

Preface

Many people keep diaries and write down everything in detail or simply make notes. Throughout the years I have made a list of the main events in my life and I have not bothered to keep a diary. However, while I was living and teaching in London, I started to write descriptions of people I encountered or observed around me or when I was on holiday. These observations have given me food for thought.

There are various ways of studying these observations. One could simply take each description separately, concentrating on reading and pronunciation practice, answering the questions, using one's own words and improving the use of vocabulary for discussion. However, if one wants to practise writing in one's own words, one could answer the questions first before oral work is done. Grammar, such as the use of tenses, adjectives and adverbs, prepositions and phrasal verbs could be introduced or revised by using the examples in the descriptions.

If one prefers to work on a project, then various observations could be used to fit in with a certain topic. One could choose, for example, travelling on public transport, jobs, school education in England, holidays, religion, lifestyles or social problems. Fashion, strange or unusual people, Africa, human behaviour or people from other countries could also be dealt with.

These are just a few ideas and I do hope everyone will be inspired to write their own observations.



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People on the Underground

Tooting Bec to Tottenham Court Road,

Balham to Baker Street,

Fulham Broadway to Finsbury Park,

Piccadilly to Paddington,

Heathrow to Harrow.

Travelling by London Underground is fascinating.

People, people, people in the underground.

People in rush hours, people in off-peak periods.

People sitting in a row opposite you.

People, all so different, all so fascinating.

Faces, expressions, fashions that cannot be captured
in a fleeting moment.

A camera would only change everything
and people would put artificial smiles on their faces.

Therefore only the memory remains and lingers on.

Comprehension and Discussion:

1. Why is travelling by London Underground so fascinating?
2. Why is it difficult to photograph people in the Underground?
3. Do you have any contact to people you see on the bus or train?
4. If you wanted to start a conversation with a person, how would you go about it?
5. How do people pass their travelling-time?

The Occupants of 124 Streathbourne Road

Mr. Saunders was my landlord

and I lived on the first floor.

The house was full of music
which you heard now and again at the front door.

There was the sound of jazz on the first floor.

I put on my record player and listened to jazz.

Mr. Saunders put his radio on and conducted classics.

Marjorie put Flamenco on and danced for her cats.

The house was full of music.

Every time I had visitors, we heard Mr. Saunders concert.

Every time I had visitors, Marjorie danced for us.

Now living in Düsseldorf, my friends ask me:

“Do you remember that mad house?”



Comprehension and Discussion:

1. Why could 124 Streathbourne Road be described as a lively house?
2. Is it annoying to hear music coming from another flat?
3. What role does music play in your life?
4. What effects can music have on people?
5. Is opera dying out? Give reasons.

Mr. Saunders

Mr. Saunders was my landlord
and had some rather strange habits.

When it came to making tea,
he would boil some milk in a saucepan,
add tea leaves to it, place the tea strainer
over his mug and pour the milky tea into it.

Having drunk that milky tea, he would proceed
into his sitting room, put on his classical music programme
on his radio and stand there and conduct it.

His door was left open, so his tenants knew he was
concentrating on his overture and didn't want to be disturbed.

Mr. Saunders had some really strange habits.



Comprehension and Discussion:

1. Why was Mr Saunders a strange person?
2. Is it a good idea to live in a house where the landlord or landlady lives?
3. Do people, living in high-rise buildings, get to know each other?
4. Would you like to live in a flat or a house?
5. If you lived on your own in a rented flat, what costs would you have every month?

Marjorie

Marjorie was Mr. Saunders' niece and lived at the top of the house.

She was over fifty and had spent many years in Spain doing Flamenco dancing at a Spanish night club.

Clickety-click, how the years had passed.

Clickety-click, she was back in London.

Clickety-click, she wanted to forget her arthritis.

Her five cats enjoyed the Flamenco music.

We enjoyed the Flamenco music every day.

She always played her castanets.

Clickety-click. At seven o'clock in the morning, she went down to get the milk bottles.

Clickety-click. At eight o'clock she went down to see if the postman had been there.

Clickety-click was her greeting and she danced her life away.

Comprehension and Discussion:

1. Why could Marjorie be described as being eccentric?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having relatives living in the same house?
3. Would you like to live on the ground floor or at the top of a house?
4. Why do young people want to leave home as soon as possible?
5. What do you think of men over thirty still living with their mother?

Miss Hartwell

Miss Hartwell was the mathematics teacher for our first year at grammar school.

She was tall, hearty and horsey.

She had a big mouth and a fine set of teeth.

