
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Mermaids – fact or fiction?

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Dan

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English – the show that brings you an interesting topic, authentic listening practice and vocabulary to help you improve your language skills. I'm Dan...

Catherine

And I'm Catherine. In this programme we'll be discussing mermaids, as well as teaching you 6 new items of vocabulary, of course...

Dan

How would you like to be a mermaid?

Catherine

A half-human and half-fish? Well, Dan, I think it's all a myth.

Dan

Well, then you'll find this week's question a bit of a difficult one to answer.

Catherine

I suppose I will. Go on then.

Dan

When did the most recent **alleged** mermaid sighting take place? Was it a) the 1400s b) 1800s or c) 2000s?

Catherine

Ok, and by **alleged**, you mean 'said or believed to be true but not proven'. I don't believe in mermaids, but I think there's a lot of people who do, so I will say c) the 2000s.

Dan

Well, we'll find out if you're right a bit later on. So, what do you know about mermaids, Catherine?

Catherine

Well, a mermaid is a creature that's similar in appearance to a woman but instead of legs, a mermaid has the tail of a fish. The males are called mermen, and they live in the ocean. I thought they were a myth.

Dan

They certainly appear to be mythical. They feature in legends and stories from all over the world. The earliest known one in a story dates from ancient Assyria, around 1000 BC. Can you think of a more modern example?

Catherine

Many people will be familiar with the Disney story, 'The Little Mermaid'.

Dan

Yes. Before it was an animated movie, it was a renowned fairy-tale written by Hans Christian Andersen, first published in 1837. Interestingly, a small bronze statue of the little mermaid has been sitting in Copenhagen in Denmark since 1913.

Catherine

There you go! There's no real evidence.

Dan

What if I told you that over 200 mermaids have recently gathered in Greensboro, North Carolina in the USA?

Catherine

You're telling me fish tales, Dan

Dan

Ok. I'll confess. They aren't real mermaids. Each person is a normal human wearing a waist-high latex tail. They meet to share an interest in aquatic mythology, take underwater photos, and swim. For many of them, it's a source of income too! Listen to Daniel Craig, five year merman, explain.

INSERT

Daniel Craig, merman

A lot of the mermaids we have attending here are professional mermaids. They will entertain at birthday parties, social events, company events. I **stumbled across** the mermaiding community merely by accident.

Catherine

So it's a job too! A professional merman. And Daniel said that he **stumbled across** it, or 'found it by accident'. So, it doesn't really count then though, does it Dan?

Dan

A real, real mermaid? **That's a different kettle of fish**, which is an idiomatic phrase that means 'a completely different matter or issue'. Well, while we have no hard evidence, such as a photo of a real mermaid, there have been several sightings. One of the more recent ones was in 2009 in Haifa Bay.

Catherine

Hang on now, that rings a bell! That's in Israel, isn't it? And it **allegedly** appeared at sunset. Apparently the mermaid was doing tricks.

Dan

There you go then!

Catherine

But there is no reason, Dan, to believe that it was anything other than a **hoax**, which means 'a deception or lie – often done for humour or sometimes cruelty'. Well, real or not, it could be fun to be a mermaid. I wonder what it would be like?

Dan

Well, that I can help with. Let Daniel Craig explain why he likes it so much.

INSERT

Daniel Craig, merman

It's just **serene**. It's the perfect place for a temporary **getaway**.

Catherine

So he likes it because it's **serene**, which means 'calm and peaceful'.

Dan

Yes and he says it's the perfect **getaway**, which is 'a place you go in order to escape from normal life'.

Catherine

Well, I still don't believe in mermaids, but I do believe, Dan, that you asked me a question.

Dan

I definitely did. I asked, when did the most recent **alleged** mermaid sighting take place? Was it a) the 1400s b) 1800s or c) 2000s?

Catherine

And I said I think it was the 2000s

Dan

And you have hit the nail on the head. Well done.

Catherine

Thank you

Dan

You're right. It was the 2000s. It was in 2012 in Zimbabwe and it was reported by the water resource minister. Let's take a look at the vocabulary from this programme. Our first word was **alleged**. If something is **alleged** it is 'said or believed to be true but not proven to be true'. Can you think of a recent example, Catherine?

Catherine

US President Donald Trump has alleged that newspapers have been printing fake news, but apparently there's no proof. And our next one was **stumbled across**. So, if you **stumble across** something you 'encounter or find it by accident'. It's a phrasal verb and you could also say come across. So, Dan, have you ever **stumbled across** anything unusual?

Dan

Well, there was a time when I was going to a party in Holborn and I got completely lost. And there on the floor in front of me I **stumbled across** a map of London. It got me straight to the party.

Catherine

Spooky.

Dan

The next one after that was **a different kettle of fish**. **A different kettle of fish** is an idiomatic phrase which means 'a completely different matter or issue'. You could also use the phrase 'a horse of a different colour'.

Catherine

Next up, we had **hoax**. And a **hoax** is 'a deception or lie – which is often done for humour or cruelty'. What was the last hoax you did, Dan?

Dan

One Christmas I wrapped a broken lightbulb in a box and gave it to mother as a present. I pretended to drop it and the broken lightbulb made a glass shattering noise and she thought that I had broken her present. After that we heard **serene**. **Serene** means 'calm and peaceful'. The noun is serenity. What's your idea of serene, Catherine?

Catherine

Two weeks, lying on the beach, drinking lemonade, listening to the sound of the sea. Fabulous. And finally we had a **getaway**. A **getaway** is an informal word meaning 'a place you go in order to escape from normal life', such as a holiday. So, where's your favourite getaway, Dan?

Dan



My favourite **getaway** is my yoga class. I find it really, really refreshing. Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon!

Catherine

And we are on social media too, so make sure to visit us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

Both

Bye!