

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #626
The Strange Story of Punch and Judy
14th Aug, 2026

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Transcript

[00:00:05] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today it's the start of another three-part mini-series, this time on unusual British traditions.

[00:00:31] In today's episode, part one, we are going to be talking about Punch and Judy, the strange, violent, and originally Italian puppet show that became one of Britain's best-known seaside traditions.

[00:00:46] In part two, we turn to fox hunting, a very different type of tradition that is technically illegal, but still goes on up and down the country.

[00:00:57] And in part three, we are going to be talking about the rise and fall of the British seaside holiday.

[00:01:04] OK then, let's not waste a minute and get right into it.

[00:01:11] Let me start this episode by teaching you a completely [pointless¹](#) piece of English vocabulary. It's a word I almost guarantee you've never heard, and that applies even if you are a native speaker.

¹ not useful or needed

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[00:01:28] That word is a swazzle. S-W-A-Z-Z-L-E.

[00:01:36] It's a small metal device you can put in your mouth that turns your voice into something so unusual I don't think I'm even going to try to describe it.

[00:01:47] I'll just play it for you:

[00:01:54] That is the voice of a character called Mr Punch, the star of the strange British tradition of the Punch and Judy show.

[00:02:04] Now, Punch and Judy is one of those things that feels deeply, perhaps even [quintessentially](#)², British. A small red-and-white [striped](#)³ [booth](#)⁴ on a beach.

[00:02:16] A [hook-nosed](#)⁵ puppet with a [squeaky](#)⁶ voice, a stick in his hand, and a crowd of children laughing along.

[00:02:25] It feels about as British as fish and chips, wet [deckchairs](#)⁷ and disappointing summer weather.

² in the most typical way

³ with lines of different colours

⁴ a small covered place for a show or selling things

⁵ with a curved nose, shaped like a hook

⁶ high and thin in sound

⁷ folding chairs used outside, often at the beach

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[00:02:33] It is also, in its origins, not really British at all; it's Italian.

[00:02:39] So, let's start with where it comes from, and how it got to Britain.

[00:02:45] In the early seventeenth century, in the streets and squares of Naples, something called commedia dell'arte was [flourishing](#)⁸. Now, commedia dell'arte was a kind of [improvised](#)⁹ street comedy, performed by travelling players who would arrive in a town, set up a stage, and entertain crowds with rude jokes, [slapstick](#)¹⁰ music, and [stock characters](#)¹¹ that everyone in the audience already knew.

[00:03:15] One of those [stock characters](#) was a man called Pulcinella.

[00:03:21] He was a Neapolitan invention, and he had a [hooked](#)¹² nose and a [hump](#)¹³ on his back.

⁸ doing very well; growing strongly

⁹ made up while performing, not planned exactly before

¹⁰ silly physical comedy, often with people falling or being hit

¹¹ well-known types of characters used again and again

¹² curved like a hook

¹³ a round raised part on his back

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[00:03:29] He wore a white costume, a black mask, and he spoke in a strange, [squawking¹⁴](#) voice, a bit like the one you heard a minute ago.

[00:03:40] He wasn't a nice man. He was [cunning¹⁵](#), lazy, greedy, and easily upset. He hit people. He [insulted¹⁶ figures of authority¹⁷](#). He was the sort of character someone in seventeenth-century Naples wasn't meant to admire, but would laugh at anyway.

[00:04:00] The name Pulcinella is thought to have come from the Italian word "pulcino", which means "little chick", baby chicken, so it's a reference to his [beaky¹⁸](#), chicken-like face and funny, almost bird-like voice.

[00:04:17] Now, Pulcinella was a [hit¹⁹](#) in 17th century Naples.

[00:04:21] And like all [hits²⁰](#), he travelled.

¹⁴ making a loud, harsh, bird-like sound

¹⁵ clever in a sneaky way

¹⁶ said rude things to them

¹⁷ people with power, such as police or leaders

¹⁸ like a bird's nose or beak

¹⁹ very popular success

²⁰ very popular successes

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[00:04:25] Italian performers took him to Paris, where he became Polichinelle. They took him to other European cities, where his name was [tweaked](#)²¹ or translated.

[00:04:36] And on the 9th of May 1662, he came to London.

