

Cambridge University

Cambridge University is the second-oldest university in the English-speaking world (after the University of Oxford) and the seventh-oldest in the world.

The story of Cambridge University begins in 1209 when several hundred students arrived in the little town of Cambridge after having walked 60 miles from Oxford. These students were all churchmen and had been studying in Oxford at that city's well-known schools. It was a hard life at Oxford for there was constant trouble, even fighting, between the citizens of the town and the students. Then one day a student accidentally killed a man of the town. The Mayor arrested three other students who were innocent and they were put to death. In protest, many students left Oxford, some of them went to Cambridge. And so the new University began. It was Cambridge University. Of course, there were no Colleges in those early days and student life was very different from what it is now. Students were of all ages and came from anywhere and everywhere. Life in College was strict. Students were forbidden to play games, to sing (except sacred music), to hunt or fish or even to dance. Books were very rare and all the lessons were in the Latin language which students were supposed to speak even among themselves.

In 1440 King Henry VI founded King's College, and other colleges followed.

Nowadays there are more than 30 different colleges, including five for women students and several mixed colleges, in the University. The number of students in colleges is different: from 30 to 400 or 500.

There are many ancient traditions that are still observed at Cambridge. Students are required to wear gowns at lectures, in the University library, in the street in the evening, for dinners in the colleges and for official visits. One more tradition is to use Latin during public ceremonies of awarding degrees.

All the students must pay for their education, examinations, books, laboratories, university hostel, the use of libraries. The cost is high. It depends on college and university speciality. Very few students get grants.

Many great men studied at Cambridge, for example, Bacon (the philosopher), Milton and Byron (the poets), Cromwell (the soldier), Newton (the outstanding physicist), Darwin (who is famous for his theory of evolution) and Kapitsa (the famous Russian physicist).

1. What is the second-oldest university in the English-speaking world?
2. When was the University of Cambridge founded?
3. How many colleges are there at the University now?
4. What ancient traditions are still observed at Cambridge?
5. Who studied at this University?

Graffiti

You can travel almost anywhere in the world, and you will probably see graffiti. Although graffiti is more common in big cities, today you may find it in almost any region or district, big or small. It's everywhere: on trains, walls, bridges and buildings. Love it or hate it but graffiti is part of the everyday urban world. Some people consider it art while others think it's vandalism. However, few of them really know how old graffiti is.

The word graffiti itself probably comes from the old Greek verb which means "to write". Writings on walls already existed in ancient Rome. The Romans cut graffiti on walls and monuments. It showed phrases of love, political ideas, simple thoughts, magic spells, alphabets, and famous quotations from literature.

Modern graffiti dates back to the US of the 1960s. At that time for young people it was a form of self-expression and a political protest. Teenage groups in New York, for example, painted graffiti to mark their territory. Later, there started competitions between different groups. That meant that the quality of graffiti became more important than just the amount of it.

Today graffiti has travelled all over the world. However, it is still an illegal art. It has been always painted on private or public property, like cars, trains, fences and house walls. As a result most people see it as vandalism. Besides, it's rather hard to clean graffiti paints, and cities spend millions every year on it. So, in most countries graffiti is forbidden.

On the other hand, modern graffiti is, by its nature, a form of painting. After all, the artists use the same methods and materials. However, instead of paints a graffiti artist prefers sprays, markers, and crayons. Some of their works are really impressive and fascinating, they are powerful and have a deep meaning. Graffiti often makes grey walls look cheerful.

The purpose of some graffiti is to spread and declare social ideas. That's why a lot of graffiti paintings have political topics. Some cities have special places where the walls of different buildings can be used to create pieces of graffiti art.

Probably, the most famous graffiti artist is Banksy, who comes from Bristol, England. He strongly believes that writing graffiti on buildings is an effective way to communicate with people. His works are very often aggressive, provocative and even rude. In his graffiti he expresses personal political and social views, which are against war and capitalism.

1. Is graffiti an old or modern art?
2. When and where did modern graffiti begin?
3. Why is it considered to be an illegal art?
4. What is the purpose of graffiti?
5. Who is the most famous graffiti artist?

Peer pressure

"Peer pressure"* is very strong, especially among young people. Almost everyone can remember a moment when they did something because their friends were doing it. Teenagers often buy something just because their friends have it, and this thing comes into fashion. If teenagers didn't imitate their friends' behavior, there would be fewer social problems: smoking, crime and so on.

