

Brexit

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What does the UK stand for and *where* is it?
2. What does the EU stand for and *what* is it?
3. What type of vote is a referendum?



B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| ___ 1. referendum | a) having a good variety |
| ___ 2. turnout | b) to work together to agree on terms |
| ___ 3. eligible | c) number-one, key |
| ___ 4. Commonwealth | d) to be against |
| ___ 5. oppose | e) a vote about a single question or issue |
| ___ 6. camp | f) the number of people that attend or participate |
| ___ 7. diverse | g) to cause surprise or disturbance |
| ___ 8. shock | h) to prompt something to happen |
| ___ 9. step down | i) to give up one's leadership position |
| ___ 10. petition | j) being allowed to do something |
| ___ 11. negotiate | k) a document that people sign to try to reverse a decision or rule |
| ___ 12. primary | l) a group of associated nations previously belonging to the British Empire |
| ___ 13. trigger | m) causing strong disagreement |
| ___ 14. contentious | n) a group or side |

Reading

1. On June 23, 2016, a historic **referendum** took place in the United Kingdom (UK). The referendum question was: *Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?* The possibility of Britain leaving the EU became known as *Brexit*.
2. Over 30 million people voted in the referendum. The **turnout** was higher than Britain's last general election. **Eligible** voters were British, Irish, and **Commonwealth** citizens (18 and over) living in the UK. UK citizens living outside of the UK for under 15 years were also eligible.
3. Those **opposed** to Brexit were in the "Remain" **camp**. This included Britain's prime minister, David Cameron, as well as the majority of citizens in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and London. These voters wanted the UK to remain a **diverse** nation. They valued their rights to work, trade, and move about freely in the EU.
4. Supporters of Brexit were in the "Leave" camp. This included the majority of citizens in England (excluding London) and Wales. These voters wanted the UK to have more control over its borders. They also wanted the UK to have freedom to make its own business rules. Nigel Farage, the head of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), was the leader of this camp.
5. On June 23, 52% of voters chose "Leave the European Union." The "Leave" win **shocked** the world. People began to google the "European Union" to get a better understanding of why it exists. Within hours, the value of the British pound (£) had fallen to a historic low and Prime Minister Cameron had **stepped down**. A few days later, Nigel Farage stepped down as well. Farage said he had achieved his goal of helping the UK become a "self-governing" nation.
6. In the weeks following the referendum, millions of people signed a **petition** asking for a second referendum. The new prime minister, Theresa May, told citizens that "Brexit is Brexit." **Negotiating** the exit would take approximately two years. The status and rights of British nationals living in the EU and of EU nationals living in the UK became a **primary** concern.
7. In November 2016, the English High Court ruled that the government needed parliamentary approval to **trigger** Article 50 and leave the EU. Over the next two years, the EU and the UK negotiated a divorce deal. On January 15, 2019, Parliament voted "no-deal" to May's **contentious** Brexit plan. The deadline for exit remains March 29, 2019.

The European Union

The EU is an economic and political group of 28* European countries. In terms of the movement of goods, services, and people, the EU acts as a single country. Many members of the EU also share a currency (the euro). The original purpose of the EU was to encourage political and economic cooperation and discourage war.

*If Brexit becomes official, the EU will have 27 members.

"It is true that the past years have been the most difficult ones in the history of our union, but I always remember what my father used to tell me—'What does not kill you makes you stronger.'"

—Donald Tusk, EU president

Comprehension

A. Timeline

Place the following in chronological order (1–9).
One item is not mentioned in the reading, but is correct.
Place a star beside it and guess where it belongs.

- _____ The leader of UKIP announced his plans to step down.
- _____ 72% of eligible voters cast a vote in the referendum.
- _____ The idea of Britain exiting from the EU became known as *Brexit*.
- _____ The “Leave” camp won the referendum with 52% of votes.
- _____ Prime Minister Cameron announced his plans to step down.
- _____ People organized a petition for a second referendum.
- _____ Prime Minister Cameron promised to hold a referendum about the UK leaving the EU.
- _____ Parliament voted “no-deal” to May’s Brexit plan.
- _____ Prime Minister Theresa May said “Brexit is Brexit.”

B. Ask & Answer

Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner.
Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

1. What type of vote is a referendum?
2. Who was eligible to vote in Brexit?
3. Which camp was Prime Minister Cameron in?
4. What role did Nigel Farage play in the Brexit campaign?
5. What major item does Prime Minister May have to negotiate?
6. What major ruling did the English High Court make in 2016?

Portmanteaus

The word *Brexit* is a portmanteau. It blends two words (*Britain + exit*) into one.

A portmanteau is different from a compound noun, which features two complete words as one (such as *doghouse* and *doorknob*).