[00:04:44] We know that date because of a man called Samuel Pepys. Pepys is one of the most useful figures in English history. For nearly a decade he kept a detailed personal diary that recorded everything he ate, drank, [gossiped about](#)²², and went to see.

[00:05:04] And an extra little fun fact about Samuel Pepys is that he wrote one of the most detailed accounts of the Great Fire of London, which happened in 1666, and as the [flames](#)²³ approached his house, he dug a big hole to protect his most [prized possessions](#)²⁴, the first of which was his parmesan cheese.

[00:05:27] And as one more side note, we do have an episode on The Great Fire of London. It's one of our member-only ones, and it's episode number 115.

[00:05:37] Anyway, back to the story.

²¹ changed a little

²² talked about (especially other people's private lives)

²³ the bright burning parts of a fire

²⁴ things he owned and valued very much

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[00:05:40] On that particular Friday in May 1662, Samuel Pepys walked through Covent Garden in central London and stopped to watch a puppet show.

[00:05:52] The puppeteer was an Italian known as Signor Bologna. He was performing a [marionette](#)²⁵ show, which is a show with stringed puppets, and one of his characters was a [hook-nosed troublemaker](#)²⁶ called Punchinello, the [Anglicised](#)²⁷ version of Pulcinella.

[00:06:14] Pepys was impressed. He described the show as "very pretty, the best that ever I saw, and a great resort of [gallants](#)²⁸."

[00:06:24] A great resort of [gallants](#) is an unusual phrase, and not something you'd hear nowadays, but it just means a fashionable crowd. In other words, it was a show for adults, not children.

[00:06:37] Within months, Pepys had seen the show again. And he was not the only fan. Later that same year, King Charles II, the recently [restored](#)²⁹ king of England, asked Signor Bologna to perform for him at his palace. The king was so delighted that he gave

²⁵ a puppet moved by strings

²⁶ someone who caused problems

²⁷ changed to sound more English

²⁸ fashionable people; well-dressed people

²⁹ put back in power

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the puppeteer a gold chain and medal worth twenty-five pounds, which works out at something like five thousand Euros in today's money.

[00:07:10] That date, the 9th of May 1662, is now traditionally treated as Mr Punch's UK birthday. There is even a small festival held in Covent Garden each May to mark it.

[00:07:25] But the character that Pepys saw that afternoon was still, in every meaningful sense, an Italian visitor. The journey from Italian puppet to British [icon](#)³⁰ would take [the best part of](#)³¹ two centuries.

[00:07:40] The first thing that needed to change was the puppet itself.

[00:07:46] The original Mr Punch, Pulcinella, was a [marionette](#): a puppet on strings, [operated](#)³² from above.

[00:07:54] Putting on a [marionette](#) show requires a large stage and quite a lot of [kit](#)³³.

[00:08:00] A [glove puppet](#)³⁴, on the other hand, sits directly on the performer's hand. The puppeteer stands hidden inside a simple vertical fabric [booth](#), holds his hands

³⁰ a very famous symbol

³¹ almost; nearly

³² controlled

³³ equipment; things needed for the job

³⁴ a puppet worn on the hand

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above his head, and operates the puppets from below. The [booth](#) can be a single [striped](#) canvas sheet thrown over a frame.

[00:08:22] The whole thing is very light, and can be set up and [packed away](#)³⁵ in a matter of minutes.

[00:08:29] Whatsmore, [glove puppets](#)³⁶ move in a completely different way to [marionettes](#)³⁷.

[00:08:36] [Marionettes](#) move [gracefully](#)³⁸, slowly, like they're floating in the air.

[00:08:42] [Glove puppets](#) are different. Everything is more physical. You can throw them around. You can have one [whack](#)³⁹ another over the head with a [thud](#)⁴⁰. You can throw a baby out of a window. You can fight a crocodile, [slapping](#)⁴¹ it with a stick.

³⁵ put away after use

³⁶ puppets worn on the hand

³⁷ puppets moved by strings

³⁸ in a smooth and beautiful way

³⁹ hit hard

⁴⁰ a heavy dull sound

⁴¹ hitting with an open hand

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[00:08:59] In fact, the word "[slapstick](#)" comes from this world, as in "[slapstick](#) comedy", the style of [exaggerated](#)⁴² comedy where people bang into walls or pretend to hurt themselves.

