

Big Ben

In this lesson, you will learn about London's iconic clock tower and the famous bell inside it. You will also talk about nicknames and how they stick. Let's begin!



Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What is Big Ben?
2. Where is Big Ben located?
3. Have you seen this landmark? What major tourist attractions have you seen around the world?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.
Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| ___ 1. formerly | a) an easily recognized and well-known place |
| ___ 2. landmark | b) to break open |
| ___ 3. careless | c) to make a ringing sound |
| ___ 4. complex | d) at a previous time |
| ___ 5. design | e) a guided walk around a building or area |
| ___ 6. crack | f) not careful, indifferent |
| ___ 7. chime | g) a group of buildings on one site |
| ___ 8. illuminate | h) the temporary or permanent closing of a facility |
| ___ 9. closure | i) to prepare a plan or drawing |
| ___ 10. tour | j) to light up |

Reading

1. Elizabeth Tower (sometimes called *St. Stephen's Tower*) is the UK's most famous **landmark**. **Formerly** called *Clock Tower*, it was renamed in 2012 for Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee. It overlooks the River Thames at the Palace of Westminster in Central London. The giant bell inside the tower is known as "Big Ben." The bell's nickname is so famous that many refer to the whole tower by this name.
2. On October 16, 1834, the Palace of Westminster (home of the British Parliament) caught on fire. The fire broke out when two **careless** workmen overloaded some furnaces.* Thousands of people watched as firefighters and volunteers tried to put out the flames.
3. Only a few parts of the **complex** survived the fire. In 1836, the government held a competition to **design** a replacement palace with a clock tower. The structure was completed in 1854. The tower was 315 feet (96 metres) high, and the bell inside it weighed over 13 tons.
4. The first bell **cracked** during the testing phase, so the metal was melted down to make a replacement bell. The replacement bell **chimed** for the first time on July 11, 1859. Two months later, this bell cracked too. Engineers replaced the hammer with a lighter one and repositioned the damaged bell.
5. Big Ben chimes from the tower's belfry at the top of every hour. Four smaller bells chime at every quarter. Great Westminster Clock always keeps perfect time from the top of the tower. It has four faces that **illuminate** at night. Another light shines when Parliament is in session.
6. During World War II, the clock went dark due to blackout regulations. Big Ben has also been silenced three times in history for repairs. The most recent **closure** was on August 21, 2017. Reconstruction is scheduled to last four years. During this time, the clock will not function and Big Ben will not chime.
7. Though Big Ben attracts thousands of tourists each year, the inside of the clock tower is not open to the public. Residents of the UK can make special arrangements for a **tour**.

*Note:

Tally sticks were once used to record debts. The workers were burning a large pile of them because they were no longer used by Parliament.

Did You Know?

A stack of British coins sits on top of the clock's pendulum. The weight balances the pendulum and ensures perfect timekeeping. By adding or removing a coin, the Keeper of the Great Clock can make sure the clock keeps perfect time. A single penny adjusts the time by 0.4 of a second per day.

Comprehension

A. True or False?

Read the statements below. Write T if the statement about London's clock tower and bell is true. Write F if the statement is false and correct the information in your notebook.

- _____ 1. Big Ben is the name of the tower, not the clock.
- _____ 2. The famous clock tower was renamed after Queen Elizabeth II.
- _____ 3. During World War II, the clock faces didn't light up.
- _____ 4. 2017 is the first year Big Ben has been silent since 1859.
- _____ 5. People from the US cannot tour inside the clock tower.
- _____ 6. Big Ben has a crack in it.
- _____ 7. The big bell in the clock tower chimes every 15 minutes.
- _____ 8. Elizabeth Tower was part of the original complex.

B. Timeline

Place the following in chronological order (1–8).
One item was not mentioned. Place a * beside this sentence and guess where it belongs in the timeline.

- _____ Firefighters tried to save the palace, but most of the complex was lost.
- _____ The first bell in the new clock tower cracked.
- _____ The clock tower went dark during World War II.
- _____ A lighter hammer was added to the second bell.
- _____ Two workmen started a fire in the Palace.
- _____ Many people protested the 2017 closure of the iconic landmark.
- _____ The British government held a competition to design a new palace with a clock tower.
- _____ Elizabeth Tower was scheduled for a four-year closure.

Vocabulary Review

A. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from page 1.
You may need to change the word forms.

1. Our school was _____ called St. Rose High.
2. Be careful not to _____ the mirror. That brings bad luck.
3. Listen for the big bell to _____. Then you'll know it's exactly noon.
4. The _____ of the tunnel created a traffic nightmare.
5. I'll give you a _____ of the complex so that you know your way around.
6. They _____ the clock so that you could see the time no matter where you stood.

B. Choose the Correct Word

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>1. The London Eye is a <u>landmark</u> on the river.</p> <p>a) iconic site
b) scary ride
c) observation deck</p> | <p>3. It was a <u>careless</u> mistake to leave that hole in the ground.</p> <p>a) expensive
b) irresponsible
c) detailed</p> | <p>5. The Paddington Hotel was <u>formerly</u> known as Scancourt Hotel.</p> <p>a) formally
b) in the past
c) nicknamed</p> |
| <p>2. The full moon <u>illuminated</u> the sky over London.</p> <p>a) fogged up
b) hung over
c) lit up</p> | <p>4. The <u>complex</u> needs a lot of repairs.</p> <p>a) construction area
b) difficulty
c) set of buildings</p> | <p>6. You can hear the smaller bells <u>chime</u> on the quarter hour.</p> <p>a) ring
b) hit
c) hammer</p> |

How “Big Ben” Got Its Name

A. Introduction

There are two theories as to how Big Ben got its name.

1. Sir Benjamin Hall’s name is inscribed on the bell. He was the *First Commissioner for Works* and oversaw the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament and the installation of the bell.
2. Ben Caunt was a champion heavyweight boxer in England in the 19th century. His nickname was “Big Ben.”

B. Survey

Survey a few classmates to find out which theory they believe. Find out if your classmates have a nickname (and story) too. Share your results.

Example Questions:

- Which theory do you think is true?
- Why does that theory seem more realistic to you?
- Do you have a nickname? How did you get this name, and why do you think it stuck?

“Nicknames stick to people, and the most ridiculous are the most adhesive.”

—Thomas C. Haliburton, author

Name	Theory	Reason	My Nickname (and how I got it)