

July 3, 1963

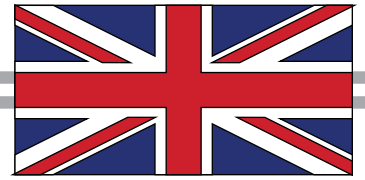
Dear Class:

I've been in London for a week and already feel British. That's because—like many people here—I always go out with my umbrella. It is cold and foggy and has rained almost every day. But I'm off to see the world, even if I see it from under an umbrella.

I saw the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, climbed the Tower of London where heads rolled, heard Big Ben chime, and had tea in cozy little tea shops. One was even called The Cozy Tea Shoppe.

I love walking around cities, and London is great for that. But there is one problem. Because cars drive on the left side of the road—what we call the wrong side—crossing the street can be very dangerous. It seems like I was always looking for traffic in the wrong direction. Here's how I learned to cross the streets: Walk very close to someone who talks with a British accent and assume that he or she lives here and knows how to do it safely.

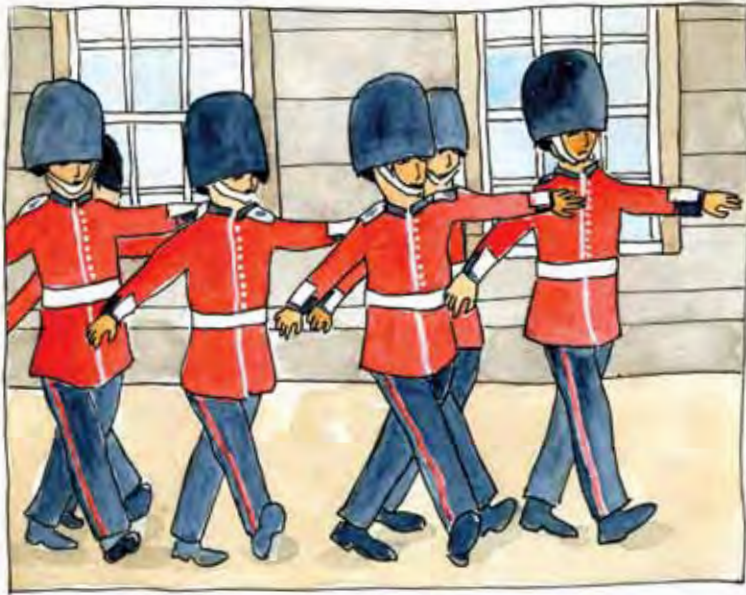
One of the fun things I did as I walked around the city was to look for unusual names of streets. Friday Street is named after the fishmongers who sold fish there on Fridays. There's a Man in the Moon



Letter from England

Big Ben is the largest four-faced chiming clock in the world. Built in 1859, it is in a tower at the end of the Parliament building. There are at least two different versions of how Big Ben got its name. One is that it is named after Sir Benjamin Hall, who oversaw the installation of the clock. The other is that it is named after a popular heavyweight fighter at the time, Benjamin Caunt. In any case, it was renamed the Elizabeth Tower in 2012 to honor Queen Elizabeth II's sixty years on the throne. See Mrs. J under her umbrella in front of Big Ben.





Buckingham Palace

The Queen's home in London is Buckingham Palace. Outside, guards dressed in red tunics, black pants, and tall furry hats change troops with all the formality you expect from royalty. You can smile at the guards, but they are trained never to smile back. All Mrs. J could think of when she was there was the A.A. Milne poem: "They're changing Guard at Buckingham Palace— Christopher Robin went down with Alice." (Milne also wrote *Winnie the Pooh*.)

Passage and Bleeding Heart Yard, which may have been the scene of a murder in 1626. To lighten things up, there is also a Ha Ha Road. My favorite name, though, is Petticoat Lane Market, where people sell clothes—in addition to petticoats, which are old-fashioned skirts often with ruffles and lace that were worn under dresses—from stalls on the street.

Speaking of walking: For more than a thousand years, kings, queens, soldiers, and clergy walked the aisles of Westminster Abbey. And now, so did I. There is so much to see—the stained glass windows, the paintings on the wall, and the Poets' Corner where many famous British writers are buried—that I didn't know where to look first. I chose the Poets' Corner.

The Abbey has been the burial place for royalty since the eleventh century. It also is the place where great celebrations for the living are held, such as coronations and royal weddings. Queen Elizabeth II was crowned in the Abbey in 1953, and I watched it on TV. I stood just where she did, and I actually felt queenly. Maybe that's because my childhood name was Queenie.