[00:09:13] So at some point in the eighteenth century, Punch [made the leap](#)⁴³ from one form to the other, from [marionette](#) to [glove puppet](#). And this is when things really started to [take off](#)⁴⁴.

[00:09:29] A [glove puppet](#) show could be set up at the corner of a busy street, performed for an hour, and [packed away](#) in a wheelbarrow. The whole thing was [portable](#)⁴⁵, cheap, and perfectly suited to street performance. This new kind of show needed a new kind of performer. And it could all be operated by one person, who would stand inside the [booth](#) and operate the puppets with both hands.

[00:10:01] He became known as a "[professor](#)⁴⁶".

[00:10:04] Why "[professor](#)", nobody is quite sure.

⁴² made bigger or more excessive than normal

⁴³ changed from one thing to another

⁴⁴ become popular or successful

⁴⁵ easy to carry or move

⁴⁶ a Punch and Judy performer

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[00:10:08] It seems to have been a slightly grand, slightly playful title, given to a man who had [mastered](#)⁴⁷ a craft that was difficult and not entirely [respectable](#)⁴⁸.

[00:10:20] The [professor](#) also had a secret weapon, and it was the same secret weapon that Italian Pulcinella had used a century before. A small metal [reed](#)⁴⁹, held against the roof of the mouth, that gave Punch his [unmistakable](#)⁵⁰, [ear-piercing](#)⁵¹, [squeaky](#) voice.

[00:10:39] In English, this device became known, as you now know, as a [swazzle](#)⁵².

[00:10:51] Now, I have to [confess](#)⁵³ that I have never tried it, but it does appear that the [swazzle](#) is not an easy piece of [kit](#) to use.

[00:11:01] You need to shape the words clearly while forcing air through the [reed](#), switching between Punch's voice and your normal voice, all while making sure you don't accidentally [swallow](#)⁵⁴ the thing.

⁴⁷ learned to do very well

⁴⁸ seen as proper or good by society

⁴⁹ a small thin part that air passed through to make a sound

⁵⁰ very easy to recognise

⁵¹ very loud and high; painful to hear

⁵² a small device used in the mouth to make Mr Punch's voice

⁵³ admit it is true

⁵⁴ make it go down your throat

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[00:11:14] But if you manage it, if you master it, you'll be able to produce something that sounds like a chicken arguing through a child's toy [whistle](#)⁵⁵.

[00:11:25] Punch [professors](#)⁵⁶ trained for years to use one properly, and even today the [swazzle](#) is considered the [badge](#)⁵⁷ of a real Punch and Judy performer. If you cannot do the voice, you are not accepted as a real Punch man.

[00:11:42] Punch also got a new [wardrobe](#)⁵⁸. The plain white Italian costume was dropped, and by the middle of the eighteenth century Punch had taken on the red and yellow colours of the English [jester](#)⁵⁹, with a tall pointy hat and a stick in his hand. He looked, in other words, less like a Neapolitan street performer and more like a figure from a [medieval](#)⁶⁰ English court.

[00:12:10] He also gained a [cast](#)⁶¹, supporting actors, or rather, supporting puppets.

⁵⁵ a small wind instrument in which sound is produced by blowing air

⁵⁶ Punch and Judy performers

⁵⁷ a sign used for identification or membership

⁵⁸ clothes

⁵⁹ a funny performer in a king's court

⁶⁰ from the Middle Ages

⁶¹ all the other characters in the show

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[00:12:16] And this is where the story gets a bit complicated. For a long time, there was no fixed script.

[00:12:24] Each [professor](#) performed his own version of the show, with his own characters, his own jokes, and his own [running order](#)⁶².

[00:12:33] The most famous surviving version comes from the late 1820s, when a writer called John Payne Collier recorded, or claimed to record, the performance of a Punch performer named Giovanni Piccini.

[00:12:49] The book was illustrated by a celebrated [caricaturist](#)⁶³ and it was given a wonderful title: "The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Punch and Judy".

[00:13:01] This 1828 book became the [canonical](#)⁶⁴ version of the show. It is what most people today think of as the "traditional" script.

[00:13:12] There is, however, a slight problem with it.

