



# Using AI in Creating Visual Materials for a Course in British Culture and Civilization

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to analyse the benefits of using artificial intelligence tools such as Chat GPT in order to create, based on a given material and on given instructions, visual materials such as collages for a course in British Culture and Civilization. This course has been taught by the author of the present paper during the academic year 2025-2026, second semester, to second year BA level students specialized in Translation and Interpretation, having English as a main foreign language. The course curricula was designed by the author of the present paper to be built around the way in which various historical references from the past of British culture and civilization are still relevant today. As we walk throughout cities and rural areas, and as we look at landscapes throughout the territory of the UK, we can see various details that can be explained based on the history of the UK, starting from names of London boroughs, which take us to the ancient Roman past of these areas, and ending up with 18th and 19th century Great Britain, which were the main time periods when modern society as we know it today began, based on various important institutions such as tea and coffee houses. The author of the present paper has used her class materials and her prompts to create, for the last courses, collages in order to illustrate for students various topics, starting from the UK shopping malls, types of houses in London, and moving on to influence of the 18th-19th century UK institutions, and typical British stories such as mystery and detective stories. We know that visual materials may have a high impact since we rely most of all on the visual sense in order to understand the world and get our information about the outside world. The methodological framework is made up of teaching techniques, visual impact, cultural awareness and psychology.*

**Keywords:** *Psychology, visual sense, cultural empathy, cultural awareness*

## 1. Introduction

Using AI as a tool to help us in our work has already become a current practice nowadays. Of course, we need to distinguish between ethical and non-ethical ways of using AI in our activities, ranging from students' work to researchers' work, as well as from looking for information regarding how to organize a trip, or how to redesign our home interior, to using AI agents in order to help in putting posts on online social media regularly, using our knowledge and our written communication style. AI can be used to a widely accepted extent when we need to do work fast, such as when working with data and sorting out through information, or when sending emails and creating suitable message faster than we would do if we were to compose each and every email. When we speak about doing our own work, we need to be cautious as to what extent we can use AI, so that we do not have entire sets of homework and papers written by AI in our place.

AI can bring the past to life, if we consider how we can take photographs and information from the past, and ask AI to create pictures for us, reconstructing certain places and animating certain scenes, such as those from old, historical areas and houses in cities. Plenty of visual materials can be created with the help of AI, starting from images and posters with both images and information, to sketches and progress of history of cultures, as well as posters with presenting certain topics and issues, together with the conclusions if we take into account teaching a course in British Culture and Civilization.

The present paper focuses on the way in which Chat GPT was used to create a series of visual materials for some of the courses of lectures for a course in British Culture and Civilization taught by the author of the present paper during the second semester of the academic year 2025-2026, to students in the Translation and Interpretation Specialization at the Technical University of Civil



