



# General Introduction



# Lesson 1

## General Information on the UK and the USA

### Learning Objectives

- Master the key facts of the UK and the USA.
- Make an oral report about the two nations by generalising the information from the texts.
- Generalise the characteristics of the two nations by making a comparison between them.

### Starter

1. Identify the following pictures, and say what you know about them.



2. Tell about the location of the UK and the USA and their capital cities, and give as much information as you can.

## Texts

### Word Box



**arctic** *adj.* 极冷的, 严寒的

**biblical** *adj.* 《圣经》的, 有关《圣经》的

**constitutional** *adj.* 宪法的

**daffodil** *n.* 水仙 (花)

**duration of sunshine** 日照时间

**Hispanic** *n.* 西班牙人

**inscription** *n.* 题词

**Judaism** *n.* 犹太教

**multi-racial** *adj.* 多种族的

**obedience** *n.* 顺从

**populate** *v.* 居住着, 生活于

**refugee** *n.* 难民

**robin** *n.* 知更鸟

**Sikhism** *n.* 锡克教

**temperate** *adj.* 温带的, 温和的

**thistle** *n.* 蓟

**tyrant** *n.* 暴君

**arid** *adj.* 干旱的; 贫瘠的

**Buddhism** *n.* 佛教

**constitutional monarchy** 君主立宪制

**Democratic Party** (美国) 民主党

**Hinduism** *n.* 印度教

**hovercraft** *n.* 气垫船

**Islam** *n.* 伊斯兰教

**monarchy** *n.* 君主政体, 君主制

**national anthem** 国歌

**polarise** *v.* (使) 两极分化

**racial discrimination** 种族歧视

**Republican Party** (美国) 共和党

**shamrock** *n.* 三叶草, 白花酢浆草

**sterling** *n.* 英国货币

**the River Thames** 泰晤士河

**topography** *n.* 地形, 地貌

### Text A



**Pre-reading: Tell as much as you know about the following places.**

England

Scotland

Wales

Northern Ireland

Atlantic Ocean

North Sea

Irish Sea

English Channel

## THE UK

### Location and Area

The full name of the UK is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with several different names such as Britain, Great Britain, the UK, the British Isles, etc. As a country in northwestern Europe, it is bordered to the south by the English Channel, to the east by the North Sea, to the west by the Irish Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The British Isles are two islands situated off the European continent, with the larger one known as Great Britain. The UK consists of four main parts: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. London is the capital city through which the River Thames flows. With an area of about 244,000 sq. km, Britain is about 1,000 km from north to south, and 500 km across in the widest part.

### Population and Dialects

Britain is one of the most densely populated countries of Europe. The total population of the country is around 60.6 million, the majority of which is living in southern England, while the barren and cold northern Scotland is sparsely populated. Because of its long tradition of accommodating immigrants and refugees, Britain is considered as one of the most multi-racial countries in the world, containing a diversity of ethnic groups, most of which are from [the Commonwealth<sup>1</sup>](#) countries. According to statistics, about 160 languages and dialects are spoken in London.



### Climate

Britain has a fairly mild and temperate climate and is sometimes overcast. It can be as hot as 32°C in the summer, and as cold as -10°C in the winter. However, the average high in London is around 21°C and the average low is around 12°C. The annual average rainfall varies from over 1,600 mm in the mountainous areas of the north and west to less than 800 mm over the central and eastern parts. In the south, the annual average duration of sunshine is around 1,750 hours, while the dullest parts of England, the mountainous areas, have annual average totals of less than 1,000 hours.

### Industry and Economy

As one of the 27 member states of the [European Union](#)<sup>2</sup>, the UK is a leading trading power and financial centre. Agriculture is an important industry and highly efficient. Primary energy, like coal and oil, are major contributors to the economy, but services like banking and insurance are the greatest contributors. Britain uses the pound sterling. The sign for the Great British Pound (GBP) is £.

### National Symbols and Famous Figures



The national flag of the UK is the Union Flag (Union Jack), and the national anthem is *God Save the Queen*. The government is constitutional monarchy, in which the Queen is recognised as Head of State, and the Prime Minister is the head of government. Different parts of Britain have different national flowers: rose for England, thistle for Scotland, daffodil for Wales, and shamrock for Northern Ireland. The European robin is the national bird of Britain. Britain is the birthplace of Sir Issac Newton, Charles Darwin, William Shakespeare and *the Beatles*<sup>3</sup>, home of the world's largest foreign exchange market, the world's richest football club—Manchester United, the inventor of the hovercraft—Christopher Cockerell, and the author of the *Harry Potter* books—J. K. Rowling.

