

LEVELED BOOK • L

Big Ben and Westminster Palace



Written by Philip Slater

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A photograph of the interior of the House of Commons in the United Kingdom. The image shows a grand, ornate hall with a high, vaulted ceiling decorated with intricate gold patterns and paintings. The walls are also highly decorated with gold leaf and murals. Several large, ornate chandeliers hang from the ceiling, casting a warm glow. The room is framed by a large, arched doorway in the foreground, which is also highly decorated. The overall atmosphere is one of historical grandeur and elegance.

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Focus Question

Why are Big Ben and Westminster Palace a famous landmark?



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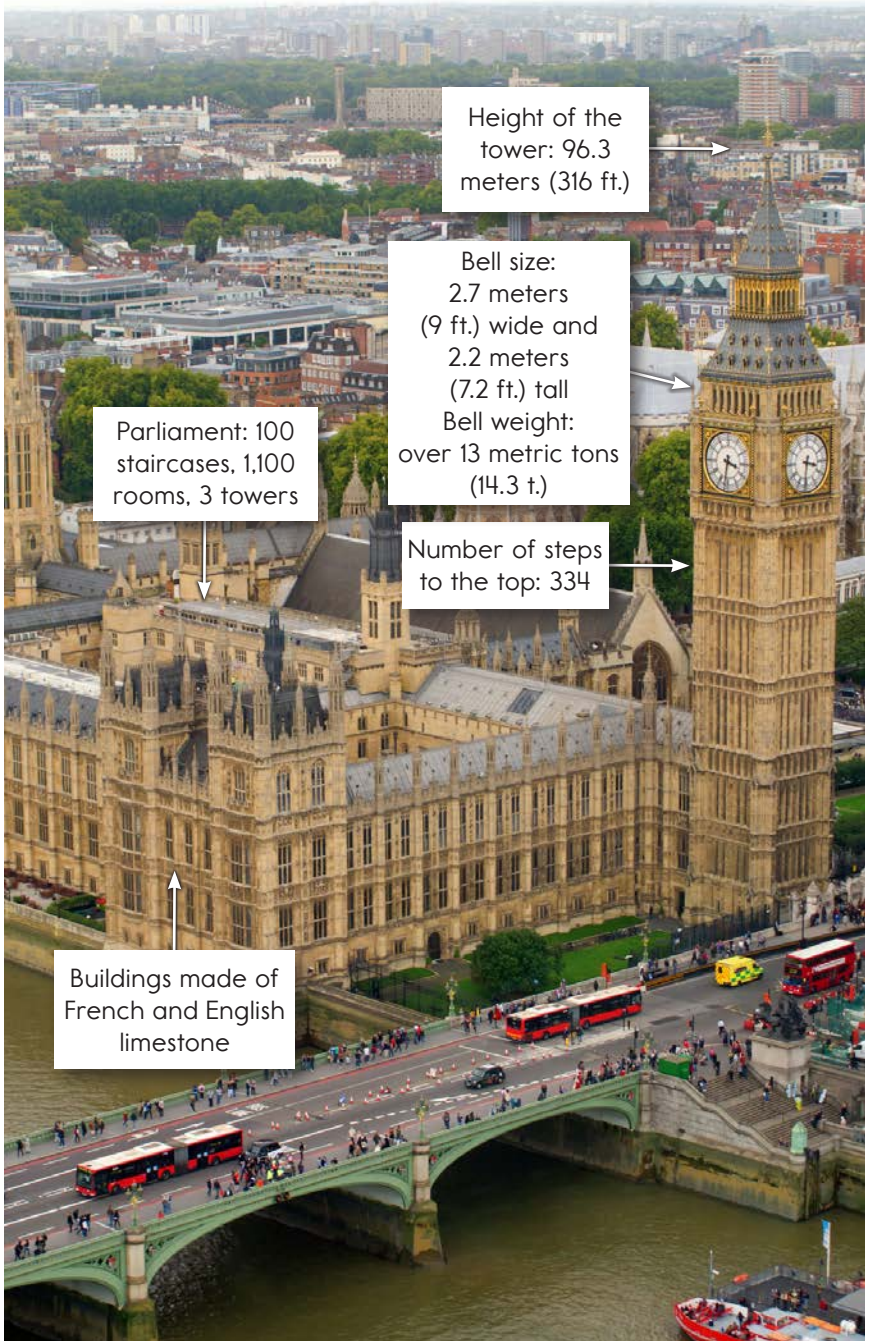


An average-sized person could fit inside Big Ben many times over.