Engineering, the Faculty of Engineering in Foreign Languages, Department of Foreign Languages and Communication. The author of the present paper has created a curricula for this course of lectures starting from references to the past which are still around in British society and which make up their common context of everyday life discussions, and which needs to be understood starting from the historical episodes and personalities by members outside British culture. British culture is made up of a series of references which can be traced to the past or to various ideas about how the British culture and identity can be portrayed in order to be unique and immediately recognizable due to its specific features. Starting from the questions: Where can we find the British spirit nowadays? What is uniquely and typically British? What are values typical for the British? we can go through mainstream and popular culture elements, as well as through the history of British culture. As examples, we can consider how tv shows such as Doctor Who (which ran from 1963 to the present) presents us with a typical British lord, even if he is shown in a science fiction setting, where he travels in space and time. What matters is his attitude. Another tv show, Downtown Abbey (2010-2015), presents us with the lives of a typically British aristocratic family and their servants during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, showing us their typical lifestyle and behaviour. British humour is present in Monty Python's Flying Circus (1969–1974), where we see dry humour, as well as absurd situations. In addition, outsiders can associate British culture with typical British heroes and characters, such as James Bond, Sherlock Holmes, Robin Hood, the latter being used metaphorically in debates about taxes and redistribution. We can also think about personalities with strong associations with British culture, such as William Shakespeare. Writers such as George Orwell, through their work, are references in debates dealing with topics such as free speech, surveillance, and speaking and revealing the truth in the political world. Contemporary characters such as Harry Potter and stories in this series make references to boarding school nostalgia, which is specific to members of British culture and part of their everyday life, common reality. In this way, a course in British Culture and Civilization can set up and trace some important landmarks for Romanian students in order to be able to adapt to the British society and to understand their common universe of references. They may be familiar with everyday life rituals and practices, such as the 5 o'clock tea, using the weather as a topic for small talk, queuing as a sign of discipline, respect, and politeness, pub culture, where socializing takes place, famous foods such as fish and chips. They may also be familiar with British attitudes such as emotional restraint, which is expressed in the idea of the "stiff upper lip," as well as to their saying "sorry" very frequently, and with their use of self-deprecation, irony, and understatement (e.g. saying "not bad" instead of "very good"). They may also be familiar with the importance of monarchy and constitutional tradition and they may know some of the historical events and personalities. At the same time, they need to be prompted to take a deeper, more analytical look, at British culture and society, and to understand that the British monarchy stands for continuity, unity, as well as for national identity, that the Magna Carta represents a foundation of liberty and of the rule of law, that Winston Churchill is a symbol of leadership, national resilience and wartime unity, who is frequently used as a historical reference in relation to these ideas in contemporary political speeches, that Margaret Thatcher is referred to in debates about free markets, privatization, as well as national sovereignty, that the World War II is a symbol of endurance and collective sacrifice, often referred to as "The Blitz Spirit," that the Industrial Revolution is used as a reference to innovation and economic transformation in discussions on this topic. In addition, this course raises awareness to the still existing talk in British society about class and social structure, in relation to accent – where we see the division between Received pronunciation, or RP English, associated with the upper and upper middle classes vs the regional accents, such as Scouse, Geordie, and Brummie for the working class -, and to education – where we see the division between public and private schools and universities, between Oxford and Cambridge for the elites vs other universities. Values that are part of the British culture and identity are also mentioned in the course of lectures, e.g. fair play, common sense, the rule of law, tolerance, liberty. The slogan *Keep calm and carry on* from World War II is revived in present-day talk in British society, and it refers to British emotional restraint and composure. The specific type of British communication is also presented, which is indirect and which means that it focuses on avoiding conflicts. Avoiding conflicts is also signalled based on the use of humour as an emotional buffer. Historical landmarks of Great Britain, such as the Roman period and other influences are presented based on the names of the London boroughs, whose etymology reveals the way in which various areas that are now urban were rural in the past. The course of lectures also underlines the key time periods in the historical development not just of British society, but of societies all over the world: the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Victorian Age. During these ages, societies as we know them today have begun to take shape. The 18<sup>th</sup> century brought tea and coffee houses into social and intellectual life, with intellectual debates available, democratically, for all social classes. The Victorian Age gave the start to the Industrial Revolution and to the possibility



of social mobility, as well as to the prevalence of life in urban areas.

With the last courses of lectures, the teacher decided to prompt students to see how previous knowledge gained in the beginning courses can be applied to various British cultural products, and also to look at various aspects in present British society, and of life in contemporary Great Britain based on their significance from the past, by using visual materials created with the help of Chat GPT.

## 2. Materials and Methods

A course in British Culture and Civilization wishes to make students feel a sense of cultural empathy with the members of British society. The historical aspects are part of the background knowledge which they should have in common with the members of the contemporary British society, in order to better relate to them and not to feel left out. After setting up the basis, with historical references and their relation to the present-day world, with the values and communication style of British culture, with national traits the British themselves consider to belong to them, this course of lecture continues with presenting students with ways in which they can relate to the British culture members, starting with cultural products which originate in British culture but which were afterwards influential in all other cultures, and which are certain stories and genres of stories. Fiction serves as a well-known way to build and develop empathy skills for readers, and British fiction is no exception. One of the courses of lectures focused on mystery and crime fiction, which could be traced back to the Victorian-age penny dreadfuls, which were cheap serial publication, costing one penny, about exciting and thrilling happenings. The material created with the help of Chat GPT based on prompts and additional details along the process was the following one, shown in Fig. 1 below:

