
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Water burial

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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Dan

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English– the show that brings you an interesting topic, authentic listening practice and six new items of vocabulary. I'm Dan...

Neil

And I'm Neil. In this episode we'll be discussing water burial.

Dan

Yes. It's a bit of a **bleak** subject, I'm afraid.

Neil

Something which is **bleak** is unpleasant or without hope.

Dan

And, do you know what's really **bleak**? It's this week's question. On average, how many people die each hour?

- a) six thousand
- b) sixty thousand
- c) six hundred thousand

Neil

I am going to guess b) sixty thousand

Dan

And we'll find out if you're right or not at the end of this show. So, the actual figure is 55m people each year. Now, religious or not, there is a practical issue to be dealt with, which is, Neil?

Neil

What to do with the body?

Dan

Exactly! So what are the options for the average person?

Neil

Well, there's burial, or there's cremation.

Dan

Burial is when a body is put into the earth and cremation is when a body is burnt. But there are big problems with both. For example, what two things do most people need in order to be buried?

Neil

Well, a coffin – or a box to put the body in and a **grave**. That's the place the coffin and body go into.

Dan

Exactly, but coffins are most often made of wood. In the US they use four million acres of forest every year just to make coffins. And as for **graves**, cemeteries are beginning to get overcrowded – there's no space left! After all, dying is not exactly a new thing! It's been happening for years.

Neil

Aha, but with **cremation**, there's no space needed. And they burn gas to dispose of the body. That's got to be better.

Dan

You'd think so, but no. I'll let Sahar Zand, reporter for the BBC, explain why.

INSERT

Sahar Zand, BBC reporter

During the process, a number of **toxins** can be emitted into our environment, including mercury from dental fillings. Cremation also has a carbon cost. With the energy used to process one body, you could actually heat a home for the best part of a week in winter

Neil

So cremation can release **toxins**, or poisons, into the environment and it comes with a very high energy cost – enough to heat a home for almost a week! OK. I can see a smug look in your eye, Dan. What do you have up your sleeve?

Dan

It's the latest thing. Water burial.

Neil

Water burial?

Dan

This is where the body is put into an alkali solution and heated to 150 degrees centigrade. This breaks down the tissue and leaves only the skeleton.

Neil

Interesting.

Dan

Yes! It has huge advantages over cremation

Neil

Such as?

Dan

Well for one thing, it takes only 4 hours to finish. It follows the same as when a body **decomposes**, but quicker.

Neil

When something **decomposes** it breaks down and decays. Ok, anything else?

Dan

It uses much less energy. Each body is weighed and then the computer calculates exactly how much of everything is needed.

Neil

Ok, it's more efficient too. Why are you smiling?

Dan

This is the best part! Listen to Sahar again.

INSERT

Sahar Zand, BBC reporter

All that's left at this point is a **brittle** skeleton and any artificial **implants** that they may have had in their body – and they come out almost as good as new. There's even talk of sending the implants to the developing world, where they can benefit populations that don't have access to them, because they're very expensive.

Neil

So after the process you have a **brittle**, or easy to break, skeleton and any **implants** that they had inside them.

Dan

Implants are artificial additions to the body, such as plastic hips or an artificial heart. And they're clean! They can be recycled and given to someone who needs them! Isn't that cool?

Neil

So, what happens to the skeleton?

Dan

It gets ground up into dust and put in a jar to give to the family – exactly the same as a traditional cremation. I love it! Sign me up! Would you like to give it a shot?

Neil

Well, I can't answer that question. But can I have the answer to our quiz question?

Dan

Of course. I asked: On average, how many people die each hour?

- a) six thousand
- b) sixty thousand
- c) six hundred thousand

Neil

I said b) sixty thousand

Dan

And you, my friend, are dead in the water. Unfortunately, it's a) six thousand

Neil

Ok. Well that's probably better, isn't it?

Dan

Yes.

Neil

Shall we have a look at the vocabulary then?

Dan

Certainly. Our first word was **bleak** meaning something unhappy, unpleasant or without hope. What types of things do we typically describe as bleak, Neil?

Neil

Oh, the weather in the UK can be bleak. It's very, very dark in the winter. Next we had **grave**. A grave is a hole in the earth where a body is placed. However, there is another use.

Dan

Yes. We can talk about a situation being **grave**. The outbreak of war is a very grave situation for many people. Then we had **toxin**. A **toxin** is a substance which is poisonous. Have you ever been poisoned by a toxin, Neil?

Neil

Well, I suppose so, yes. I've had food poisoning and that's caused by **toxins**. After that

was **decompose**. When something **decomposes**, it breaks down and decays. Much like when fruit goes bad and turns black and then becomes liquid.

Dan

Then we had **brittle**. Something which is **brittle** is easily broken. For example, Neil?

Neil

Glass, crockery, tiles and some plastic. Crisps! And finally we had **implant**. An **implant** is something artificial which has been put into the body – such as an artificial heart or a replacement hip. Would you like to have any implants, Dan?

Dan

I'd quite like robotic legs. Then I could run faster than anyone!

Neil

Well, we've run out of time, so that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon!

Dan

And we are on social media too - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. See you there.

Both

Bye!