

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #337

Penny Dreadfuls | “The Victorian Video Game”

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[00:00:04] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] 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.

[00:00:20] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about something called the “Penny Dreadful”.

[00:00:28] A penny is, as you may know, the smallest [denomination¹](#) of the British pound, and dreadful means awful, very bad, terrible.

[00:00:38] And put together, a “Penny Dreadful” was a type of short horror story popular during the Victorian era.

¹ unit of value

[00:00:46] It's a [genre](#)² that has all but died out today, in its original format at least, but was one of the biggest [crazes](#)³ of 19th Century Britain, even being called “the Victorian [equivalent](#)⁴ of video games”, and being described as “Britain’s first taste of mass-produced popular culture for the young”.

[00:01:07] So let's get right into it and talk about the [phenomenon](#)⁵ of the penny dreadful.

[00:01:15] “The rising moon was just [peeping](#)⁶ above the [horizon](#)⁷, and a few [faint](#)⁸, [sickly](#)⁹ [beams](#)¹⁰ of light shot up from it into the night sky.

[00:01:25] Standing in the middle of the road [...] was a horse and rider. The moonlight [shimmered](#)¹¹ upon both with a strange effect.

² style

³ very popular things

⁴ being the same as

⁵ Something important that existed

⁶ coming partially into view

⁷ the line at which the earth's surface and the sky meet

⁸ not strong or clear

⁹ weak

¹⁰ rays, flashes

¹¹ shone, gave out light

[00:01:34] The rider was tall and muscular and sat in the [saddle](#)¹² with an [ease](#)¹³ and [grace](#)¹⁴.

[00:01:41] The [steed](#)¹⁵, [or horse], which he rode was none other than the celebrated ‘Black Bess’, her rider went by the name of Dick Turpin.”

[00:01:52] The horseman was leaning forward in his [saddle](#) and intensely listening as a carriage approached.

[00:01:58] Inside the carriage were a man and wife and they were travelling with a rare treasure, a golden cup, which they had been closely guarding throughout their journey.

[00:02:09] As the couple made their way towards Turpin, they suddenly heard a gunshot and got so frightened that their golden cup fell to the floor.

[00:02:19] Then they heard a voice: “pull up, [coachman](#)¹⁶, or you are a dead man!”

[00:02:25] It was Turpin, and when the coach stopped he approached the window.

[00:02:30] The husband’s terror was clear on his face and he asked if Turpin was going to kill them.

¹² the seat on a horse

¹³ no difficulty

¹⁴ easiness of movement, elegance

¹⁵ horse

¹⁶ the driver of the horse-drawn carriage or vehicle

[00:02:36] Turpin [assured](#)¹⁷ that he was not before he lifted his hat and said “I am sorry to trouble you, but this is really a case of [necessity](#)¹⁸.”

[00:02:45] He then demanded their money, jewellery and the golden cup.

[00:02:50] Fearing Turpin and his gun, the couple did as they were told and got out of the carriage to give their [riches](#)¹⁹ to the [robber](#)²⁰ while the coachman, or driver, had ran off to get help.

[00:03:02] As they struggled to remove their jewellery and grab the golden cup from the floor of the carriage, an army of around 12 police [emerged](#)²¹ from around the corner...

[00:03:14] This is the story from the very first [instalment](#)²², or episode, of Black Bess, a series that would go on to become the most popular of the Penny Dreadfuls.

[00:03:26] The sudden ending, or [cliffhanger](#)²³, was typical of these stories as they had to keep their readers [eagerly](#)²⁴ awaiting the next episode the following week.

¹⁷ promised

¹⁸ the state of being required, need

¹⁹ valuables

²⁰ the one who was stealing from them

²¹ appeared suddenly

²² episode

²³ sudden ending

²⁴ in a very interested way

[00:03:37] And this strategy was clearly a success, as Black Bess continued for a [whopping²⁵](#) 254 books.

[00:03:46] People [couldn't get enough²⁶](#) of the adventures of Dick Turpin, the [highwayman²⁷](#) who lived a century before these tales made him famous in the 1860s.