On the other hand, "peer pressure" can also produce positive results. Youth crime and vandalism in one of the districts of Bristol, a city in England, fell by 20% last year. Why? Because young people stopped doing stupid and anti-social things. Now they are trying to keep out of trouble. And it's all the result of a new project.

Two Bristol policemen organized a football league for teenagers in one of the poorest parts of the city. The idea is to prevent teenagers from committing crimes. They want to show teenagers how they can spend their free time in a better way.

The policemen introduced a system in which football results are connected to young people's behaviour outside the football grounds. Teams get points for winning their matches, but lose points if any team-member does anything he shouldn't on the football field or off it! For example, teams get ten points for winning a match, but if any player is arrested, the team loses ten points. If a member is caught doing an act of vandalism, such as spraying graffiti, the team loses five points. Three points are lost for less serious crimes.

The results in Bristol are great. None of the teenagers playing in the football league has been arrested by the police. Instead of doing antisocial things and causing problems these teenagers are trying to behave properly!

The idea is already getting popular in other parts of Britain, and similar programs will be started in other cities. Social workers are also trying to use "peer pressure" to get other positive results. If some more original ways are found, levels of crime among young people will soon be falling quickly.

Some people also think that a similar system should be used for professional footballers. If a professional player gets into a fight on the football ground, his team loses points. In this way footballers will try to behave with more respect to other players.

1. What is "peer pressure"?
2. What did the two Bristol policemen organize?
3. How do teams get points?
4. Why can a team lose 5 points?
5. What are the results of the project?

Halloween

Halloween dates back to an ancient Celtic festival. The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago in the area of Ireland, the United Kingdom and northern France, celebrated their new year on November 1. This day showed that the summer was over and winter had come. Because of the cold and darkness, winter was associated with human death.

Celts believed that on Halloween night the ghosts of the dead returned to earth. With their help, the Druids or Celtic priests, could predict the future. It was important because people depended on the natural world which was dangerous and changeable. They wanted to know what their life would be like in the next year.

For this event the Druids built big bonfires, where the people gathered to burn crops and animals. It was a gift to the Celtic gods. During the celebration, the Celts wore costumes made of animal heads and skins. They sang, danced and listened to the stories the Druids told them.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, lots of immigrants started coming to America. They helped to make the celebration of Halloween a popular national event. Americans began to dress up in frightening costumes and go from house to house asking for food or money. The most popular characters were witches, ghosts, and vampires. Everyone tried to look as ugly and scary as possible.

Halloween is closely associated with the Jack-o'-lantern, a pumpkin with a candle inside that shines through the holes to make a horrible face. Most people think that the Jack-o'-lantern is an American tradition. However, the original Jack-o'-lantern was not a pumpkin but a man who, according to the old Irish legend played a trick on the devil himself. He was punished for that and was accepted neither to heaven nor to hell. The Irish people shared the legend with the Americans and showed them how to make Jack-o'-lantern out of the pumpkin.

By the 1930s, Halloween had been celebrated with parades, town-wide parties and lots of other entertainment. Later a new tendency appeared. By the 1950s, Halloween had changed into a holiday directed mainly at children. On that evening children in costumes travel from house to house in order to ask for treats (such as some sweets, a small present or a few coins) with the question "Trick or treat?" The trick is a threat (usually not working) to perform mischief on the owner of the house if no treat is given. "Trick or treat?" has become a traditional practice on Halloween in many countries.

1. Who started Halloween?
2. Why was predicting the future important for the Celts?
3. What were the most popular characters in America?
4. What is the Jack-o'-lantern?
5. Who is the holiday mainly directed at ?

Eton

Within a ten minute walk of Windsor Castle, across a bridge over the River Thames, there's an old Gothic building. It is the legendary Eton College. It is one of England's largest independent schools and one of the highest in prestige. Members of the British royal family are traditionally educated here. It was one of the best schools when first founded and remains so now; it is still commonly known as one of the greatest schools among all the schools in the world.

Following the old tradition, Eton is a full boarding school, which means all students live and study at the school with their fellow students throughout the school year. Eton is also one of the four remaining boys' schools, so there's no opportunity for a girl to study there. Eton students traditionally come from England's wealthiest and most prestigious families, many of them aristocratic. Boys enter Eton at about 13 and continue there until they are ready to enter university.

