



## The United Kingdom

England is only one of the three countries which make up the island of Great Britain, the other two being Scotland and Wales. The union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland constitutes the United Kingdom. The south-western part of Ireland is the Irish Republic, or Eire, which became an independent republic in 1922. Sometimes “Ulster” is used as an alternative name for Northern Ireland, but this is incorrect. The Province of Ulster consists of nine counties, six of which are in Northern Ireland and three in the Irish Republic.

Since the United Kingdom is made up of four different countries, its population consists of a variety of different peoples reflecting in their individual characters the physical and historical differences that exist between England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

England is mainly Anglo-Saxon, while highland Britain is essentially Celtic. The Germanic tribes that settled in England in the fifth century never reached Scotland and Wales and these territories remained independent for many centuries. Wales was joined to England in the 13<sup>th</sup> century while the Union between England and Scotland only dates back to 1707.

The Scotsman today is very proud of his country’s past and does not like anyone to call him an Englishman. His national costume is the kilt, a pleated skirt whose colours and pattern vary according to the clan to which he belongs. A clan is a group of families having the same name and ancestor.

The Welsh differ greatly from the English. They have a language and tradition of their own, and they are a much more emotional people. They are great lovers of music, dancing and songs. The Irish, like the Welsh and the Scots, are proud of their Celtic origin, and they are strongly attached to their Catholic tradition. Their love for music and nature, as well as the melancholy of their character, is reflected in Irish literature and folklore.

In general, however, the similarities between the English, the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish are nowadays more numerous than the differences. All of them have contributed to a distinctively British way of life.

### Comprehension Questions.

1. What countries make up the island of Great Britain?
2. What is meant by the United Kingdom?
3. What is the difference between Ulster and Northern Ireland?
4. When was Wales joined to England?
5. What can you say about the Scots?
6. What is a clan?



7. What is the main religion in the Irish Republic?

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Answer Key

1. England, Scotland and Wales.
2. Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
3. Ulster is a province of nine counties. Six of these counties make up Northern Ireland while three are in the Irish Republic.
4. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
5. They are proud of their country's past and do not like to be called English.
6. A group of families which have the same name and a common ancestor.
7. Catholicism.