**Topic N1 "The British Parliament"**

The British Parliament is the oldest in the world. It originated in the 12th century as Witenagemot, the body of wise counselors whom the King needed to consult pursuing his policy. The British Parliament consists of the House of Lords and the House of Commons and the Queen as its head. The House of Commons plays the major role in law-making. It consists of Members of Parliament (called MPs for short). Each of them represents an area in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. MPs are elected either at a general election or at a by-election following the death or retirement. Parliamentary elections are held every 5 years and it is the Prime Minister who decides on the exact day of the election. The minimum voting age is 18. And the voting is taken by secret ballot. The election campaign lasts about 3 weeks, The British parliamentary system depends on political parties. The party which wins the majority of seats forms the government and its leader usually becomes Prime Minister. The Prime Minister chooses about 20 MPs from his party to become the cabinet of ministers. Each minister is responsible for a particular area in the government. The second largest party becomes the official opposition with its own leader and "shadow cabinet". The leader of the opposition is a recognized post in the House of Commons. The parliament and the monarch have different roles in the government and they only meet together on symbolic occasions, such as coronation of a new monarch or the opening of the parliament. In reality, the House of Commons is the one of three which has true power. The House of Commons is made up of six hundred and fifty elected members, it is presided over by the speaker, a member acceptable to the whole house. MPs sit on two sides of the hall, one side for the governing party and the other for the opposition. The first 2 rows of seats are occupied by the leading members of both parties (called "front benches") The back benches belong to the rank-and-life MPs. Each session of the House of Commons lasts for 160-175 days. Parliament has intervals during his work. MPs are paid for their parliamentary work and have to attend the sittings. As mention above, the House of Commons plays the major role in law making. The procedure is the following: a proposed law ("a bill") has to go through three stages in order to become an act of parliament, these are called "readings". The first reading is a formality and is simply the publication of the proposal. The second reading involves debate on the principles of the bill, it is examination by parliamentary comity. And the third reading is a report stage, when the work of the comity is reported on to the house. This is usually the most important stage in the process. When the bill passes through the House of Commons, it is sent to the House of Lords for discussion, when the Lords agree it, the bill is taken to the Queen for royal assent, when the Queen sings the bill, it becomes act of the Parliament and the Law of the Land. The House of Lords has more than 1000 members, although only about 250 take an active part in the work in the house. Members of this Upper House are not elected, they sit there because of their rank, the chairman of the House of Lords is the Lord Chancellor. And he sits on a special seat, called "WoolSack" The members of the House of Lords debate the bill after it has been passed by the House of Commons. Some changes may be recommended and the agreement between the two houses is reached by negotiations.

**Topic N2 "US Congress"**

The United States of America is a federal republic consisting of 50 states. Each of which has its own government ("state government"). In some ways the United States is like 50 small countries. Each state has its own governor, its own police and its own laws. The present constitution was proclaimed in 1787 in Philadelphia, the President is the head of the whole country and the government and "commandeering chief" of the armed forces. He makes the most important decisions and chooses the ministers, the members of his cabinet. But the President cannot do just what he wants. The Congress must agree first. Americans choose a new president every four years. The residence of the President is the White House in Washington, the Capital city. The government of the whole country (the Federal government) works from Washington, this is where the Congress is based. The Capitol is the seat of the US Congress. Congress is the American parliament which consists of 2 chambers. The Senate and the House of Representatives. The first Congress met in 1789 in New York city. The membership then consisted of 22 senators and 59 representatives. Today the House of Representatives has 435 members. Elections to the house take place every 2 years. There are 100 senators (2 from each state), they are elected to serve for a period of six years, but every two years elections to the senate took place when one/third of its members must be changed or re-elected. Election day is always in the month of November, on the first Tuesday, after the first Monday. Americans who aren't yet 25 years old have no right to be elected to the House of Representatives. Whose, who are under 30 can't be elected in the Senate. The main political parties in the United States of America are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

