

FICHE DE COURS : Geography of Great Britain

Place dans les programmes du lycée : alors que certains chapitres du programme officiel d'histoire-géographie en français nous posent de réels problèmes d'adaptation, certaines correspondances sont en revanche évidentes, et les thèmes s'imposent d'eux-mêmes. Ainsi, alors que la France figure au programme de géographie de Première, il semble tout naturel de lui substituer la géographie de la Grande-Bretagne en DNL plutôt que de traduire ou redire tout ou partie du cours sur la France en langue anglaise. Remarquons que la Grande-Bretagne figure d'ailleurs parmi les pays européens dont l'étude est possible dans la partie du programme en français qui porte sur l'Europe.

Objectifs de contenu et linguistique : c'est un chapitre « fort », dans la mesure où il réunit plusieurs conditions idéales du cours de DNL : il correspond parfaitement à un chapitre du programme en français ; il offre un contenu riche en concepts et en lexique (localisation, cartographie, démographie, économie, paysage ruraux / urbains...) ; il permet un regard comparatif riche et pertinent entre deux pays et deux cultures (réflexion sur la notion de ville, par exemple) ; il permet d'acquérir une bonne connaissance du pays dont la langue est pratiquée en classe ; enfin, il présente une indéniable dimension européenne.

Place dans le plan du cours : il s'agit d'une partie importante du programme de Première, et à ce titre on peut choisir de la développer sur plusieurs semaines (4 ou 5 heures) afin d'aborder un thème par heure (paysages, population, villes, économie, intégration spatiale et politique dans l'Europe). En fin de séquence, l'organisation du territoire peut faire l'objet d'un exercice de cartographie de synthèse. Ici, je choisis de présenter un de ces thèmes : la ville et la banlieue. Il permet d'aborder les notions de géographie urbaine communes à la France et à l'Angleterre, et en même temps de préciser les traits originaux des villes britanniques.

III – Cities and suburbs in Great-Britain

A – The urban network in Great-Britain

B – City and Suburbs : the example of York

A – The urban network in Great Britain

Doc. 1 – The first 15 of 35 British urban areas of more than 200 000 in 2001

	Name	Population in 2001
1	London	8,278,251
2	Birmingham	2,284,093
3	Manchester	2,244,931
4	Leeds	1,499,465
5	Glasgow	1,168,270
6	Newcastle upon Tyne	879,996
7	Liverpool	816,216
8	Nottingham	666,358
9	Sheffield	640,720
10	Bristol	551,066
11	Brighton	461,181
12	Edinburgh	452,194
13	Portsmouth	442,252
14	Leicester	441,213
15	Bournemouth	383,713

Doc. 2 – Map of major cities in Great Britain



Q 1 – What is the definition of an urban area ?

Q 2 – On the outline map of Britain, map the 15 urban areas according to their size.

Q 3 – Add up these areas' population. What proportion of the total population does it represent ?

Q 4 – What can you say about London ?

Q 5 – Where are cities number 2, 3, 4 and 7, 8, 9 located ?

A 1 – An urban area **comprises** a central **city** and its **suburbs**, including both smaller **towns** and **rural areas** depending on the central city.

A 3 – The total **amounts to some** 20 million inhabitants : in other terms, one third of the total population is **distributed** in only 15 areas, which is the sign of high **concentration** and **population density**.

A 4 – London is clearly **oversized** : its **agglomeration**, called **Greater London**, **sprawls** uninterrupted on a 50 km diameter zone, and holds more than 10% of the total population, which makes it the largest capital-city in Europe. As it is four times as large as the second city in rank, it fulfills the definition of a **primate city** : a city which is at least twice the size of the second city of the nation, or which contains one third of the population of the nation.

Moreover, London is a **global metropolis** : **metropolization process** is the concentration of population and strategic activities in urban centres ; **metropolises** hold a power of **polarization** on **local, national and international scales**.

