

# AGADIR FRENCH HIGH SCHOOL

## General knowledge about some English-speaking countries

### THE UNITED KINGDOM

#### General Information

- Great Britain = England, Wales and Scotland.
- Population about 60.5 million.
- United Kingdom = Great Britain and Northern Ireland (/Ulster).
- Flag = Union Jack
- Currency = the Pound (£)
- National anthem = "God Save the Queen"
- Political regime = constitutional monarchy
- Head of state: the Queen (also head of the legal system, commander in chief of the army and head of the church of England but mainly representative role)
- National emblems:
  - England = Rose
  - Wales = Daffodil OR Leek
  - Ireland = Shamrock
  - Scotland = Thistle

### ENGLAND

#### Government

##### Parliament

- House of Lords = 92 appointed members (non-elected) who examine and revise bills (*projets de loi*) that are voted by the house of Commons
- House of Commons = 650 elected members

##### Government

The Prime Minister = executive power.

Members of the government = Lord Chancellor (*ministre de la justice, président de la chambre des Lords*), Chancellor of the Exchequer (*ministre des finances*), Foreign Secretary (*ministre des affaires étrangères*), Home Secretary (*ministre de l'intérieur*), Defense Secretary (*ministre de la défense*).

3 main political parties:

- The Labor Party represents the interests of the working class
- The Conservative Party is from the right wing
- The Liberal Democrats

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## Historical landmarks

- **1<sup>st</sup> Century BC** (Before Christ). Roman invasions
- **1066**: William of Normandy (Guillaume le conquérant) invaded England and defeated the Saxon king (Harold II) at the battle of **Hastings**
- During the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547) the **Church of England became independent from the Roman Catholic Church** (because Henry wanted to divorce his wife, which was not allowed by the Pope). Henry VIII had 8 wives.
- **1642**: a **civil war** broke out between the Cavaliers (the King's supporters) and the Roundheads, led by Cromwell. **Charles I** was executed in 1649 and **Cromwell's** republic lasted until 1660, when Charles II was restored
- **1707**: England and Scotland were joined by the act of union
- Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901, the longest reign in the British history) saw the expansion and prosperity of the **British Empire**. Victoria was called Empress of India
- **1914**: Britain entered WWI. Its fleet played a major role in maintaining the communication between allies
- **1939**: under the leadership of **Winston Churchill**, Britain entered **WWII**
- **1952**: King Georges II was succeeded by **Elizabeth II**
- **1993**: The UK ratified the **Maastrich** treaty but chose to remain outside of the Economic and Monetary Union
- **1997**: The Labor Party won the General Election. **Tony Blair** formed the new Cabinet. He resigned in favor of **Gordon Brown in 2007**
- **2010**: The General Election gave **no clear majority** to either major parties (Labor and Conservative). David Cameron decided to form the **first coalition government since WWII**, with the Liberal Democrats, the third main party.

## Famous Places

- The Houses of Parliament, on the banks of the river Thames = House of Commons and the House of Lords
- Big Ben
- Buckingham Palace: royal palace
- Stratford-upon-Avon: birth and burial place of William Shakespeare (1564-1616)
- 10 Downing Street: house of the Prime Minister in London
- Harrods: a fashionable department store in Knightsbridge (London)
- Balmoral: private home of the Royal Family since 1852

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## IRELAND

### General Information

- **Northern Ireland (or Ulster)**
- Capital = **Belfast**.
- Population = **50% Protestants** and about **40% Catholics**.
  
- **Republic of Ireland (or Eire) = parliamentary democracy.**
- Capital = **Dublin**.
- Population = **92% Roman Catholics**.
- Currency = **Euro (€)**

### Historical Landmarks

- **1801**: the **Act of Union** joined **England and Ireland** as the “United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland”
- **1845-1849**: the **Great Potato Famine** caused the **death** of nearly 700 000 people and caused 1 million people to **emigrate**, mainly to the **USA**
- **1916**: Irish nationalists unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow British rule.
- **1919**: **the rebels proclaimed Ireland as a republic** and Guerrilla against the British forces ensued.
- **1921**: **creation of Northern Ireland**. The main Protestant counties were separated from the Irish Free State
- **Late 1960's**: beginning of **the Troubles** (riots in 1969). **Conflicts** over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and the **relationships between Catholic and Protestant communities**.
- **January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1972**: **Bloody Sunday**. The Catholic minority **demonstrated in favor of equal rights** between them and the Protestants in Northern Ireland. **14 people were shot by the British Army**. (Sunday bloody sunday by U2)
- **1985**: Anglo-Irish Agreement gave Dublin an official consultative role in Northern Ireland's affairs for the first time.
- **1998**: Good Friday Agreement, a major landmark in Northern Ireland Peace Process. **End of the Troubles**

### Definitions

- The **I.R.A.** = Irish Republican Army
- The **Sinn Féin** = movement for the political unification of Ireland
- **The Troubles**: a period of ethno-political conflict (mainly between Protestants and Catholics) in Ulster (song Zombie by the Cranberries).

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## THE US

### General Information

- The US = 50 states = 48 + Alaska and Hawaii.
- US flag = “Old Glory” or “Star Spangled Banner” = 13 stripes (*rayures*) for the 13 founding British Colonies and 50 stars for the 50 states.
- National Anthem : Star spangled banner.
- US population = 350 millions composed of Whites and minorities of Black Americans and Hispanic Americans mainly

### Politics

The President = **four-year term** and may be reelected only once

Main political parties :

- **Democratic Party** (emblem: the donkey) = liberal left wing.
- **Republican Party** (emblem: the elephant) = right wing.

