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FROM FLORISTIC SYMBOLS TO THE HISTORY AND NATIONAL CHARACTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND AND BELARUS

Educational research in the English language

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CONTENTS

Preface……………………………………………………………………………... 3

1.Symbol as an element of a culture……………………………………………… 6

2. Flower symbolism…………………………………………………………….. 8

3. National Flowers of the United Kingdom

3.1. Flower symbols of England…………………………………………………...9

3.2. Flower symbols of Scotland………………………………………………….10

3.3. Flower symbols of Wales…………………………………………………….11

3.4. Flower symbols of Nothern Ireland…………………………………………..13

4. Flower symbols of Belarus…………………………………………………15

5. Conclusion ………………………………………………………………...18

Literature……………………………………………………………………. ……19

Supplement 1

Supplement 2

Supplement 3

Supplement 4

Supplement 5

Supplement 6

Supplement 7

Supplement 8

Supplement 9

Supplement 10

Supplement 11

Supplement 12

Supplement 13

# Preface

What associations come to mind when we talk about the UK? Most likely, these are London, the gloomy Tower, Fog, Big Ben, Queen Elizabeth, the London Eye, guardsmen in funny hats and the traditional for us “Oatmeal, sir!”

 When we remember one or another country, we usually associate it with any flower or plant, which are popular in the state.

The theory of "national flower" came to us from ancient times.

Such natural symbols as flowers and plants reflect the diversity of the natural world. People often give ordinary everyday plants a special symbolic meaning, isolating them from the environment. Each of the floristic signs has its own history, its own special symbolic meaning that has developed over the centuries. It is difficult to imagine a country that does not have its own "sign" plant. Every nation has its own symbols. They are designed to prove the national identity, preserve the cultural values ​​of the past, reflect the relationship between modern society and the past generation.

We conducted a study among the pupils of the 6-th – 11-th forms in Beniakony school, which showed their knowledge on flower symbolism in the cultures of the Belarusians and the British (Supplement 1).

We also interviewed students aged 12 –17 from various parts of the UK to know their level of intelligence on their national floral symbols and Belarusian floral symbols, using the social network Instagram. (Supplement 2).

The survey results presented the fact that both teenagers from Belarus and teenagers from the UK are not deeply informed of the role of floral symbols in the history and culture of the country. Most students didn’t think about the aims of the origin and choice of national floral symbols. Some of them did not know and did not think about the use of floral symbols and their role nowadays.

Our pupils books give us a very little information, so we decided to find out from a reliable resource more about these symbols. In our work we tried to find out where and how they appeared, and why they are depicted on the coat of arms of Great Britain and Belarus in the context of their cultures. We think that flower symbols can show our national character, which is connected with typical features of people living in any country. That is why we were interested to learn how national symbols are used in modern society in our country and in the UK.

The hypothesis of our research is that in the culture of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Belarus there is a flower symbol, which reflects its history, environment habitation, the mentality of the nation, beliefs, traditions and ideals.

The topic is very important for pupils. I think we need to develop as a multicultural linguistic persons, able to talk about our national culture in Belarusian language and in English. And it can help us to develop our English.

The relevance of studies is the study and comparison of the national floral emblem in the context of Belarusian and British cultures.

The goal of our research is to study the aims of the choice of the national floral emblem in the English and the Belarusian cultures.

The main objectives of research are to:

1. Explore the literature and Internet resources on flower symbolism.

2. To study the aims and principles of choice of the national floral emblem of Great Britain and Belarus in the context of their cultures.

3. Define the cultural identity of the selected floral characters.

4.Conduct comparative analysis of the floral characters as elements of cultures, reflecting the character of the British and the Belarusians.

5. Find some common features of the use of floristic symbols in the UK and Belarus.

The object of the research is the cultural identity of flowers as symbols of countries.

The subject of the research is the cultural identity of flower symbolism of Great Britain and Belarus.

In the course of the work, the following research methods and techniques were used: studying and reviewing of the literature, descriptive method, comparative analysis, Internet resources, summarizing, questioning.

The material of our research can be used as the additional material during English lessons and extracurricular activities. We have created two brochures for pupils.