The British Museum, founded in 1753, is the oldest public museum in the world and is free to all



Tower of London

William the Conqueror built a fortress to guard the entrance to London soon after he became king in 1066. Although the fortress is called the Tower of London, it actually has 21 towers. Over the centuries, the Tower of London was used as a royal palace, a treasury, and a prison. Princes and queens as well as thieves were hanged, burned, and beheaded behind the fortress walls. A more pleasant thing to do there today is to see the dazzling crown jewels.

"studious and curious persons." This sounds like the place for me! It houses objects thousands of years old, including the skin of a two thousand-year-old human (humans, too) from ancient Egypt. You know how I love books, so a special treat for me was to see the beautifully displayed original manuscripts. Jane Eyre, a nineteenth-century novel by Charlotte Brontë, was opened to a very dramatic part of the story, where the wedding between Jane and Rochester was halted because he was still married to a crazy woman who lived in the attic.

London is well known for its theater, so I made sure to see a play one evening. We get our theater programs for free in the United States, so I was surprised that here you have to pay for one. Much to my embarrassment, I didn't have enough English pounds with me—that is English money, not the extra weight I gained eating pastries with my tea.

As much fun as I had in London, I took a trip out of town for a day. I caught a train at Paddington Station (that is the station Paddington Bear was named after because the book's author lived near it) and ended up in Stratford-upon-Avon, where the countryside is



At the time of Mrs. J's trip, getting money to use in the country you were visiting wasn't as easy as it is today, when you can get local currency from an ATM (automated teller machine). At that time, many Americans had special travelers checks that were converted to the country's currency at banks and stores. Britain still uses the pound, but starting in 2002, many European countries stopped using their own currency and started using the euro. When Mrs. J was in France, she used francs; in Italy, lira; in Portugal, escudos; in Spain, pesos; and in Greece, drachmas. Today, she would use euros in all those places. This is a lot easier than learning a different money system in each country.

British Museum

The manuscripts Mrs. J saw at the British Museum are now housed in a new building of the British Library. The library has so many items—books, stamps, maps, manuscripts—that if you saw five items a day, it would take eighty thousand years to see the whole collection. You can see some of these items online.

The website is listed at the end of the chapter.

About the cat mummies at the British Museum: Egyptians did not worship animals, but many of their gods and goddesses had their own specific animals. The cat was the special animal to the goddess Bastet. Back then, some people believed that if you left a cat mummy at her temple, Bastet would help solve your problems. Do you think this would really work?



lush and there are flowers everywhere. It should be lush because of all the rain.

Stratford-upon-Avon is the birthplace of William Shakespeare and home of the Swan Theater where the Royal Shakespeare Theater performs his plays. I saw The Tempest, which is a fantasy about love, magic, power, and forgiveness. Seeing it performed in England—and particularly in Stratford—the play made more sense to me than when I saw it in New York. Even for a teacher, Shakespeare's words can sometimes be hard to follow.

In addition to visiting Shakespeare's birthplace, I went to the cottage where his wife, Anne Hathaway, grew up. It still has some of the original sixteenth-century furniture, including the bed she slept in. The guides wore clothing from Anne and Will's time. It was so real-looking that I expected to see Shakespeare himself knock on the front door. I was not surprised to learn that Stratford is the most visited tourist attraction in England outside London.

On my last day in London I went to the Tate Gallery. It turns out that I saved the best for last.

In 2011, Queen Elizabeth's grandson, William, married Kate Middleton in Westminster Abbey. More than three billion people watched the wedding on TV. Did you see it?

The Tate has a lot of paintings by my favorite British artist, William Turner. He always loved drawing. When he was thirteen, his father sold his son's paintings at his barber shop. Then, only two years later, Turner was exhibiting at the Royal Academy of Arts. That's quite a jump for a teenage artist—from a barber shop to the Royal Academy.

I cancelled plans to visit Parliament (the line was too long) and take another look around Westminster Abbey (it was too rainy). Maybe I'm just too excited about where I'll be tomorrow: PARIS.

Farewell to London,
Mrs. J

Tate Modern

Today, there is another Tate in London—the Tate Modern, housed in an old power station on the banks of the River Thames. Mrs. J would have loved the modern art there. A boat takes people from one Tate to another. Doesn't that sound like a fun way to go to a museum?