

English for Life in the UK

Episode nine: Art and Culture in the UK

Welcome to episode nine of English for life in the UK. This is a podcast for intermediate level learners of English and is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the St Augustine's Centre in Halifax, Yorkshire.

Today's episode is brought to you by Christine and John and is about art and culture in the UK. As this episode focuses on works of art and pieces of music, this will be a little difficult if you are simply listening on the pod cast. What we suggest you do, is to use the Internet, and potentially Google, to find the works of art that are being referred to, so that you can look at them as we are talking about them. And the same goes for the pieces of music. If you use iTunes or Spotify or any of the other music apps you should be able to find most, if not all, of the pieces of music that we refer to in this episode. *[See list at end of transcript]*

... MUSIC...

C: Okay so in the session we talked about art and culture in ... in the UK and in fact we ... we ... focused on works of art, visual art, and music in particular. So John you focused on visual art.

J: Yeah. I ... I took nine masterpieces.

C: What do you mean by a masterpiece? Would you explain?

J: Well ... we went through that didn't we. We explained that, for example ... the Mona Lisa or the .. the Sistine Chapel or pieces, pieces of art that are considered to be iconic or very valuable or very influential. (Yes). So we explained that concept to them ... which they understood and we went on to look at nine British masterpieces through ... through the ages, which have been very important, or influential, or tell us .. more importantly they are pieces of art that tell us something about the people who produced them and about the period of history that they came from.

C: It was very interesting, I mean, you choose nine, didn't you?

J: ..yeah.

C: Would you .. would you tell us now which nine you chose and why you chose them.

J: Well we start.. I'll go through them, kind of, roughly chronologically. So the first one we looked at was the Sutton Hoo helmet which is a famous Anglo-Saxon helmet which was excavated in 1939. It was buried as part of a .. a ship burial of a King of East Anglia, called King Radwell ... and its one of the most famous pieces of ... one of the most famous artefacts from that period. It's in the British Museum... We had some beautiful pictures of it and we .. we talked about how the period previously, by some historians had been referred to as the dark ages after the fall of the Roman Empire .. and we just .. we showed.. it were a very good example of the artistry and craftsmanship of the Anglo-Saxon people of the time. It tells us a lot about the first English really. (yes) So from 625 A.D.

We went on then to look at something from ... closer to home for you, the .. the

Lewis chessmen. Again they were from ... found on the Isle of Lewis in 1831, but they date back to the 12th century. They are a set of chess pieces that were carved from ivory, which were actually made in Norway. So again that speaks to the history of that part of Scotland. At the time it was ruled by the Norwegians, or the Vikings. I think they found that quite interesting. Some of them were chess players. Interesting.

And we moved on .. a little further to examine the Bayeux Tapestry which again they found interesting because obviously that tells us the story of the Norman conquest which we looked at previously .. and which is certainly something that will come up in the citizenship exam. 1066 and all that. (Yes). They found that interesting.

And then moving on to the York Minster which is an example of the things that the Normans built once they ... began to rule over England. So we looked at the east window specifically of York Minster which is a magnificent example of stained glass, ... the largest I think of its kind in England. And we explained the story that it tells. It's obviously a very beautiful decorative piece of art that tells basically the Bible story, so from Genesis all the way through to the book of Revelation. And we explained that this was the way that people who were non-literate, who couldn't read and write at the time, were able to be taught the stories of the Bible, basically. ... So some of them had been to York, or ... are going to go to York so that's something that they'll be able to experience when they go there. We then..

C: Yes it was the next piece that that really surprised me it was the ... it was the Gin Lane and Beer Street by Hogarth (yeah). Now I didn't know this story and I don't ... I don't know that piece and I didn't know the story that you explained so well. (yeah) It's very interesting

J: Yeah, we..we kind of explained this as being a piece of really .. propaganda. So it were another word we used that they understood. So we got some examples of propaganda in the modern era from their countries and ... as we say.. we went on to explain the story of Hogarth... that it was a phenomenon that was known as the 'gin craze'. So during the 1700s people were initially encouraged to distill gin cos this was a way of keeping grain prices high ... and there was something of a mania or a craze for gin drinking, perhaps akin to modern drug abuse or drug crazes, if you like. .. and in the prints, the two prints that complement each other. The one is Gin Lane and the other one is Beer Street. So Hogarth paints ... a picture of a healthy and wholesome and happy .. Beer Street where people are drinking good old-fashioned English ale and this is seen to be healthy and decent and upstanding as opposed, on the other hand, to Gin Lane, where people were all falling into penury and misery through the evils of 'mothers ruin', as it was also described as. So I think they found that interesting because I'd say it were part of the campaign for the Gin Act which was an act of Parliament which basically taxed gin and clamped down on the production and consumption of gin.

