The United Kingdom – a Multicultural Society

The UK has welcomed newcomers for centuries. It is a mixture of diverse ethnic groups, each with their own distinct culture and sometimes their own language or religion. Afro Caribbean people, for example, arrived in the UK after the second World War.

There are over 1.5 million Muslims in Britain, mostly Asians. Asian, however, can be a misleading term as it refers to all those people with roots or family connections in the former British colonies of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Asian does not always mean that the person is of Indian descent. Not all Asians are Muslim. Some are Hindus and others are Sikhs. These 2 groups celebrate the festival of Diwali on November 6th.

The Irish have come to Britain for many years, looking for work. After World War Two Irish and other European workers were encouraged to take factory jobs. Britain couldn’t get enough workers to help rebuild the economy and to work in the new Health Service so employers also looked to former colonies and Commonwealth countries. India, countries in Africa and the Caribbean had been controlled by Britain in the past and had strong cultural links with Britain, including the language. Many arrived in the hope of building a new life for their young families.

The descendants of these immigrants are now the teachers, the footballers, the TV presenters, the musicians and the politicians that shape British society. There are numerous ethnic newspapers, magazines, TV programmes, radio stations and internet sites for each community. The largest groups live in and around the capital London and many other groups are concentrated in the industrial centres in Yorkshire, The Midlands and the South East.

Ethnic minorities timeline

- 19th century: Jewish arrivals from Russia/Poland, escaping persecution;
- Irish people escape from poverty in rural Ireland
- 1948 –50s: Caribbean workers invited to help rebuild post war Britain
- 1950s-60s: Asians from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh escape poverty
- 1970s: East African Asians escape persecution and Vietnamese escape war
- 1980s: Eastern European refugees arrive from war and political unrest in Romania and the former Yugoslavia.

Ethnic groups in the UK (6.5% of the British population are from ethnic minorities)

- White – 53,074,000 (includes Irish, Polish, Italian etc).
- Black Caribbean – 490,000
- Black African – 376,000
- Black other – 308,000
- Indian – 930,000
- Pakistani – 663,000
- Bangladeshi –268,000
- Chinese – 137,000
- Other Asian – 209,000 (includes Vietnamese, Malaysian, Thai)
- Other – 424,000 (people who did not think they fitted the above categories)

(Figures from 2002)
A Multicultural Society

1. Questionnaire
   • Where do your family originally come from?
   • Have they always lived in your town?
   • Where were your grandparents born?
   • Did they ever move to another town or country? When? Why?
   • Has anyone in your family ever emigrated? Where did they go? Why?

2. Discuss which of the following factors might decide a person’s ethnic group?
   • religion
   • sex
   • skin colour
   • language
   • country of origin
   • political opinions

3. Read and find out:
   • Where do black people in Britain originate from?
   • Which country or countries do British Asians come from?
   • When was the main period of immigration into Britain?
   • What is the largest ethnic minority in the UK today?

4. Interpretation
   • Name as many former British colonies as you can.
   • Why are the colonies important in understanding the UK today?
   • Did your country have any colonies? When? Where?
   • What was the main reason for immigration to Britain after the war?
   • Think of 2 other possible reasons for ethnic groups to change country.
   • Where did most immigrants in the UK decide to live? What parts of your country might attract immigrants? Why?

5. Your country
   • Describe your own ethnic group. Why do you belong to this group? Is your group a minority group in your own country?
   • Describe the different ethnic groups that make up your country. Do you know the numbers for each group? Which are the main minority groups? Where did they originate? When and why did they move to your country? How do they contribute to the life of your nation?

6. Group discussion
   A group of immigrants or refugees will be arriving in your school soon.
   • What aspects of school life might they need help with?
   • How would you make them feel welcome?
   • Describe 3 things you could do to help them get used to life in your country.

http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistant-multiculturaluk.htm
The history of multicultural Britain

For centuries people have settled in the UK, either through invasion, Britain’s expansion into the world, to escape political or religious persecution or in search of better economic opportunities making the UK’s record on multiculturalism second to none in Europe.

The Celts, who lived in Britain from the first millennium BC, were pushed into Scotland, Wales and Cornwall by the Romans and later invaders and settlers from Northern Europe – including the Danes, Norse, Angles and Saxons.

The Romans brought the first Black people to Britain; an African division of the Roman army was stationed at Hadrian’s Wall in the 3rd Century. The Normans invaded in 1066, adding French culture to Anglo-Saxon and Celtic life.

A Jewish community came into Britain after 1066, until their expulsion in 1290. Oliver Cromwell allowed their resettlement in 1656. Lombards, Hansa and other merchants came for trade, and Gypsies arrived in the 16th century.

The Muslim population in Britain dates back to the 18th Century when Muslim sailors, known as lascars, serving on British merchant ships began settling in the port cities of Cardiff, Liverpool, Glasgow and London. The largest migration of Muslim communities began in the 1950s, coming mainly from South Asia and settling in inner city London, the industrial towns of the Midlands, and the textile towns of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Strathclyde. As of 2001 there are now approximately 1.6 million Muslims in Britain, making it the largest religious minority in Britain.

The climate of tolerance also enabled communities fleeing persecution in Europe to settle in Britain as well as other groups attracted to Britain by the chance of economic security, often bringing new trades or coming to work in new industries.

The legacy of the British Empire also attracted immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the 1960s to 1980s; they now make up the largest immigrant communities. Many came because of the prospects of work in the textile and other industries.

This history of immigration to Britain has produced today’s uniquely diverse nation. There is now an estimated minority ethnic population of more than 4 million, 7.1% of the population. The Office for National Statistics projects that the minority ethnic population will almost double by 2020, because of its higher birth rate.

Ethnic diversity has enriched British society, it is now home to communities from every corner of the globe. The different communities have helped build today’s vibrant Britain and contributed to its economic, social, democratic and cultural development. Prime Minister Tony Blair said, ‘We celebrate the diversity in our country, get strength from the cultures and the races that go to make up Britain today.’

http://www.britainusa.com/sections/articles_show_nt1.asp?d=11&i=281&L1=41013&L2=41084&L3=41084&a=26006
Questions for excerpts from *East is East* and *Bend It Like Beckham*

- Do most immigrants integrate into the new society?
- What difficulties do immigrants face in arriving in a new nation?
- What difficulties do host communities face when receiving immigrants?
- What about the children of mixed marriages, what particular difficulties do they face?
- What tensions are produced within the immigrant community, especially between older and younger generations?
- How does immigration affect societies?
- What does emigration do to the societies that people leave.

- What about in education – what particular challenges do children face coming into schools in a new country?
- How can we help the integration of immigrant children?