



BRITAIN TODAY

I. BEFORE YOU READ.

You are going to read an article about Britain's place in today's world. Before you read, match the words from the text in A with the definitions in B. Use a dictionary to check your answers.

A	B
oddly	in a strange or unusual way
self-assessment	violent people, especially criminals
torrent	channel at the edge of a road which collects water
thugs	generally, without considering the details
jobs	process of judging your own achievements
gutter	use power to affect or influence something
inches	practice of giving importance to all cultures in society
multiculturalism	large amount of something which comes very quickly
sword	something attached to another larger or more important thing
bully	rude, noisy and sometimes aggressive young people
adjunct	units of measurement equal to 2.54cm
exert	person who uses his strength or power to hurt others
broadly	long metal weapon with a blade and a handle



BRITAIN TODAY

2. NOW READ THE ARTICLE.

A _____

Who are we? For we British, that's an oddly difficult question. Although our national self-assessment usually notes a number of good points (we're inventive, tolerant, and at least we're not French), it lists a torrent of bad ones too. Our society is fragmented, degenerate, irresponsible. Our kids are thugs, our managers greedy and incompetent. We hate our weather. Our public services are abysmal. Our society is rude and unfriendly. We drink too much. Our house prices are crazy, our politicians sleazy, our roads jammed, our football team hopeless. When a newspaper invited readers to put forward new designs for the backs of British coins, one reader suggested: "How about a couple of jobs dancing on a car bonnet, or a trio of drunk young ladies in the gutter?"

B _____

Anyone reading today's papers would almost certainly come away with an impression of a society uneasy with itself, a land where racial and religious tension rests only inches beneath the surface. But if this is the case, it's certainly nothing new. Contemporary multiculturalism may pose challenges, but infinitely fewer than it posed in the past. The Viking version of multiculturalism generally involved a sword in the stomach. The 16th-century version of a multi-faith society involved burning heretics on bonfires.



BRITAIN TODAY

C _____

In any case, our confusion goes far wider and deeper than national, ethnic or religious issues. Recent reactions to the war in Iraq exposed long-standing divisions about the country's attitudes to its past. When the British government chose to go to war, was it acting in its old role of imperialist bully? Or in its equally old role of global policeman and bringer of freedom? The national debate displayed both responses, both equally impassioned. Should we be proud or ashamed of the former Empire? Or perhaps it has nothing to do with us any more? For all our love of military adventure, are we perhaps, as many believe, just a glorified adjunct of the United States, a kind of East Atlantic Puerto Rico? Is this what has become of a country whose empire once covered a quarter of the earth's surface but used an army smaller than that of Switzerland to exert its rule?

D _____

After centuries of believing ourselves to be different from 'abroad', today's Britain suddenly finds itself looking very much the same as its counterparts elsewhere in the rich world. Though we're a bit more American than most (look at our labour markets, or our jails), broadly speaking we're just the same as everyone else. A bit better here, a bit worse there, but not so distinctive or different as we once believed ourselves to be.

Adapted from *This Little Britain* by Harry Bingham (HarperCollins)

The Article is divided into four parts, A, B, C and D.

Choose the best title from the list below for each part of the article.

Is Britain America's little brother?

A history of religious and racial unrest.

Not so different after all.

What's wrong and what's right with Britain today?



BRITAIN TODAY

3. LOOK AT THE ADJECTIVES USED TO DESCRIBE BRITAIN AND THE BRITISH.

Adjectives found in the text are in list A. For each one, choose its **antonym** (opposite meaning) from the list in B. Use a dictionary to check your answers.

A

tolerant

degenerate

irresponsible

greedy

incompetent

abysmal

sleazy

hopeless

drunk

uneasy

longstanding

impassioned

proud

ashamed

distinctive

B

proud

competent

ashamed

ordinary

moral

trustworthy

relaxed

excellent

intolerant

apathetic

responsible

talented

generous

recent

sober



BRITAIN TODAY

4. READ THE TEXT AGAIN.

Decide if the statements below are true (T) or false (F).

	T	F
The British generally think of themselves as creative and open-minded.	_____	_____
The British believe their society is polite and convivial.	_____	_____
Britons generally have a positive opinion of their politicians.	_____	_____
The author believes that there are now fewer problems caused by race and religion than there were in the past.	_____	_____
All British people are proud of Britain's role in world history.	_____	_____
A lot of people think that Britain is under the control of the USA.	_____	_____
The British empire was so large because it had the greatest number of soldiers.	_____	_____
For many centuries the British believed themselves to be dissimilar to people from other countries.	_____	_____

5. EXPRESSION.

The authors says, "*Though our national self-assessment usually notes a number of good points ...it lists a torrent of bad ones too.*"

If you did a self-assessment of your country, what would you note as its good points? And its bad points? Give reasons for your opinions.