# symbol as an element of a culture

Symbolism has existed since ancient times as a way of representing the world in the form of concrete images, a way of concretizing thoughts.

The word "symbol" comes from the ancient Greek language (from the Greek "symbolon") and has many meanings such as "service mark", "certificate". The term is understood differently by linguists.

According to “Тлумачальны слоўнік беларускай мовы” by А. Я. Баханькоў, сімвал – гэта “умоўнае абазначэнне, знак чаго-небудзь” [1, p.322]. According to «The Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English” by A.S. Hornby “symbol– a sign; a mark, object, animal, idea, which represents something else” [2, p.293].

Thus, we see that the definition of “symbol” in the English and Belarusian languages has the same meaning. So, a symbol is anything that is used to stand for something else.

All cultures include symbols that confer meanings to things and events. These symbols are expressed through what we call language. Language conveys the beliefs and values of a culture.

Various folk cultures and traditions assign the symbolic meanings to plants, including flowers.

Symbols are part of the culture and history of peoples. Symbolic objects and signs accompany any nation throughout its history development. Natural symbols reflect the diversity of the natural world. People often give ordinary everyday plants a special symbolic meaning, isolating them from the environment.

Each of the floristic signs has its own history, its own special symbolic meaning that has developed over the centuries. It is difficult to imagine a country that does not have its own "sign" plant. Every nation has its own symbols. They are designed to prove the national identity, preserve the cultural values ​​of the past, reflect the relationship between modern society and the past generation.

Culture combines many elements to create a unique way of living for different people.

In our research, we are going to take a closer look at floristic symbols.

Our work is devoted to the plant symbols of Great Britain and Belarus, because that floral symbols are a valuable source of information about the culture and the mentality of the people, they contain myths, legends, customs. But what served the reason for the choice by the whole people of this particular plant as national symbol? What is the history of the origin of the national sign? These questions will also be answered by our work.

We were interested to learn about the use of national floral symbols in modern society in the UK and Belarus.

2.FLOWER SYMBOLISM

Since ancient times, flower symbolism has been an important part of cultures all around the world. From new life to death, from purity to passion, flowers have had many meanings in myths and legends. Flowers are associated with youth, beauty, and pleasure. But as they wilt and die, flowers represent fragility and the swift passage from life into death[3, p.47]. Specific flowers such as roses and lilies have assumed symbolic significance in mythology. It is necessary to note that the associations and religious meanings of flower symbolism have existed for centuries.

## nATIONAL FlowerS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

3.1 FLOWER SYMBOLS OF ENGLAND

The RED ROSE is the symbol of England. (Supplement 3).

Studying the history of Great Britain, our attention was attracted by such a phenomenon as war of the Scarlet and White Roses. The connection between the name of a delicate flower and military events is surprising.

This symbol goes back to the War of the Roses, which was the war within the country. It lasted 30 years (1455-1485). Two Houses were struggling for the English throne – the Lancastrians and the Yorkists.

Red rose was the emblem of the Lancastrians and the white rose was that of the Yorkists. Their rival ended when King Henry VII, the Lancastrian, married Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of the Yorkist. Since that time the red rose has become the national emblem of England[4].

The war of the Roses is a very important period for the British culture and history. It has been a turning point in the history of the United Kingdom. With the close of the Wars of the Roses, we may recognize the complete ending of the Middle Ages in England, and the establishing of the “Renaissance,” which begins Modern History.

Red roses often appear in poetry, literature, classical artwork, contemporary films and everywhere in between. Scottish poet, Robert Burns, compared his love to a red rose in the poem Red, Red Rose, and the card “soldiers” in Alice in Wonderland lost their heads for painting white roses red, just to name a few classics.

So we believe that the rose reflects the following main features of the English: self-possession, diplomacy, devoutness, ability to stay cool-headed in all situations.

## 3.2. Flower symbols of Scotland

 The Scottish symbol is a wild plant called the THISTLE (Supplement 4).

Each country chooses its national emblem of the most beautiful plant, but Scotland made a rather unexpected choice of the purple thistle symbol. Severity and stubbornness of Scottish character is clearly reflected in this symbol.

