



# The United Kingdom

## TERMS & NAMES

London

secede

Good Friday  
Accord

Charles Dickens

## MAIN IDEA

The United Kingdom is a small nation in Western Europe with a history of colonization.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

British economic, political, and cultural traditions have influenced nations around the world.



## Vocabulary

**Great Britain:**  
the name for the island that contains Scotland, England, and Wales

## A Kingdom of Four Political Regions

The United Kingdom is a small island nation of Western Europe. Its culture has had an enormous impact on the world. The nation's official name is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. **London**, located in southeastern England, is the capital.



Four different political regions make up the United Kingdom: Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland (see the map below). The British monarchy has ruled over the four regions for hundreds of years.

**National Government** Today, the government of the United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy. The British monarch is a symbol of power rather than an actual ruler. The power to govern belongs to Parliament, which is the national lawmaking body.

The British Parliament has two parts. The House of Lords is made up of nobles. Elected representatives make up the House of Commons. The House of Commons is the more powerful of the two houses.

The prime minister leads the government. He or she is usually the leader of the political party that wins the most seats in the House of Commons. The other political parties go into “opposition,” which means their role is to question government policies.

**Regional Government in Great Britain** Recently, the national government of the United Kingdom has returned some self-rule to some regions of Great Britain. In the late 1990s, voters in Wales approved

plans for their own assembly, or body of lawmakers. Also at this time, the Scots voted to create their own parliament. Both Wales’s assembly and Scotland’s parliament met for the first time in 1999.

### Vocabulary

**monarchy:**  
government by  
king or queen

### Reading Social Studies

**A. Clarifying**  
Who is the head of  
government in the  
United Kingdom?



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Location** • Which region of the United Kingdom is on a different island?
- Location** • Which body of water separates the United Kingdom from France?





## BACKGROUND

The roots of division in Northern Ireland go back to at least the 1600s, when English and Scottish colonists settled there. These Protestant settlers took over the lands of Irish Catholics.

**Governing Northern Ireland** Throughout the 20th century, there were conflicts in Northern Ireland between Irish Catholic nationalists and Irish Protestants who supported the government of the United Kingdom. In fact, during the 1960s, many Irish Catholics wanted Northern Ireland to **secede**, or withdraw from, the United Kingdom. They hoped to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. Irish Protestants—a majority in the region—generally wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom.

In 1969, riots broke out, and the British government sent in troops to stop them. Violence between groups of Protestants and Catholics continued for almost 30 years. In 1998, representatives from both sides signed the **Good Friday Accord**. This agreement set up the Northern Ireland Assembly, which represents both Catholic and Protestant voters. For this government to succeed in Northern Ireland, however, the former enemies will need to work together.



**Parliament** The Houses of Parliament have been used by the British government since 1547. The buildings are located in London, alongside the River Thames (tēms). They include the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and Westminster Hall. One of the most famous parts of this complex is the clock tower. Commonly called “Big Ben,” this is actually the name of the 13-ton bell inside the tower, not the tower itself.

In 1834, a fire destroyed much of the original buildings. The reconstruction by architect Sir Charles Barry was completed in 1860. The Houses of Parliament are visited and photographed by tourists from around the world.