[00:03:57] And Turpin was not alone, for tales about highwaymen were the longest lasting [trend²⁸](#) within penny dreadful literature.

[00:04:06] By the time Turpin rode onto the scene in 1868, penny dreadfuls had been around for roughly 30 years, and there were more than a million copies being sold every week.

[00:04:19] Given that many would be bought and read aloud to groups of multiple people, it's safe to [assume²⁹](#) that the number of people who either read or listened to a Penny Dreadful story would be several times this number.

²⁵ impressive and surprising

²⁶ liked it very much

²⁷ an outlaw who stole from people on the road

²⁸ style, fashion

²⁹ accept it without question or proof

[00:04:34] And when you think that the entire population of England and Wales was 17 million people in 1851, we are likely talking about the [vast majority](#)³⁰ of the teenage population of the country.

[00:04:49] But what was so special about these stories?

[00:04:52] And how did they get so popular?

[00:04:55] Well, as the name suggests, penny dreadfuls were sold for a single penny.

[00:05:02] Sure, a penny back in the 19th century was worth a lot more than it is today, but it was still very cheap. One penny is about 25p now, it's a quarter of a pound, but perhaps a better comparison is that one [instalment](#) of these books was about the same price as a loaf of bread.

[00:05:25] And to give you another point of comparison, this [genre](#) was very cheap compared to normal books, books you may well have heard of.

[00:05:35] For example, an [instalment](#) of a Charles Dickens novel such as Oliver Twist would cost around 12 pennies, or 1 shilling.

[00:05:45] Before you're thinking, [hang on](#)³¹, these Penny Dreadfuls are just short stories or chapters of a book, no wonder Oliver Twist was more expensive, it's an entire

³⁰ almost all of them

³¹ wait a minute

book, remember that Charles Dickens also published his books in the same, [serialised](#)³², format, with new [instalments](#)³³ coming out over a period of weeks or months.

[00:06:07] So, each [instalment](#) of a Penny Dreadful was incredibly cheap, less than 1/10th of the cost of a normal book.

[00:06:16] As you might expect, this low price tag did a great deal to expand the number of people who were able to read or, if they were [illiterate](#)³⁴, listen to these stories, and [in so doing](#)³⁵ for the first time it opened up literature to society’s poorest, which in Victorian England, was the majority of the population.

[00:06:39] So, how was it possible to make them so cheap?

[00:06:43] Well, partly, automation. [Innovations](#)³⁶ in printing technology allowed for mass produced prints on very cheap and thin paper.

[00:06:53] With the invention of the steam powered press in 1814, printing had become mechanical and automated.

³² published in regular parts or episodes

³³ episodes

³⁴ not able to read or write

³⁵ because of this

³⁶ new methods or ideas

[00:07:01] It was 5 times faster than the at-the-time revolutionary Gutenberg printing press.

[00:07:07] Paper was cheap, for once, and the process of printing onto the paper, and then putting it all together, was more **efficient**³⁷ than ever before.

[00:07:17] To keep costs low, they did not have **fancy**³⁸ thick book covers, they were simply 8 to 16 pages of thin paper with columns of text.

[00:07:28] Really, they were more like a modern-day magazine or comic book.

[00:07:34] And let’s not forget the cost of actually writing the stories.

[00:07:39] This **genre**, much like what is **disparagingly**³⁹ called “airport novels” nowadays, was written quickly, often with **generic**⁴⁰ and **formulaic**⁴¹ characters.

[00:07:52] Authors working for publishing houses would write **tirelessly**⁴², often being paid a penny per line and being responsible for up to 10 stories at the same time.

³⁷ producing good results, effective

³⁸ impressive and expensive

³⁹ in a critical or unkind way

⁴⁰ common, not interesting

⁴¹ being of no special quality or type

⁴² without getting tired, in an energetic way

[00:08:04] As a result, Penny Dreadfuls were [criticised](#)⁴³ for their [lack](#)⁴⁴ of literary [merit](#)⁴⁵, for not being particularly good books.