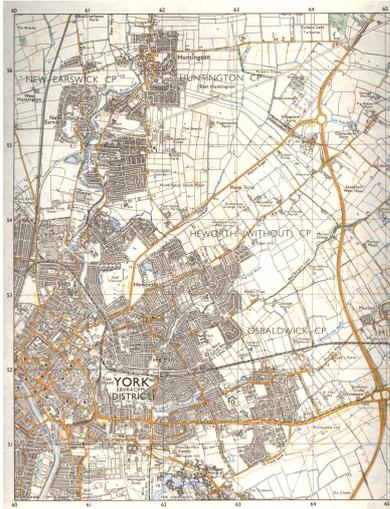
A 5 – These cities are **located in the Midlands** and **Yorkshire**. The center of the country **appears to be** a second urban center, reaching up to 6 millions. Some **clusters**, like Manchester and Liverpool, form a **conurbation**, that is an urban area with **multiple centers**, or two urban areas joining together. Their location is obviously linked to the industrial history of the region.

The rest of the cities are **sparsely distributed** : the North-East coast and the **Scottish belt** (Edinburg-Sterling-Glasgow) to name a few. In the surrounding areas, the **network** gets **loose**, and sometimes a **micropolitan stands out** : it is a town with a population of more than 15,000 in an isolated county of more than 40,000.

B – City and Suburbs : York (case study)

Cette seconde séance est une étude du cas de York (124 000 habitants), à l'appui du logiciel **Google Earth** ou à défaut, d'images tirées de ce logiciel. Nous ne saurions trop insister sur la richesse offerte par cet outil en cours de géographie (précision des mesures, force de la démonstration, souplesse d'utilisation, possibilité de comparaisons rapide).

Doc. 3 – 1/25 000 map of York



Doc. 4 – Aerial view of the city centre



Q 1 – Present document 3. What different parts can you divide the town into ?

A 1 – This is a **topographic map** of York. The **scale** is 1 cm for 250 m, and enables good reading of the **spatial organisation** of the city. The city can be roughly divided into a **historical centre**, the **core** of the area, as opposed to the **suburbs**, the **outskirts** of which **encroach on** the **countryside**, leaving occasional **blank patches** : these **unoccupied** areas are the **green belts**, zones of **retricted real-estate** development. In the utmost **peripheral areas**, the limit to which the **built area stretches** is known as the **rural-urban fringe**.

Q 2 – What identifies on documents 3 and 4 the historical centre of York ? What are the various economic functions of this area ?

A 2 – York was **built on a river**, the Ouse, by the Romans who called it **Eboracum**. It was – and still is – surrounded by a **wall** : it therefore had a **defensive purpose**, and played an important part during the Viking invasions. It features a cathedral, the York Minster (see additional photos) ; it shelters an **archbishop** which happens to be second in rank in the hierarchy of the Church of England. It therefore had – and still has – a **religious function**. Eventually, the streets show more **random organisation** than the suburbs, and look to be more **tightly knit together** : in the center, **density** is much higher. Their **architecture** (see additional photos) **testifies of** this density and old age : mutiple-storey houses, made of **half-timbered** walls of chalk and wood (the Shambles).

Q 3 – Now look at document 5, and describe the patterns of the suburbs. What is the function of this area ?

Doc. 5 – The North-East fringe of York suburbs



Doc. 6 – Back-to-back bungalows, York



A 3 – Document 5 describes a **dwelling area, a housing neighbourhood** of York. The density is not high, as fields mingle with the houses. The houses are **planned** in a very specific way, although there is no clear **pattern** : single houses line up **in rows** ; streets are often **dead-ends** or **lanes**, which purpose is only to **layout** the dwellings, and not **to connect** the areas together. The landscape seems devoid of shops, restaurants, or any other tertiary activity, apart maybe for some sporting **facilities**.

Q 4 – Look at document 6 : describe the architecture and make suppositions concerning the lifestyle that goes along with this type of neighbourhood.

A 4 – Document 6 shows a row of semi-detached bungalows **made of bricks**. **Semi-detached houses** consist in pairs of houses built **side by side** as units, sharing a party wall and usually in such a way that each house's layout is a mirror image of its twin. Documents 5 and 6 emphasize **individual property rather than collective habitat** ; in counterpart, all **the houses are alike**, they are **standardized**. Both documents suggest the **prominent role of cars**, most often two per **household**, which enable people to connect to the city centre for work (**to commute**), shopping, or **leisure**. These areas have only **few retail shops** : the **shopping centre**, or **mall** (US term), visible on document 5, provides people with everything (shops, movie theatre, restaurants) and going to central York is not really necessary on a daily basis. This part of the York urban area could be described as a **edge city** in the sense that journalist Joel Garreau gave to this term (*Edge City : Life on the New Frontier*, 1991) : a commercial center located on the suburban periphery of a metropolitan area near major highway intersections.

