



Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift

ABOUT THE STORY

Gulliver's Travels is a book in four parts. The first part, *A Voyage to Lilliput*, tells the story of a traveller called Gulliver and a voyage he takes. During the voyage, his ship is wrecked in a storm. He wakes up on an island called Lilliput which is inhabited by very small people (the Lilliputians), who are less than six inches (15 cm) tall. They have the same characteristics as the people from Gulliver's homeland – they are mean, vicious, corrupt, greedy and jealous. The Kingdom of Lilliput and the people who rule it is a satirical representation of the United Kingdom and the government of the time. In the extract below, Gulliver describes seeing the emperor's palace for the first time.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Swift was an Irish novelist who lived from 1667–1745. After finishing university in Dublin, he moved to England and became politically active, working closely with members of the English government. After the government lost power, Swift couldn't find work, so he returned to Ireland. At that time, Ireland had many social and economic problems. Swift interested in these problems and started writing about them in his novels, in the form of satire. *Gulliver's Travels*, published in 1726, is his most famous satire, in which he makes fun of the governments of the time, as well as the problems that were present in both Ireland and England.

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The emperor's palace is in the centre of the city where the two great streets meet. It is enclosed by a wall of two feet high, and twenty feet distance from the buildings. I had his majesty's permission
5 to step over this wall; and, the space being so wide between that and the palace, I could easily view it on every side. The outward court is a square of forty feet, and includes two other courts: in the inmost are the royal apartments,
10 which I was very desirous to see, but found it extremely difficult; for the great gates, from one square into another, were but eighteen inches high, and seven inches wide. Now the buildings of the outer court were at least five feet high,
15 and it was impossible for me to stride over them without infinite damage to the pile, though the walls were strongly built of hewn stone, and four inches thick. At the same time the emperor had a great desire that I should see the magnificence
20 of his palace; but this I was not able to do till

three days after, which I spent cutting down with my knife some of the largest trees in the royal park, about a hundred yards distant from the city. Of these trees I made two stools, each
25 about three feet high, and strong enough to bear my weight. The people having received notice a second time, I went again through the city to the palace with my two stools in my hands. When I came to the side of the outer court, I stood upon
30 one stool, and took the other in my hand; this I lifted over the roof, and gently set it down on the space between the first and second court, which was eight feet wide. I then stepped over the building very conveniently from one stool to the other, and
35 drew up the first after me with a hooked stick. By this contrivance I got into the inmost court and, lying down upon my side, I applied my face to the windows of the middle stories, which were left open on purpose, and discovered the most
40 splendid apartments that can be imagined.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

enclosed (line 2): surrounded

desirous (line 10): if you are desirous of something you want to have or do it

inches (line 12): British measurement of length. One inch is equivalent to 2.54 cm.

stride (line 15): walk with long steps

pile (line 16): a large amount of something

hewn (line 17): rock or wood cut into a rough shape

yards (line 23): British measurement of length. One yard is equivalent to 0.9 m.

stools (line 24): seats that have legs but no support for your back or arms

feet (line 25): British measurement of length. One foot is equivalent to 0.3 m.

bear (line 25): support

stept (line 33): old-English spelling of stepped

hooked stick (line 35): a stick with a curved end

contrivance (line 36): invention

inmost (line 36): in the centre

applied (line 37): put something on a surface

splendid (line 40): beautiful, lovely



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Before reading

- 1 Jonathan Swift wrote different types of material using different styles. Match the different types of writing (1–5) with their definitions (a–e).

- 1 novels
 2 satire
 3 essays
 4 propaganda
 5 poems

- a Short pieces of writing about a particular subject.
 b These often have lines that rhyme.
 c Long pieces of fictional writing.
 d This uses humour to criticise people or issues, especially political issues.
 e This tries to convince you to think in a certain way.

- 2 Read the first line of the excerpt: *The emperor's palace is in the centre of the city where the two great streets meet.* In pairs, discuss what you think the palace might look like. What is inside it? Who lives there?

While reading

- 1 Read the text. Answer the questions in your own words.

- 1 Describe the location of the palace.

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- 2 What did Gulliver want to do most?

.....

- 3 Why was it difficult for Gulliver to see the royal apartments?

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- 4 Why did Gulliver cut down so many trees?

.....

- 5 Was he successful in his plan?

.....

- 2 Find words in the excerpt which describe these features of the places in the text.

- 1 Words which describe the palace as a building.

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- 2 Words which describe Lilliput as a very small place.

.....

- 3 Gulliver is finally able to see the 'splendid apartments'. Based on the information already given about the palace in the text, what do you think these look like? Write three sentences to describe them.

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After reading

- 1 Work in a small group. Discuss these questions.

- 1 What is amusing about these two sentences from the text?

I had his majesty's permission to step over this wall ...

At the same time the emperor had a great desire that I should see the magnificence of his palace ...

- 2 What do you think are the similarities and differences between Lilliput and where Gulliver comes from?

- 2 Work in the same group. Imagine you are on a voyage and arrive at a place that is different to your own society. Discuss what some of the key differences might be, as well as things that are similar, and make notes in the table. Use some of the ideas below to help you, as well as your own ideas.

physical surroundings • the people • transport
 language • the government

Differences	Similarities

- 3 Now write a short paragraph describing arriving at the place. Say what is similar and different to your own society.