⁶² the order in which things happened

⁶³ an artist who drew funny pictures of people

⁶⁴ accepted as the main or official version

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[00:13:16] John Payne Collier was one of the most [prolific](#)⁶⁵ literary [forgers](#)⁶⁶ in English history. He spent much of his later career inserting fake notes and fake documents into early Shakespeare editions, and getting caught doing so.

[00:13:33] So historians today are not entirely sure how much of what he wrote down in 1828 was a [faithful record](#)⁶⁷ of what Piccini actually performed, and how much was tidied up, [polished](#)⁶⁸, or simply invented.

[00:13:50] What is clear is the [cast](#) list, because most of these characters appear again and again in earlier descriptions.

[00:13:59] There is Punch himself. There is his wife Judy, hence the name, "Punch and Judy".

[00:14:06] There is their baby. There is Toby the dog, who in earlier shows was an actual live, performing dog who sat on the front of the [booth](#). There is the policeman. There is a clown called Joey. There is Jack Ketch, the [hangman](#)⁶⁹. There is a hungry crocodile,

⁶⁵ producing a lot of work

⁶⁶ people who made fake documents or writing

⁶⁷ a true and correct account

⁶⁸ improved to make it smoother or better

⁶⁹ a person whose job was to hang criminals

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who is usually interested in Punch's sausages, which Punch has for reasons that aren't entirely clear.

[00:14:30] And in many versions, there is the devil himself, who arrives at the end to [drag⁷⁰](#) Mr Punch off to hell.

[00:14:38] The plot, what actually happens in a Punch and Judy show, is famously violent.

[00:14:46] A typical show goes something like this. Punch is left to look after the baby. The baby cries. Punch loses patience and throws it out of the window.

[00:14:58] Judy returns, understandably furious. She attacks Punch, Punch attacks Judy, and before long she too has been knocked aside.

[00:15:08] Then society starts arriving to restore order.

[00:15:13] A policeman comes to arrest Punch. Punch beats the policeman.

[00:15:17] A [hangman](#) comes to [execute⁷¹](#) Punch. Punch tricks the [hangman](#) into putting his own head in the [noose⁷²](#).

⁷⁰ pull with force

⁷¹ kill him as a legal punishment

⁷² a rope circle used for hanging someone

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[00:15:25] A crocodile appears and tries to steal the sausages. Punch fights the crocodile. And in some versions, when even the devil comes to [drag](#) him down to hell, Punch beats the devil too, [cackling](#)⁷³ while all of this is going on.

[00:15:41] After each successful act of violence, Punch leans forward and shouts his [catchphrase](#)⁷⁴ to the audience through the [swazzle](#): "That's the way to do it!"

[00:15:51] And the audience, at least most of the time, [roars with laughter](#)⁷⁵.

[00:15:57] Now, by the early nineteenth century, Mr Punch was already a familiar street character in London and other large English cities. The [booth](#) could be set up on any corner, the show drew in a crowd, and the [professor passed a hat](#)⁷⁶ at the end for tips.

[00:16:16] It was rough, urban, working-class entertainment — no longer the [preserve](#)⁷⁷ of Samuel Pepys and his beloved parmesan.

[00:16:24] Then came two big changes.

⁷³ laughing in a loud, harsh way

⁷⁴ a phrase he said again and again

⁷⁵ laughs very loudly

⁷⁶ presented his hat to collect money in it

⁷⁷ something kept mainly for

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[00:16:27] The first was the railway. From the 1840s onwards, the British railway network [exploded](#)⁷⁸.

[00:16:36] For the first time, working people in industrial cities had cheap, fast access to the coast. Small fishing villages turned into [booming](#)⁷⁹ holiday resorts, as we'll be talking more about in part three.

[00:16:51] And what did the new [day-trippers](#)⁸⁰ want at the seaside, alongside sand and ice cream? They wanted entertainment.

[00:17:00] Punch [professors](#) were perfectly placed to provide it.

[00:17:05] The [booth](#), with its tall stripes of red and white, was already [portable](#). The show was already short, loud, and easy to follow.

[00:17:14] All a [professor](#) had to do was pack up his cart, get on a train, and [set up shop](#)⁸¹ on the beach.