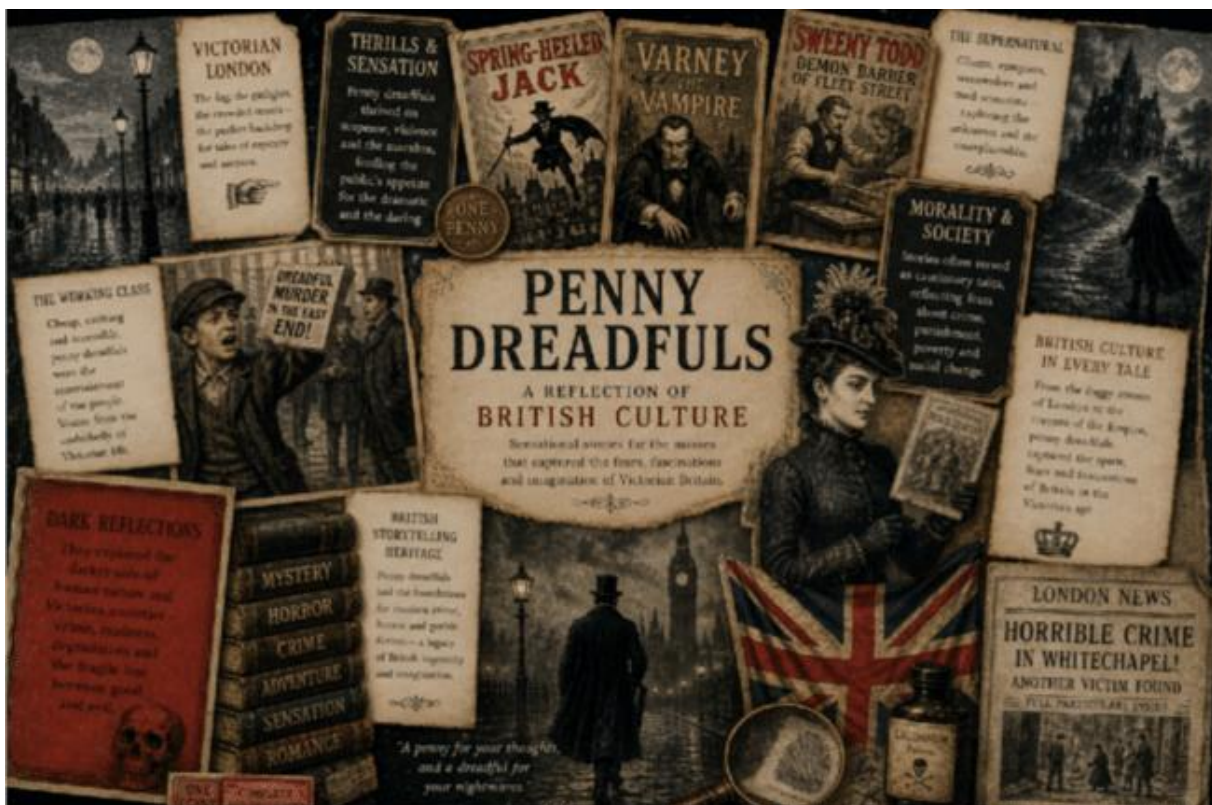


Fig.1. Victorian Penny Dreadfuls

The visual material in Fig. 1 raises the students' awareness to the context of Victorian London, to the aspect of its street, to its working class, to the issues worrying the Victorians and making them fear at the time, which were all present in the Victorian dreadfuls, as well as to the features included in these stories, e.g. horror, adventure, romance, mystery, crime, sensation, etc. A newspaper headline about a crime committed during these times shows how these stories reflected issues present during Victorian society. Most of all, this visual material prompts students to think and to understand how Penny Dreadfuls were a reflection of British culture, making them understand them by relying on their notions of history regarding the Victorian Age. The Victorian Age – or, at least, some of its aspects, come to life once they are explored based on such stories.



Victorian and Edwardian ghost stories could also be traced as the source of contemporary-day mystery, thriller, suspense, and crime stories, full of unexpected plot twists, just like the Victorian penny dreadfuls. These stories contain the main ingredients of novels and stories that remain successful to these days. The penny dreadfuls contained plenty of examples of anti-heroes, fighting for justice in society, while the Victorian and Edwardian ghost stories included plenty of fantasy elements, and they made reference to the aristocratic mansions with all of their secrets and mysteries from the past. Fig. 2 below tries to help students enter the atmosphere of Victorian and Edwardian ghost stories, to consider some famous titles, as well as to create a picture of the living society of the times, not based on historical dates and mainstream events, but based on everyday life:



