

# Time's up! One world, one clock

When do you have to get up in the morning in order to get to school on time? When are you going over to your best friend's house? How long do you have left to read in bed until it's "lights out"? To know the time, all you have to do is take a quick look at the clock. But the numbers—the hours, minutes, and seconds—we use today have come a very long way. This is how they came about.

## Position of the Sun

In Europe, it was common for a village or town to have just one clock, often displayed on a tall clock tower. The time on these clocks was set according to the Sun: midday was whenever it was highest in the sky and not at 12 p.m. as it is today. This meant that even towns and cities in the same country kept different times. They could be a few minutes or even a few hours apart.

This made life difficult. Should a train or boat journey be timed from the place it started from or the place it arrived? If you arranged to meet someone at 6 p.m., was that your time or their time? At first, people dealt with this by changing their timepieces as they traveled. Coaching companies even printed information sheets on how and when to change your watch.

## Setting the clock

However, British railway companies wanted a better solution—a single standard time that was the same across the country. In 1847, Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)—the time at Greenwich, London—was chosen as the standard time for rail schedules across Great Britain. It became known as Railway Time.

By the late 1800s, people had realized it would be useful to have a standard time to refer to wherever you were in the world. The United States and most of the world's sea charts were already using GMT as the basis for working out the time. So, in 1884, Greenwich Mean Time was chosen as the international standard.

