

THE BRITISH COUNCIL POLAND
BRITISH STUDIES WEB PAGES

<http://elt.britcoun.org.pl>

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This site provides regularly updated materials for Polish teachers and learners of English. The approach is cross-cultural and the site aims to create both a storehouse of resources and a forum for teachers and students across Poland to benefit from.

Ten editions of the pages have been produced so far: "Views of Britain", "Festivals", "Youth Culture", "Education", "Government", "Myths, Legends, Folk and Fairy Tales", "Sport", "Health", "Identity", and "2001 - Back to the Future". The home pages for each issue are conveniently arranged in the form of a book-like table of contents, which is an advantage for those less experienced with the Internet browsing.

What can you find in the British Studies Web Pages? Well, there is a wide variety of materials there: facts and figures about the UK; lesson plans for teachers; texts and articles in English; cross-cultural questionnaires; extracts from British books; pictures and cartoons; quizzes and games; academic articles; competitions; notes on teaching of cultural studies; links to other interesting web sites; annotated bibliographies; book reviews; and of course a letters page for the users to send comments and questions.

Many of the above items have been developed by the authors themselves, a team of Polish and British teacher trainers, while a deliberate attempt is made to include Polish 'voices', both teachers and students.

Specifically, the site offers you material which can be used in English language classes, at home for self-study, and for project work. You can view and use the content on screen in a lab or, if you prefer, you can easily print it out and use in hard copy in the form of handouts, as the pages are not overloaded with graphics. And that proper balance is another advantage for those with slow Internet connections.

The site aims to provide resources that focus on providing information about aspects of daily life (such as food, clothes, language differences) rather than on elements of high culture such as artistic achievements, national institutions, and so on. However the latter are not neglected, as there are numerous references to more academic issues throughout the site. Indeed a comprehensive list of links provides information for anyone interested in digging deeper into these matters as well as resources at a more academic level. These pages reflect British Studies developments that are currently happening across Europe, (Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and most recently Estonia and

Germany), and they help to provide that vitally important element of personal and local experience which is missing from many courses and coursebooks for teaching English.

Indeed, rather than just presenting facts, the site emphasises the cross-cultural exploration of material. Sometimes these classroom activities are made explicit, and at other times articles are left to be developed by teachers for their own classroom contexts.

Moreover, it routes teachers to other resource points through the Bibliography section where you can find pointers to both hard copy and electronic resources in the form of "high level and classroom related hard copy resources" as well as useful CD ROMs.

A Selected British Studies Bibliography is a section of the website intended to provide help in locating information and materials in the British Studies Resource Points. Each web issue contains a selected annotated bibliography on the subject of the issue based on some of the publications and other materials provided in the Resource Points which relate to the main theme.

Its Links Section aptly utilises the phenomenal resources available on the WWW by pointing people to the relevant websites wherever possible. This section is expanding all the time.

The site is being developed to foster interactivity. It is likely to become a forum moving towards being teachers' discussion place. It includes a FAQs page whose aim is to get teachers to start communicating by e-mail sending in questions to be answered onsite. Each issue has a quiz section, which is another attempt to create interaction, as well as an attempt to make the site a 'fun' place to visit.

There are also thematic competitions aimed at promoting every new issue with prizes for the winners, which is meant to act as a draw as well as a means of disseminating resources to teachers.

The graphic aspect of the project is mainly a combination of custom-made pictures and, most importantly, scanned samples from Views of Britain and Britain Now competitions organised by the British Council Poland. Most of them are clickable thumbnails making way to opening full pictures for those with fast connections who want to make further use of the graphics.

The current, special issue of the web pages - **2001 – Back to the Future**, revisits each of the earlier themes from previous issues to take a look at some aspects of our contemporary world, trying to make readers conscious of the extent our present and future borrows from the past. It is partly a cross-section of the site and therefore lends itself easily as a sampler to reflect on the previous issues included in the pages.

So, in **Views of Britain**, facts and figures are used both to survey the way the British think of themselves and to examine how they are perceived by others. For example, there is a classroom activity on stereotypes and a provocative short story, "Notting Hill."

When revisiting **Myths and Legends**, the world-wide interest in the Harry Potter books is touched upon. In this section there are some Polish responses to Harry Potter, putting the phenomenon into

the wider perspective of our timeless need, both within children and adults, for myth. The interactive quiz on the subject is surely the kind of entertainment Harry himself would approve of.