A Famous Bell

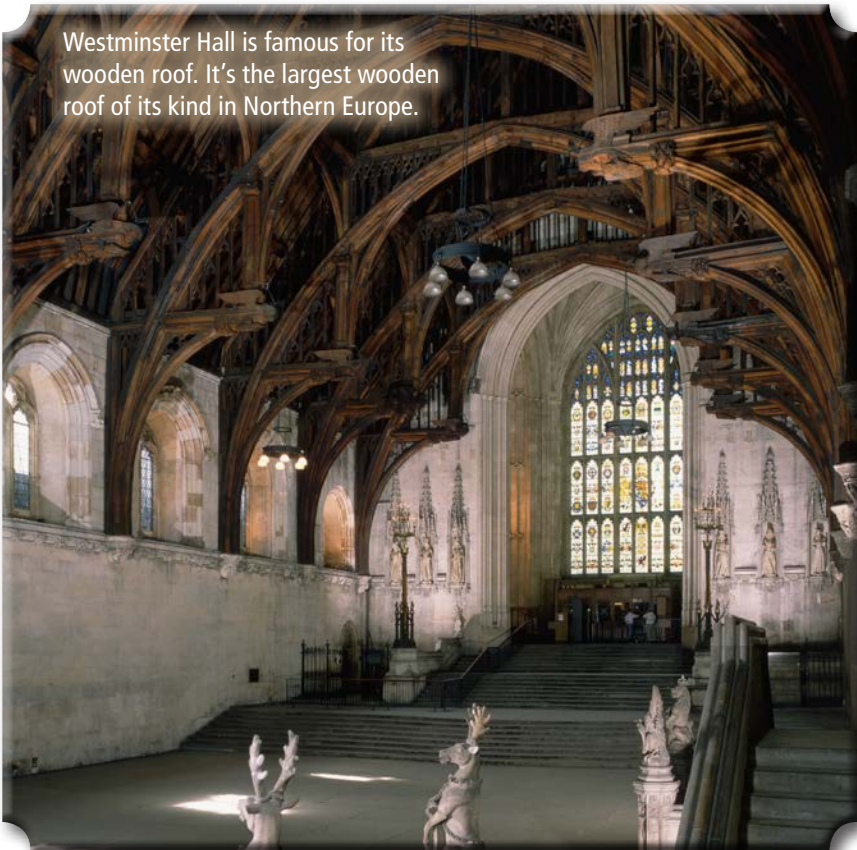
Big Ben is a huge bell at the top of a tall clock tower in London, England. The bell is as heavy as two elephants. Big Ben, the tower, and the clock are all important. They are part of Westminster Palace, which is home to **Parliament**. People all over the world have heard of Big Ben.

Parliament and Big Ben



An Old Building

Westminster Palace has several buildings. The oldest building is Westminster Hall. The hall is more than nine hundred years old and is still used today. Kings and queens lived at Westminster until 1512.



This painting from the London Museum shows the fire of 1834. Westminster Hall was the only building left after the fire.



Burned Down and Built Up

A fire in 1834 burned most of Westminster Palace. Six years later, there was a search to find someone to build the palace again. Charles Barry got the job. It took thirty years and a lot of money to build the new palace.

Augustus Pugin planned the clock that is part of the tower. Pugin decided to make a clock with four faces—one on each side. Each clock face has 312 pieces of glass.