### Religions and Beliefs

Most British people are Christian, although all other religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism are freely practised. The most popular festivals are religion-related such as Christmas, Easter, [Whit Sunday](#)<sup>4</sup>, etc.

## Text B

**Pre-reading: Tell as much as you know about the following places.**

San Francisco	Texas	New York City	Washington, D.C.
Gulf of Mexico	California	Atlantic Ocean	Pacific Ocean

## THE USA

### Location and Area

The USA, short for the United States of America, also called America, the States, the US, or Uncle Sam, is the fourth largest country in area, next to Russia, Canada and China. Located in the central part of North America, it is bordered by Canada to the north and Mexico to the south, with its continent extending 2,574 km from north to south and 4,505 km across. A flight from New York to San Francisco takes five and a half hours, and a trip by car from coast to coast takes five to six days. Washington, D.C. is the capital city. Travellers are always impressed with the national parks and national forests dotted all over the country, scenes unexpected of a nation considered to be a symbol of advanced industry and technology.



### Population and Ethnic Groups

Known as the “melting pot<sup>5</sup>”, the United States is another typical multi-racial country, with a population of 303 million, about 13.3% of which are African Americans, 12.5% Hispanics, 3.7% Asians and Pacific Islanders, 0.9% American Indians, and the rest are white Americans. The vast majority of Americans live in urban areas where cultural and economic advantages are offered. Although it is widely believed that class is totally nonexistent and all men are created equal in America, racial discrimination and class problems have always been headaches for the society. As the richest country in the world, wealth in the US is polarised. According to Edward Wolff, a professor of economics at New York University, the richest 1% of households owned 38% of all wealth in the United States.

### Climate

Due to the immense size and spread of topography in the US, the climate is incredibly varied. If there is a “general” climate then it is temperate, but it is also tropical in Florida and Hawaii, arctic in Alaska, arid in the Great Basin of the southwest and semiarid in the Great Plains to the west of the Mississippi River. The temperature range runs between the extremes of 57°C in California’s Death Valley to -62°C in Alaska.

### Economy

The American economy is a free enterprise system, with the public sector accounting for only one fifth of American economic activity. The bulk of America’s wealth is produced by private industries and businesses, ranging from giants like [General Motors](#)<sup>6</sup> to thousands of small, independent enterprises. In agriculture, for example, about 90% of the country’s farms are private property of the farmers.

### National Symbols and Famous Figures



The national flag of the USA is the Stars and Stripes. Some states have their own state flag. The national anthem is *Star Spangled Banner*. The government system is federal republic, with Democratic Party and Republican Party as the two main political parties. Rose is recognised as the national flower and the bald eagle as the national bird, which can be seen in many places in the US, such as on [the Great Seal](#)<sup>7</sup>, the Federal Agency seals, the President’s flag, and the one-dollar bill. The US currency is the American dollar, with the sign US\$ to stand for it. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and [Theodore Roosevelt](#)<sup>8</sup> are the four most beloved presidents in American history. Mark Twain, Martin Luther King, Shirley Temple and Michael Jordan are some of the well-known figures loved by people of different ages and nationalities.

### Music, Sports and Holidays

[Rock’n’roll](#)<sup>9</sup>, Jazz, Country and Western music are typical American music loved by people all over the world. Baseball is the national sport while American football, basketball and boxing are all very popular sports loved by the whole nation. Christmas, Valentine’s Day, Independence Day, Halloween, and Thanksgiving Day are the most popular holidays and festivals in the United States.

The biggest religion in the US is Christianity. 82% of Americans say they believe in God. The motto of the seal of the United States carries the biblical words, “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God”. American currency bears the inscription “In God We Trust”.