[00:08:12] We'll come to some of the results of this shortly, but the point to remember here is that they were very cheap to make, meaning that they could be sold for the cost of a loaf of bread.

[00:08:24] And the result of these penny dreadfuls being so affordable was, of course, that they could be bought and enjoyed by people who would never have been able to buy a book before.

[00:08:36] The 19th century was, after all, a time of [booming](#)⁴⁶ [literacy](#)⁴⁷ rates in Britain, principally due to the widespread availability of schooling for children.

[00:08:47] In the 1830s, under 50% of women and only around 60% of men could read.

[00:08:54] Within just 40 years, by the mid 1870s, 90% of the British population could read.

⁴³ judged in a negative way

⁴⁴ absence

⁴⁵ quality

⁴⁶ rising

⁴⁷ the ability to read and write

[00:09:03] And despite these better education [outcomes](#)⁴⁸ for children, as you may know, life in Victorian Britain was pretty tough and [miserable](#)⁴⁹, especially at the start of the 19th century.

[00:09:17] In 1821, almost half of the entire [workforce](#)⁵⁰ was under the age of 20 and the average age children began working was just 10 years old.

[00:09:30] They would work in factories, on farms, as [chimney sweeps](#)⁵¹, in [all manner of](#)⁵² tough and dangerous jobs. Even Charles Dickens, who became the most celebrated and successful of Victorian writers, worked as a child in a factory that produced [boot polish](#)⁵³.

[00:09:49] Throughout the 19th century, the British government did pass [legislation](#)⁵⁴ to improve the [plight](#)⁵⁵ of the working poor, but it was a slow process.

⁴⁸ results

⁴⁹ very unhappy

⁵⁰ the people available for work

⁵¹ people whose job was to clean the inside of chimneys (the pipes that lead the smoke of a fireplace out)

⁵² a lot of different types of

⁵³ a substance used to protect boots and make them shine

⁵⁴ set of rules or laws

⁵⁵ bad condition or situation

[00:10:00] In 1833, for example, the “Factory Act” was celebrated as a wonderful thing for children, but what did it say? Only that you had to be 9 years old to legally work.

[00:10:14] In any case, even if it did improve, slightly, life as a child in Victorian Britain was somewhat [miserable](#).

[00:10:22] And suddenly, along came this option of reading stories of adventure, mystery, murder, and the [supernatural](#)⁵⁶, all at a price that wouldn’t [break the bank](#)⁵⁷, that you could actually afford.

[00:10:37] As such, these books provided a welcome escape from the [drudgery](#)⁵⁸, boredom and [hardship](#)⁵⁹ of factory life or classroom learning, and they were a massive hit.

[00:10:50] So, you are probably wondering, what were these stories actually about?

[00:10:55] Well, you heard a bit of one at the start of this episode, and you may have heard of some of the others.

[00:11:02] Sweeney Todd, which was turned into a Tim Burton movie starring Johnny Depp, was one of the most famous Penny Dreadfuls.

⁵⁶ forces that cannot be explained by science or the laws of nature

⁵⁷ cost more than they could afford

⁵⁸ hard and boring work

⁵⁹ difficult conditions

[00:11:10] If you haven’t heard the story, or seen the 2007 film, this tale is all about a barber, a hairdresser, who killed his customers by [slitting](#)⁶⁰ their throats with his [razor](#)⁶¹.

[00:11:24] And the customers weren’t just killed, they were turned into meat pies and sold to [unwitting](#)⁶² members of the public.

[00:11:33] Then there was Black Bess, which we heard at the start of the episode.

[00:11:37] And these are just to name a few.

[00:11:40] Before long, increasing amounts of penny dreadfuls [emerged](#) and there was a huge choice of which weekly tale or [scandalous](#)⁶³ character whose adventures its readers could follow.

[00:11:51] Between 1830 and 1850 there were up to 100 publishers offering these cheap stories.