There is a legend that explains why it became the Scottish emblem. According to that legend, ancient Scandinavians wanted to plunder the land of Scotland and settle there. So, they landed on the east coast of Scotland.

The Scots gathered their army to defend the land. They assembled behind the river Tay and made a camp to have rest after a long march. The Scots were sleeping and didn`t expect the enemies.

When the Norsemen decided to attack the Scots, they took their shoes off not to make noise. But one of the Norsemen stepped on a thistle. That sudden and sharp pain made him scream. So the Scots heard this «alarm» and put the Norsemen to fight. That is how the thistle became the emblem of Scotland.

The thistle also features in Scottish and British heraldry through symbols, logos, coat of arms and on British currency.

In the language of flowers, “the thistle is an ancient Celtic symbol of nobility of character as well as of birth, for the wounding or provocation of a thistle yields punishment” [5]. Often, the inhabitants of this country associate the nature of this plant with their own treats: unpretentious, stubborn, purposeful thistle which are similar to the Scots.

Thistles aren't just found in gardens and in parks. You can see the emblem in the international rugby team and football clubs, in local businesses and major organizations and corporations and on the uniforms of police officers. Today the Thistle is seen on everything from jewelry to soap and tea-towels, and it's a Scottish symbol recognized all over the world.

## 3.3. Flower symbols of Wales

Wales has got two national symbols. These are the daffodil and the leek. (Supplement 5). They are both connected to the Patron Saint of Wales, St. David. Saint David is a man who had a great influence on the formation of Christianity in the country and built more than ten monasteries on its territory.

According to the legend, during a battle against the Saxons, St. David advised his soldiers to wear leeks in their hats so that they could easily be distinguished from the enemies.

Another link between the leek and St. David the belief that he had to live on bread and wild leek for several years.

However, today each year on St. David`s Day the leek is worn in the cap badges of every soldiers in every Welsh regiment.

Whatever the case, the leek has been known to be a symbol of Wales for a long time; Shakespeare, for example, refers to the custom of wearing a leek as an “ancient tradition” in Henry V. In the play, Henry tells the Welsh officer Flu Ellen that he too is wearing a leek “for I am Welsh, you know, good countryman” [6]. The 1985 and 1990 British one pound coins bear the design of a leek in a coronet.

But outside the army, many other Welsh people have substituted the leek by the daffodil, perhaps because it looks more attractive and certainly smells a lot better.

Daffodil is another symbol of Wales and a symbol of cold beauty, narcissism, vanity and selfishness.

In Greek mythology, Narcissus is related the story of a beautiful young man and hopelessly in love with a nymph Echo: Narcissus as punishment for neglecting love Echo was sentenced to love reflected. According to the legend, “narcissus flower grew up where a beautiful Greek Young Narcissus fell in love with his reflection in the water, died of self-love. In the ancient world it is believed that the human soul is present in his reflection, which is an omen of death, so narcissus flower has become a symbol of youthful death. Traditionally it is pinned to the bodies of the dead” [7].

The daffodil is also associated with St. David`s Day, due to the fact that it breaks into blossom on that day. Interesting to note that one of the many Welsh names for a daffodil is “Cenhinen Bedr” which means “Peter`s leek”.

It is interesting to know that the daffodil personifies national and the cultural uniqueness of the Welsh, desire for beauty, creativity and originality.

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## 3.4. Flower symbols of Northern Ireland

 The national flower of Northern Ireland is the shamrock, a three-leaved plant similar to clover. (Supplement 6).

The shamrock has been used as a national symbol since the 18th century due to its association with Ireland’s patron saint – St. Patrick.

Saint Patrick is most famous for bringing Christianity to Ireland. The legend tells how he used the shamrock, a kind of a white clover with three leaves to explain the Holy Trinity.

“An Irish tale tells of how Patrick used the three-leafed shamrock to explain the Trinity. He used it in his sermons to represent how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit could all exist as separate elements of the same entity. His followers adopted the custom of wearing a shamrock on his feast day.

The name of St. Patrick is surrounded by a rich tradition of oral legends and myths most of which has been exaggerated over the centuries. It is so because inventing exciting tales as a way to remember history has always been a part of Irish culture. Some of these legends say that Patrick raised people from the dead [8].