Fig. 2. Victorian and Edwardian Ghost Stories

In addition, the lecture discussed novels by Agatha Christie, which are still enjoyed nowadays by readers from all over the world, and which present us with typical, emotionally restrained British cultures, speaking RP English, and with detective relying on reason and logic in solving various crimes, who once again seem typically British. The novels by Agatha Christie prompt readers to consider the origins of their own perception about members of British culture as very polite, emotionally restrained, and also using indirect communication and dry humour. From the previous stories, which were based on ghost hauntings, irrational mysteries with irrational explanations, with a loss of contact with reason and down-to-earth reality, we reach with the stories of Agatha Christie a highly down-to-earth British society, whose members rely strongly on reason and where everything is reduced to rational explanations. By the end of the stories, everything has been explained based on reason, and we have realized that everything can have a logical explanation. A complete picture of British cultural life and society is presented in the novels by Agatha Christie, if we look at the visual material proposed for this part of the lecture, in Fig. 3. We can find typical British settings, references to pubs and social life, reflections of typical British values, class and society, the British weather, manners, a sense of fair-play, as well as scenes related to travel where the railways are present, which were part of the society of those times, making modern life possible and comfortable. The novels by Agatha Christie are so familiar to all of us, that we may notice how we may have not been aware that they belong to a culture different than our own. We have all been transposed into the stories and felt in a very familiar world.



Fig. 3. British Culture in Agatha Christie's novels

UK malls, part of everyday current life, are illustrated in Fig. 4 below:

## UK MALLS AND UK MALL CULTURE

Different from the USA.  
Deeply connected to British history, cities and everyday life.

### 1. WHAT IS A "MALL" IN THE UK?

In British English, going to a mall means:

- shopping
- visiting a "mall"

The word "mall" usually refers to a shopping centre.

**WESTFIELD LONDON**  
One of Europe's largest urban shopping centres

**TRAFFORD CENTRE**  
Home for the shopping elite and good food

**BLUEWATER SHOPPING CENTRE**  
A large outdoor shopping and leisure destination

### 2. DIFFERENCE FROM AMERICAN MALL CULTURE

**BRITISH SHOPPING TRADITIONS**  
The "high street" is the main shopping street of a town or neighbourhood.

**UK CITIES ARE OLDER AND DENSER**  
British cities were built before cars.

**MALL VS HIGH STREET**  
UK malls are for day-to-day shopping.

### 3. FAMOUS UK SHOPPING CENTRES

**WESTFIELD LONDON**

- one of Europe's largest urban shopping centres
- large indoor shopping centre
- shops and services
- large food courts

**TRAFFORD CENTRE**

- shopping centre in the heart of the city
- shops and services
- large food courts

**BLUEWATER SHOPPING CENTRE**

- large outdoor shopping and leisure destination
- shops and services
- large food courts

### 4. SOCIAL ROLE OF MALLS IN BRITAIN

**TEEN CULTURE**  
Malls become places to hang out, meet friends, watch films, and socialise.

**NEIGHBOURHOOD CLUBS**  
Malls become places to meet friends, watch films, and socialise.

**DATE FROM THE 1980s**  
UK shopping centres became especially popular from the 1980s onwards.

### 5. BRITISH VS AMERICAN ATMOSPHERE

**BRITISH MALLS**

- More integrated with the city
- More walkable
- More integrated with public transport
- More integrated with the city

**AMERICAN MALLS**

- Large
- More isolated
- More car-dependent
- More integrated with the city

### 6. DECLINE OF THE TRADITIONAL HIGH STREET

Causes include:

- online shopping
- large shopping centres
- changing consumer habits
- changing habits

People use the facilities of their shopping centres.

### 7. CULTURAL MEANING

British malls are:

- multi-cultural
- global
- diverse
- multi-cultural
- multi-cultural

**BUY IN BAGGAGE**  
Malls are a key part of British culture.

### THE UK SHOPPING EXPERIENCE TODAY

**TRADITIONAL HIGH STREETS**  
Historical high streets

**SHOPPING CENTRES**  
Modern shopping centres

**MARKETS**  
Local markets

**DEPARTMENT STORES**  
Large department stores

**IN THE UK, SHOPPING IS MORE THAN BUYING THINGS - IT'S HISTORY, CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY.**

Fig. 4. UK malls.

Students understand how the UK prefers a shopping area in the city where people can walk or use public transport and not rely on cars, which makes them different from US malls which rely mostly on



personal cars for transport. There are also famous UK shopping centres and historical shops, which show students that the history of the place remains an important part of British identity. Types of houses in the UK (shown in Fig. 5 below) allow students to experience a sense of specificity tied to place:



### TYPES OF HOUSES IN THE UK

UK homes come in many shapes and styles. The main types are based on how they're built and whether they share walls with neighbours.

