

Муниципальная научно-практическая  
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# Why Do the British Drink Tea All Day? A Cultural and Historical Exploration

Author: [Your Name],  
Grade [X],  
School [Number]  
Supervisor: [Teacher's Name]

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## 1. Introduction

Tea is far more than a beverage in the United Kingdom—it is a symbol of national identity, a daily ritual, and a quiet force that shapes social interactions. From the first cup in the morning to the comforting brew offered during moments of stress, tea permeates nearly every aspect of British life. The common phrase “fancy a cuppa?” is often less about thirst and more about care, connection, and routine. This deep cultural attachment raises a compelling question: why do the British drink tea all day?

This research paper aims to explore the historical, social, and cultural roots of tea consumption in the UK. While tea is enjoyed in many countries, its role in Britain is unique in both scale and significance. By examining its journey from luxury import to national staple, analyzing its function in everyday life, and comparing British habits with those of Russian school students, this research seeks to understand how a simple drink became a cornerstone of a nation’s way of life.

The hypothesis guiding this work is that tea in Britain has evolved beyond mere refreshment to become a meaningful social ritual—one that helps individuals manage stress, strengthen relationships, and maintain a sense of normalcy. To test this idea, the project combines historical analysis, cultural observation, and original field research in the form of a student survey conducted at a local school.

## 2. History of Tea in the United Kingdom

The story of tea in Britain begins in the 17th century, when the British East India Company first introduced the exotic drink from China. At first, tea was a rare and expensive luxury, enjoyed only by the aristocracy and the wealthy elite. Its high cost was due to long trade routes and heavy taxation, which made it a status symbol as much as a beverage.

By the 18th century, demand had grown so dramatically that widespread smuggling emerged as a means to avoid taxes. Tea became so popular that it began to influence social habits, with “tea tables” appearing in homes and public spaces. The government eventually responded by lowering taxes, making tea more accessible to the general population.

The 19th century marked a turning point. As the British Empire expanded, tea plantations were established in India and Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka), ensuring a steady and affordable supply. This democratization of tea

coincided with the Industrial Revolution, during which factory owners began granting workers short breaks to drink tea. These “tea breaks” were not merely acts of kindness—they were practical measures to maintain alertness and morale during long shifts. Over time, this practice became embedded in British work and school culture.

Thus, tea transitioned from a luxury to a necessity, supported by economic, imperial, and social forces. Its presence in homes, workplaces, and public institutions reflected not just taste, but a growing national identity centered around routine, resilience, and quiet endurance.

### 3. The Social Role of Tea in Daily Life

In Britain, tea is more than a drink—it is a ritual of connection and comfort. The act of making and sharing tea serves as a social glue, binding people together in both ordinary and extraordinary moments. The “tea break” is a well-established tradition in offices, schools, and hospitals, offering a brief pause in the day to rest, chat, and recharge. It is not uncommon for colleagues to gather around a kettle, exchanging news or simply enjoying a moment of calm.

A more formal expression of this tradition is the “afternoon tea,” a practice introduced in the 1840s by Anna, the Duchess of Bedford. At a time when dinner was served late, she found herself peckish in the mid-afternoon and began inviting friends to join her for tea, bread, and cake. The custom quickly gained popularity among the upper classes and has since evolved into a cherished cultural experience, often enjoyed in hotels and historic estates.

Perhaps most revealing is the emotional role tea plays in British life. The simple question “Fancy a cup of tea?” is often used to express concern or offer support. It is a gentle way of saying, “I’m here for you.” This phrase is commonly heard in homes, police stations, and hospitals—anywhere people face stress or grief. During World War II, tea was one of the few items not fully rationed, and soldiers and civilians alike relied on it for morale. Even today, offering tea after a difficult event remains a deeply ingrained gesture of care.

In this way, tea functions as both a stimulant and a sedative—a drink that awakens the mind and soothes the soul. It is a small act with large symbolic meaning, reinforcing stability, kindness, and continuity in everyday life.