**Topic N3 "Business Trips"**

Never before in the history of the world have businessmen traveled so much as they do today. It is not surprising because we are living in a world of growing international trade and expanding economic and technical cooperation. Fascinating though it is for tourist travelling, however, has become the most tiring of all the occupations for many businessmen and experts. Choosing a comfortable hotel to stay at is, therefore, a matter of some importance. There are plenty of good hotels, motels, and guest houses, in the world, conveniently located for major business centers. Many developing countries, such as India, Egypt, Nigeria, Lybia, etc have excellent hotels. Their numerous facilities include both: large and small cocktail barber's shops and conference halls, equipped with simultaneous, multilingual translation systems. There are parking areas which can accomodate a lot of cars. It might be useful for travelling businessmen and tourists to know that tailor shops, shoe repair shops and laundry, dry cleaning services are available for guests. People in the office help guests to book train or steamer tickets and rent a car. They are also ready to give all necessary information. Nowadays people who go on business mostly travel by air as it is the fastest means of travelling. Passengers are requested to arrive at the airport 2 hours before departure time on international flights and an hour on domestic flights as there must be enough time to complete the necessary airport formalities. Passengers must register their tickets, weigh in and register the luggage. Most airlines have at least 2 classes of travel: first class and economy class which is cheaper. Each passenger of more than 2 years of age has a free luggage allowance. Generally this limit is 20kg for economic class passenger and 30kg for first class passenger. Excess luggage must be paid for except for some articles that can be carried free of charge. Each passenger is given a boarding pass to be shown at departure gate and again to the stewardess when boarding the plane. Watch the electric sign flashes when you are on board, when the "Fasten Seat Belts" sign goes on do it promptly and also obey the "No Smoking" signal. Do not forget your personal effects when leaving the plane.

**Topic N4 "Customs and Traditions"**

There are many customs and traditions in England. And I would like to tell you some of them. First tradition is called "Wrong side of the bed" When people are bad tempered we say that they must have got out of bed on the wrong side. Originally, it was meant quiet literally. People believe that the way they rose in the morning affected their behavior throughout the day. The wrong side of the bed was the left side. The left always having been linked with evil. Second custom is called "Blowing out the candles" The custom of having candles on birthday cakes goes back to the ancient Greeks. Worshippers of Artemis, goddess of the moon and hunting, used to place honey cakes on the altars of her temples on her birthday. The cakes were round like the full moon and lit with tapers. This custom was next recorded in the middle ages when German peasants lit tapers on birthday cakes, the number lit indicating the person's age, plus an extra one to represent the light of life. From earliest days burning tapers had been endowed with mystical significance and it was believed that when blown out they had the power to grant a secret wish and ensure a happy year ahead. And the last tradition I would like to tell you is called "The 5th of November" On the 5th of November in almost every town and village in England you will see fire burning, fireworks, cracking and lighting up the sky. You will see too small groups of children pulling round in a home made cart, a figure that looks something like a man but consists of an old suit of clothes, stuffed with straw. The children will sing:" Remember, remember the 5th of November; Gun powder, treason and plot". And they will ask passers-by for "a penny for the Guy" But the children with "the Guy" are not likely to know who or what day they are celebrating. They have done this more or less every 5th of November since 1605. At that time James the First was on the throne. He was hated with many people especially the Roman Catholics against whom many sever laws had been passed. A number of Catholics chief of whom was Robert Catesby determined to kill the King and his ministers by blowing up the house of Parliament with gunpowder. To help them in this they got Guy Fawker, a soldier of fortune, who would do the actual work. The day fixed for attempt was the 5th of November, the day on which the Parliament was to open. But one of the conspirators had several friends in the parliament and he didn't want them to die. So he wrote a letter to Lord Monteagle begging him to make some excuse to be absent from parliament if he valued his life. Lord Monteagle took the letter hurrily to the King. Guards were sent at once to examine the cellars of the house of Parliament. And there they found Guy Fawker about to fire a trail of gunpowder. He was tortured and hanged, Catesby was killed, resisting arrest in his own house. In memory of that day bonfires are still lighted, fireworks shoot across the November sky and figures of Guy Fawker are burnt in the streets.