Under **Health** there is Health Update, which is a light-hearted look at what the medical experts have been telling us we should and shouldn't do. On a more serious note you can read two articles examining medical developments, and in particular the moral and ethical issues they sometimes raise. Both articles can serve as the basis for classroom discussion.

In **Government** you can find a quick guide to UK devolution, and a set of interactive quizzes to see how much you know about it. The possible consequences of constitutional change in the UK are dealt with in another article.

In the **Festivals** section you can find the opinions of some Polish and British people on the topic of the changes reflected in attitudes towards traditional festivals and the arrival of new ones, both the United Kingdom and Poland. You can also use this survey as the basis of a classroom activity.

The **Sport** area offers you, among others, a choice of classroom activities and another interactive sports quiz.

Young people's attitudes and behaviour reflect changes in society, and in **Youth Culture** results of recent surveys on British Youth today are presented. This item also has ideas for how it can be used in the classroom. Another article examines how language is also constantly changing to reflect the transformation.

The **Education** zone has a look both at the past and possible futures of education and compares the British and Polish educational systems.

The **Identity** issue provides a fascinating insight into Polish opinions on British, Polish, and European identities – something you will want to contrast your views with.

To conclude, it is worth stressing that the successful development of such a site depends not on one person or even a design team alone but also, and perhaps most importantly, on the enthusiasm of the individuals working in schools and colleges who use it. Enjoy!

PUZZLEMAKER

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Puzzlemaker is a part of DiscoverySchool.com (<http://school.discovery.com>), together with such its other parts as Brain Boosters, ClipArt Gallery, Cybersurfari, Dictionary Plus and Science Fair Central. The site is a puzzle generation tool for everyone, students, teachers and parents alike. With the help of the site, it is possible to create and print word searches, crossword and math puzzles

using your own word lists. Also, it is easy to build your own maze or print computer-made mazes created around holidays and classroom topics.

Among the types of puzzles that can be created we can find "Fallen Letters," "Letter Tiles," "Cryptograms," "Double Puzzles," "Math Squares," "Number Blocks," "Criss-Cross Puzzles," "Hidden Message Word Searches," "Word Searches," "Computer Generated Mazes" and "Mazed Things." After having chosen a type of the maze, one just needs to click "Go" to start generating a puzzle. The whole process is easy to follow, instructions are written in simple language, so creating a puzzle should not be a problem even for low-level students. The first step is usually to enter the title of your maze. After that, you need to specify the shape of your maze, its size, its fill style. Then you proceed with entering vocabulary to your puzzle, and here the procedure depends on the type of a puzzle chosen. Finally, you get the ready-made puzzle which you can print or save to disc and then upload to a class website.

The site also allows its users to add pictures to their puzzles from the built-in clipart gallery, in order to make puzzles more attractive in terms of graphics. Students can also access vocabulary lists, which may help them to create a puzzle. This is especially useful when students want to create a puzzle concentrating on a particular topic, but may also be used as a kind of vocabulary revision. Also, it is possible to save students' puzzles in a "Custom Classroom" for future reference. Another interesting feature of the site is that students can subscribe to a "PuzzleNews newsletter," so that they would receive new puzzles to solve from time to time by email. In this way, we can provide our students with some off-class reading, which will surely attract students because of its problem-solving and competitive nature. Finally, visitors to the site can also try to cope with a new crossword or a maze each day.

When using the site, the teacher and students can access the FAQ section, where there are frequently-asked questions about puzzles answered, so some assistance to the process of creation is provided. Also, the teacher might review the other sections such as "Help" or "Hints" in order to make full use of the site.

It needs to be said that one of the main advantages of the site is its interactivity. Students create puzzles of their own design, and then they may give their puzzles to solve to other students. Thanks to the very simple and effective engine of the site, students may become materials writers themselves, at the same time being engaged in competition with others and learning and revising vocabulary. Also, it is important that the site is directed to kids, and thanks to that the level of language is extremely easy. It seems that thanks to that the site is accessible even to elementary students, and the attractive simple and intuitive layout of the site makes it possible to create puzzles with Young Learners as well.

To sum up, it needs to be said that Puzzlemaker site should be recommended as great help in vocabulary learning and revising. It can be used both by a teacher (preparing materials for classroom use) and by students (practising vocabulary by creating puzzles for each other). The interactivity and attractive layout of the site, together with the problem-solving nature, make the tasks organised on the basis of it a truly enjoyable and profitable experience.