## Cultural Notes

1. **the Commonwealth:** the Commonwealth of Nations, 英联邦。包括英国及其自治领地和其他已独立的前殖民地、附属国, 1931年的《威斯敏斯特法案》宣告英联邦正式形成。
2. **European Union:** 欧盟。简称EU, 当今世界一体化程度最高的区域政治、经济集团组织, 现有27个成员国, 总部设在比利时首都布鲁塞尔。
3. **the Beatles:** 甲壳虫乐队/披头士乐团。20世纪最知名的英国流行乐队, 1956年成立, 由约翰·列侬、林格·斯塔路、保罗·麦卡特尼和乔治·哈里森组成。该乐队于1962年首次赢得国际声誉, 于1970年解散。
4. **Whit Sunday:** 圣灵降临节。复活节后的第七个星期日。
5. **melting pot:** 熔炉 / 种族杂居区。来自不同文化的移民或种族形成一个完整统一的社会。美国因其多种族共存现象而被称作“民族大熔炉”。
6. **General Motors:** 通用汽车公司。世界上最大的集制造、技术和服务于一体的多元化经营公司。
7. **the Great Seal:** 美国国印
8. **Theodore Roosevelt:** 西奥多·罗斯福。美国第26届总统, 1906年成为美国第一位诺贝尔和平奖获得者。与华盛顿、杰斐逊、林肯一起被公认为美国四大总统。
9. **rock'n'roll:** 摇滚乐。最早始于20世纪中叶, 由美国黑人音乐家制作, 专门为黑人听众演奏。20世纪60年代成为青少年喜爱的流行音乐。

## Lesson Review

### I. Vocabulary Building: Match each of the items on the left with its meaning on the right.

- |                                |                                       |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. pound sterling              | a. national anthem of the USA         |
| 2. <i>Star Spangled Banner</i> | b. national flag of the UK            |
| 3. European robin              | c. capital city of the USA            |
| 4. Washington, D.C.            | d. political system of the UK         |
| 5. constitutional monarchy     | e. nickname for the USA               |
| 6. melting pot                 | f. the most famous British playwright |
| 7. William Shakespeare         | g. British currency                   |
| 8. the Union Flag              | h. national bird of the UK            |



**II. Key Facts: Complete the following chart with the information from the texts.**

Nations Facts	UK	USA
Full Name	the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	the United States of America
Continent	Europe	North America
Territory	island	large landmass
Population	1)_____ million	303 million
Capital	London	2)_____
National Anthem	<i>God Save the Queen</i>	3)_____
National Flag	4)_____	Stars and Stripes
National Bird	European robin	5)_____
National Flower	rose, thistle, daffodil, shamrock	6)_____
Sign of the Currency	7)_____	\$
Government System	constitutional monarchy	8)_____
Government	Parliament	Congress
Head of State	monarch	president
Head of Government	Prime Minister	
Major Holidays	Christmas, 9)_____, _____	Christmas, Thanksgiving Day
Prominent Figures	10)_____	Mark Twain, Martin Luther King, Michael Jordan

**III. Discussion and Report: Discuss the following questions in groups and make an oral report to the class.**

1. What are the climatic differences between the UK and the USA?
2. Can you explain the two different political systems in the UK and the USA?
3. How do you understand the famous words by George Mikes: “When people say England, they sometimes mean Great Britain, sometimes the United Kingdom, sometimes the British Isles—but never England” ?

4. The USA is known as the “melting pot”. Do you think China can be called a melting pot, too? Give your reasons.

#### IV. Extensive Activities: Complete the following activities from resources available.

1. Talk about the meaning of the national flags, anthems, birds and flowers in the UK and the USA.
2. Prepare an oral introduction of the two countries.
3. Do you know anything about the following pictures? Give a brief introduction to each of them.



## Case Study

### Case 1

#### BRITISH RESERVE

When mentioning the characteristics of the British, the first words stepping into our minds may be reserve, humour, patience and modesty, of which reserve is the most typical of the British. The frequently quoted story about the British reserve was written by Richard Musman in the 1970s:

... The platform was full of middle-aged men wearing dark suits and carrying umbrellas. They all had neatly folded newspapers under their arms, either *The Times* or *The Telegraph*. They hardly greeted each other, though most of them knew one another, at least by sight. They did not shake hands. The train came in, and they all got into first-class compartments. As soon as they sat down, they unfolded their newspapers. The two walls of newspaper which stretched across the compartment were not lowered until the train approached Waterloo an hour later. Not a word was spoken. The return journey was no different, except that they were now reading evening newspapers...

Another way to show British reserve is their use of language. The British people seldom use extremely emotional words. Even when they are facing a fascinatingly beautiful view or recommending an excellent movie to friends, they would just say, “fine”, “not bad”, or “good”, which actually mean “great”, “terrific” or “excellent”.

However, British men are throwing away their stiff upper lips, according to a new survey. The once buttoned-up British are now happy to drop tears quite openly when facing emotions.