The school was founded by Henry VI in the fifteenth century to provide free education for poor pupils who would then go on to get a higher education at King's College in Cambridge. That connection no longer exists today.

All students have a uniform of a black tailcoat and a waistcoat, a white collar and dark trousers. All students wear a white tie. This uniform is not for special occasions, it is worn at all times for all classes. If you visit Eton during term time, you will see students walking along the streets with books under their arms dressed in their uniforms.

At Eton, there are dozens of organisations known as 'societies', in many of which students come together to discuss a particular topic. The societies are traditionally governed by the boys themselves. Societies range from astronomy to Scottish dancing and stamp-collecting. Some of them are dedicated to music, some to arts, some to languages, and so on.

The official color of the college is the so-called 'Eton blue'. It's a light blue-green colour which has been used since the early 19th century. The main purpose was to identify Eton sportsmen in rowing races and on the cricket field.

1. Where is Eton College situated?
2. Is it a school or a university?
3. Who founded Eton college? When was it founded?
4. What is the uniform of the students?
5. What societies are there in Eton?

Marathons

Many Americans enjoy running marathons – a forty-two kilometer race. More than three hundred marathons were held in the United States last year and that number is expected to grow.

The New York City marathon is held every year on the first Sunday of November. It is a big sporting event with thousands of participants. One can see celebrities and famous sportsmen among the marathon runners. A famous cyclist, whose excellent physical condition helped him complete the marathon in less than three hours, admitted that the race was ‘the hardest physical thing he had ever done’.

While the New York City marathon is the biggest, the Boston Marathon is the oldest one. Boston’s is held in April. Boston is famous for the fact that Roberta Gibb became the first woman to unofficially run that marathon in 1966. At that time, people did not believe women could run marathons. The Olympics did not hold a women’s marathon event until 1984 in Los Angeles, California.

Today’s marathons welcome everyone. The popularity of the sport has spread among people who are interested in health and fitness. Many middle-aged people like to spend a weekend visiting a new city and running a marathon there. Some magazines call the middle-aged people of today the ‘marathon generation’. Forty-three percent of marathon runners in the United States are 40 years old or older. There are many organisations for marathoners. Nowadays many local running clubs offer training programmes that can prepare runners for the big race.

A marathon really starts several months before the race. You need to run about five days every week to prepare. Most runs should be for half an hour. You should also try to run for an hour or more each Sunday. This is a very basic way for an average runner to prepare.

What you can’t prepare for is running in a big marathon with thousands of other participants. A marathon is in many ways a social event. There is a sense of community. The spectators are as much a part of the race as the runners. Almost every age group is present. At the start of the race there is a lot of shouting as the runners want to release some tension. They have three to five hours of hard running ahead of them.

However, there are people who want to run farther. For them ultra-marathons are organised that take running to a different level. An ultra-marathon is any race longer than a marathon. One of the oldest ultra-marathons is held annually in California, USA. It is 160 kilometers long. Last year, 210 people finished the race. The winner, Graham Cooper, finished in eighteen hours and seventeen minutes.

1. How long is a marathon?
2. What is the oldest American marathon?
3. What is Boston marathon famous for?
4. Why do magazines call the middle-aged people of today the ‘marathon generation’?
5. Is a marathon a social event? Why?

Pirates

There have always been people who robbed ships in the open sea. We know them as pirates or corsairs. Many of them were sailors who lost their jobs, others were just young men and women looking for adventure. Thousands of pirates were active from 1650 – 1720. These years are sometimes known as the 'Golden Age' of piracy. Probably the most famous pirates of this period are Blackbeard, Henry Morgan, William 'Captain' Kidd, and the Barbarossa brothers.

The "Jolly Roger" is the well-known pirate flag. There are a number of theories about its origin. It is thought that the first pirates used a red flag, which was common in sea attacks. A red flag told other ships that there would be no pity and no prisoners would be taken. This red flag was called *Joli Rouge* (pretty red) in French. Most probably, English people pronounced it in their own way "Jolly Roger". Another theory says that "old Roger" was another name for the devil.

