



evropský
sociální
fond v ČR



EVROPSKÁ UNIE



MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY



OP Vzdělávání
pro konkurenceschopnost



GYMNÁZIUM
PRACHATICE

INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Student's Worksheet

UK - Political system and history

Political system

Task 2: Read the text about the British political system

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy. It means the head of the state is the King or the Queen. Now it's Queen Elizabeth II. She reigns, but she doesn't rule. She can act only on the advice of her ministers. Nevertheless she performs some important executive and legislative duties, e.g.: she opens and dissolves the Parliament, signs bills which have been passed by both Houses (Royal Assent), holds audiences with the Prime Minister and represents the state.

The Constitution of the UK isn't written. It's a set of laws based on custom, tradition and common law.

British parliamentary system is one of the oldest in the world. It started to develop after King John's signature of Magna Charta in 1215.

The supreme law-making body in the country is the Parliament. It consists of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The House of Commons consists of 650 Members of Parliament (MPs) who are elected in general elections for five years. It's presided over by the Speaker. All the MPs are paid.

The House of Lords consists of 1,170 peers including hereditary peers, life peers (Lords Temporal), lords of appeal, archbishops and bishops of the Church of England (Lords Spiritual). The house is presided over by the Lord Chancellor.

This House has no real power, but it acts as an advisory council for the House of Commons.

The new parliamentary session starts with the Queen's speech (in which she outlines the government policy) in the House of Lords. From Monday to Thursday all the ministers must answer MPs' questions for one hour and two days a week the Prime Minister must answer MPs' questions.



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The supreme executive body is the Government. It's made by the party which has the majority in the Parliament and the Queen appoints its leader as the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister (now it's David Cameron - Conservative Party) appoints a team of the most important ministers as the Cabinet. The second largest party forms the official opposition with its own leader and the "shadow cabinet".

There are few political parties in the UK. The main ones are: the Conservative Party, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats.

Since 1999 Scotland has had its own Parliament which is able to make some laws. It's settled in Scottish Parliament Building Holyrood in Edinburgh.

History

Here are some facts from the history of Great Britain:

Pre-historic period

We don't know a lot about this period, but it's a period when e.g. Stonehenge was built.

Celtic period

The Celts arrived to British Isles 2,500 to 3,000 ago. One of their tribes – the Britons gave its name to Britain. Their language survives in Welsh, Scottish and Irish Gaelic as well as in the names of some rivers (the Avon) or places (Dover).

Roman Britain

England was added to the Roman empire in 43 AD. They built military camps, fortresses, roads, baths and Hadrian's Wall to protect them against the Celtic tribes in Scotland.

In A.D. 60 in the south of Britain the queen of the Celtic Iceni tribe Boadicea led the revolt against the Romans, but was defeated. This confirmed Roman control of the province. Boadicea killed herself, but she became the national heroin. Now her statue is near Westminster pier in London.

Anglo-Saxon period

When the Romans left Britain in 410, the Germanic tribes of the Angles, the Jutes and the Saxons came and drove the Celtic tribes to the mountains. They moved the society from the tribal to feudal organization and fought with the Danes. The most famous Saxon king was Alfred the Great who united the Angles and the Saxons and successfully defended his kingdom against the Viking attempt at conquest. He also encouraged education and translated the Bible. The capital of his kingdom was Winchester.



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Period of feudalism

In 1066 William the Conqueror (Duke of Normandy) invaded Britain and defeated the Saxon king Harold in the Battle of Hastings. He was proclaimed the King of England. It had a big impact on the language, because the Anglo-Saxon languages mixed with French and a new language – English - was born. In 1215 the noblemen forced King John to sign Magna Carta Libertatum which limited the absolute power of the King. This Charta became the basic of democratic rights and civil liberties.

In 1337 – 1453 there was a Hundred Years' War which was a series of conflicts between the Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of France for control of the French throne. England was defeated and lost all its possessions of the English kings except for Calais.

In 1348 the population of England was reduced from 4 million to 2 because of the Black Death - an epidemic of plague.

From 1455 to 1485 England suffered from the War of Roses. It was a struggle for possession of the Crown between the House of York (a white rose) and the House of Lancaster (a red rose). It ended when Richard III (House of York) was killed in the battle of Bosworth. The victor Henry Tudor (King Henry VII) founded a new monarchy with the House of Tudors on the throne.

The Tudor period

It's a period of the discovery of America and of the Renaissance. There were two important rulers of the House of Tudors:

Henry VIII – a despotic king known for his 6 wives and for his founding of the Church of England.

Elizabeth I – her reign is known as Elizabethan Era and it's famous above all for the flourishing of English drama, (William Shakespeare), and for the explorations of Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh which established the British supremacy on the sea.



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The Stuarts and the English revolution

The growing conflict between the King and the Parliament led to the Civil War (1642 – 1649). It finished with Oliver Cromwell's (the Puritan army leader) establishing a republic and with the execution of King Charles I. But in 1660 the monarchy was restored.

Industrial revolution

From 1760 to 1820 technical innovations (James Watt's steam engine, George Stephenson's steam locomotive etc.) led to the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Britain changed from an agricultural country to the industrial one.

In 1805 Admiral Nelson defeated Napoleon's fleet at the battle of Trafalgar.

In 1815 the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon in the battle of Waterloo.

Britain lost its 13 American colonies, but they were replaced by colonies in Canada and India.

The Victorian Era

The period of Queen Victoria's reign 1837 - 1901 was a long period of peace and prosperity for the country. Britain became the greatest industrial, financial and commercial power in the world as well as the greatest sea and colonial power (colonies in Africa).

20th century

Britain took part in WWI as well as in WWII. During WWII it suffered a lot of bombing. In 1940 there was the Battle of Britain – the first battle fought only by air forces. A lot of Czech pilots took part in it. In this time the country was led by Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill known, beside the others, for his famous V-victory sign.

In the post war period the industrial growth went on, but Britain lost its leading position in the world.

In 1979 Margaret Thatcher became the first woman Prime Minister. She was called the iron lady because of her hard-line conservatism in British politics. Her political philosophy and economic policies emphasised deregulation



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(particularly of the financial sector), flexible labour markets, the privatisation of state-owned companies, and reducing the power and influence of trade unions. She also won The Falklands War. It was a ten-week war between Argentina and the United Kingdom over two British overseas territories in the South Atlantic.

Task 1: How much can you remember? Answer these questions?

Who gave the name to Britain?

Why did Queen Boadicea become national heroine?

Who was the best-known Anglo-Saxon king?

What happened in 1066 at Hastings? What impact did it have?

What was Magna Carta?

Why did the Hundred Years' War started?

What was the War of Roses?

What do you know about Henry VIII and Elizabeth I ?

What was the English revolution?

How did the Industrial revolution start?

Who were Sir Horatio Nelson and Duke Wellington?

What do you know about The Victorian Era?

What was The Battle of Britain?

Who was Baroness Margaret Thatcher?



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