[00:17:22] By the late Victorian period, the red-and-white [striped](#) puppet [booth](#) had become one of the most recognisable images of the British seaside.

⁷⁸ grew very quickly

⁷⁹ growing fast and doing very well

⁸⁰ people who visited a place for one day

⁸¹ start working

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[00:17:33] The second big change was a magazine.

[00:17:37] In July 1841, two journalists in London started a new weekly [satirical](#)⁸² publication.

[00:17:46] They needed a name, and they needed a [mascot](#)⁸³. They [settled on](#)⁸⁴ the most famously [anarchic](#)⁸⁵, disrespectful, [authority-mocking](#)⁸⁶ character they could think of, and they called their magazine "Punch", after Mr Punch himself.

[00:18:03] The full title was "Punch, or the London Charivari", and on its cover, week after week, Mr Punch and his dog Toby looked out at the reader.

[00:18:16] The magazine started small. But by the 1850s it was selling forty thousand copies a week, and by 1910 over a hundred thousand.

[00:18:27] For Victorian Britain, this gave Mr Punch a kind of [double life](#)⁸⁷.

⁸² using jokes to criticise people or society

⁸³ a person, animal, or character used as a symbol

⁸⁴ chose after thinking

⁸⁵ against rules and order

⁸⁶ making fun of people in power

⁸⁷ two different roles or sides

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[00:18:33] On the beach, he was a cheap, [knockabout](#)⁸⁸ puppet act for children.

[00:18:37] In a smart London club, he was the cover star of the country's most [prestigious](#)⁸⁹ [satirical](#) magazine. The same [hook-nosed troublemaker stood for](#)⁹⁰ both. He had become a kind of national symbol of British [misrule](#)⁹¹: the small voice that [mocks](#)⁹² authority, breaks the rules, and [gets away with it](#)⁹³.

[00:18:59] But the world that had made Punch and Judy famous did not last.

[00:19:05] In its [heyday](#)⁹⁴, there were an estimated 400 Punch men, or [professors](#), in Britain.

[00:19:12] In 1939, a survey counted only forty-four professional Punch men.

[00:19:19] And by the end of the twentieth century, that number had fallen to around twelve.

⁸⁸ rough, silly, and physical

⁸⁹ respected and admired

⁹⁰ represented, acted as a symbol

⁹¹ bad rule; disorder

⁹² makes fun of

⁹³ does something wrong and is not punished

⁹⁴ the time when it was most popular or successful

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[00:19:26] There are some obvious reasons. From the 1960s onwards, cheap flights and [package holidays⁹⁵](#) meant that British holidaymakers increasingly [jettied off⁹⁶](#) for the south of Spain rather than sitting on a windy beach in northern England. With fewer [day-trippers](#), there was less work for Punch [professors](#), and fewer young people willing to spend years learning the [swazzle](#) for a [shrinking⁹⁷](#) audience.

[00:19:52] There is also the argument that the style of the show, what was happening on stage, was simply [losing its appeal⁹⁸](#).

[00:20:01] The most obvious problem is the violence against women.

[00:20:06] It is a violent show with a violent male [protagonist⁹⁹](#) who beats his wife with a stick, throws his baby out of a window, and then [cackles¹⁰⁰](#) "That's the way to do it!".

[00:20:17] To a lot of people, that was increasingly not funny, not something they wanted to watch.

⁹⁵ holidays where travel and hotel were bought together

⁹⁶ flew away by plane

⁹⁷ becoming smaller

⁹⁸ becoming less interesting or popular

⁹⁹ the main character

¹⁰⁰ laughs in a loud, harsh way

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[00:20:24] Domestic abuse charities have argued that the show [makes light of](#)¹⁰¹ violence in the home. Women's rights campaigners have questioned what message it sends to small children.

[00:20:37] And in some places, perfectly understandably, this argument has won.

[00:20:43] A town council in South Wales removed a Punch and Judy show from a local festival [on the grounds that](#)¹⁰² it was, in their words, "too violent and contained [inappropriate](#)¹⁰³ hitting".

[00:20:57] And there was a recent survey of two thousand British parents that found around forty per cent thought the traditional Punch and Judy was too violent for their own children.

[00:21:09] The defenders of the show have their own arguments. They say it is [satire](#)¹⁰⁴, not instruction.