Another popular image from the pirate world is a parrot, sitting on the captain's shoulder. Well, there's no historical proof of that. No doubt, pirates often travelled to faraway exotic lands and brought unusual animals as souvenirs with them. Parrots were particularly popular because they were colourful, could be taught to speak, and were easier to care for than, say, monkeys. However, you can't imagine a pirate fighting with a bird on the shoulder. This image possibly began with the book 'Treasure Island'. In the book, the ever famous Long John Silver carried a parrot as a pet.

Before joining a ship each pirate signed an agreement called "Articles". This explained the rights and laws on board the ship, how much a person was paid, what to do in case of emergency, etc. For example, playing cards for money was not allowed. For breaking the rules a pirate would be shot or left on a desert island with a bottle of water and a gun.

A pirate ship was organized democratically. After a successful attack they divided the treasures equally, only the captain and the cook got more. They sometimes decided together which ship to attack or where to sail next. Most pirates were paid four times more than they had when they were sailors. But on land they were criminals and lots of money was offered to those who caught them.

However, for some time the English government supported pirates. There were lots of pirates in the sixteenth century when England was at war with Spain and the Dutch Republic. Queen Elizabeth I ordered them to rob Spanish ships and bring gold, silver and jewels to the country. Sir Francis Drake was one of the most famous pirates. He brought lots of treasures to England and also was the first Englishman to sail all the way around the world. Because of this, he was made a knight by Queen Elizabeth I.

1. What period in history was called the Golden Age of piracy?
2. Where do the pirates of the past often travel to?
3. What pet was popular among pirates?
4. How was a pirate ship organized?
5. Why was Francis Drake made a knight ?

Red Nose Day

There's one special day in Britain when you can see lots of people all over the country wearing clown red noses. This is known as *Red Nose Day*. It's arranged by a charity organisation 'Comic Relief' whose aim is to collect money for people who are in need.

'Comic Relief' was started in 1985 by the writer Richard Curtis and the comedian Lenny Henry. At that time, people in Ethiopia were suffering from an awful hunger and something had to be done. The idea was simple. Richard and Lenny decided to gather a group of much-loved British comedians to give public performances. And in this way they would collect money to help people in desperate need. They also hoped to let people know about poverty in Africa. Richard and Lenny strongly believe that laughter is the best weapon to fight tragedy, poverty and injustice. That was how 'Comic Relief' was born.

One of the main events organised by 'Comic Relief' is *Red Nose Day*. It takes place every two years in the spring, though many people think that this day should be held annually. The first *Red Nose Day* was held on 5 February 1988 and since then they have been held on the second or third Friday in March.

The event is widely celebrated in the UK and many people consider it to be a type of unofficial national holiday. The symbol of the day is the red nose which you can find in various supermarkets and charity shops. The thing is that red noses are not sold and you cannot buy them, but you can leave a small sum of money (a donation) and just take one. The exact sum of the donation is not fixed. You can leave as much as you want – it's an act of charity.

Since 1985 there have been all kinds of noses: plastic, soft, boring common ones, there were noses that looked like faces, noses that made noises, noses that changed colour when they got hot... This year it's a dinosaur theme, which means noses are shaped like small creatures from pre-history.

On *Red Nose Day* money-raising events take place all over the country and many schools participate. In the evening of *Red Nose Day* a 'telethon' takes place on the BBC channels. This is like a televised marathon that shows a selection of the events of the day, and lots of short comic performances and reports of how the money will be spent. It starts in the evening and goes through into the early hours of the morning. There's a *Red Nose Day* page on Facebook and you can follow it on Twitter. People also upload videos of local charity events on YouTube and Facebook.

So, if you are ever in the UK on *Red Nose Day*, now you know why you will find normal people wearing red noses and doing silly things! It's all for a good reason!

1. Is Red Nose Day an old or a modern event?
2. When and why was it started?
3. Where can you take a red nose on that day?
4. What events take place all over the UK on Red Nose Day?
5. What is the sum of a donation?

Mark Twain

Mark Twain wrote 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn' in 1884. Since then, the book has been published in at least sixty languages, and some people say it is the best book ever created by an American writer.

The writer's real name was Samuel Clemens. Samuel was born in 1835. He grew up in the state of Missouri on the Mississippi River. After his father died, young Samuel went to work as an assistant to a publisher. Ten years later, he became a pilot on a steamboat that sailed on the Mississippi. He heard the riverboat workers call out the words "mark twain!" That was a measure for the depth of water. Later he used this word combination as a pen-name.