⁶⁰ cutting, slashing

⁶¹ a device with a sharp blade for removing hair

⁶² without knowing

⁶³ causing public shock and anger

[00:12:00] In the beginning, the stories were usually about [highwaymen](#)⁶⁴ like Dick Turpin, men who stopped people on the roads and [robbed](#)⁶⁵ them.

[00:12:09] Indeed, the very first penny dreadful which came out in 1836 was a collection of [biographies](#)⁶⁶ called The Lives of the Most [Notorious](#)⁶⁷ [Highwaymen](#).

[00:12:20] As a quick side note, if you haven’t listened to our episode on [Highwaymen](#), it’s quite a fun one, it’s episode number 197.

[00:12:30] Over time, though, other characters and [storylines](#)⁶⁸ began to increase in popularity, it wasn’t only about criminals.

[00:12:39] The most popular series was The Mysteries of London, which published a new episode every week for 12 years, each one selling around a quarter of a million copies.

⁶⁴ outlaws who stole from people on the road

⁶⁵ stole

⁶⁶ the stories of their lives

⁶⁷ famous for something bad

⁶⁸ types of stories or the main events of the stories

[00:12:52] These stories were based in the Victorian [slums](#)⁶⁹, or poor areas of the city where many of the readers lived, and they turned the [grim](#)⁷⁰ surroundings into adventurous sites of mystery.

[00:13:06] Whether it was a murder or a [scandalous plot](#)⁷¹ against a rich and evil [superior](#)⁷², readers loved these [sensational](#)⁷³ tales.

[00:13:16] As to the question of why, well, you only have to take a look at the most popular [genres](#)⁷⁴ on YouTube or Netflix to see that this [genre](#), this style, this type of story, is still equally popular.

[00:13:32] True crime, mysteries, the [supernatural](#), we can debate the reasons why, but modern series like True Detective or Stranger Things are, in some ways, simply developments, and certainly more expensive developments, on the Penny Dreadful [genre](#).

[00:13:51] And the [serialised](#) format certainly helped [boost](#)⁷⁵ their popularity. Just like if your favourite TV series ends on a [cliffhanger](#), ends with something exciting

⁶⁹ the poor areas of the city

⁷⁰ miserable, depressing

⁷¹ story

⁷² better

⁷³ very exciting

⁷⁴ styles

⁷⁵ increase

happening that might change the [plot](#) completely, well this was exactly the same with the Penny Dreadful.

[00:14:10] People would save their money, [eagerly](#) awaiting the next [instalment](#) so they could see what would happen next.

[00:14:17] There were even stories of book clubs being formed, kids who couldn't afford the 1 penny price tag would [club together](#)⁷⁶ and buy a book to share, and even those children who weren't able to read would join the club and listen to the story being read out loud.

[00:14:36] Initially, the subjects tended to be believable but “real-life” style stories - murderers, adventure, and so on, but all within the [confines](#)⁷⁷ of the “real” world.

[00:14:50] As time went on, Penny Dreadfuls started to become more [supernatural](#) as well, involving [supernatural](#) beasts and [goings-on](#)⁷⁸.

[00:14:59] There were [vampires](#)⁷⁹, ghosts, evil spirits, all of whom would commit [gruesome](#)⁸⁰ crimes to the delight of their readers.

⁷⁶ share the cost

⁷⁷ limits

⁷⁸ strange events

⁷⁹ dead people who come back to life and drink the blood of the living

⁸⁰ horrible, shocking

[00:15:09] But, as with any new [craze](#)⁸¹, especially one that [captivates](#)⁸² the hearts and minds of the young, it wasn't long before there were as many critics as there were fans.

[00:15:23] Much like horror movies or violent video games today, there were adult critics who feared the impact that [devouring](#)⁸³ these stories would have on the children of the time.

[00:15:35] Victorians were famously [moralistic](#)⁸⁴, with the upper classes feeling like they had a moral duty to protect their supposed [inferiors](#)⁸⁵ from moral [decay](#)⁸⁶, and the [phenomenon](#) of the Penny Dreadful was really the first time that society en masse had had access to this kind of entertainment.

