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language

Cultural Classroom

Lesson 1: United Kingdom

You can't get more **English** than that!

Every visitor to London lucky enough to see it is dazzled by the sound and spectacle of the Changing of the Guards at Buckingham Palace. Every day in spring and summer and every other day the rest of the year, the solemn re-staging of the traditional ceremony reassures the spectator that -- as the saying goes -- there will always be an England! After all, what more perfect symbol of a perpetually unchanging England could you possibly find than the red-coated figure of a Queen's Life Guard standing erect, bearskin on head, keeping watch over the headquarters of the British monarch?

After witnessing the ceremony one unseasonably warm spring day, we wanted to find out how the Guards maintain their oh-so-English stiff upper lip when it is obvious they must be feeling hot and tired. We were lucky to find an off-duty Guard willing to talk to us, a young man we'll call Hari X, who, like every member of Her Majesty's Life Guard, insisted upon absolute discretion (including anonymity) when discussing his "job."

The first thing we wanted to know was: Isn't the uniform uncomfortable, especially the bearskin hat? Hari laughed -- discreetly. "It's properly called a bearskin, plain and simple. If you'd ever worn one, you'd know it feels nothing like wearing a hat. Still -- to answer your question -- the uniform, including the bearskin, is something one simply gets used to wearing, and -- anticipating your next question -- once you've got it on, it's well nigh impossible to carry oneself in any way other than with the military bearing required of a Guard. So the uniform actually makes maintaining the proper posture, both marching and standing in formation, easier. In any event, we don't always wear the bearskin. Sometimes it's a visored helmet with a kind of plume but made of horsehair."

Our next question was: Are you what's called a "beefeater"? This time Hari's laughter was less discreet. "It's the Yeoman Warders at the Tower of London you're probably thinking of, although many people call us Guards beefeaters, too. I want to say, though, that in my particular case, it's an unfortunate choice of words. I am of East Indian descent, and my family are Hindu and in principle practice vegetarianism. In any case, the slaughter of cattle, which are sacred to Hindus, is strictly forbidden. So, no -- you cannot properly call me a 'beefeater'!"

READING FOR DETAIL

1. Where does the Changing of the Guards take place?
2. How often is the ceremony re-staged?
3. What are some words that describe the ceremony?
(dazzling, spectacular, solemn, traditional, impressive)
4. What is Buckingham Palace ?
5. What do the Guards wear?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is the stereotype of the typical Englishman?
2. In what ways (if any) does Hari fit the stereotype of the typical Englishman?
In what ways (if any) does he not?
3. In the third paragraph of the passage, Hari says, "anticipating your next question." What question did he think we were going to ask next?

FOCUS ON THE LANGUAGE

1. Word associations: match the words in column A with words in column B that have meanings associated with those in column A

A.	B.
posture	red coat
visitor	perpetually unchanging
uniform	The Queen
bearskin	In any case,
there will always be	spectator
In any event,	hat
Her Majesty	bearing

2. What's the difference between "to find out" and "to find" (see paragraph 2)?
3. In the third line of the third paragraph, there are two occurrences of "you'd" ("if you'd ever worn" and "you'd know"). What's the difference?

ENGLISH SOUNDS VS. ENGLISH SPELLINGS

One of the challenging things about English is the fact that the same combination of letters may represent different sounds in different words. In this passage, for example, the words "laughter" and "slaughter" have nearly the same spelling but very different pronunciations. Can you correctly pronounce these two words?

In the words below, a some portion of the word is underlined . Find a word in the passage that has the same combination of letters as the underlined portion of the words below but with a different pronunciation.

(Example: word = through; answer = enough)

<u>took</u>	<u>finger</u>
<u>phone</u>	<u>bother</u>
<u>lords</u>	<u>bear</u>
<u>catch</u>	<u>hearing</u>
<u>wound</u>	<u>geography</u>
<u>wind</u>	<u>arch</u>