In 1861 Clemens travelled west and became a reporter for newspapers in Nevada and California. He wrote news stories, editorials and sketches under his pen-name *Mark Twain*. He developed his own narrative style – friendly, funny, and often satirical, which won him a wide audience. The first success came with the story 'The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County'.

Mark Twain travelled a lot during his lifetime not only round the USA but also to Europe and the Holy Land. He naturally began writing books about his travels. 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer' was published in 1876, and soon after he began writing a sequel, 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn'.

It took Mark Twain longer to write 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn' than any of his other books. He started writing in 1876, but put the story away after about two years of work. He returned to it in 1883, and the following year it was published.

From the beginning, the book was strongly debated. Some critics praised its realism and honesty but the others strongly disliked it. They protested against the personality of Huck – a rough, dirty and disobedient boy. They could not agree that such a person should be the main character of a book. What's more, critics disliked the way Mark Twain used the language of a common, uneducated person to tell the story; no writer had ever done that before.

Today there is no longer any debate about the importance of 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn' in American literature. In 1935 Ernest Hemingway wrote: "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called 'Huckleberry Finn.' There was nothing before. And there has been nothing as good since."

No wonder then, that the novel 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn' was a great inspiration for film producers – more than 20 screen versions of the book have been shot not only in America but in Europe, Russia and Japan. There are feature films, musicals, cartoons and even Japanese anime.

1. What was the real name of Mark Twain?
2. What were his working experiences?
3. What kind of style did Mark Twain use?
4. Why was the novel 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn' strongly debated?
5. How many screen versions of the book have been shot?

Tea

Everybody knows that Britain is a tea-drinking nation. Tea is more than just a drink to the British – it is a way of life. Many people drink it first with breakfast, then mid-morning, with lunch, at tea-time (around 5 o'clock), with dinner and finally just before bed. As a nation, they go through 185 million cups per day! No less than 77% of British people are regular tea drinkers; they drink more than twice as much tea as coffee.

A legend says that tea was discovered in China in the third millennium BC. When a Chinese Emperor was having breakfast in his garden, a tea leaf fell into his cup with hot water. The water became coloured and the Emperor was delighted with the taste of the new drink. To Britain, tea came much later. It happened in the 17th century, when the British ships landed on the shore of China and came back with a load of tea. Tea drinking became fashionable in England after Charles II married the Portuguese princess Catherine of Braganza. She adored tea, and introduced it to the royal court. Just as people today will copy celebrities, people in the 17th and 18th centuries copied the royal family. Tea drinking spread like wildfire, starting first among the nobles and then spreading to wealthy businessmen who liked to sit down for a nice “cuppa” in coffee houses. Tea was an expensive product. It was only for the rich and often kept under lock and key.

In the 17th century the British really had two daily meals – breakfast and dinner. Dinner was the heaviest meal of the day, and was usually served in the afternoon. The custom of eating a regular “afternoon tea” began during the 1700's, as people began serving dinner later and later in the evening. For the aristocracy, or at least for the Duchess Anna Maria of Bedford, 6 hours between meals was simply too long. She began to ask for a cup of tea and light snacks to be served around 5 pm, and then began to invite guests to join her. The custom of “afternoon tea” was born, and it spread among the upper classes and then among the workers, for whom this late afternoon meal became the main of the day.

The first tea shop for ladies was opened by Thomas Twining in 1717 and slowly tea shops began to appear throughout England making the drinking of tea available to everyone. The British appreciated the new drink for its taste. It was also believed that tea cured lots of diseases. However, the most important thing was that drinking tea prevented lots of diseases – to make the drink people used boiled water and drank less raw water.

Tea has worked its way into language too. Nowadays people have tea breaks at work. Many people call the main evening meal tea, even if they drink beer with it. When there is a lot of trouble about something very unimportant, it is called a storm in a tea cup. When someone is upset or depressed, people say they need tea and sympathy. In fact, tea is the best treatment for all sorts of problems and troubles.

1. Why is tea considered to be a way of life for an Englishman?
2. Who brought tea to Britain first?
3. Why was tea often kept under lock and key?
4. How could tea prevent diseases in the past?
5. What does it mean “a storm in a tea cup”?