

A History of Britain

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Summary

More than 2,000 years of times past are brought to life in this lively and interesting account of Britain's history. It reveals the main events, characters and movements that have made Britain the country it is today. Although a small country, Britain's history is important on the world stage, and this book places Britain within its world context. Beginning with the Romans' invasion of Britain in 55BC, the book follows Britain's history in a broadly chronological order, though the chapters are organised thematically. Feature boxes within the main body of the text also describe some of the most famous characters from British history in more depth. Some social history, as well as political history, is also covered.

Chapter 1: Chapter 1 is called *Invaders*, and it covers the period of British history from 55BC until the last successful invasion of Britain by a foreign army in 1066. After the Romans came the Angles and Saxons, the Vikings and then the Normans. Each of these different invaders during these early years had an important influence on Britain, its language, culture and its people. The chapter profiles one of Britain's most spirited heroines – Boudica. She fought fiercely against the Romans for the right to govern her own people and land.

Chapter 2: This chapter explains the complicated relationship between the four countries which comprise 'The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.' (These are England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.) The chapter pays particular attention to the long and difficult relationship between England and Ireland, and the causes of the religious and social tensions that still exist between the two countries today.

Chapter 3: This chapter covers the part of British history known as the Tudor period. It describes the reigns of Henry VIII and his children (most notably, Queen Elizabeth I). During this time, Britain changed from a Catholic country to a Protestant one. The chapter explains the reasons why – and the consequences.

Chapter 4: This chapter continues Britain's story from the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. This period of British history is dominated by the battle of power between the monarchy and parliament, representing the people. The text reviews the growth of 'the power of the people' in Britain from the *Magna Carta* (an early British bill of rights – the only one in existence) to the present day. In particular, it covers the English Civil War, when supporters of Charles I and supporters of Parliament fought fiercely all over the country.

Chapter 5: Chapter 5 turns to social history, and tells the story of the Industrial Revolution and its impact on British society. It describes the dreadful condition of workers' lives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the resulting growth of a revolutionary spirit amongst the people. But Britain was able to modernise and improve people's lives without violent revolution. This chapter explains how and why.

Chapter 6: Finally, the last chapter looks at the growth and decline of Britain's great empire. It explains how Britain's earlier history meant it was able to acquire new lands across the globe and highlights the importance of Britain's great hero, Admiral Nelson. Britain's roles in World War I and World War II are described too. The book ends with an evaluation of Britain's place in the world today.

Background and themes

Although Britain is a small country, it still plays a relatively important role on the world stage. Much of its history, too, is important on a world scale; and the themes of its history are those of the history of mankind.

Catholic vs. Protestant: Religion – particularly the conflict between the Catholic and Protestant divisions of Christianity – has played a vital part in making Britain the country it is today. Henry VIII began the process of changing Britain from a Catholic nation to a Protestant one, mainly because the Protestant Church allows divorce and since his wife didn't give him a son to rule after him, he wanted to marry another woman. Despite attempts by

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Mary I and Mary Queen of Scots to make Britain Catholic again, Britain remained Protestant. Religion continues to shape history today both in Britain and around the world.

Monarch vs. Parliament: The balance of power between the monarch, government and the people of Britain is a theme that appears again and again in its history. When Oliver Cromwell's army defeated the King's Men in the English Civil War it looked as though Britain would never have a monarch again. In fact, it was only eleven years before Parliament invited Charles II to rule in the place of Cromwell's son. But from this point onwards, Parliament was more important to Britain's government than ever before. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries more and more men and women were given the power to vote for politicians to represent them.

Wars: War has shaped Britain into the country it is today. After suffering several successful invasions from outside until 1066, Britain became involved in many different wars at home and abroad. In 1588, Britain was lucky to defeat the Spanish navy off its own coast. Nelson's great battles against Napoleon and the Spanish are still remembered with pride by British people. And the World Wars of the twentieth century, as well as the struggle of Britain's colonies for independence, have helped to shape modern world politics.

Great people in Britain: Great history depends upon great people making brave decisions and taking positive actions. This book profiles some of the most colourful and important men and women in Britain's history. By stressing the importance of these people, we realise that individuals really do have the power to change history.

Discussion activities

Chapter 1

Before reading

- 1 **Discuss:** Talk about pictures on the cover. Have students look at the front cover of the book. Ask them to say what/who they see in the pictures. *Which picture comes first in the history of Britain? Which one comes last?* It doesn't matter if students don't know the answers – they will find out by reading the book. If you have time to prepare in advance, cut out historical images from magazines, newspapers or the Internet and stick them on cards. Then divide the class into groups and ask them to place the cards in chronological order. This exercise helps students to think about history in broad terms – a useful preparation for reading the book.

After reading

- 2 **Role play:** Students work in pairs. Ask them to prepare and then act out the following conversation.
Student A: You are Boudica. Your husband has just died and the Romans tried to take his money. You want to build an army and fight the Romans. Talk to Student B about your army. Tell him/her why you want to fight. How can you help him/her if you win? Can you make him/her join your army?
Student B: You are a British farmer in the east of England. Your local queen, Boudica, wants you to fight in her army. Do you want to join her? How do you feel about the Romans? Will it be dangerous? What will you get for fighting? Will you join her army?