Can you figure out which words were blended to make these portmanteaus?

#	Word	Blend
1	motel	<i>motor + hotel</i>
2	brunch	
3	smog	
4	workaholic	
5	Grexit	
6	staycation	
7	frenemy	
8	webinar	

Vocabulary Review

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

- The referendum is only for people in our province.
 - politics
 - reform
 - vote
- There was a low turnout due to the rain.
 - reversal
 - attendance
 - vote
- The students have diverse religious beliefs.
 - difficult
 - contentious
 - varied
- You are not eligible to vote unless you are a citizen.
 - preserved
 - allowed
 - equal
- We were shocked to hear that he was stepping down.
 - excited
 - surprised
 - triggered
- I am opposed to the new rule about uniforms.
 - against
 - opposite
 - arguing

Discussion

1. How would Brexit affect language teachers?
2. How would Brexit affect students?
3. Could British English lose its importance after Brexit?
4. How does the refugee crisis in Europe relate to Brexit?
5. Would Brexit cause other EU nations to think about leaving the EU?
If yes, which ones?

Research

IN SMALL GROUPS

During the Brexit negotiations, the “backstop” became one of the most contentious issues. Do some research and share your findings about this primary element of concern for both sides.

1. What is the Brexit backstop?
2. What is the EU’s position on the backstop?
3. What do the EU and the UK agree on about the Irish border?

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students read about the historic referendum in the UK in which citizens voted to leave the EU (2016). Students learn and practice new vocabulary and discuss how Brexit will affect language teachers and learners.

LEVEL: High Int – Adv

TIME: 2–2.5 hours

TAGS: Brexit, European Union, EU, David Cameron, Theresa May, English language learning, English language teaching, British English, refugee, borders, Ireland, backstop

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

1. UK stands for United Kingdom.
2. EU stands for European Union. It is an economic and political group of 28 (27 without the UK) European countries. It acts as a single country when it comes to movement of goods, services, and people. The full answer is located in the note on page 2.
3. A referendum is a vote about a single question (Yes/No style).

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

- | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. e | 3. j | 5. d | 7. a | 9. i | 11. b | 13. h |
| 2. f | 4. l | 6. n | 8. g | 10. k | 12. c | 14. m |

Reading

Read as a class, in groups, in pairs, or individually.
Discuss the quote.

Comprehension

A. TIMELINE

- 6 The leader of UKIP announced his plans to step down.
- 3 72% of eligible voters cast a vote in the referendum.
- 2 The idea of Britain exiting from the EU became known as *Brexit*.
- 4 The “Leave” camp won the referendum with 52% of votes.
- 5 Prime Minister Cameron announced his plans to step down.
- 7 People organized a petition for a second referendum.
- 1* Prime Minister Cameron promised to hold a referendum about the UK leaving the EU.
- 9 Parliament voted “no-deal” to May’s Brexit plan.
- 8 Prime Minister Theresa May said “Brexit is Brexit.”

B. ASK & ANSWER

1. A referendum is a vote with one question that has two options.
2. The eligible Brexit voters were British, Irish, and Commonwealth citizens (18 and over) living in the UK. UK citizens living outside of the UK for under 15 years were also eligible.
3. The UK’s prime minister was in the “Remain” camp.
4. Nigel Farage led the “Leave” camp during the Brexit campaign.
5. Prime Minister May has to negotiate the status and rights of British nationals living in the EU and of the EU nationals living in the UK.
6. The English High Court ruled that Parliament had to approve the UK leaving the EU.

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Portmanteaus

Challenge your students to figure out which two words create each portmanteau in the chart.

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. motor + hotel | 5. Greece + exit |
| 2. breakfast + lunch | 6. stay (at home) + vacation |
| 3. smoke + fog | 7. friend + enemy |
| 4. work + alcoholic | 8. web + seminar |

Vocabulary Review

1. c 2. b 3. c 4. b 5. b 6. a

Discussion

Answers will vary. You may want to search for a blog post or article on the topic of Brexit and language learning/teaching. Many teachers have weighed in on this topic since the referendum.

Research

Answers will vary. You may want to provide an article on the topic of the Brexit backstop.

1. The Brexit backstop is an agreement to ensure there is no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland even if no specific deal is in place for trade and security.
2. The EU wants the backstop to apply to Northern Ireland only and does not want the backstop to have a time limit.
3. Both the EU and the UK agree that they do not want a hard border (a physical customs checkpoint) at the Irish border.

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the word *Practice*. Most other English-speaking countries spell it this way: *Practise* (when used as a verb; *Practice* when used as a noun). Make it a challenge for your students to find this word in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spelling.