



A Sailor's Life

Unit 2: Life on Board

Key Stage 1

***Written by Hazel Askew
and Martha Burns Findlay***





The Full English Extra

The Full English Extra was an initiative to preserve and promote the folk arts, building on the success of EFDSS' flagship project The Full English, which created the world's largest digital archive of folk songs, dances, tunes and customs, and a nationwide learning programme that reached more than 16,000 people. The project was led by the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Full English Extra saw the collections of Mary Neal, suffragette, radical arts practitioner and founder of the Esperance Girls Club, and folk dance educator Daisy Caroline Daking added to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library online archive (www.vwml.org), alongside its collection of 19th century broadside ballads and songsters.

The Full English learning programme worked with three national museums – the Museum of English Rural Life at the University of Reading, the National Coal Mining Museum for England near Wakefield in West Yorkshire and the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London – combining folk arts and museum education to provide powerful new learning experiences for schools and music hubs.

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Written by: Hazel Askew and Martha Burns Findlay

Edited by: Frances Watt

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Life on Board

Jobs On Board

A large warship needed a crew of 700 to 800 men. There were many different ranks of men aboard a naval ship ranging from servants and ordinary seamen to surgeons and cooks all the way up to admirals and captains.

For the ship to run smoothly the whole crew had to work together. Discipline was very important to ensure everyone completed their duties to a high standard. Duties included climbing the rigging, scrubbing the decks and keeping a look-out in the crow's nest. The boatswain was the man in charge of making sure everyone worked hard and obeyed orders. There were various punishments for those who disobeyed their orders or broke rules.

The Boatswain's Whistle

This whistle once belonged to an important rank of sailor called a boatswain. A boatswain was the senior crewman of a ship. What symbol on the whistle shows that it belonged to a sailor?

The boatswain was in charge of the day-to-day duties, assigning sailors their tasks to make sure that everything got done. He would use his whistle, the boatswain's call, to give regular commands to his sailors. For example, a blow of the whistle might signal mealtimes, a change of staff or an emergency. The sound was very shrill and high pitched so it could be heard above the noise of the wind and the sea.

Activity: For one day the teacher will transform into the boatswain equipped with a boatswain's call. The class should then be ordered to do various duties depending on the orders given:

- **1 short whistle blow:** ALL HANDS ON DECK – everyone on their hands and knees scrubbing the floor.
- **2 short whistle blows:** CROW'S NEST – everyone should stand on their chair and keep a look out.
- **3 short whistle blows:** CLIMB THE RIGGING – everyone walk around the room as though they are climbing the rigging.
- **1 long whistle blow:** BELOW DECKS – everyone can relax like sailors below deck and pretend they are enjoying their free time.

Song 2 - The Topman and the Afterguard

The text of this song was collated from broadside sources by A.L.Loyd. The tune came from Harry Cox from Potter Heigham, Norfolk, and was collected by E.J.Moeran in 1927.

This traditional song goes through the different people on the ship, and their roles and characters. It is great as a song to hear as a class and to listen out for all the roles mentioned and what it tells you about them. You could also learn verses in smaller groups.

Lyrics

1. As a topman and an afterguard was a-walkin' one day,
Says the topman to the afterguard, I mean for to pray,
For the rights of all sailors and the wrongs of all men,
And whatever I do pray for, you must answer, amen!

2. First I'll pray for the bosun with his little stick;
Who bawls out, all hands, then gives us a lick,
Strikes many a brave fellow and kicks him amain
May the devil double triple damn him, says the afterguard, amen!

3. Then I'll pray for the purser who gives us to eat,
Spew-burgoo, rank butter and musty horse meat,
With weevily old biscuit, while he gets the gain,
May the devil double triple damn him, says the afterguard, amen!

4. Then I'll pray for them navy officers who hold up our due,
We're owed three years' wages and prize money, too,
And it's, you can't have it yet, jack, try next voyage again,
May the devil double triple damn him, says the afterguard, amen!

5. Then the last thing I'll pray for is a jug of good beer,
For the lord sent the liquor our spirits to cheer,
And where we have one pot, I wish we had ten,
And never never want for grog, my boy, says the afterguard, amen!

The Topman and the Afterguard



Glossary

- **Afterguard:** men who were stationed on the quarter-deck and poop, to work the after sails. They were usually ordinary seamen or landsmen with responsibility for the majority of the hardest and most boring jobs on board a ship.
- **Bosun/Boatswain:** seaman who superintends sails, rigging, cordage, anchors and cables, and who also pipes the hands to their duties
- **Grog:** a drink issued to the navy, consisting of one part of spirits diluted with three of water. It was introduced by Admiral Vernon in 1740 and discontinued in 1971.
- **Purser** (pronounced *pusser*): officer who took charge of the provisions and slops (clothing) of a man-of-war.
- **Rank butter:** butter that had curdled and gone sour.
- **Spew-burgoo:** burgoo is an oatmeal gruel.
- **Topman:** selected smart seamen stationed in the several 'tops' (a sort of platform placed over the head of the lower mast. The tops are named after their respective masts). The top-men attended to the setting or taking in of sails.
- **Weevily:** infested with weevils (Curculionidae/Snout beetles)

Comprehension Questions

Listen to the song.

- 1) What did you learn about the bosun?
- 2) What did you learn about the purser?
- 3) What did you learn about the naval officer?

Activity: Listening, character development

- **TASK** – Listen to the song as a class, and perhaps divide into groups to listen out for specific characters in the song and see how much you can learn about what they do.
- In your small groups describe your character in your own words. Perhaps find out what uniform your character would have worn and draw them.



- **EXTENSION** – Write your own verses about other naval jobs you have learn about.

Additional Resources This resource features ‘listening’ songs for you to play to your class, and ‘learning’ songs which you can all learn to sing and join in with. Free downloads of all the songs presented in this pack are available from the EFDSS Resource Bank.



Explore The Full English digital archive

www.vwml.org/thefullenglishproject

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