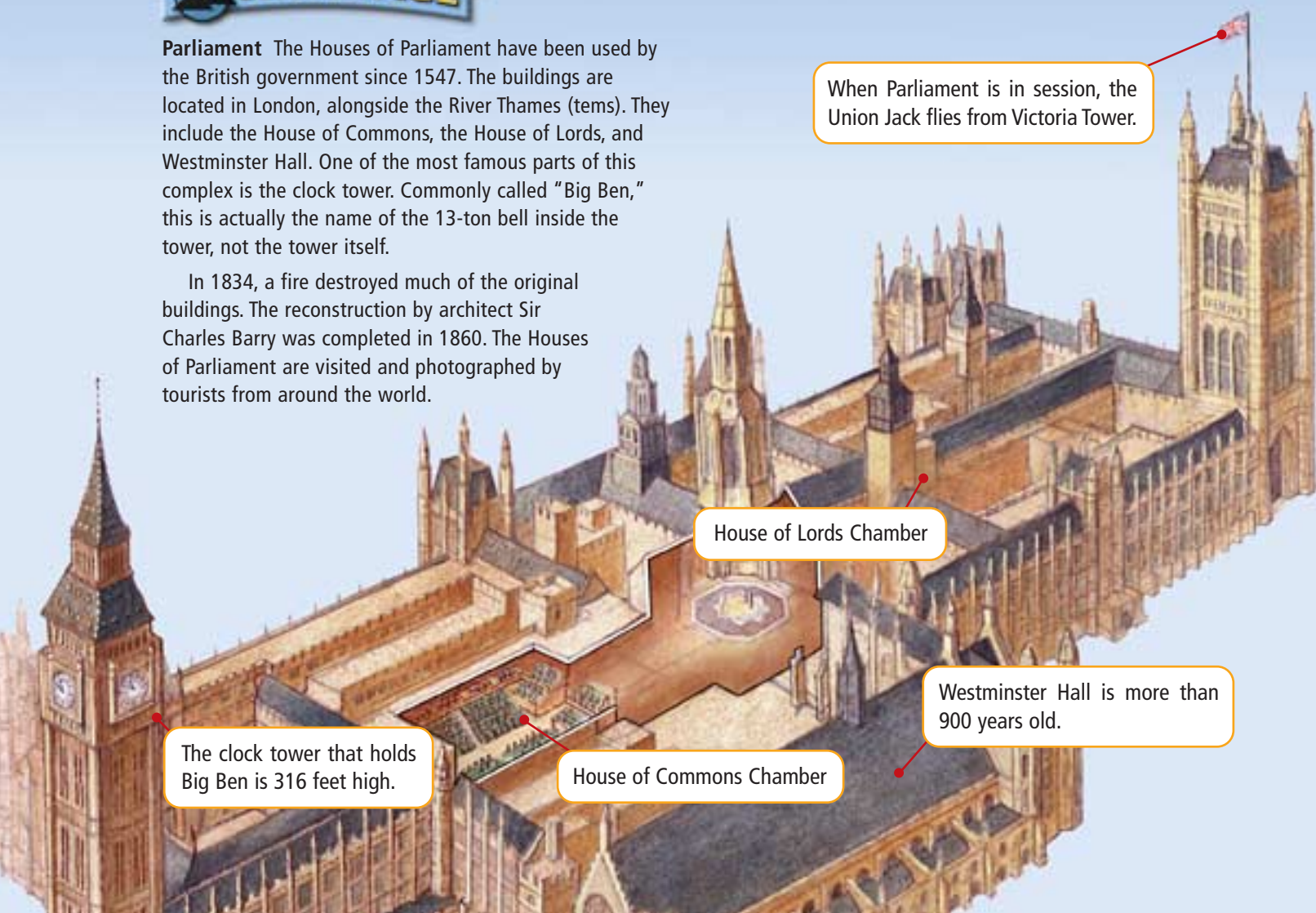
When Parliament is in session, the Union Jack flies from Victoria Tower.

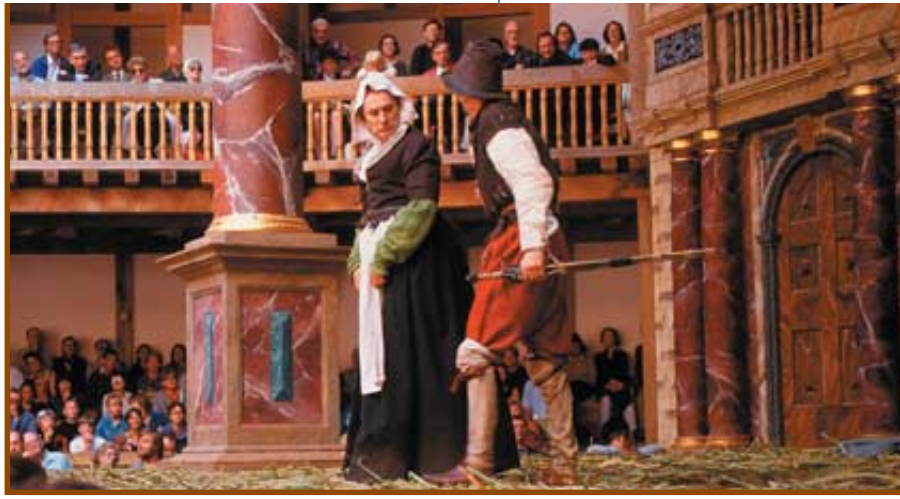
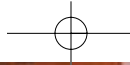
House of Lords Chamber

Westminster Hall is more than 900 years old.

The clock tower that holds Big Ben is 316 feet high.

House of Commons Chamber





**Region •** London's New Globe Theater is a replica of the 17th-century playhouse that originally hosted William Shakespeare's works. ◀

## Cultural Heritage

The United Kingdom has a rich cultural heritage that includes the great Renaissance playwright William Shakespeare. With a long history as an imperial power, the nation has been exporting its culture around the world for hundreds of years. For example, India, Canada, and other former British colonies modeled their governments on the British parliamentary system. British culture has also set trends in sports, music, and literature.