The shamrock entered the consciousness of the Irish people, as a symbol of the freedom and independence of Ireland. Irish people are known for their friendliness and politeness. A distinctive feature of the local population is attentiveness and desire to help.

Since the [1800 Acts of Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_1800) between Britain and Ireland the shamrock was incorporated into the [Royal Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Coat_of_Arms_of_the_United_Kingdom), depicted growing from a single stem alongside the rose of England, and the [thistle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_thistle) of Scotland to symbolize the unity of the three kingdoms. Since then, the shamrock has regularly appeared alongside the rose, thistle and (sometimes) [leek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leek) for Wales in [British coins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coins_of_the_pound_sterling) such as the two shilling and crown, and in [stamps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stamps_and_postal_history_of_the_United_Kingdom). The rose, thistle and shamrock motif also appears regularly on British public buildings such as [Buckingham Palace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buckingham_Palace" \o "Buckingham Palace).

The shamrock is the national flower of Northern Ireland, like the rose in England or thistle in Scotland. The shamrock plant is recognized the world over as the badge of Ireland. It is now used by many state bodies to represent Ireland and Irish culture abroad. In fact, the symbol of the shamrock is protected by law as a trademark and its use is restricted to goods or services of Irish origin.

It was also mentioned in many songs and ballads of the time. For example, a popular ballad called The Shamrock Shore.

Shamrock often appears as part of the emblem of many various organizations, businesses and places also use the symbol to advertise a connection with the island.

## Flower symbols of Belarus

As for Belarus, it should be noted that such plants as cornflower, clover flowers, flax flowers did not become state symbols, but they were and are used as emblems and symbols of organizations, districts and regions.

The State Emblem is framed by a wreath of golden rye ears intertwined with clover flowers on the right, and flax flowers on the left.(Supplement 7)

Rye, clover and flax are traditional components of the Belarusian way of life. They symbolize the enduring value of the native land, the genetic connection between generations, the industrious and peaceful nature of the Belarusian people. Clover is a symbol of connection with the creative world of animals: a cow, a sheep, because for them it is the best food. Belarus is a country of habits and tradition, which can also be traced in floriculture. On the other hand, a good habit of planting vegetation and flowers in the area adjacent to your home has instilled in Belarusians a genuine love for all living things.

Since ancient times, the wreath has been used by peoples as a reward for the winner and personified victory. A wreath of ears intertwined with clover and flax flowers is a symbol of memory and the connection between contemporaries and ancestors. A wreath formed from a bunch of rye has since ancient times had a sacred meaning for all Slavic peoples who have created their own special culture over the centuries. The Slavs believed that a bundle or other grain message was the most worthy way to appeal to divine powers with a request to send down or bestow a new harvest and prosperity. To this day, many residents of our villages put a sheaf or a bunch of ears from the new crop in the house as a guarantee of labor success in the future. Clover is a symbol of connection with the creative world of animals, for which clover is the best food. The ancients believed that man is a part of the whole world of living beings, able to save his life and ensure prosperity only if the rest of the animal world is preserved and prosperous. Flax is the cotton of the north, flax is a symbol of the transformative power of labor, a sign of goodness and prosperity.

All regions in our country have their own aemblems. We have carefully studied these emblems. Five regions have their coat of arms with floral symbols [18].

Vitebsk region has its own emblem (Supplement 8). It is a French shield, in the red field of which is depicted a silver rider in armor, holding a sword in his right hand above his head, in his left - a shield with a golden six-pointed cross. The coat of arms is crowned with a large golden city crown with five teeth. It is framed by two golden oak branches twined and connected by a blue ribbon .The coat of arms was based on the historical coat of arms of the Vitebsk province of 1856.

The emblem of the Gomel region is an image of a French shield (Supplement 9). The shield is crowned with a large golden city crown. The shield is framed by two golden oak branches twined and connected by a red ribbon.

The emblem of the Grodno region is a French shield, in the red field of which a golden bison is depicted (Supplement 10). The coat of arms is crowned with a large golden city crown. The shield is framed with gold oak branches intertwined with a blue St. Andrew's ribbon.

