1 Visiting Canada

A Letter from Nathaniel **Dear Mom and Dad, I'm having a great time here in Toronto, Ontario. Aunt Susie and Uncle Rick are taking good care of me. Cousin Joe is fun to play with, and Cousin Margaret is really smart and tells me lots of neat stuff.**

I have to admit I was a little scared when I came here last week. You said I'd have a great time visiting our Canadian relatives. Then you showed me on a map that Canada is the country just north of the United States. But it's still a long way from our house in Kansas to Ontario in Canada. And I worried because I knew that Canada was a different country.

I was afraid that when I got there, people would be wearing strange clothes and speaking a language I didn't understand. They might be eating strange food I didn't like. And if I couldn't eat the food, I might starve! It turned out I really didn't have to worry about the food. The first day there, I ate cornflakes for breakfast and hamburgers for lunch.

As you can see, Canada is a huge country. It is made up of ten provinces and three territories. Can you find Toronto, Ontario, where Nathaniel is visiting?

It felt just like home! And I could understand everything that people said, because they were speaking English, just like we do. The neighborhood here even looks like our neighborhood back in Kansas. Best of all, my favorite TV shows are on here, too!

The second day I was here, Aunt Susie took me grocery shopping. At the checkout counter, the clerk said, "That'll be thirty dollars and eighty-two cents, please." I thought, wow! Even the money here is just like the money back home—dollars and cents. I was starting to wonder if I'd really left home at all.

But then I started figuring out how Canada really is different from the United States. As we were leaving the grocery store, Aunt Susie said, "Nathaniel, would you like to see some Canadian money?"

This Canadian grocery store looks much different from a U.S. supermarket.

The Canadian one-dollar bill has words written in French and in English.

She handed me some paper money. I saw right away that it wasn't like American money. For one thing, it wasn't green. Also, on the front of it was a picture of a woman I'd never seen before. "That's the queen of England," she said.

I asked why the queen of England was on Canadian money.

Aunt Susie said, "I'm sure you study American history at school. You probably know that hundreds of years ago, America was ruled by England. But the English didn't rule only what is now the United States. They ruled Canada as well. Then, in the 1700s, the Americans fought a revolution to free themselves of English rule. The United States became a separate country, but Canada stayed a **colony** of England. Today we're an independent country, but we're still proud of our English **culture.** In fact, we say that the queen of England is Canada's "head of state."

vocabulary

colony land that is settled far from the country that governs it

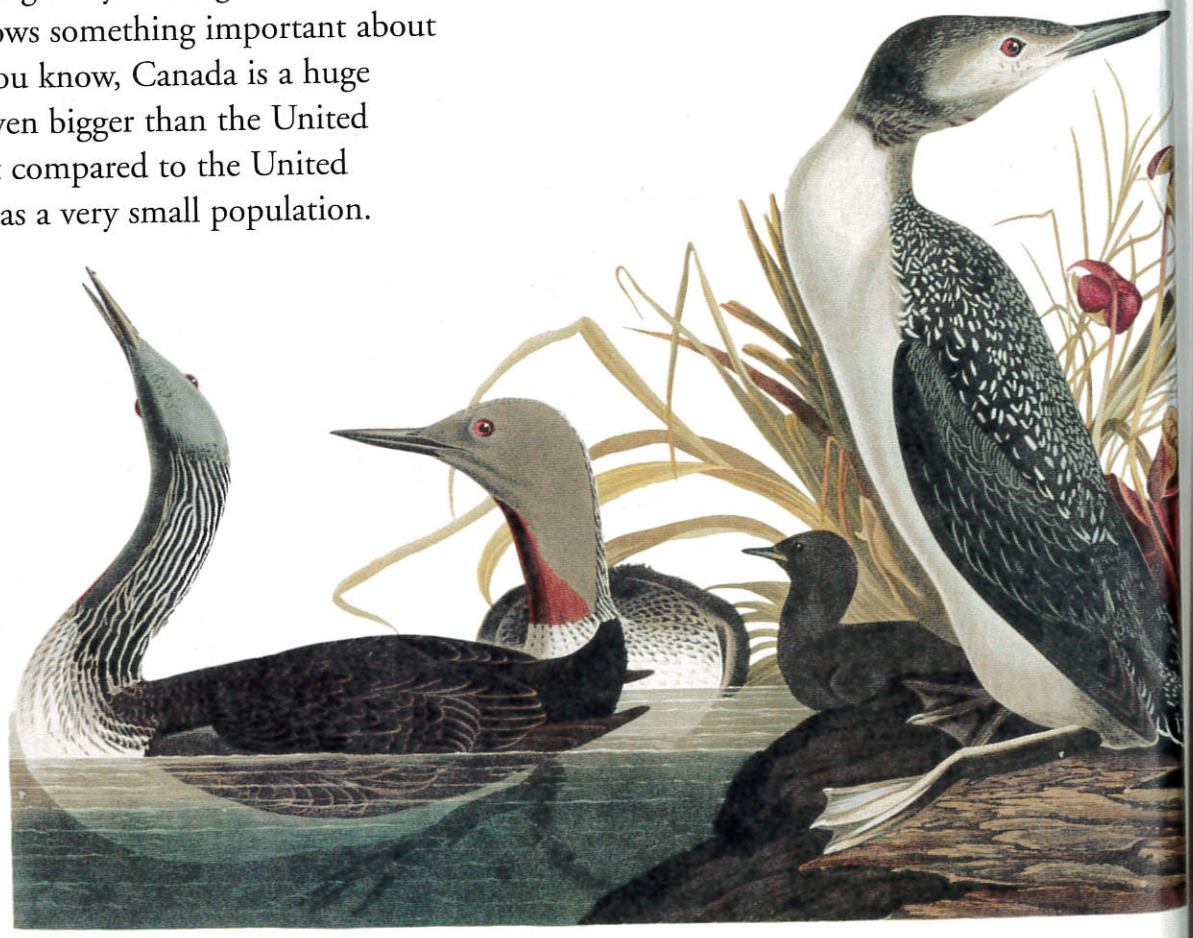
culture the language, religion, customs, and traditions of a group of people