So, yeah, we went on then to JMW Turner. [... long pause ...] JMW Turner and his famous, probably his most famous painting the Fighting Temeraire from 1838 which we learnt is going to adorn the new £20 note that's being released in 2020.

C: Mmm.. I didn't know that ... very interesting.

J: Yeah they found that one interesting, yeah. So we explained who Turner was, that he's probably... certainly of that period, the most famous, well renowned English portrait painter and the painting of the Fighting Temeraire is his most famous work. It was voted .. Britain's favourite painting in a poll in 2005. ... It's a beautiful painting for many reasons in terms of its artistry, and the light that Turner manages to show in his paintings and they've a very interesting story as well. We explained that the Temeraire was one of the ships that fought the French at Trafalgar ... defeated the French in the famous naval battle .. which prevented Napoleon from being able to invade the UK. We explained about Nelson, Nelson's column, again something else that will come up on ..on the citizenship tests quite often, and just explained the painting that it shows ... illustrates a passing of an epoch of British naval supremacy. It shows a steam tug which is pulling the old sailing ship away, very sadly to the wrecking yard to be broken up for spare parts. So you are seeing the passing of the age of sail and the birth of the Industrial Revolution in the form of the steamship which is taking over from the .. the old sailing ships so... and also at a personal level Turner were coming towards the end of his life, to the end of his career so we're seeing the sun setting not just on that era but also on .. on Turner as a man so there's issues of mortality and things to .. to examine there.

C: And of course, it's really beautiful.

J: Yeah it is a beautiful painting. I look forward to seeing the new £20 notes. Yeah. So then we moved into the 20th century and we started to look at ... modern art, if you like. So we examined a work called 'Family of Man' which is actually at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. So another .. another piece of art that the students might see on their travels. And that's by Barbara Hepworth, a very famous artist who was born locally in Wakefield ... a contemporary of Henry Moore who she studied with at the Leeds College of Art. And we just .. we discussed Barbara Hepworth's life and how influential she'd been, great artists like Picasso that she associated with and was influenced by. .. So I think they found that quite interesting...(Yes)..so nice to see some women again in what is quite a male dominated .. topic this week unfortunately.

C: Yeah. Traditionally it certainly has been.

J: We did have a lot of women, obviously, who made the Bayeux Tapestry so hopefully equaled up the gender balance a wee bit there. So they found Barbara Hepworth interesting.

We moved on then to .. a favourite of mine, a personal favourite of mine, a gentleman called Peter Saville who famously founded the Factory record label in Manchester in the late 70s with Tony Wilson and Alan Erasmus... and Peter Saville's famous .. probably the most famous graphic designer of the late 20th century. He's very famous in musical circles for designing the album covers for bands like New Order, Joy Division, the Buzzcocks so we explained that he was part of what we described as Punk and New Wave (New Wave, yeah). They found that quite interesting and then we finished with A very famous... probably one of the most famous contemporary artists in the UK, a guy called Anthony Gormley. And we used the picture of the Angel of the North which stands in Gateshead by the A1 motorway, something that most of the students were familiar with. They'd seen that on the television or in person in Newcastle and we

just described .. some of the controversy that .. that surrounded the ... this particular piece of public art. It was seen as, by some people in the region, as being very expensive, a lot of people weren't particular fond of it. And we went on to explain that as time passed it became, kind of an iconic figure for that part of the world. The Newcastle United fans were .. put a .. they dressed it in a Newcastle United football shirt when they got through to the final and I think ever since that it's been seen as.. been part of the ... part of the local culture in the north-east and they're very fond of it, So...

So, they were our nine pieces of art and we then, for the second half of the lesson, went on to examine some famous works of British music.

C: Indeed.

J: Which you are going to tell me about. (laughs)

C: I will. I will. I mean we chose.. we chose 10.. in fact it was Mark who made the choice. I'm sorry that Mark can't be with us today. He's is not so well today. But he chose these as .. just as examples of different kinds of music ... made famous by British musicians. ... There were some of classical music

J: So could you give us an example. What did you use to illustrate classical?

C: We certainly did 'Land of Hope and Glory' by Elgar.... Yeah.... And we played a choral version of it so we had people singing on that which was rather good. ... We played 'Jerusalem'. Again ... and that is .. is an anthem if you like its used as an anthem. We talked about it being seen as the English anthem, not the British anthem, but the English anthem.

J: Yeah. We explained the concept of anthems, didn't we, because we also played 'God save the Queen', British anthem. Again which is something which will tie in nicely with any citizenship exams and obviously when they go through their citizenship .. when they receive their citizenship they, I believe they sing the national anthem, don't they?

C: Oh, I didn't know that! Oh my goodness.

J: And can I just add, I thought that were wonderful what you did. You .. you asked and we are obviously very diverse group of students. Christine asked each of the students to sing their own respective national anthems...

C: If they wanted to...

J: .. which I thought were very nice.