**Topic N5 "Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)"**

Thomas Jefferson one of the American President of the past was born in Virginia in 1743. When he was 14 years old, his father died and the young boy was left to choose for himself what to do. Jefferson studied literature and languages. He also studied to be a lawyer, and later he wrote many of the Virginia laws. One of the laws for which he worked very much was a law to allow many child to go to school free. Schools in America were only for the children whose parents were rich. When Jefferson was still a young man he was one of those who wanted freedom from England. His most outstanding achivment was as chief author of the Declaration of Independence, a statement of human rights and liberties. It was read to the happy people on the 4th of July, 1776. Jefferson also drew up the constitution for his state, Virginia, and served as its governor. He was sent to France as the foreign minister of the United States of America and afterwards was President's Washington secretary of state. A few years later he became the country's third president, serving in this position for 2 terms. The author of the Declaration of Independence did another important thing for the American people. He worked out a plan for a university where the students and teachers could live and work together in a village build for them. It was one of the first schools to teach science. Today, it is the university of Virginia. This well known man was also a self-taught architect. He introduced the simple classical design to America when he designed the Virginia State Capital Building. He also designed his own home, he remained the most influential architect of his time. Thomas Jefferson did many useful things during his life time and he always thought of how to help ordinary people. He was a practical and theoretical scientist too. Jefferson's best traditions have been kept up by American progressive people in their struggle for peace and democracy.

**Topic N6 "Pets"**

The English people like animals very much. Pet: dogs, cats, horses, ducks, canaries, chickens and other friends of men have a much better life in Britain, than anywhere else. In Britain they have special dog shops, selling food, clothes and other things for dogs. There are dog hair-dressing saloons and dog cemeteries. The English arrange dogs' shows and organize dogs' supper parties for winners of dogs' competitions. They do all they can to make animals feel well in their home and outside their homes too. There were photographs in English newspapers of a mother duck and her young family, crossing slowly the road from Hyde Park to Kensington Garden. All traffic around was stopped to let Mamma Duck and her little ones walked quietly from one park to another. In recent years the English began to show love for more exotic animals such as crocodiles, elephants, tigers, cobras, camels. You won't be surprised, we think, when we tell you that London Airport has a special "animal hotel". Every year thousands of animals arrive at London Airport, some stay the night there; others stay several weeks. In one month, for example, "the hotel" looked after 47000 creatures: birds, insects, fish, elephants, monkey and other animals. There are about 4000000 dogs, 6000000 cats, 8000000 caged birds and lots of other animals in Britain. The English people believe that they are the only nation on the Earth that is really kind to its animals.

**Topic N7 "Washington, DC"**

The city of Washington, the capital of the United States of America is located in the District of Columbia (DC for short) Many people consider Washington DC to be one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It is filled with many parks, wide streets and impressive buildings. In the centre of the city, in Capitol Park, visitors' eyes focus on the Capitol, where Congress convince to inect laws. Many visitors come to Washington DC to see the White House. It is the greatest attraction for many of them. The White House, the official residence of the President, is situated at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. The largest room in this building of over the hundreds room is the East Room, scene of many state receptions, balls and musicals. Other famous rooms are: the Green Room, the Blue Room, the Red Room, which are used for afternoon teas and for receptions held before state dinners. The Blue Room, the most formal of these "colors" room is an oval-shaped room connecting the Green and the Red Rooms. On the second floor, the floor with the family quarters and quests rooms, is the Lincoln Room, which one served as an office for president Lincoln but today serves as an honor guest room. In this room Lincoln signed the emancipation proclamation of 1863. Other landmarks in Washington DC include memorials to three Presidents: The Washington Memorial, The Lincoln Memorial and The Jefferson Memorial; The Library of Congress, The National Gallery of Art, The John F. Kennedy center for the Performing Arts. The Capitol is in the very center of Washington. It is located on the Capitol Hill, the highest point in the city. The Capitol is the highest building in Washington. There is a law in Washington not to build buildings higher than the Capitol. The corner stone of the Capitol was laid by George Washington on Sep 18th, 1793. The Capitol is the seat of the government of the United States of America.