"Does that mean she's in charge?" I asked.

"No, not at all," Aunt Susie said. "Like America, Canada is a republic. The people rule through their elected representatives. Our top official is called the prime minister. He has about the same power as your president. Look, here's a one-dollar coin. It has the queen's picture on it, too." I looked at the gold-colored coin she handed me. On one side was a picture of the queen. On the other side was a picture of a bird that looked sort of like a duck. "That bird is a loon," Aunt Susie said. "We call the one-dollar coin a 'loonie.'"

I laughed and said it sounded like a funny name for money. She laughed back and said, "I guess you're right. But that picture shows something important about Canada. You know, Canada is a huge country, even bigger than the United States. But compared to the United States, it has a very small population. Much of Canada is wilderness—wild country where people don't live. The wilderness is full of animals, including the loon. Like a duck, it lives on lakes. Look, here's another Canadian animal. Do you know what it is?"

She handed me a five-cent coin. I saw a picture of a furry animal with a wide, flat tail, but I couldn't tell what it was. Aunt Susie said that it was a beaver. "You know, beavers are amazing animals. They can gnaw down trees with their teeth. And they were very important in Canadian history. In the days when Canada was a colony, thousands and thousands of people came from Europe because of the beavers."



Canadian loons build their nests close to water.

French and English are Canada's main languages. Many Canadian signs are written in both English and French.

"Why? Did they want to see beavers chop down trees with their teeth?" I asked.

Aunt Susie laughed. She said, "No. It was because in Europe in those days, the most popular kind of hat was made out of beaver fur. So people came over to trap the beavers and turn them into hats."

It didn't sound like a lot of fun, being made into hats. I was still feeling sorry for the beavers when we got home.

When we walked into the living room, Margaret was watching TV. The people on the TV were talking, but I couldn't understand what they were saying.

Margaret saw that I was puzzled. She said, "They're speaking in French. In fact, on this TV channel, *all* the shows are in French."

Margaret told me that, along with English, French is one of the two main languages of Canada. She explained that most of the people in Ontario speak English as their main language. In some other parts of Canada, the people speak French as their main language. But all Canadians study both English and French in school. Margaret knows French well because she's been studying it for eight years.

Margaret turned off the TV and asked, "Do you know anything about the people of Canada?"

"Not really," I said.

Canadian coins show many of the country's symbols: the loon, the mounted policeman, the beaver, and the maple leaf.

"Well, Canada is a pretty **multicultural** country. The largest group of Canadians are people whose ancestors were settlers from England. The second-largest group are the people whose ancestors were from France. But lots of other groups settled here too. On the west coast of Canada, there are many people whose families came from countries in Asia such as China. Many of them speak an Asian language as well as English or French.

"The people who have been here the longest are the native peoples. They were here long, long before the English and the French came to Canada. For years most people called them Indians, but now many Canadians prefer to be called native peoples. There are several different groups of native peoples. Many of them live in separate communities called reserves.

Canadians are huge fans of hockey. This Canadian is playing at an Olympic hockey match.

"In the far north of Canada is the homeland of the native people called the Inuit (IHN yoo iht). They have a really amazing culture. Their part of Canada is so far north that it's covered with ice and snow most of the year. But the Inuit have learned how to survive in this harsh land. Until recently, some of them even built temporary houses out of snow!"

vocabulary
multicultural having people from many cultures and backgrounds

I thought the idea of a snow house was pretty cool. (Sorry for the silly joke.) But Canadians seem to know a lot about ice and snow. Joe says that even here in southern Canada, it's freezing cold most of the winter. Joe likes the snow and ice because winter is hockey season. He's got his own hockey stick, skates, and pads, and there are pictures of hockey players all over his walls. Canadians seem to be as crazy about hockey as Americans are about baseball and football—maybe *more* crazy.

So, Mom and Dad, don't worry about me. I'm having fun and learning a lot about Canada. I'm still glad that the food's not too different, though. In fact, do you know what the national symbol of Canada is? It's the leaf from the maple tree—the tree whose sap is used to make syrup for pancakes. And you know how I love maple syrup. Every time I see a Canadian flag with a maple leaf on it, I get a little hungry!

Love,

Nathaniel