¹⁰¹ treats something serious as if it is not serious

¹⁰² because

¹⁰³ not suitable

¹⁰⁴ humour that criticises people, power, or society

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[00:21:16] They say Punch has always been a [wicked¹⁰⁵](#) character, and that the [joke is on him¹⁰⁶](#), not on his victims.

[00:21:24] They point out that he ends up in hell in many versions of the script, which is hardly an [endorsement¹⁰⁷](#) of his behaviour. They also argue that children do not read puppet violence in the same way adults do: the violence is [stylised¹⁰⁸](#), ridiculous, and obviously unreal.

[00:21:45] They suggest that this is nothing compared to many video games, where characters do much worse.

[00:21:53] And they argue that taking the violence out of Punch and Judy is a bit like taking the wolf out of Little Red Riding Hood. You can do it, but at the end it's not really the same story.

[00:22:06] This being said, there have been attempts to modernise, creating less violent versions of the show, or versions where Judy hits Punch as much as he hits her.

¹⁰⁵ very bad or evil

¹⁰⁶ he is the one people should laugh at

¹⁰⁷ support or approval

¹⁰⁸ not realistic; shown in a special, simple way

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[00:22:18] The thing is, there really isn't a pure, original version. It has always changed.

Punch looks different, what happens in the show has [evolved](#)¹⁰⁹, it has never been a single, fixed text. It is a tradition with a [core](#)¹¹⁰ set of characters, bent and rewritten in every generation that has performed it.

[00:22:40] So, what does the future hold for Punch and Judy??

[00:22:44] Well, it is hard to imagine the show returning to the centre of British popular culture. There are fewer [professors](#) than there used to be, and no great national movement to bring it back.

[00:22:57] If you are lucky, or unlucky, and you find yourself at a British seaside town, you might still [stumble across](#)¹¹¹ the [telltale](#)¹¹² red-and-white [striped canopy](#)¹¹³ of a Punch and Judy show, and hear the [inimitable](#)¹¹⁴ sound of the [swazzle](#).

[00:23:14] If you ever see one, stop for a moment and have a look at Mr Punch.

¹⁰⁹ changed slowly over time

¹¹⁰ the main and most important part

¹¹¹ find by chance

¹¹² easy to recognise as a sign of it

¹¹³ a cloth roof or cover

¹¹⁴ impossible to copy exactly

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[00:23:20] He has lasted three and a half centuries. He has [outlived¹¹⁵](#) the king who first [applauded¹¹⁶](#) him in 1662. He has [outlived](#) the magazine that borrowed his name in 1841. He has [outlived](#) generations of children who once stood on the sand, staring up at that [striped booth](#), laughing at a puppet who did everything he was not supposed to do.

[00:23:42] Whatever happens to him next, that is, by any standard, a pretty [remarkable](#) [run¹¹⁷](#).

[00:23:50] OK, then, that is it for today's episode, the first part of our three-part mini-series on unusual British traditions.

[00:23:58] Next up we'll be moving into fox hunting, a very different type of entertainment that many people would say is not entertainment at all.

[00:24:06] And in part three, we'll tell the story of the rise and fall of the British seaside holiday, the place where Punch and Judy really became a cult tradition.

[00:24:16] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

¹¹⁵ lived or lasted longer than

¹¹⁶ clapped to show enjoyment

¹¹⁷ a long and impressive period of success

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[00:24:21] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Pointless	not useful or needed
Quintessentially	in the most typical way
Striped	with lines of different colours
Booth	a small covered place for a show or selling things
Hook-nosed	with a curved nose, shaped like a hook
Squeaky	high and thin in sound
Deckchairs	folding chairs used outside, often at the beach
Flourishing	doing very well; growing strongly
Improvised	made up while performing, not planned exactly before
Slapstick	silly physical comedy, often with people falling or being hit
Stock characters	well-known types of characters used again and again
Hooked	curved like a hook
Hump	a round raised part on his back

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Squawking	making a loud, harsh, bird-like sound
Cunning	clever in a sneaky way
Insulted	said rude things to them
Figures of authority	people with power, such as police or leaders
Beaky	like a bird's nose or beak
Hit	very popular success
Hits	very popular successes
Tweaked	changed a little
Gossiped about	talked about (especially other people's private lives)
Flames	the bright burning parts of a fire
Prized possessions	things he owned and valued very much
Marionette	a puppet moved by strings
Troublemaker	someone who caused problems
Anglicised	changed to sound more English
Gallants	fashionable people; well-dressed people