## 4. Types of Tea and How It Is Consumed

The most common type of tea consumed in the UK is black tea, valued for its strong flavor and energizing effect. Among the most popular varieties are English Breakfast, a robust blend often served with milk, and Earl Grey, which is flavored with bergamot oil and sometimes enjoyed without milk. These teas are typically consumed from mugs, though formal afternoon tea may use fine china cups.

Milk is a key component for many British tea drinkers, though preferences vary. Some add sugar, honey, or lemon, depending on taste and tradition. The order in which ingredients are added—milk before or after the tea—has long been a topic of debate, with some arguing it reflects class distinctions from the past.

Tea is rarely consumed alone. It is commonly accompanied by biscuits, scones with clotted cream and jam, or small sandwiches, especially during afternoon tea. These pairings enhance the experience, turning a simple drink into a miniature celebration of hospitality.

In recent years, new trends have emerged. Herbal teas, green tea, and fruit infusions have gained popularity, particularly among younger generations seeking healthier or caffeine-free options. Tea bags, introduced in the 20th century, remain the most common method of preparation due to their convenience, though loose-leaf tea is still favored by enthusiasts.

Despite these changes, the core ritual remains unchanged: a hot cup of tea, shared or savored in quiet reflection, continues to define a moment of pause in a busy day.

## 5. School Survey

To explore how tea culture is perceived outside the UK, a survey was conducted among 30 students at a local school. The goal was to compare their attitudes toward tea with those commonly found in Britain and to assess the potential for introducing a “tea break” in the school environment.

The survey consisted of five questions focusing on tea consumption habits, emotional associations, and awareness of British traditions. The results revealed that 87% of respondents drink tea regularly, primarily at home.

However, only 12% reported drinking tea during the school day, citing a lack of access and time. When asked if they associate tea with relaxation, 40% said yes, while the rest viewed it simply as a warm drink.

Fewer than one-third of the students were aware of the British “tea break” tradition. Nevertheless, 63% expressed interest in having a short tea break at school, particularly after the third lesson, which many described as the most tiring part of the day. Suggestions included serving herbal teas, allowing students to bring their own mugs, and organizing a monthly “British Tea Day” with traditional snacks.

These findings suggest that while Russian students do not currently have a tea-drinking culture at school, they are open to adopting one. The idea of a brief pause for tea was seen not just as a chance to relax, but as a way to improve mood, focus, and social interaction.

## 6. Conclusion

This research confirms that tea in the United Kingdom is far more than a drink—it is a cultural institution. Rooted in history, shaped by empire, and reinforced by social habit, tea has become a daily ritual that supports both physical energy and emotional well-being. It serves as a moment of pause, a gesture of care, and a symbol of resilience.

The survey of Russian school students reveals a striking contrast: while tea is consumed at home, it plays no formal role in the school day. Yet, there is clear interest in changing this. A short, structured tea break could offer students a chance to rest, reconnect, and recharge—much like their British counterparts.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that schools consider introducing a five-minute tea break after the third lesson. This small change could enhance the learning environment, promote cultural awareness, and provide a practical example of how simple traditions can improve well-being.

In a world that often feels rushed and overwhelming, the British “cuppa” offers a quiet lesson: sometimes, the most powerful solutions come in the smallest packages.

## 7. List of Used Literature

1. Chrystal, Paul. Tea: A Very British Beverage. Pen & Sword History, 2020.  
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3. YouTube. The History of Tea in Britain. Created by Timeline - World History Documentaries,  
17 July 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1ECzOC90rQ>.  
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4. ProQuest. Tea and the British Empire: A Social and Economic History. PhD dissertation, University of London, 2018.  
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## Presentation Text:

Read this aloud while advancing slides at the [→ Next Slide] markers. Total time: ~7 minutes.

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(Slide 1)

Good afternoon, respected jury members, teachers, and fellow students.

My name is [Your Name], I am in grade [X] at [Your School Number], and today I present my research on a simple question with a deep cultural answer:

Why Do the British Drink Tea All Day?

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(Slide 2)

Here is the plan of my work:

I will begin with the goal and hypothesis of my research. Then, I will explore the history of tea in the UK, its social role, and the types of tea commonly consumed. Next, I will present the results of a school survey I conducted. Finally, I will share my conclusions, recommendations, and sources.

