

Witchcraft at the British Museum - Tapescript

“Right, well this is Irving back in the British Museum with you Natasha, talking about witchcraft. You have to understand *witchcraft* is a very old thing indeed, and in *ancient* Mesopotamia, in Babylonia, they had *witches* and *wizards* too and people thought they were responsible for all sorts of *horrible* things, like being sick, being ill, losing all your money, your house falling down. And if you thought there was a witch after you, what you did was you went to a special *magician* who knew what to do, and they made a *figurine* out of wax. Okay, and they stuck in a bit of fingernail, or a bit of hair from the naughty person, and then with all sorts of *magic* words they set fire to the wax and it all melted, and when that happened the witch was supposed to shrivel up and be useless and never trouble you again. So it’s a very old idea and that’s how they used to deal with it.

Most things on view in the British Museum are to do with *good* magic by people who protected other people, they looked after them, and they dealt with *evil* magic. I’ve seen in museum drawers a sheep’s heart from the nineteenth century which was stuffed full of iron nails so it looked like a pin-cushion, and this was buried somewhere by somebody with all sorts of horrible ideas at the back of their mind, and that’s the sort of thing that witches in ancient times, or medieval times, used to use very often to wreak evil magic. But I don’t think there’s much like that on exhibition.

In the Egyptian galleries there’s lots of magic things for good purposes, to make people better, to make them well, to get rid of your enemies, but nothing quite so *gruesome* as the stuffed sheep’s heart with iron through the middle. And it’s probably true that in lots of different places and lots of different times in history, in villages, and places in the country, there’s usually an old woman who lives in a tumble-down cottage, who knows all about plants and other ideas, and what the weather means and what you can tell from the behaviour of animals, and the right time to do things, and might give you a spell if you needed one, especially if you were in *love* with someone who didn’t take any notice of you, and all that kind of thing. And probably there have always been women like that, I know one or two myself, but they’re not actually on exhibition in any of the cases here I have to tell you.”



Bewitched

Witchcraft at the British Museum

In this soundfile Irving Finkel tells us about the British Museum's exhibition of items connected to witchcraft throughout history.

You can visit the British Museum at <http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/default.aspx>

Before listening why not test your knowledge of famous witches with our bewitching quiz? *'Which Witch is Which?'*

Witches seem to be everywhere these days. Some of them you may remember from books you read when you were younger. Others can be found on TV, in films, plays and books. If you don't know the answers you could consult your crystal ball, or get online and conjure up the answers for yourself. (Check the answers at the end of these activities).



Which Witch is Which?

1. In the books about Winnie the Witch, she has a cat. What's his name?
a/ Mog b/William c/ Wilbur
2. In 2005 the 1960s television show 'Bewitched' was re-made as a film starring Nicole Kidman as Isabel the witch. What was the witch's name in the original TV series?
a/ Samantha b/ Sabrina c/ Sorcerina
3. In British legend King Arthur's half sister was a powerful sorceress. What was her name?
a/ Morgan le Faye b/ Morgan le Capitain c/ Hermione Gingold
4. The beginning of which Shakespeare play features three witches?
a/ Romeo and Juliet b/ King Lear c/ Macbeth
5. Now complete the Shakespeare's witches' rhyming spell 'Hubble bubble toil and'.
a/ magic b/ trouble c/ sorcery
- 6/ More recently, the 'Wyrd Sisters' is a group of witches who feature in books by which present day writer?
a/ J. K. Rowling b/ Terry Pratchett c/ Eoin Colfer
- 7/ In the 1939 film 'The Wizard of Oz' which witch isn't wicked?
a/ the Witch of the North b/ the Witch of the East c/ the Witch of the West

Bewitched - Witchcraft at the British Museum

Listening 1 - Listening for particular words.

Listen to the sound file and number the words in the order you first hear each one. The first one is done for you.

	<i>horrible</i>			<i>good</i>
	<i>magician</i>			<i>wizards</i>
1	<i>witchcraft</i>			<i>figurine</i>
	<i>love</i>			<i>ancient</i>
	<i>witches</i>			<i>magic</i>
	<i>evil</i>			<i>gruesome</i>

Listening 2 - Comprehension

Listen again, more carefully, and answer the following questions.

1. In ancient times witches were thought to be “responsible for all sorts of horrible things.” What were they?
2. How could a wax figurine help you ‘if you thought there was a witch after you’?
3. In the British Museum’s Egyptian galleries there are lots of magic things “for good purposes,” but what were these ‘good purposes’?
4. Irving makes the connection between our ideas of witches and wise old women living in the country. What kind of knowledge does he suggest they may have?





It's Witchcraft

Ten words from the soundfile are hidden in this wordsearch, can you find them.

h	f	w	a	p	t	z	p	j	h	g	g	r	c	d
n	m	i	d	v	r	s	l	l	a	r	e	k	b	o
h	o	r	r	i	b	l	e	n	u	u	u	u	i	o
w	a	x	c	v	x	q	c	l	t	e	h	l	m	g
q	m	o	b	p	x	i	h	f	t	s	j	h	g	t
q	q	a	y	p	e	o	a	u	z	o	f	w	x	z
n	g	b	g	n	r	r	f	f	h	m	d	v	u	o
l	v	a	t	i	c	f	o	j	e	e	t	f	v	p
l	m	y	o	h	c	u	e	d	r	a	z	i	w	d
o	p	t	c	v	r	i	v	h	e	k	k	n	b	d
c	l	t	r	t	n	b	a	v	z	r	p	l	e	o
a	i	j	b	z	u	i	o	n	r	y	r	n	q	s
w	t	g	l	s	w	l	z	p	x	s	m	i	k	s
p	c	z	a	j	m	a	v	l	x	j	f	a	d	u
t	j	l	f	m	u	n	i	o	z	o	n	g	g	u

witchcraft



Answers and teachers notes

• Quiz 'Which witch is which?'

1, c 2, a 3, a 4, c 5, b 6, b 7, a

If you scored between 1 and 2 you are Sabrina, between 3 and 5 Samantha, between 6 and 7, congratulations you are Winnie.

• Listening 1

The first listening activity focuses on picking out individual words. If you are using this with a class you could try giving each learner one of the words, ask them to stand up and sit down when they hear 'their' word.

1, witchcraft 2, ancient 3, witches 4, wizards 5, horrible 6, magician

7, figurine 8, magic 9, good 10, evil 11, gruesome 12, love

• Listening 2

The second listening activity focuses on comprehension, variations on the answers are possible. In class students might use the tapescript to check their own work.

1. In ancient times Irving tells us that witches were thought to be “responsible for all sorts of horrible things.” What were they?

“being sick, being ill, losing all your money, your house falling down.”

2. How could a wax figurine help you ‘if you thought there was a witch after you’?

“a special magician ... set fire to the wax and it all melted, and when that happened the witch was supposed to shrivel up and be useless and never trouble you again.”

3. In the British Museum’s Egyptian galleries there are lots of magic things “for good purposes,” but what were these?

“to make people better, to make them well, to get rid of your enemies”

4. Irving links our ideas of witches to wise old women living in the country. What kind of knowledge does he suggest they may have.

“in villages, and places in the country, there’s usually an old woman who lives in a tumble-down cottage, who knows all about plants and other ideas, and what the weather means and what you can tell from the behaviour of animals, and the right time to do things”

• It’s witchcraft - wordsearch

The words hidden in the wordsearch are

ancient good gruesome horrible love magic magician wax witchcraft wizard
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