
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Robin Hood



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Alice

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Alice...

Neil

... and I'm Neil. Hello.

Alice

Hello, Neil. Now what do you know about Robin Hood?

Neil

OK. Well, he wore green tights...

Alice

Yes, he did.

Neil

He was good at archery... he had a girlfriend called Maid Marion. He was English – although he sometimes he has an American accent in Hollywood films.

Alice

Yes.

Neil

There was a great Disney cartoon series using animal characters. Robin and Maid Marion were foxes.

Alice

Anything else? What about being an **outlaw** or criminal? Heroically fighting against injustice and corruption?

Neil

Oh yeah, there's all that stuff as well – robbing the rich and giving to the poor. Yes, yeah... he lived in Sherwood Forest with a band of merry men.

Alice

Yes, he did. OK, it sounds like you've watched a lot of TV and film versions but haven't read the literature.

Neil

Oh, come on, Alice! Have you read the literature?

Alice

Yes I have. I studied English at university and one of my specialist subjects was medieval literature. The **Middle Ages** or **medieval** period lasted in Europe from the 5th to the 15th century.

Neil

I see. And I'm guessing that Robin Hood is the subject of today's show?

Alice

Absolutely. You're right! So here's a question for you, Neil: When do we find the first reference to Robin Hood in English literature? Was it in the...

a) 5th century?

b) 10th century?

Or c) 14th century?

Neil

Well, I'm going to go for the middle one – and that's b) 10th century.

Alice

OK. Well, we'll find out if you're right or wrong later on. Now, why do you think the stories of Robin Hood have lasted from the Middle Ages through to the modern day?

Neil

Well, I suppose it's got appeal on lots of levels – action, adventure – there's some comedy stuff there with the merry men. And of course, romance, like I said before.

Alice

Yes, indeed. Actually the early versions of Robin Hood were very violent. Let's listen to Professor Thomas Hahn talk about one of the ballads called The Monk.

INSERT

Thomas Hahn, Professor of English Literature at the University of Rochester, New York

The Monk is, I think for most modern audiences who've either seen movies or read children's stories or whatever, quite disturbing in terms of its levels of violence. In terms of trying to make some comparisons with popular culture it seems to me that it's really at the

level of Sopranos in terms of things like dismembered bodies and actual violence and assassinations.

Neil

What's a **ballad**, Alice?

Alice

Well, It's a song or poem that tells a story. People were telling the stories of Robin Hood for a long time before they were written down – and performing them too.

Neil

Really? And how about the comparison between the Robin Hood ballads and the Sopranos? Now The Sopranos is a popular US TV series about gangsters. Maybe I should get The Monk on audiobook. What do you think?

Alice

Yes, I don't think you'd find it disturbing – **disturbing** means making you feel upset or shocked. **Assassinations** are the murder of important people, often for political reasons. And **dismembered bodies** are bodies that have been cut or torn into pieces.

Neil

Right. It sounds like medieval entertainment for guys. You know, like martial arts movies these days.

Alice

Well, yes, you may be right. Now do you remember you mentioned Maid Marion at the start of the show?

Neil

I do.

Alice

Well, actually, in the early ballads there is no Maid Marian. She appears in later versions along with other characters we know well today. But Robin is always a trickster, and a man with a bow in a wood.

Neil

A **trickster** is someone who deceives or cheats people. That's impressive, Alice. You certainly know your medieval ballads.

Alice

Yes, I do. So what's so appealing about this man with a bow? Let's listen to Professor Hahn again.

INSERT

Thomas Hahn, Professor of English Literature at the University of Rochester, New York

What he represents I think is a kind of strong and forceful masculinity that operates on its own terms and for its own interests and that's I think what we admire in these stories.

Neil

What does it mean to **operate on your own terms**, Alice?

Alice

Well, Neil, it means to do what you want according to your own rules. And **masculinity** means the qualities typical of a man. Now, remember my question from earlier? I asked: When do we find the first reference to Robin Hood in English literature? Was it in the...

a) 5th century?

b) 10th century?

Or c) 14th century?

Neil

And I said b) 10th century.

Alice

Yes, well... I'm afraid you are wrong, Neil. The first reference occurs in the English poet William Langland's book *Piers Plowman* written between 1370 and 1390. Sloth, the lazy priest, says: "I kan not parfityly my Paternoster as the preest it singeth,/ But I kan rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre."

Neil

Well, Alice, can you translate that into modern English, please? Maybe that's for another show.

Alice

Maybe another show...

Neil

Can we just have today's words again, please?

Alice

We certainly can. And we can have those in modern English. OK. Here they are:

outlaw

medieval period or Middle Ages

ballad

disturbing

assassinations

dismembered bodies

trickster
operate on your own terms
masculinity

Neil

Well, that brings us to the end of today's 6 Minute English. We hope you enjoyed today's walk in the woods. Please do join us again soon.

Both

Bye.

Vocabulary

outlaw

criminal

medieval period or Middle Ages

the period in Europe from the 5th to the 15th century

ballad

a song or poem that tells a story

disturbing

making you feel upset or shocked

assassinations

the murder of important people, often for political reasons

dismembered bodies

bodies that have been cut or torn into pieces

trickster

someone who deceives or cheats people

operate on your own terms

do what you want according to your own rules

masculinity

the qualities typical of a man