C: .. which was interesting because, of course most of the people in the class have actually fled their countries. They've left them and so I was surprised at how much they did want to sing them. They were quite shy but they actually liked singing them.

J: Yeah, I thought that were nice.

C: So we did that. And of course the other piece of classical music that we chose was the Messiah, Handel's 'Messiah'. I was surprised that more people didn't know it but I suppose it's very religious. Anyway, we did that. Also we chose just one piece of Jazz: Courtney Pine... 'Inner State of Mind' we chose. And he's known as a sax.. saxophonist. In fact I went to see him once in Leeds ... I really enjoyed it.

J: So what did we choose for, perhaps the more popular end of ...?

C: Well... hmm.. in straightforward pop music of course, the most popular we chose .. 'Sing' by Ed Sheeran because, of course, Ed Sheeran was born in Halifax.

J: I didn't know that until today.

- C: You didn't know that .. and it's interesting ... it's interesting that a number of the group liked Ed Sheeran ... but not as much as Adele. She was really popular in the group and we chose her as well. Because they, between them, are world-famous .. musicians, selling music all over the world, both Adele and Ed Sheeran. But we played some older pop music, some older rock music, 'Hey Jude' by the Beatles, of course and we .. we played some folk rock.
- J: Who did we choose to represent folk music.
- C: Folk rock? ... Sandy Denny..she was .. she played with Fairport Convention and .. 'Who Knows where the Time Goes' is probably her most, and their most, famous song and we chose that. I'm looking on here on my list of music to see if I've.. Oh Yeah! and of course we did ... we played some Stormzy, some rap.
- J: I think he's one of Mark's favourite artists, isn't he. I think Mark put Stormzy in there.
- C: Yes, definitely.
- J: He's very much down with the kids I think there. (laughs)
- C: But he was .. rap, you know he is quite mainstream. The fact that he was the headline act at last year's Glastonbury Festival .. just shows how important and significant rap is (Absolutely) in popular music.
- J: Yeah. Very interesting that ..that several of those were initially American forms of music but which have been taken up by British artists and become very successful, haven't they? Jazz, rap etc.
- C: Yeah. And actually that's all we had time for in this session.
- J: And very well. I think we squeezed a lot in
- C: We did, we did of course there's a whole lot more to art and culture in the UK but we can't do everything
- J: And the topic of next week's lesson and podcast is ...
- C: Religion. Yeah.. OK?
- J: Thank you

Additional support

Today I want to talk a bit more about two particular words that John used within the podcast. I also want to talk about the citizenship test which he referred to and about transcripts which we will make available soon for this podcast.

So on the language points, John used the phrase '**artefact**'. An **artefact** is any object, anything made by a human being, and usually it's used to refer to things that have historical and/or cultural interest. He also used the word '**propaganda**'. **Propaganda** is misleading information, information that isn't really completely true or accurate and which is used specifically to promote a particular cause, a particular argument. In this podcast John was using it in relation to the Hogarth paintings, where Gin Lane was being portrayed as all bad whereas Beer Street was positive.

Now John also referred in this podcast to the citizenship test and for those of you who are not our students and we haven't explained this, for those refugees and migrants who wish to become British citizens, after five years of residency this is possible but you have to pass a citizenship test. This is a multiple-choice test and it covers a wide range of things and those

areas are the very things that we are covering in this podcast. We don't try to cover everything required for the citizenship test and also we do do some things that are outside the test but there is a large part of what we cover in this podcast which would be useful to anybody hoping to become a British citizen and to do the necessary test.

As additional support for those of you learning English, and wanting to know more about life in this country, we are starting to produce transcripts of these podcasts. That is a written version of what is said in the podcasts, a transcript. These will soon be available through the St Augustine's website (www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk) and Twitter account, so look out for those.

That's it for this week. Thank you for listening.

Works of art discussed in this episode:

- The Sutton Hoo Helmet
- The Lewis Chessmen
- The Bayeux Tapestry
- The Great East Window in York Minster
- 'The Fighting Temeraire' by JMW Turner
- 'Gin Lane' and 'Beer Street' by William Hogarth
- 'The Family of Man' by Barbara Hepworth
- The album cover of Joy Division's 'Unknown Pleasures' by Peter Saville
- 'The Angel of the North' by Anthony Gormley

Pieces of music:

- 'Land of Hope and Glory' from Elgar's March No 1 in Pomp and Circumstance.
- 'Jerusalem', poem by William Blake music by Hubert Parry
- 'The Hallelujah Chorus' from 'Messiah' by Handel
- 'Hey Jude' by the Beatles
- 'Inner State of Mind' by Courtney Pine.
- 'Who Knows Where the Time Goes'' by Fairport Convention
- 'Sing' by Ed Sheeran
- 'Rolling in the Deep' by Adele
- 'Brotherhood' by Stormzy