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(Slide 3)

My main goal was to understand the historical, social, and cultural reasons behind the British love for tea.

My tasks were:

1. To study the history of tea in Britain.
2. To analyze its social role.
3. To identify the main types and traditions of consumption.
4. To conduct a survey among school students.

The object of my research is British tea culture; the subject is its social and historical role.

My hypothesis is that tea is not just a drink, but a meaningful ritual — one that helps people cope with stress and strengthen social bonds.

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(Slide 4)

To achieve this, I followed six main stages:

1. I studied reliable sources about British tea culture.
2. I analyzed its cultural and social significance.
3. I researched the most common types of tea and how they are consumed.
4. I conducted a survey of 30 students at my school.
5. I processed and analyzed the results.
6. And finally, I formulated my conclusions.

Now, let's look at the key findings.

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(Slide 5)

Tea first arrived in Britain in the 17th century through the East India Company. At first, it was a luxury for the wealthy.

By the 18th century, demand was so high that people smuggled tea to avoid taxes. In the 19th century, tea plantations in India and Ceylon made it affordable for everyone. It became a staple in homes and factories.

During the Industrial Revolution, “tea breaks” were introduced to keep workers alert and rested — a tradition that continues in workplaces and schools today.

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(Slide 6)

But tea is much more than a historical habit — it plays a powerful social role.

The “tea break” is a moment to pause, talk, and recharge.

The formal “afternoon tea,” introduced in the 1840s, remains a symbol of hospitality and elegance.

And in difficult moments, the simple offer of a “cuppa” — “fancy a cup of tea?” — is a way of saying, “I care about you.”

During World War II, tea was never fully rationed because it was seen as essential for morale.

Even today, tea is a gesture of comfort in homes, hospitals, and police stations.

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(Slide 7)

So, what kind of tea do the British drink?

The most common is black tea — especially English Breakfast, strong and usually with milk, and Earl Grey, flavored with bergamot oil.

Most people add milk, though some prefer sugar, lemon, or honey.

Tea is rarely drunk alone. It comes with biscuits, scones with jam and cream, or small sandwiches — especially during afternoon tea.

While herbal teas and tea bags are becoming more popular, the classic “builder’s tea” — a strong, milky brew — remains the favorite.

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(Slide 8)

To compare British habits with our own, I conducted a survey of 30 students at my school.

I asked: Do you drink tea? Do you associate it with relaxation? Did you know about British tea breaks? Would you like one at school?

The results were interesting:

- 87% drink tea regularly — but mostly at home.
- Only 12% drink tea at school.
- 40% associate tea with relaxation.
- Only 27% knew about UK tea breaks.
- But 63% said they would like a short tea break during the school day — especially after the third lesson.

This shows that while we enjoy tea, we don’t yet have a culture of shared pauses. But we are open to change.

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(Slide 9)

So, what can we conclude?

Tea in the UK is not just a drink — it is a cultural ritual that supports well-being, connection, and routine.

It has become part of the national identity through history, empire, and daily practice.

Our survey shows that Russian students are ready to adopt similar traditions.

Therefore, I recommend introducing a 5-minute tea break after the 3rd lesson in our school schedule.

It could help us relax, improve focus, and even learn more about British culture.

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(Slide 10)

My research is based on credible and accessible sources:

- Chrystal, Paul. Tea: A Very British Beverage
- Esquires Coffee. A Brief History of Tea in Great Britain
- Timeline. The History of Tea in Britain (YouTube)
- ProQuest. Tea and the British Empire: A Social and Economic History

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(Slide 11)

This research has real practical value.

We could:

- Improve the school atmosphere
- Reduce stress
- Promote cultural understanding
- And even organize a monthly “British Tea Day” with tea and snacks

Small traditions can make a big difference in our daily lives.

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(Slide 12)

Thank you for your attention.

My name is [Your Name], and this project shows how a simple cup of tea can carry deep cultural meaning.

I am ready to answer your questions.