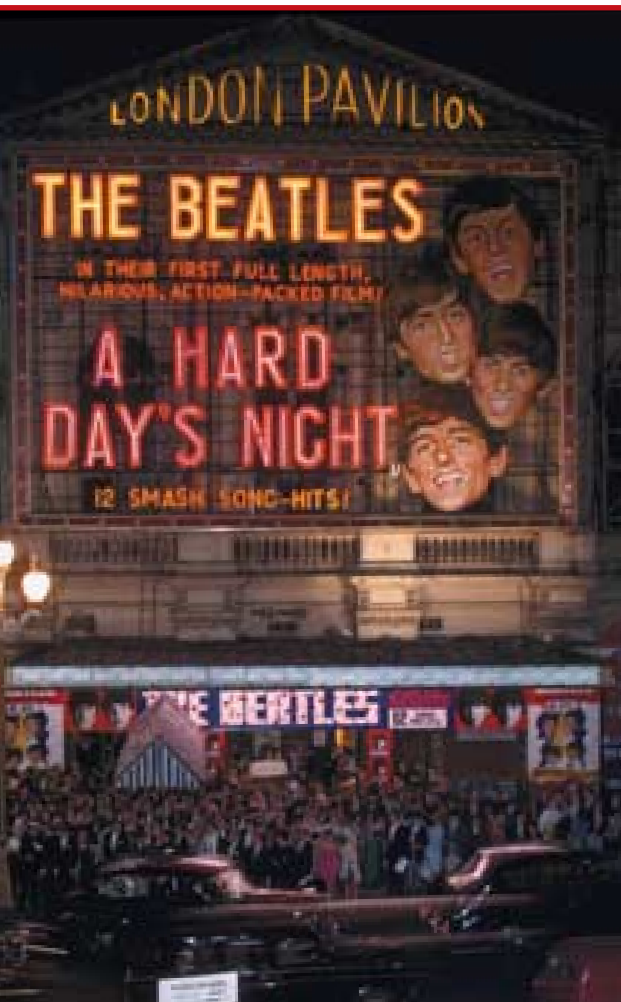
**Region •** In the early 1960s, the Beatles became wildly popular, not only in the United Kingdom, but also around the world. ▼

**Music** British music influenced the early music of Canada and the United States, both former British colonies. One British tune long familiar to people in the United States is “God Save the Queen.” You probably know it as “My Country, ’Tis of Thee.”

Several countries have put the words of their national anthems to this traditional British melody.

During the 1960s, many British musical groups—including the Beatles and the Rolling Stones—dominated music charts around the world. In later decades, other British singers, including Elton John, Sting, and Dido, became popular favorites.

**Literature** The best-known cultural export of the United Kingdom, aside from the English language itself, may be literature. In the 19th century, Mary Shelley dreamed up Frankenstein’s monster, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle first wrote about Sherlock Holmes. Another popular author of the time was **Charles Dickens** (1812–1870), who wrote *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol*.







## Reading Social Studies

**B. Recognizing Important Details** Why was the United Kingdom able to spread British culture across the world?

Two gifted British writers of the 20th century are Virginia Woolf and George Orwell. Modern British authors have also given the world many popular stories for young people. They include C. S. Lewis, who wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and J. K. Rowling, who created the Harry Potter books.



**Region •** J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books have captured the imaginations of children worldwide. ▲

## The British Economy

The United Kingdom is an important trading and financial center. Many British citizens also make their living in mining and manufacturing. Factories in the United Kingdom turn out a variety of products ranging from china to sports cars. The nation has plenty of coal, natural gas, and oil to fuel its factories, but it has few other natural resources.

The need for imported goods makes trade another major industry of the United Kingdom. The nation imports many raw materials used in manufacturing. It also imports food, because the farms of this nation produce only enough to feed about two-thirds of its large population.

## SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

### Terms & Names

- 1. Identify:** (a) London (b) secede  
(c) Good Friday Accord (d) Charles Dickens

### Taking Notes

- 2.** Use a chart like this one to describe the major aspects of the United Kingdom's modern government, economy, and culture.

Modern United Kingdom	
Government	
Economy	
Culture	

### Main Ideas

- 3. (a)** Identify the four regions that make up the United Kingdom.  
**(b)** What role does the British monarch play in the government of the modern United Kingdom?  
**(c)** What impact has the culture of the United Kingdom had on its colonies and on other parts of the world?

### Critical Thinking

#### 4. Analyzing Issues

Why do you think the conflict in Northern Ireland is so difficult to resolve?

#### Think About

- differences in religious beliefs
- recent changes in British regional governments
- the long period of continued violence

### ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Reread the information about British football from the "Dateline" feature that opens the section. Write a **description** of a sport that interests you.