⁸¹ great interest and enthusiasm about something

⁸² holds their attention and interest

⁸³ reading with great interest

⁸⁴ judging people about what they think is right or wrong

⁸⁵ people who weren't as good as them

⁸⁶ fall, failure

[00:15:56] It's hard to [overstate](#)⁸⁷ the fear and moral [panic](#)⁸⁸ that [ensued](#)⁸⁹, with one newspaper in 1886 even declaring that penny dreadfuls were, I quote, “the [poison](#)⁹⁰ which is threatening to destroy the manhood of democracy”.

[00:16:14] Why?

[00:16:15] Well, just like video games, people feared that simply reading about crime would mean that someone was more likely to commit crimes, that reading violent stories could [inspire](#)⁹¹ violent acts.

[00:16:29] And in the final two decades of the 19th century, after the penny dreadful [craze](#) had reached its height, people were increasingly [blaming](#)⁹² the stories for crimes actually committed by children.

[00:16:43] Almost every month, there would be news stories of crimes or acts that were [blamed](#)⁹³ on Penny Dreadfuls.

⁸⁷ describe it as something more serious than it really was

⁸⁸ sudden and strong feeling of fear

⁸⁹ followed

⁹⁰ a dangerous substance

⁹¹ give rise to, encourage

⁹² considering them responsible

⁹³ considered to have happened because of them

[00:16:51] In 1892 there was one of some schoolboys who ran away with a gun and were caught with a note which read:

[00:17:00] “Steal the money; go to the station and get to Glasgow. Get boat for America”.

[00:17:06] People believed the boys were [inspired](#)⁹⁴ by tales such as Jack Harkaway’s Schooldays, which was about a boy who ran away to begin a life of adventure.

[00:17:16] In the same year, the [suicide](#)⁹⁵ of a 12-year-old boy who hanged himself was also [blamed](#) on penny dreadfuls.

[00:17:25] In court, the [verdict](#)⁹⁶ was announced as “[suicide](#) during temporary [insanity](#)⁹⁷, [induced](#)⁹⁸ by reading [trashy](#)⁹⁹ novels”.

[00:17:35] But [tensions](#)¹⁰⁰ really hit an all-time high in 1895, when the body of a woman was found in a house in London.

⁹⁴ encouraged, affected

⁹⁵ the act of killing himself

⁹⁶ official decision about what had happened

⁹⁷ the condition of being mad or crazy

⁹⁸ caused

⁹⁹ of low quality

¹⁰⁰ difficult or uneasy situations

[00:17:45] The police didn’t have to search far for her killers, as they were, in fact, her 12- and 13-year-old sons.

[00:17:53] The elder boy had [insisted](#)¹⁰¹ that his brother told him to [stab](#)¹⁰² their mother to death, and when the police investigated, they found a huge collection of penny dreadfuls in the house.

[00:18:06] The copies were used as evidence in the case and in court a judge called for laws to “stop the [inflammable](#)¹⁰³ and shocking literature that is sold.”

[00:18:17] All of these [controversies](#)¹⁰⁴ were the beginning of the end for the penny dreadful [craze](#), as publishers began to [distance themselves](#)¹⁰⁵ from problematic material and real-life tragedies.

[00:18:30] It’s not exactly good for business if you’re being [blamed](#) for causing terrible murders and [suicides](#)¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰¹ stated in a certain way

¹⁰² hit her with a sharp object

¹⁰³ able to cause fire, dangerous

¹⁰⁴ discussions and disagreements

¹⁰⁵ stay away from

¹⁰⁶ the acts of people killing themselves

[00:18:37] As a result, there was a gap in the market for more [uplifting](#)¹⁰⁷ stories for children, stories that included moral or educational lessons, stories that ended well, stories without murder, violence or [brutality](#)¹⁰⁸, stories that a parent would be much happier to buy for their child than a Penny Dreadful.

[00:18:58] The [patriotically](#)¹⁰⁹ named The Union Jack was one of them, and in fact the entire objective of The Union Jack was, and I’m quoting directly, to “put the Penny Dreadfuls out of business”.

[00:19:13] The Union Jack had another large advantage - its price.