### Historical landmarks

- **1620: Pilgrims** from Europe embark onboard the **Mayflower**, a ship which brings them to America. They found the Plymouth colony and only survive their first year thanks to the help of the Indians who provide corn and poultry.
- **1621**: The Pilgrim fathers organize a **thanksgiving** day in honor of the Indians and their help. Eating turkey and corn has become a traditional dish for Thanksgiving
- **1776**: 4<sup>th</sup> of July, **declaration of independence** from the British Crown (the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is celebrated as **Independence Day**). “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*”
- **1775-1783: War of independence** / Revolutionary war. The war was ended by the ratification of the Paris treaty, in which Great Britain ceded all Native American territory between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River to the United States.
- **1789**: The American Constitution went into effect.
- **1861-1865: The American Civil War** (*guerre de secession*) opposed the **southern states** to the **northern states**. The South relied on (*s'appuyait sur*) slavery for its economy while the North was in favor of abolition. See movie *Gone with the Wind*.
- **1862**: president Lincoln declared that slaves were free.
- **1865**: the **13<sup>th</sup> amendment abolished slavery**
- **1892**: creation of **Ellis Island** as the main gateway to America for immigrants
- **1920's: Roaring Twenties** and the **Jazz Age**. Period of economic, cultural and artistic dynamism. See *The Great Gatsby*
- **1929**: Wall Street black Thursday. Economic crash

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- **1930's: Great Depression. Prohibition** (alcohol was prohibited). See gangster movies.
- **1941: Pearl Harbor** Attack. The US enter the war
- **1945:** August. The US drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. End of WWII
- **1960's: Civil Rights Movement (Martin Luther King)**. Black Americans demonstrate in favor of equality
- **1963:** I Have a Dream (MLK speech)
- **1964:** Civil Rights Act **abolishes segregation**.
- **2001: World Trade Center terrorist attacks**. The USA declare war to terrorism.

## Definitions

- American Dream : based on the declaration of independence, it is the idea that anyone should be given **equal opportunities** in the pursuit of happiness. It also implies **freedom** and **justice** for all, and the faith in **hard work bringing success** ("self-made men", "from rags to riches").
- The Deep South aka **Dixieland**. The heart of the **Confederate** states (southern states during the civil war) which opposed the **Union** (northern states)
- The Frontier the borderline between the **settled territories** (*les territoires colonisés*) and the **Indian territories** (or the **Far West**). The Myth of the Frontier refers to the conquest of Indian territories to expand America.
- The Melting Pot : the idea that America would be a crucible (*un creuset*) in which **all nationalities would be transformed into a new "race"**. It has been opposed with the idea of a salad bowl in which nationalities would **mix together without dissolving into a new identity**.
- Manifest Destiny : the idea that America has a **mission towards other countries**, that of **expanding the virtues of its institutions and beliefs to them, redeeming them** and making the world in the image of the US. It was mainly used to **justify American Expansionism**.

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## AUSTRALIA

### General Information

Capital = **Canberra**.

Biggest city : Sydney.

Population = 20 millions, including **1% aborigines** and 7% Asians.

### Historical and cultural Landmarks

- **1770: James Cook** claimed the East coast of Australia without consulting with the existing inhabitants.
- **1788-1840**: Transportation of **convicts** (*des bagnards*) to **Botany Bay** (Today's Sydney). Australia was first of all a **British Penal Colony**, which means convicts had the choice between going to prison, or being sent to Australia to begin another life.
- **1829-1830**: a **smallpox** (*petite vérole*) epidemic wiped out (*balaya*) **40 to 60 percent of the Aborigine** population. **Conflicts** with settlers also led to the **death** of great numbers of natives.

### Definitions

- Uluru aka Ayers Rock, a **sacred mountain to Aborigines** and one of the most famous landmark in Australia.
- Aborigines : the **native population** of Australia. It was wiped out by the contact with European population (diseases and conflict)
- **The Dreamtime** : the moment when the world was created for Aborigines
- The Dreaming : a story that **explains the creation** of plants, animals and men

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## NEW ZEALAND

### General Information

New Zealand = two islands.

Capital = Wellington

Largest city : Auckland

Population = 85% European and 15% Māori

### Historical landmarks

- **1050-1350: Polynesians** settle in New Zealand. Their descendants develop a Māori culture based on land and kinship links
- **1770: James Cook** reaches NZ. He is the first explorer to circumnavigate and map the island.
- **1840: The treaty of Waitangi** is signed between the British crown and Māori chiefs.
- **1893: the right to vote is granted to women**, which makes NZ the first country in the world to enact universal female suffrage.

### Definitions

- Māori : the **natives** of New Zealand. Their culture is **based on the respect of the land**, as it is their link with their ancestors. Relationships between the members of a tribe are very important. Although the Māori are the **second largest ethnic group** of the NZ, they are **often discriminated against** and have poor living conditions (unemployment, alcoholism etc. see Once were Warriors
- Pākehā : Māori word referring to the **European population**.
- The Haka : Traditional war dance from Polynesian populations. The most famous Haka is the Ka Mate which is performed by the All Blacks (the NZ rugby team) before each rugby match.
- The Treaty of Waitangi : A treaty signed between the British Crown and more than 500 Māori chiefs. **It brought NZ into the British Empire and gave Māori sovereignty on their lands and possessions** as well as **equal rights with British citizens**. However, it was written in **two languages**: while the English version gives the British Crown sovereignty over NZ, the Māori version only grants *kawanatanga*, which is a less important power. The treaty **created tensions between Māori and Pākehās**.