

British Culture and Society: Behind the Historical Headlines and Cultural Icons

Brit társadalom és kultúra: BBNAN13000 D2

Lecturer: Balogh Beatrix
Time and place: Thursday 10.15-11.45 D 216
Availability: Tuesday 16.00-17:00 (Office Hours) Rm 102, or by appointment
email: balogh.beatrix@btk.ppke.hu

This seminar looks behind the historical headlines and cultural icons of Britain—from Stonehenge to Harry Potter—to bring British history and society “up close and personal.” Although the weekly topics follow a broad historical chronology, the course is grounded in Critical Culture Studies and examines why certain events or images have become iconic.

The seminar develops the general cultural familiarity needed to understand major British historical periods, figures, and institutions, connecting historical knowledge to literature, film, popular culture, and contemporary debates—in short, the skills needed to interpret the British cultural landscape. These aims align with the themes of the new British and American Culture and History (BACH) examination, and while the course is not an exam-prep class, its selected topics naturally support the cultural fluency the exam requires.

The schedule remains flexible and may be adjusted to students’ interests and contributions they bring to the table.

Assessment: Two short in-class tests (20% + 20%) with brief cultural knowledge questions; one student presentation (30%); active participation in seminar discussions/group tasks, completion of short film review tasks (30%). More than 3 absences automatically result in an “incomplete”.

Choose one of the historical Figure, image, or cultural Institution for your **presentation** and prepare a ppt-aided brief that looks beyond the familiar headline. Unpack the topic through fascinating detail, interpretation, and debunking myth, and highlight its contemporary relevance, or explain how it became a cultural icon. Engage your audience—peer review or student feedback are part of the process. If you wish to present on a topic that does not clearly fit the themes below, consult the instructor. The 3-5 slides presentation must be submitted to Teams the day before your scheduled talk and must include a final slide listing your sources (for facts, interpretations, and images).

No textbook is required. Prepare for class discussions by briefly reviewing the key dimensions of the upcoming topics. There will be Occasional film assignments (e.g., *The Remains of the Day*, *Bloody Sunday*, *The Queen*, *Harry Potter*, *Uncivil War*, or selected clips), and you are welcome to bring popular-culture references (films, songs, fashion) into discussions or into your presentation.

Sessions

Sept 10	Introduction	Goal orientation, syllabus, requirements. Constituent countries OR <u>cultural regions</u> ? England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the North-South Divide. Stereotypes, clichés, and regional identities.
Sept 14	Deep Time Britain: Sites, Texts, and Origins	<u>Stonehenge</u> (mystery, myth, archaeology); <u>Bayeux Tapestry</u> (narrative, propaganda, Norman Conquest and impact); <u>Magna Carta</u> (myth vs reality; why it matters culturally).
Sept 24	Tudors, Reformation, and the Age of Shakespeare	The Iconic portraits and their symbolism. <u>Henry VIII</u> (wives, religion, power); Reformation and cultural change. <u>Elizabeth I</u> (iconography, empire, Gloriana). <u>Shakespeare</u> as “institution.”
Oct 1	Britishness in transition: Class Society, Appeasement, and Wartime Churchill	Watch <i>Remains of the Day</i> (film) for this class. Aristocracy, servants, estates. <u>Class as cultural identity</u> . Quintessential Britishness, Interwar Britain, <u>Appeasement</u> , and the decline of the old elite. Discussion: “Is class still Britain’s deepest cultural fault line?” / <u>Churchill as cultural icon</u> and a <u>wartime leader</u> . How <u>WWII</u> still shapes British identity.
Oct 8	Review I	Short test #1 (image + short answers). Review and spillovers.
Oct 22	Monarchy: Constitution, symbolism, continuity, modern debates	<u>The Monarchy</u> through the lens of political necessities, personal drama and national crisis. A poignant study of <i>The Queen</i> , set in the aftermath of the 1997 death of Diana. <u>Tony Blair</u> and New Labor. Discussion: Why does Britain keep the monarchy?

Nov 5	Democracy in Britain: Parliament, Elections, Parties	Instructor presentation and group tasks. Discussions: I. Pros and Cons of Appointed <u>Lords</u> . II. Are we seeing the end of the <u>two-party system</u> ?
Nov 12	The Troubles, Bloody Sunday, and road to reconciliation	Interpret <u>Northern Irish Murals</u> (iconic images). Historical background of Northern Ireland conflict; Civil rights movement, paramilitaries, British Army; <i>Bloody Sunday</i> as iconic image. Peace process and Good Friday Agreement. Group task: " <u>Design a museum exhibit on The Troubles.</u> "
Nov 19	Independence or Union? Post-Brexit Constitutional Futures of Scotland and Northern Ireland	Scottish identity collage. Scottish Independence and Irish Unification Debates. OR Brexit structural causes through the film <i>Uncivil War</i> and the symbolic language of "independence"
Nov 26	Boarding Schools and "Roxfords"	<u>Harry Potter</u> and British <u>educational institutions</u> in popular culture (films, TV shows). Institutional ethos, privileges, class stereotypes, and symbolism. Students map Hogwarts houses to British class stereotypes
Dec 3		Short test #2 (image interpretation + short answers).
Dec 10		Final Review