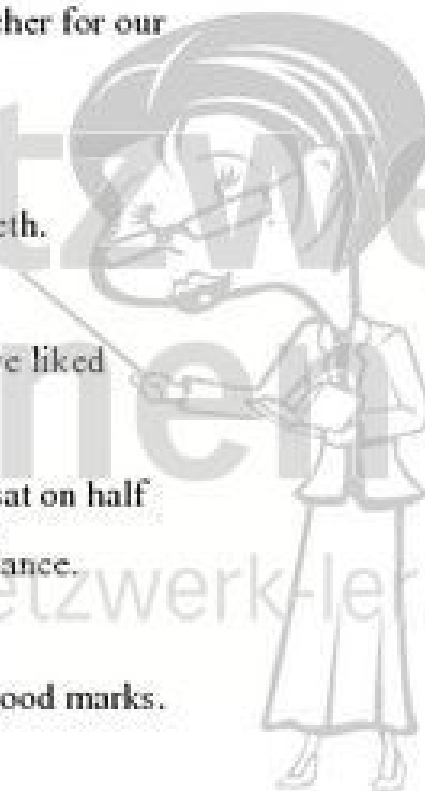
She talked a lot and spat a lot.

Those sitting in the front row would have liked to put up their umbrellas.

When she came round to help you, she sat on half of your chair and you had to learn to balance.

She was tall, hearty and horsey.

She was a good teacher and we all got good marks.



Comprehension and Discussion:

1. Why was Miss Hartwell a bit strange?
2. What were her positive points?
3. Could you describe a teacher at your last school?
4. Do teachers have an easy time at school?
5. What makes a good teacher?

Patrick

Patrick was full of mischief.

He came beaming into the classroom.

He was going to have fun. We were going to have fun.

He was beaming, his eyes were twinkling.

You couldn't help liking him,

even if he disturbed the lesson now and again.

Jokingly I told him, "You know where the looney bin is?"

"That's a good word", he said. "Just the right name for my skateboard".

A week later, he brought his skateboard to school and showed us his "looney bin" painted on it proudly.

We had a lesson on skateboards. He beamed and his eyes twinkled.

He promised he was going to learn more English at home.

"Oh yes", I said, "and what about your skateboard?"



Comprehension and Discussion:

1. What kind of pupil was Patrick?
2. What is a looney bin and how is it called today?
3. Are skateboards still popular?
4. Which points are judged in skateboard competitions?
5. Should normal health insurances cover skateboard injuries?

Mark

Mark had blonde hair, blue eyes and was bashful.

At the age of eleven, he worried a lot.

That was due to the fact he was epileptic.

Luckily, he didn't have any fits in my lessons and always told me not to worry.

Mark worried a lot.

He was more mature than the other pupils.

He went out at certain times to inject himself.

He told us not to worry. Mark was brave and helpful.

He loved cleaning the blackboard, looking after the nature table, feeding the goldfish and watering the plants.

He even took two mice in a cage home with him when Trevor couldn't find a place for them during the holidays.

Mark did everything so seriously and always told us not to worry.

Comprehension and Discussion:

1. Why did Mark worry a lot at the age of eleven?
2. How did he behave at school?
3. What do you know about schools in England?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a school uniform?
5. "School days are the best days of your life!" Comment on this.

Denis the Menace

Denis was a menace.

Blonde, blue eyes and skinny.

He sat next to Ebenezer who was dark-skinned, had dark brown eyes and curly hair.

His parents came from Trinidad, but he was born in London.

Denis was a menace. He couldn't sit still.

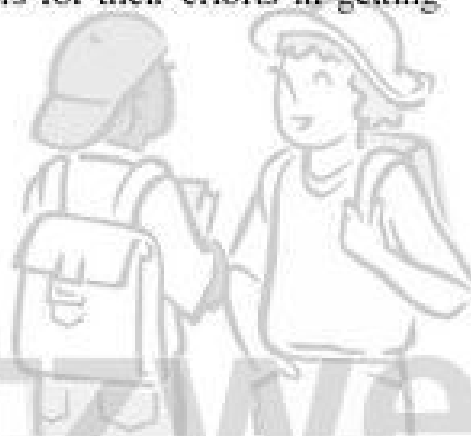
Ebenezer couldn't sit still either.

Both loved sport and were not interested in reading, writing and arithmetic.

Being eleven years old they were repeatedly told how important it was for the future.

Then they were given the jobs of being class journalists and sport reporters.

They even got an extra game of rounders for their efforts in getting something together.



Comprehension and Discussion:

1. What is a menace?
2. How can you deal with a menace?
3. How did Denis and Ebenezer get on at school?
4. Why do some pupils have problems in learning?
5. What is the ideal number of pupils in a class?