[00:19:18] It cost half a penny, half as much money as a Penny Dreadful.

[00:19:23] For a [budget-conscious](#)¹¹⁰ audience, clearly this was a big advantage.

[00:19:30] What’s more, there was a [shift](#)¹¹¹ away from [serialised](#)-fiction towards full-length books, so when you could buy a full novel of a few hundred pages for the

¹⁰⁷ pleasant, hopeful

¹⁰⁸ extreme violence

¹⁰⁹ in a way that showed love for the country

¹¹⁰ careful about spending money

¹¹¹ change, move

price of a [handful](#)¹¹² of Penny Dreadfuls, and the quality of the [narrative](#)¹¹³ was a lot better, this option suddenly wasn't so expensive at all.

[00:19:51] And on the other end of the [spectrum](#)¹¹⁴, during the 1870s there was a [boom](#)¹¹⁵ in [comic books](#)¹¹⁶, illustrated books, Which were even more [accessible](#)¹¹⁷ than penny dreadfuls, because there were pictures.

[00:20:05] The Penny Dreadful [genre](#) was being [squeezed](#)¹¹⁸ from all sides. Everything that had made it so popular - its price, its [accessibility](#)¹¹⁹, its blood and [gore](#)¹²⁰ - was now available in different formats, formats that were often preferred by readers that had once [snapped up](#)¹²¹ every Penny Dreadful on the shelf.

[00:20:27] By [the turn of the century](#)¹²², the Penny Dreadful had practically died out.

¹¹² small number

¹¹³ story

¹¹⁴ range of options

¹¹⁵ increase in popularity

¹¹⁶ illustrated books

¹¹⁷ easily liked and obtained

¹¹⁸ limited, pressed

¹¹⁹ the fact of being easily liked and obtained

¹²⁰ blood and violence

¹²¹ bought quickly

¹²² the time when the previous century ended and the next began

[00:20:33] Now, when it comes to the legacy of the Penny Dreadful, fortunately the fears about the [genre](#) destroying all [morality](#)¹²³ and [poisoning](#)¹²⁴ democracy didn't come true.

[00:20:44] Perhaps they might have [inspired](#) some [reckless](#)¹²⁵ behaviour, even violent acts, but did they turn an entire generation into [rampant](#)¹²⁶ serial killers?

[00:20:57] They did not.

[00:20:58] In fact, many commentators now point to the positive impact of the Penny Dreadful.

[00:21:05] Sure, they may not have had the literary [merit](#) of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, or Shakespeare, but they did [encourage](#)¹²⁷ a generation of children to start reading.

[00:21:17] As one professor put it, penny dreadfuls gave children “an [incentive](#)¹²⁸ to require literacy”.

¹²³ standards of good or bad behaviour

¹²⁴ damaging, harming

¹²⁵ dangerous

¹²⁶ wild, uncontrolled

¹²⁷ make them more likely to do it

¹²⁸ reason, motivation

[00:21:25] In other words, they gave children a reason, or some motivation to learn to read.

[00:21:30] They didn’t want to be [left out](#)¹²⁹ when everyone else was talking about the latest [robbery](#)¹³⁰ by Dick Turpin or who Sweeney Todd’s latest victim was.

[00:21:41] Now, it’s clearly an [overstatement](#)¹³¹ to say that the Penny Dreadfuls [single-handedly](#)¹³² increased [literacy](#) rates in Victorian Britain, as there were plenty of other factors that taught children how to read.

[00:21:54] But, the Penny Dreadfuls did [inspire](#) a generation to keep reading, to use the skills that they had learned at school.

[00:22:03] So, despite the critics and fears for the [morality](#) of Victorian youth, and fears that they would lead to the destruction of the very [fabric of society](#)¹³³, it certainly seems that there are many worse things a Victorian child could have done than getting [addicted](#)¹³⁴ to Penny Dreadfuls.

[00:22:24] Ok then, that is it for today’s episode on Penny Dreadfuls.