Chapter 2

Before reading

- 3 **Discuss:** Talk about the United Kingdom. Ask students if they know the official name of the UK – the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Ask them the following questions: *How many countries are there in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? Can you name those countries?* Students could look at the map on page 5 if they need some help.

After reading

- 4 **Pair work:** Have students work in pairs and look at the photograph on page 9. Have them describe the scene in their own words.
- 5 **Group work:** Students work in small groups. Ask them to think about the history of Ireland. *Why are there still problems between Catholics and Protestants today?* Next, the students should work in their groups to make a list of other places in the world where religious groups have a long history of disagreement. After about five minutes, ask the groups to read out their lists.

Chapter 3

Before reading

- 6 **Discuss:** Talk about the picture of Henry VIII. Have students look at the picture of Henry VIII on page 13. Ask them the following questions:
 - a *He is a famous king. Why do you think he is famous?*
 - b *He married more than once. How many wives do you think he had?*
 - c *Do you know the names of his children?*

After reading

- 7 **Pair work:** Students work in pairs. Ask them to discuss the following questions about Elizabeth I:
 - a *Elizabeth learns that her cousin, Mary, is working against her. What does she decide to do – and why?*
 - b *Elizabeth watches a play by William Shakespeare. How does it make her feel? What does she like about it?*

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- c Elizabeth learns that King Phillip's Spanish ships are coming to England to fight. What does she decide to do? How does she feel about it?

Chapter 4

Before reading

- 8 **Discuss:** Talk about monarchy. Ask students if they've got a king or queen in their countries. Ask them to explain the relationship between the monarch and the government, and who has the real power.

After reading

- 9 **Group work:** Students work in small groups to write their own *Magna Carta* for an imaginary state. Ask them to think of ten rules for good government. Walk around the class and help students with vocabulary. Then ask the groups to read out their rules and explain why they chose them. Have each group choose two of the best rules, and get some students to write them on the board. Have the rest of the students judge if they are good rules or not.

Chapter 5

Before reading

- 10 **Describe:** Have students work in small groups to talk about the picture on page 27. *What can you see? What do you think it is like to live in a house like these?*

After reading

- 11 **Role play:** Prepare enough role play cards for the whole class. On each card, write one of the following characters from late eighteenth/early nineteenth century Britain: wealthy landowner, poor farmer, factory owner, adult factory worker, child factory worker, and a politician. Give each student a card (some students may have the same cards). Students with the 'politician' cards should come to the front of the class. The other students should work individually for a few minutes to think of some questions that their character may want to ask. Meanwhile, show the 'politicians' the above list so that they can think about the types of questions they may have to answer. Finally, invite questions from the class to the 'politicians' and encourage students to discuss and debate the issues in character.

Chapter 6

Before reading

- 12 **Discuss:** Talk about the British Empire. Bring in a world map to the class. Ask students if they know which countries were ruled by the British in the past. If they are not sure, they can guess and choose the countries on the map.

After reading

- 13 **Group work:** Students work in small groups. Ask them to choose an event from Chapter 6 and re-write it as a newspaper article from the same time. Encourage them to make their articles as imaginative as they can. They should include imaginary interviews with the people, and direct quotes from them. Students may want to research their chosen event from other books or the Internet. Ask them to include pictures or photographs. Then you can publish the finished articles in a newspaper format for the whole class to enjoy.

Extra activities

- 14 **Retell:** Ask students to look at the map on page 5. What can they remember about each of the places on the map? Have students work in pairs to talk about each place. Then ask each pair to report to the rest of the class.
- 15 **Describe:** Ask students to make a historical map of their own country. *What place names will you include, and why?* Students could show their maps to the rest of the class whilst they describe the map and explain the significance of each place marked on the map.
- 16 **Guess:** Prepare some cards before class – choose some important people from British history and write their names on some pieces of card. If you want to broaden the game, think of some other famous people who the students will know about and write their names on some pieces of card, too. In class, divide the students into two teams. Choose someone from each team in turn to come to the front of the class. Show them one of the cards. Then students from both teams ask the student questions about the person on the card. The student can only answer 'yes' or 'no'. Have the other students guess the identity of the person on the card. Give one point to the team that guesses correctly.
- 17 **Pair work:** Ask students to read the Introduction on page v. It highlights some of the most important people and developments in Britain's history. Then ask students to prepare a similar introduction to a history of their own country. Encourage students to ask questions about their partner's country. Then have them prepare for a presentation in writing. If both students in a pair are from the same country, they could make one presentation together. Give students sufficient time to do some research and prepare for the presentation. When students are ready, hold a presentation day.
- 18 **Group work:** Put students into small groups. Have them choose one of the following years from British history: 55BC, 1066, 1215, 1649, 1776, 1914 or 1945. *You are a poor person at that time. What is your life like? What do you eat? Where do you live? What is your job?* Have each group discuss and prepare the written answers to these questions. When they are ready, ask them to read out their answers.