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

Restored	put back in power
Icon	a very famous symbol
The best part of	almost; nearly
Operated	controlled
Kit	equipment; things needed for the job
Glove puppet	a puppet worn on the hand
Packed away	put away after use
Glove puppets	puppets worn on the hand
Marionettes	puppets moved by strings
Gracefully	in a smooth and beautiful way
Whack	hit hard
Thud	a heavy dull sound
Slapping	hitting with an open hand
Exaggerated	made bigger or more excessive than normal
Made the leap	changed from one thing to another

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

Take off	become popular or successful
Portable	easy to carry or move
Professor	a Punch and Judy performer
Mastered	learned to do very well
Respectable	seen as proper or good by society
Reed	a small thin part that air passed through to make a sound
Unmistakable	very easy to recognise
Ear-piercing	very loud and high; painful to hear
Swizzle	a small device used in the mouth to make Mr Punch's voice
Confess	admit it is true
Swallow	make it go down your throat
Whistle	a small wind instrument in which sound is produced by blowing air
Professors	Punch and Judy performers
Badge	a sign used for identification or membership
Wardrobe	clothes

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

Jester	a funny performer in a king's court
Medieval	from the Middle Ages
Cast	all the other characters in the show
Running order	the order in which things happened
Caricaturist	an artist who drew funny pictures of people
Canonical	accepted as the main or official version
Prolific	producing a lot of work
Forgers	people who made fake documents or writing
Faithful record	a true and correct account
Polished	improved to make it smoother or better
Hangman	a person whose job was to hang criminals
Drag	pull with force
Execute	kill him as a legal punishment
Noose	a rope circle used for hanging someone
Cackling	laughing in a loud, harsh way

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

Catchphrase	a phrase he said again and again
Roars with laughter	laughs very loudly
Passed a hat	presented his hat to collect money in it
Preserve	something kept mainly for
Exploded	grew very quickly
Booming	growing fast and doing very well
Day-trippers	people who visited a place for one day
Set up shop	start working
Satirical	using jokes to criticise people or society
Mascot	a person, animal, or character used as a symbol
Settled on	chose after thinking
Anarchic	against rules and order
Authority-mocking	making fun of people in power
Double life	two different roles or sides
Knockabout	rough, silly, and physical

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

Prestigious	respected and admired
Stood for	represented, acted as a symbol
Misrule	bad rule; disorder
Mocks	makes fun of
Gets away with it	does something wrong and is not punished
Heyday	the time when it was most popular or successful
Package holidays	holidays where travel and hotel were bought together
Jetted off	flew away by plane
Shrinking	becoming smaller
Losing its appeal	becoming less interesting or popular
Protagonist	the main character
Cackles	laughs in a loud, harsh way
Makes light of	treats something serious as if it is not serious
On the grounds that	because
Inappropriate	not suitable

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

Satire	humour that criticises people, power, or society
Wicked	very bad or evil
Joke is on him	he is the one people should laugh at
Endorsement	support or approval
Stylised	not realistic; shown in a special, simple way
Evolved	changed slowly over time
Core	the main and most important part
Stumble across	find by chance
Telltale	easy to recognise as a sign of it
Canopy	a cloth roof or cover
Inimitable	impossible to copy exactly
Outlived	lived or lasted longer than
Applauded	clapped to show enjoyment
Remarkable run	a long and impressive period of success

Language spotlight

1. Get right into it

- **Meaning:** To start something immediately, without delay.
- **Synonyms:** start immediately, begin straight away, dive in
- **Antonyms:** delay, put off, postpone
- **Examples:**
 - We don't have much time, so let's **get right into it**.
 - The teacher skipped the introduction and **got right into it**.

2. Take off

- **Meaning:** To become successful or popular.
- **Synonyms:** become popular, become successful, grow quickly
- **Antonyms:** fail, decline, lose popularity
- **Examples:**
 - Her YouTube channel really **took off** after one video went viral.

- The new café didn't **take off** at first, but now it's always busy.