“30% of all British males have cried in the last month. That is a very high figure,” said Peter Marsh, Director of the Social Issues Research Centre. “Only 2% said they could not remember when they last cried.”

Long gone is the “No Tears—We’re British” time when feeling was considered a distinctly bad form. “In our poll of 2,000 people, very few people in their 40s or 50s had seen their father cry. Now it is very different,” Marsh told reporters. “77% of men considered crying in public increasingly acceptable.” Almost half the British men opened the floodgates over a sad movie, book or TV programme. Self-pity got 17% crying. 9% sobbed at weddings.



From the days of the Empire, the British have always considered themselves models of reserve, proudly mocking “emotional foreigners” who show no restraint.

“But we are clearly shifting. What we take as typical British reserve has been significantly eroded.” Women’s battle for equal rights has certainly had an effect both in the workplace and at home. “Men in their 20s or 30s are interacting with women on equal terms much more than a generation ago. That transfers into the workplace too,” Marsh said.

## Case 2

### AMERICANS' SENSE OF HUMOUR

Americans have a strong taste for slapstick (打闹剧的) comedy in various forms, and always try to show their quick-wittedness and sense of humour in face of irony.

Because everyone has ancestors, family, and friends of every possible race, colour and creed, and because sensitivity to such differences has reached unprecedented tenderness in recent years, it is considered rude to tell a joke that perpetuates (保持) an ethnic, social, religious, sexual, or racial stereotype. However, occupation, political persuasion or place of origin are still materials for humour.

For example: A Texan was boasting to an Arkansan about his ranch. "Why, my ranch is so big," he said, "that I start out in my truck in the morning to drive around it; it's night by the time I get home." The Arkansan nodded understandingly and said, "Yep, I had a truck like that once."

The only group detested enough to be a suitable butt for barbed humour is lawyers. Lawyers are unpopular because they're only consulted in times of distress, such as during divorces and murder defences. Any lawyer joke is sure to draw a laugh. Some lawyer jokes are specific:

#### *Example One:*

Q: Why don't sharks bite lawyers?

A: Professional courtesy.

Q: Why does Arizona have lots of vultures and Washington, D.C. have lots of lawyers?

A: Arizona got first choice.

#### *Example Two:*

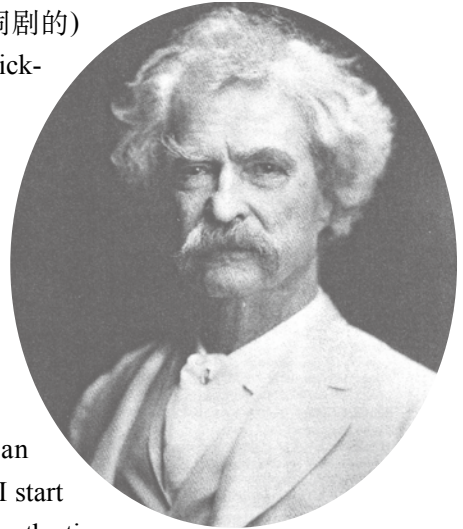
Q: What do you have when you have two lawyers buried up to their necks in sand?

A: Not enough sand.

Perhaps the most characteristic expression of American humour is the snappy retort. A classic example comes from President Abraham Lincoln. One day a man came to Abraham Lincoln's office, and saw Lincoln sitting with one leg stretching across the desk.

"Why, Mr. Lincoln," said the man sarcastically, "that's the longest leg I've ever seen!"

"Here's another just like it," said Lincoln, putting his other leg across the desk.



## Tips

以上摘选的故事充分反映了英美两国国民的性格特征。英国人以保守、绅士、含蓄、矜持著称；而美国人则以开朗、幽默、豁达、机智为世人称道。

## Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think are the reasons for this character difference between the British and the Americans?
2. Which character do you prefer? Why?
3. What are your impressions about the two peoples? Give specific examples to illustrate your point of view.