<b>1 DETACHED HOUSES</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A standalone property</li> <li>• No shared walls with other houses</li> <li>• Usually more expensive and offer more privacy</li> </ul>	<b>2 SEMI-DETACHED HOUSES</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two houses joined together by one shared wall</li> <li>• Very common in suburbs</li> <li>• More affordable than detached</li> </ul>	<b>3 TERRACED HOUSES (OR "TERRACES")</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A row of houses joined on both sides</li> <li>• Found a lot in cities</li> <li>• Can be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Mid-terrace (in the middle of a row)</li> <li>– End-terrace (at the end, with one free side)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>4 FLATS (APARTMENTS)</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-contained homes within a larger building</li> <li>• Can be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Purpose-built flats (modern blocks)</li> <li>– Converted flats (large house split into smaller units)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>5 BUNGALOWS</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-storey houses</li> <li>• No upstairs level</li> <li>• Popular with older residents</li> </ul>	<b>6 COTTAGES</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small, often older houses</li> <li>• Typically found in rural areas</li> <li>• Traditional appearance (stone or thatched roofs sometimes)</li> </ul>	<b>7 MAISONNETTES</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A flat with its own private entrance</li> <li>• Usually spread over two floors</li> </ul>	<b>8 TOWNHOUSES</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tall, narrow houses (often 2-4 storeys)</li> <li>• Common in cities</li> </ul>

**QUICK COMPARISON**

Detached – No shared walls	Flats – In a larger building	Maisonettes – Flat with own entrance
Semi-detached – 1 shared wall	Bungalows – Single-storey	Townhouses – Tall & narrow
Terraced – 2 shared walls	Cottages – Small & rural	

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
The UK has a wide range of homes, from modern city apartments to countryside cottages, each with its own charm!

Fig. 5. Types of houses in the UK.

They are introduced to the current visual aspect of UK life, and are also presented with how London apartments are very small. They are so small because of high demand of property and high property prices, as well as since London was built for terraced houses, not big apartments in Georgian and Victorian times, and also since the destruction of large city areas by bombings in World War II led to housing shortages after the war.

The course of lecture relied on visual materials, which are frequently used for the learning of English as a foreign language [1] – and this course in culture and civilization also helps students develop their foreign languages skills. While the learning of any topic is made easier based on visual materials, these materials can be considered the most natural way of learning for us, since we human beings rely on our visual sense more than on the others in order to gain our knowledge about the surrounding, external world [2]. Teaching this course with visual materials should make learning effortless, or as effortless and natural as possible, since students are used to gain their information about the surrounding world in this way in everyday life contexts. The course was designed as a trip in time and space, through the main timelines and aspects of British culture and society. It was intended to help them adapt to life in contemporary British society, since they may have the opportunity to study or even work there in the future, not just to simply visit Great Britain as tourists. When we adapt to a place, we need to consider both mentalities and the visual aspect of the places. We are aware that the small size of London apartments can be uncomfortable in the long term for someone coming from another culture. The unfamiliarity of a place, both regarding its visual aspect and habits, as well as unfamiliar references of the members of the respective culture, can lead to us experiencing culture shock, which can make us not accept the cultural differences, feel uncomfortable, and not be able to



function properly in the respective environment, e.g. at school or at work [3]. A course in culture and civilization can help prevent such situations, through building up background knowledge and through establishing cultural empathy [4] with members of another culture.

### 3. Results

When we relate to another culture, we need to take into account their specific psychology, which can be understood based on notions of cultural awareness. We have seen certain features of the British, as well as their values, mentalities, common historical references, and communication style, which can help us build a psychological portrait. We can start relating to such a portrait based on considering how their stories have also been our own as we were growing up or even later in life, such as mysteries, adventure stories, detective and crime fiction, and, nowadays, thrillers. These stories allow us to consider both familiar and specific elements, since these stories do include typical British culture elements and references, and especially those related to a certain time period. As we become aware that we owe to British culture the way our society looks today, with its institutions and democratic possibilities, we realize that we may already be familiar with some aspects of this culture.

### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

By drawing British culture closer to students, and by making them aware of how they can be more familiar with it than it may be visible at first sight – including their close connections with everything related to the English language and with English-speaking cultures – we can help prevent for them the experience of culture shock. This method holds true not just for British culture and society, but also for any other culture and society. We can replicate the same steps: becoming aware of influences on our culture and on world culture, of how we may already be familiar with some aspects of the apparent foreign culture, of the image we have built of its members, and then by looking at historical and past references still of importance to today's life of its members. Afterwards, values, beliefs, principles, attitudes, practices, traditions, may also be considered. In addition, the visual identity of a place is also important and is, after all, the first one we notice as tourists or as temporary inhabitants of a foreign country.

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