



A Sailor's Life

Unit 8: A Sailor's Life

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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Unit 8: A Sailor's Life



A Sailor's Life

The life of an ordinary sailor was tough but it did offer extraordinary adventure at sea. When the career of a sailor ended this was often due to injury, ill health, old age or lack of work. Those in higher ranking positions had usually earned enough money by the end of their career to retire into a comfortable life. However, for most sailors who had spent their lives at sea it proved difficult to adjust to life onshore.

Many ex-sailors needed to retrain in another profession in order to earn money. This was particularly difficult for sailors who had lost a limb or had gained some other form of disability as a result of their time in the Navy. For those who could not work there were limited options. Some sailors fell into poverty and became street beggars or musicians. For the fortunate ones they were admitted into Greenwich Hospital which served as a retirement home for sailors. Those who lived at Greenwich Hospital became known as Greenwich Pensioners and were distinctive by their blue coats and tricorne hats.

The Greenwich Pensioner

This picture shows a Greenwich Pensioner standing in front of the River Thames and the old Greenwich Hospital with the Queen's House, Greenwich Park and the Royal Observatory in the background. Greenwich Pensioners were retired sailors.

What else gives us a clue that this man was a sailor?

Activity: Pretend you are a Greenwich Pensioner and write a diary entry looking back on your life as a sailor. What is your story?

To dig deeper, you could also do a local history study to find out more about Greenwich and its connections with the Royal Navy and maritime history.

Here are some good places to start:

- Royal Museums Greenwich (National Maritime Museum): www.rmg.co.uk
- Old Royal Naval College: www.ornc.org
- Greenwich Heritage Centre: www.greenwichheritage.org

Song 8 - On Board a Ninety-Eight

This is a traditional song from text taken from an abridged broadside printed by Ryle of Bloomsbury, in the Frank Kidson collection. The tune is also from Kidson's collection, from Garland of English Folk Songs, published in 1926.

The song tells the story of a sailor's life, going through the different stages and events that happen along the way. It works very well as a class listening and comprehension song.

Glossary

- **Man of war:** was a British Royal Navy expression for a powerful warship or frigate from the 16th to the 19th century
- **Jack Tars:** familiar term for a sailor
- **Bosun/Boatswain:** seaman who superintends sails, rigging, cordage, anchors and cables, and who also pipes the hands to their duties

Comprehension Questions

Listen to the song.

- 1) Can you tell us what different things happened to the sailor?
- 2) How old was he at the start of the song?
- 3) How old is he at the end of the song?
- 4) How did he end up going to sea?
- 5) What battle did he fight at?
- 6) Where does he retire to?

Activity: Song writing

- **TASK** – As a class, discuss about what happens to the sailor on his journey from your memory and turn this into a class story about his journey. Maybe you can create a similar story as a class about a different sailor.
- **EXTENSION** – Pick a verse of the song and draw the sailor at that stage in his life. Put your drawings together as a class and create a class story board of the song.

Lyrics

1. When I was young and scarce eighteen, I followed a roaring trade,
And many a sly trick I have played with many a pretty maid.
My parents found that would not do, I soon would spend their store,
So they resolved that I should go on board a Man of War.
2. A bold press-gang surrounded me, their warrant they did show;
And swore that I should go to sea, and face the daring foe
So off they lugged me to the boat, Oh how I cursed my fate,
Twas then I found that I must float on board of a ninety-eight.
3. When first I put my foot on board, how I began to stare,
Our admiral he gave the word, there is no time to spare
They weighted their anchor, shook out sail, and off they bore me straight,
To watch the foe in storm and gale on board of a ninety-eight
4. Before we reached America, they gave me many a drill
They soon learnt me a nimble way to handle an iron pill
In course of time a fight began when bold Jack Tars laid straight,
What would I give if I could run from on board a ninety-eight...
5. But as time flew I bolder grew, and hardened was to war,
I'd run aloft with my ships crew, and valued not a scar,
So well I did my duty do 'till I got Boatswain's mate,
And damme soon got Boatswain too, on board a ninety-eight
6. So years rolled by and at Trafalgar brave Nelson fought and fell,
As they capsized that hardy tar I caught a rap as well...
To Greenwich College I came because I'd saved my pate,
They only knocked one wing off Jack on board a ninety-eight...
7. So now my cocoa I can take, my pouch with 'bacco stored,
With my blue clothes, and three cock'd hat I'm has happy as a Lord
I have done my duty, served my king and now I bless my fate,
But damme me, I'm too old to sing, I'm nearly ninety-eight.

On Board a Ninety-Eight



When I was young_ and scarce eight- een, I drove a roar- ing trade,_ And



man- y a sly_ trick I have played with man- y a pret_ ty



maid, boys, With man- y a pret_ ty maid.

(Repeat the tune for the 3rd and 4th lines of each verse)

Biography

Hazel Askew



Hazel Askew is a London based singer, musician and workshop leader. She has worked as a performer on the folk scene for many years, most notably with BBC Radio 2 Folk Award nominated vocal trio Lady Maisery and traditional English folk duo The Askew Sisters, with whom she won Best Female Singer at the 2011 Spiral Earth Awards.

Hazel grew up with the folk scene, participating in many youth folk education programmes and now frequently works as a folk educator and workshop leader. She frequently teaches for EFDSS on adult, youth and schools projects, most recently delivering two of the London based Full English Education projects. She has also led workshops and courses for organisations including Folkworks, Aldeburgh Young Musicians, Dartington Summer School, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and various festivals around the country. www.askewsisters.co.uk



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