The emblem of the Mogilev region is an image of the Mogilev Mother of God on a golden field of a French shield in a blue oval (Supplement 11). There are three green hills, on which are three scarlet ears with golden stems. The shield is surrounded by a wreath of golden oak and laurel leaves connected by the St. Andrew's ribbon. Oak branches are a symbol of the heroic past, strength, courage, memory of fallen soldiers. Laurel branches symbolize strength, glory and peace. Being an evergreen plant, it symbolizes constancy, eternity and immortality. In ancient Greek culture, the laurel personified victory and peace and was dedicated to Apollo and Dionysus. According to the myth, Apollo pursued the nymph Daphne, who had given her word to remain chaste. Daphne prayed for help, and the gods turned her into a laurel tree, which Apollo hugged in vain. From now on, the laurel became his sacred plant. That is why in Greece musicians, poets, dancers, whose patron was Apollo, were awarded with laurel wreaths, while athletes, athletes were crowned with olive or celery wreaths.

The emblem of the Minsk region is a French shield, in the golden field of which there are three blue wavy belts (Supplement 12). In the upper right part of the shield there is an image of the coat of arms of the city of Minsk. The coat of arms is crowned with a large golden crown with five teeth. It is framed by two golden oak branches twined and connected by a blue ribbon.

From ancient time oak has symbolized wisdom and perseverance. In the old days, the Slavs believed that the souls of dead ancestors lived in oaks. This idea is confirmed by the real fact of ancient burials in forests, in particular, oak forests - on trees and under trees. In the legends and fairy tales of the ancient Slavs, the oak is often a sacred place with which the fate of a person is connected and near which decisive events take place for the heroes. The oak was also revered as a tree of fertility; the custom of planting an oak tree at the birth of a child has been preserved.

Belarus also has its national symbols. “The symbol of Belarusian fields is the cornflower – a small blue flower” [9, p.72]. We call this flower gently and lovingly: valoshka or vasiliok. (Supplement 13)

Slavic legend explains the origin of the name. “One mermaid fell in love with a young man named Vasil. But he did not answer her affection and refused to follow her to the underwater kingdom. Love mermaid offended and turned the young man in a blue flower, which came to be called by its name - vasiliok (cornflower)” [11].

Valoshka is growing in Belarusian fields. It is blooming in Belarusian literature, in Belarusian soul. Vasiliok is a symbol of Belarus, a symbol of spirituality and purity.

We can find the image of cornflower in many Belarusian sites. Vasiliok decorates products of Belarusian factories. This beautiful blue flower is the symbol of the festival "Slaviansky Bazaar".

The national flower cornflower, or "valoshka" was elevated to the rank of a symbol by Maxim Bogdanovich in the poem "Slutsk weavers": serf girls, driven into the lord's courtyard to weave pseudo-Persian belts, yearn for freedom, " «i тчэ, забыўшыся, рука /Замiж персiдскага узору /Цвяток радзiмы васiлька».

1. CONCLUSION

Doing this work ─ gathering, processing and summarizing a large amount of material on this problem, we learned a lot of new information about the cultural identity of flower symbolism of Great Britain and Belarus. It was very interesting for us to work on this topic because we think it is given little attention to.

Thus, Belarus and each of the historic parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have their own floral symbols with its own history of origin, which indicates the uniqueness of each culture.

The flower, selected as a national symbol, is widely widespread in the flora of the country. All floral symbols have their roots in ancient times. Each culture has a legend about the origin and choice of flower symbols.

Flower symbol is given with human traits; it reflects the character and the mentality of the nation. Flower doesn’t transmit the signal of its symbolism to humans, but the man gives it a symbolic value.

Floristic symbols are widely used in heraldry, reflecting the history and national character

Flower symbols are presented on the coat of arms in the UK and Belarus.

The national floral symbols are widely used in the political, cultural and social life of the countries, in art and religion.

National flower fosters a sense of national unity among all segments of the country's population. The floral image is a universal symbol that can unite different countries and nations. Each of them hides its secret.

The study of the national symbols of the English-speaking peoples can contribute to a better deeper understanding of language, culture and history these countries, and knowledge of the symbols of our homeland contributes to the preservation national identity.

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