In this **typically British area**, the middle-class family enjoys a calm and peaceful **lifestyle**. As a majority of the British now lives in **Suburbia**, more and more people are choosing to live on the edge of urban areas, and many actually relocate to the countryside. This is called **counter-urbanisation** or **periurban development**.

An other very common model of British **suburbanization habitat** are the **terrace houses**, usually featuring **bow-windows** on the front and a **yard in the back** with a garden shed, either carefully attended to, or neglected and used as storage. Such houses are **symmetrical** to a narrow **back-alley**, and are therefore called **back-to-back houses** (see additional pictures).

À ce stade, un document additionnel est proposé, auquel on reprochera peut-être d'alourdir le propos, ainsi que son ancienneté, son parti-pris, et son niveau de difficulté linguistique. Cependant, il ouvre le travail jusqu'à présent très descriptif à une réflexion stimulante sur la ville, qui stigmatise particulièrement la morphologie urbaine britannique :

Doc. 7 – A harsh indictment of British urban landscape

“The real tragedy of England, as I see it, is the tragedy of ugliness. The countryside is lovely ; the man-made England is so vile... The great crime which the moneyed classes and promoters of industry committed in the palmy¹ victorian days was the condemning of the workers to ugliness, ugliness, ugliness [...]. The English character has failed to develop the *urban* side of a man, the civic side. Siena [in Italy] is a bit of a place², but it is a real city, with citizens intimately connected with the city. Nottingham is a vast place sprawling towards a million, and it is nothing more than an amorphous agglomeration. There *is* no Nottingham in the sense that there is Siena. The Englishman is stupidly undeveloped as citizen. And it is partly due to his ‘little home’ stunt³, and partly to his acceptance of hopeless paltriness⁴ in his surroundings... The English are town-birds today, as the inevitable result of their complete industrialization. Yet, they don't know how to build a city, how to think of one, or how to live in one. They are all suburban, pseudo-cottagey, and not one of them knows how to be truly urban”.

D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930), *Nottingham and the Mining Country*, 1920s

1 – Palmy : glorieux

2 – Siena is a bit of a place : Sienna est petite.

3 – His ‘little home’ stunt : son goût pour sa ‘petite maison’.

4 – Paltriness : mesquinerie

Q 1 – What criticism of English suburbs does this article make ?

A 1 – It **resents** English cities **for** their ugliness, and contends that they are not real cities in the true sense of the term.

Q 2 – Why does Lawrence assert that the taste of the Englishman for his ‘little home’ explains the problem of English towns ?

A 2 – Because these towns are nothing else than standardized individual homes put together, when there should be much more to a city than that : individuals do not connect, do not build a common place, do not share a common area. He stresses that the definition of “**citizen**” **implies a civic commitment**, like in ancient Athens (the Agora) or classical Rome (the Forum), or medieval Siena (the Campo). But the English suburban towns fail to recreate the centers of urban life.

Note – La réflexion, un peu abstraite, nécessitera probablement avec la plupart des classes un recours à la langue française pour insister sur la problématique et valoriser le propos.

Q 3 – What comparison with the French “banlieue” can you make ?

A 3 – The French urban landscape is also characterized by individualism and standardization, although not to such an extent, and with a different morphology. In France, generally speaking, collective habitat is more often met, even in middle-class areas. It is worth mentioning that the french term “**banlieue**” has a slightly **derogatory** bent, when used as understatement for ethnic and social “**ghettoes**”, while “suburbs” does not refer in the anglo-saxon world to anything else other than middle-class areas. In the UK as well as in the USA, difficult urban areas are not **remote peripheral** areas : they are often referred to as “**inner cities**” both to describe their location, and render the idea of closed areas.