3. Set up shop

- **Meaning:** To start working, selling, or doing business in a place.
- **Synonyms:** start working, open, begin business, start operating
- **Antonyms:** close down, leave, stop working
- **Examples:**
 - The food sellers **set up shop** near the train station every morning.
 - After moving to Brighton, she **set up shop** as a private English tutor.

4. Get away with it

- **Meaning:** To do something wrong without being punished or caught.
- **Synonyms:** avoid punishment, escape blame, not get caught
- **Antonyms:** get caught, be punished, face the consequences
- **Examples:**

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

- He copied his homework, but the teacher noticed, so he didn't **get away with it**.
- Some people think politicians often **get away with it** when they break the rules.

5. Make light of

- **Meaning:** To treat something serious as if it is not important.
- **Synonyms:** treat as unimportant, joke about, downplay
- **Antonyms:** take seriously, respect, treat as important
- **Examples:**
 - You shouldn't **make light of** bullying; it can really hurt people.
 - The film was criticised because it seemed to **make light of** crime.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. Where did the character of Punch originally come from?

- a) France
- b) Italy
- c) Spain
- d) Germany

2. What is a swazzle?

- a) A puppet costume
- b) A wooden stick used in the show
- c) A small metal device used to change the voice
- d) A musical instrument played at the seaside

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

3. Who recorded seeing Punchinello in London in 1662?

- a) Charles Dickens
- b) King Charles II
- c) John Payne Collier
- d) Samuel Pepys

4. What major change helped Punch and Judy become more portable and popular on the streets?

- a) The move from marionettes to glove puppets
- b) The move from glove puppets to marionettes
- c) The use of brighter colours
- d) The addition of live music

5. Why did Punch and Judy become strongly linked with the British seaside?

- a) Because the royal family performed it there
- b) Because railways made it easier for people to visit the coast

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

- c) Because it began in small fishing villages
- d) Because schools organised beach performances

True or False

- 6. Marionettes move more gracefully and slowly than glove puppets. (True / False)
- 7. Pulcinella was known for being kind, honest, and calm. (True / False)
- 8. The magazine *Punch* took its name from the puppet character Mr Punch. (True / False)
- 9. The number of professional Punch men increased greatly during the twentieth century. (True / False)
- 10. Some modern critics argue that Punch and Judy is too violent for children. (True / False)

Fill-in-the-Blank

- 11. As the flames approached his house, he dug a big hole to protect his most prized _____, the first of which was his parmesan cheese.

The Strange Story of Punch and Judy

12. The journey from Italian puppet to British icon would take the _____ part of two centuries.
13. So at some point in the eighteenth century, Punch _____ the leap from one form to the other, from marionette to glove puppet.
14. A small metal reed, held against the roof of the mouth, that gave Punch his unmistakable, ____-piercing, squeaky voice.
15. And the audience, at least most of the time, _____ with laughter.

Vocabulary Practice

16. In the podcast, what does **flourishing** mean?

- a) Ending suddenly
- b) Growing well and being successful
- c) Looking old-fashioned
- d) Moving slowly

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17. In the podcast, what does **portable** mean?

- a) Easy to carry or move
- b) Very expensive
- c) Hard to understand
- d) Made of wood

18. In the podcast, what does **canonical** mean?

- a) Funny and silly
- b) Lost over time
- c) Written for children
- d) Accepted as the main or standard version

19. In the podcast, what does **stylised** mean?

- a) Shown in a realistic and natural way
- b) Shown in a way that follows a clear style and is not fully realistic
- c) Hidden from the audience

d) Performed without words

20. In the podcast, what does **stumble across** mean?

a) To break something by accident

b) To perform badly in public

c) To find something by chance

d) To walk in a strange way

Answers

1. b) Italy
2. c) A small metal device used to change the voice
3. d) Samuel Pepys
4. a) The move from marionettes to glove puppets
5. b) Because railways made it easier for people to visit the coast
6. True
7. False
8. True
9. False
10. True
11. possessions
12. best
13. made
14. ear
15. roars
16. b) Growing well and being successful
17. a) Easy to carry or move
18. d) Accepted as the main or standard version
19. b) Shown in a way that follows a clear style and is not fully realistic
20. c) To find something by chance