## Supplementary Reading

### Word Box

a spell of 一阵子（风、雨等）

centigrade *n.* 摄氏度

convention *n.* 会议，大会

fleet *n.* 舰队

meteorological *adj.* 气象的

skyscraper *n.* 摩天大楼

taciturn *adj.* 沉默寡言的

vice versa 反之亦然

borough *n.* 享有自治权的市镇或区

colonise *v.* 开拓（某地）成殖民地

ethnic diversity 民族多样化

Mecca *n.* 麦加（朝圣地）

metropolitan *adj.* 大城市的，大都会的

snag *n.* 问题，困难，麻烦

venue *n.* 举办地点，举行场所

War of Independence （美国）独立战争

## Passage A

### NEW YORK CITY

New York is built on a group of islands on the east coast of the US at a point where several rivers flow into the Ocean. With a metropolitan population of around 16 million, the “Big Apple” is the largest city in the US and one of the most dynamic urban regions in the world. It includes five boroughs of New York City (Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx



and Staten Island) as well as portions of northern New Jersey, southern Connecticut, southern New York, and Long Island.

The skyscrapers and the neon nightlife, together with the inner city ghettos, symbolise the excitements and contributions of the contemporary urban living of New York. But the city's strong presence is also built upon a dramatic history. The first westerner to discover these islands was an Italian explorer in 1524. Settled by the Dutch traders, seized at gunpoint by an English fleet, New York's development into a mega-city is as astounding as any in American history. New York was named by the British to honour the Duke of York and Albany, the brother of England's King Charles II, when New Amsterdam was taken from the Dutch in 1664. New York became the name of the state and the city. After the War of Independence, New York became the capital of the US for a short time before Washington, D.C.

The city is the financial capital of the world. The major financial institutions which serve most of the American economy are headquartered here. Among them, the New York Stock Exchange stands out. In addition, practically every country in the world has a branch bank in New York. There are an estimated 400 foreign and domestic banks in New York City.

As the largest port of entry to the US, with perhaps the largest international system of airport of the world, New York is a city of dazzling racial and ethnic diversity and a magnet for immigrants. With Headquarter of the United Nations located here, it is also the centre of international political exchange.

New York City is also the home of the Hudson River, the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty. Other thrills that New York City offers include shopping on Fifth Avenue, feeling the excitement of Times Square, the world of Wall Street, the vitality of Carnegie Hall, and the concert venue in Midtown Manhattan.

Also important is the fact that the city is still the Mecca of Western culture for the arts, literature and telecommunications industry. Birthplace to Herman Melville, Henry James and Joseph Heller, and adopted home of many other playwrights, artists, etc, New York has been relentless in overturning cultural conventions. The fashion, entertainment, publishing and television industries are headquartered there, and the city is also the main centre of their operations and the source of their talent. New York is:

a city of power: Wall Street and the heart of US capitalism, the UN and global politics;

a city of ambition: Ellis Island and the eternal migrant dream;

a city of drama, art, and music: Broadway, Tin Pan alley, museums, orchestras and popular music; and

a city of writers and visionaries: émigré intellectuals, novelists and poets, and chroniclers of urban life and voices of the dispossessed.



## THE WEATHER IN BRITAIN



“Other countries have a climate, in England we have weather.” This statement, often made by Englishmen to describe the peculiar meteorological conditions of their country, is both revealing and true. It is revealing because in it we see the Englishmen insisting once again that what happens in England is not the same as what happens elsewhere; its truth

can be ascertained by any foreigner who stays in the country for longer than a few days. In no country other than England, it has been said, can one experience four seasons in the course of a single day! Day may break as a balmy spring morning; an hour or so later black clouds may have appeared from nowhere and the rain may be pouring down. At midday conditions may be really wintry with the temperature down by about eight degrees or more centigrade. And then, in the late afternoon the sky will clear, the sun will begin to shine, and for an hour or two before darkness falls, it will be summer.

In England one can experience almost every kind of weather except the most extreme. Some foreigners, incidentally, seem to be under the impression that four months of the year the country is covered by a dense blanket of fog; this is not true. The snag is that we never can be sure when the different sorts of weather will occur. Not only we get several different sorts of weather in one day, but we may very well get a spell of winter in summer and vice versa.

This uncertainty about the weather has had a definite effect upon the Englishman's character; it tends to make him cautious, for example. A foreigner may laugh when he sees the Englishman setting forth on a brilliantly sunny morning wearing a raincoat and carrying an umbrella, but he may well regret his laughter later in the day! The English weather has also helped to make the Englishman adaptable. It has been said that one of the reasons why the English colonised so much of the world was that, whatever the weather conditions they met abroad, they had already experienced something like them at home!

And, of course, the weather's variety provides a constant topic of conversation. Even the most taciturn of Englishmen is always prepared to discuss the weather. And, though he sometimes complains bitterly of it, he would not, even if he could, exchange it for the more predictable climate of other lands.