC. One activity for students after they view an initial episode is to infer why the show lasted so long before its initial cancellation and also why producer Russell T. Davies brought it back. One activity I had planned with the series premiere was asking students to look for examples of words or phrases with which they were unfamiliar. I also asked them to identify London landmarks that appeared throughout the episode, which the same could be done for landmarks in Cardiff later in the series. A teacher could also use the

show to frontload Charles Dickens, specifically *A Christmas Carole*, for an episode in which the author appears.

### III. *Parrot Sketch Not Included, Twenty Years of Monty Python*

#### APA Reference

Brand, C. (Producer), & MacNaughton, I. (Director). (1989). *Parrot sketch not included, twenty years of monty python*. [Motion picture documentary] United States: New Video.

#### Summary

Narrated by Steve Martin, this film is both a documentary about the British comedy troupe known as Monty Python and exhibits many of their hilarious sketches (without the incredibly famous “Dead Parrot Sketch” of course). Monty Python began with secondary performers/writers from three different comedy shows who banded together to form an innovative new team. This documentary highlights how they formed and carried on for the few seasons they were on television, as well as covering their impact on Britons and Americans alike. Sketches in the film include “How Not to be Seen,” “The Ministry of Silly Walks,” “The Lumberjack Song,” “Spam,” and “The Spanish Inquisition.” This film also marks comedian Graham Chapman’s last appearance with the group, as he died of pneumonia brought on by throat cancer.

#### Commentary

As many people in this country already know about Monty Python, many students will already be familiar with their material. Thus, this film provides a great way to inform students about the group’s origins and provide them with background information about how people created and operated BBC television programs. Students could form groups to research each comedian and relate how their lives influenced their comedy. In regards to the sketches, students could analyze their comedic devices, symbolism, irony, and other stylistic elements. They could also compare the Pythons’ comedy to that of Eddie Izzard, who cites them as an inspiration and has appeared with the group in place of the late Graham Chapman (“He’s not quite dead!”).

Students could also form small and/or large groups and choose sketches to perform in class in order to deepen their understanding of the Pythons' comedic methods.

#### IV. *Love Actually*

##### APA Reference

Bevan, T. (Producer) & Curtis, R. (Director/Writer). (2003). *Love actually* [Motion picture]. United States: Universal Studios.

##### Summary

*Love Actually* is a romantic comedy film that tells the stories of several Londoners living separate lives but linked by friendship, family, and most importantly, love. Of the many characters in this film, the first we see is Billy Mack (Bill Nighy), a washed-up former rocker trying to produce one last Christmas hit. Hugh Grant appears as a Prime Minister who falls in love with one of his employees at 10 Downing, while his sister (played by Emma Thompson) must contend with a cheating husband (Alan Rickman) and a widowed friend (Liam Neeson). Neeson's character, Daniel, in dealing with his wife's death, finds renewed vigor when his stepson Sam (Thomas Sangster) develops a school crush. Meanwhile, Jamie (Colin Firth) and his Portuguese house cleaner Aurelia fall in love despite their language barrier, and newlywed Juliet (Kiera Knightly) finds herself caught in a love triangle between her husband Peter (Chiwetel Ejiofor) and his best friend Mark (Andrew Lincoln). Christmas provides the backdrop for this story, creating an atmosphere of warmth and cheer.

##### Commentary

The film's all-star cast and multiple stories provide plenty of material with which students can work. Students can analyze the film for its story, editing, lighting, and the complex relationships between the characters. Students could make a chart that tracks the various relationships and provide different connections based on how each of them relate to one another. Another option is to provide the screenplay book as a model for students and ask them to work together as a class to produce a script containing several stories tied together by character

interaction. The various stories also provide the class with many different views of British society, from delivery boy Colin (Kris Marshall) to the Prime Minister. The movie could also frontload books like *As I Lay Dying* for the character perspectives or *Mrs. Dalloway* and its multiple plots.

## V. *Now That's What I Call Music Vol. 64*

### APA Reference

Various. (2006). *Now that's what i call music vol. 64* [CD]. London, UK: Emi/Virgin Records.

### Summary

This album series began in the United Kingdom in 1983, collecting 30 top singles from the British music charts. While a version of this series exists in the United States, the British edition compiles many “top of the pops” songs from the United Kingdom, while still including American hits that sell very well in Britain. The series also includes other bands and musicians from Europe that have a large appeal there. Volume 64 includes such British groups as Keane, Razorlight, Lily Allen, The Zutons, Beverly Knight, McFly, Snow Patrol; meanwhile, other European artists are Mousse T. (Germany) and Infernal (Denmark). Many other U.S. artists appear on the album, such as Busta Rhymes and Fall Out Boy, as American music holds a great appeal for music fans in Britain.

### Commentary

My primary purpose in using this album is to allow it to play as background music while students are working on research or lesson activities, preferably keeping the volume low so that the music will not be too distracting to students. The album could also generate discussion by asking students to think about why American and European artists are also popular in Britain, as well as how many American artists like Jimi Hendrix became big in the United Kingdom before they did so here. Students may wish to research British artists that have long-been renown in the U.S. such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Queen, the Spice Girls, etc. and speculate on why they achieve such popularity here. Another option is to analyze the style and format elements of

British artists, looking at word choice, meter, rhyme scheme, and more. This CD could also work as music for a British food party to go along with *Cooking the English Way*.