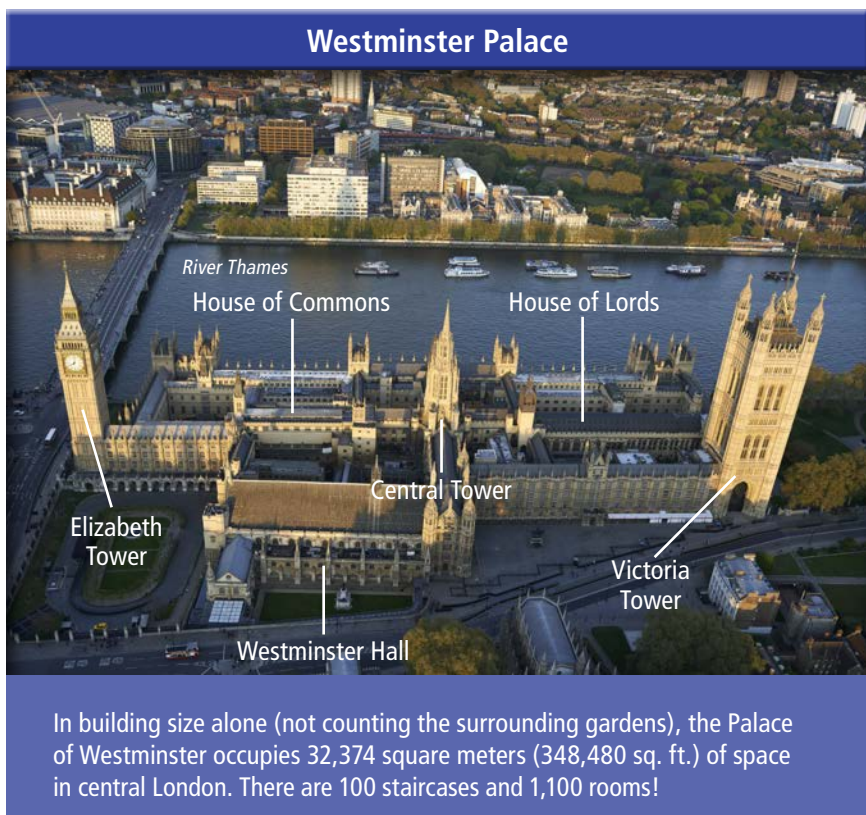
Augustus Pugin

Charles Barry



Barry and Pugin never got to see their finished buildings. They died before the work was finished.

Westminster Palace has three towers. For many years, the Victoria Tower was the largest square stone tower in the world. The Elizabeth Tower is the clock tower that holds Big Ben. The Central Tower was planned as a chimney for smoke from fireplaces inside the palace.





The House of Commons has 650 members.

Parliament

Westminster Palace is home to Parliament. Parliament is where people make **laws** for the **United Kingdom**. There are two houses in Parliament. People in the **House of Commons** help to decide what laws to make. They debate what the people need.

People in the **House of Lords** have titles, such as Lord and Lady. Others are important members of the Church of England. The House of Lords works with the House of Commons to make laws. When everyone agrees, the laws become *Acts of Parliament*.



The number of members in the House of Lords changes. Its members are given a title by the king or queen.



Four people hang on ropes to clean Big Ben's four faces.

An Amazing Clock

Big Ben's clock tells exactly the right time. People take good care of it. It takes a long time to clean the clock faces. People clean them every five years with soap and water. With its four faces, Big Ben is the biggest **chiming** clock in the world.

People who live in the United Kingdom can go to the top of the Elizabeth Tower and see Big Ben. There, they also get a great view of London and can see how the clocks work. Anyone can go to the Houses of Parliament, though. Everyone can take pictures of the clock tower from the outside.



Each year, millions of people from around the world visit Big Ben.

Every New Year's Eve, there is a huge fireworks show when Big Ben finishes chiming at midnight. Many people come from all over the United Kingdom to see the show. Big Ben always looks amazing on that night.



People listen to Big Ben's chimes and watch the fireworks on New Year's Eve.



Big Ben rings every fifteen minutes. People take good care of this landmark to make sure it always will.

Ben the Unstoppable

Big Ben is important to the British people. They hear its chimes every day on the radio and television.

When bombs damaged one of Big Ben's clock faces, the bells kept on chiming. Big Ben never stops!

Glossary

chiming (<i>adj.</i>)	capable of making a ringing sound (p. 12)
House of Commons (<i>n.</i>)	the part of the United Kingdom's government whose members are elected; the lower house (p. 10)
House of Lords (<i>n.</i>)	the part of the United Kingdom's government whose members are appointed; the upper house (p. 11)
laws (<i>n.</i>)	rules or sets of rules made by governments (p. 10)
Parliament (<i>n.</i>)	part of the government of the United Kingdom, consisting of the House of Commons and the House of Lords (p. 4)
United Kingdom (<i>n.</i>)	a country and political union in western Europe that includes England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (p. 10)

Words to Know

chiming

House of
Commons

House of Lords

laws

Parliament

United Kingdom

Front and back cover: Big Ben and Westminster Palace are in London, England.

Title page: The Royal Gallery in Westminster is used for very important events.

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Correlation

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Connections

Writing and Art

Pretend you visited Big Ben. Write a postcard to your teacher, including at least three facts from the book. Draw a picture of the landmark on the front of your card.

Social Studies

Make a model or diagram of Westminster Palace, including the Elizabeth Tower, the Victoria Tower, and the Central Tower. Label your model.

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