¹²⁹ not included

¹³⁰ the crime of stealing

¹³¹ the action of describing it as more important than it really was

¹³² without help from anything else, alone

¹³³ the order or culture of society

¹³⁴ extremely interested in

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[00:22:29] I hope it was an interesting one, and that you learned something new.

[00:22:33] As always I would love to know what you thought about this episode.

[00:22:37] Are there [equivalents¹³⁵](#) of the Penny Dreadful in your language?

[00:22:41] Do you think that the concerns about violent video games or films are any different to the concerns about Penny Dreadfuls?

[00:22:49] If so, why?

[00:22:51] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:22:55] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:23:04] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:23:09] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

¹³⁵ things that have the same meaning

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Denomination	unit of value
Genre	style
Crazes	very popular things
Equivalent	being the same as
Phenomenon	something important that existed
Peeping	coming partially into view
Horizon	the line at which the earth's surface and the sky meet
Faint	not strong or clear
Sickly	weak
Beams	rays, flashes
Shimmered	shone, gave out light
Saddle	the seat on a horse

Ease	no difficulty
Grace	easiness of movement, elegance
Steed	horse
Coachman	the driver of the horse-drawn carriage or vehicle
Assured	promised
Necessity	the state of being required, need
Riches	valuables
Robber	the one who was stealing from them
Emerged	appeared suddenly
Instalment	episode
Cliffhanger	sudden ending
Eagerly	in a very interested way
Whopping	impressive and surprising
Couldn't get enough	liked it very much
Highwayman	an outlaw who stole from people on the road

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Trend	style, fashion
Assume	accept it without question or proof
Vast majority	almost all of them
Hang on	wait a minute
Serialised	published in regular parts or episodes
Instalments	episodes
Illiterate	not able to read or write
In so doing	because of this
Innovations	new methods or ideas
Efficient	producing good results, effective
Fancy	impressive and expensive
Disparagingly	in a critical or unkind way
Generic	common, not interesting
Formulaic	being of no special quality or type
Tirelessly	without getting tired, in an energetic way

Criticised	judged in a negative way
Lack	absence
Merit	quality
Booming	rising
Literacy	the ability to read and write
Outcomes	results
Miserable	very unhappy
Workforce	the people available for work
Chimney sweeps	people whose job was to clean the inside of chimneys (the pipes that lead the smoke of a fireplace out)
All manner of	a lot of different types of
Boot polish	a substance used to protect boots and make them shine
Legislation	set of rules or laws
Plight	bad condition or situation
Supernatural	forces that cannot be explained by science or the laws of nature
Break the bank	cost more than they could afford

Drudgery	hard and boring work
Hardship	difficult conditions
Slitting	cutting, slashing
Razor	a device with a sharp blade for removing hair
Unwitting	without knowing
Scandalous	causing public shock and anger
Highwaymen	outlaws who stole from people on the road
Robbed	stole
Biographies	the stories of their lives
Notorious	famous for something bad
Storylines	types of stories or the main events of the stories
Slums	the poor areas of the city
Grim	miserable, depressing
Plot	story
Superior	better

Sensational	very exciting
Genres	styles
Boost	increase
Club together	share the cost
Confines	limits
Goings-on	strange events
Vampires	dead people who come back to life and drink the blood of the living
Gruesome	horrible, shocking
Craze	great interest and enthusiasm about something
Captivates	holds their attention and interest
Devouring	reading with great interest
Moralistic	judging people about what they think is right or wrong
Inferiors	people who weren't as good as them
Decay	fall, failure
Overstate	describe it as something more serious than it really was

Panic	sudden and strong feeling of fear
Ensued	followed
Poison	a dangerous substance
Inspire	give rise to, encourage
Blaming	considering them responsible
Blamed	considered to have happened because of them
Inspired	encouraged, affected
Suicide	the act of killing himself
Verdict	official decision about what had happened
Insanity	the condition of being mad or crazy
Induced	caused
Trashy	of low quality
Tensions	difficult or uneasy situations
Insisted	stated in a certain way
Stab	hit her with a sharp object

Inflammable	able to cause fire, dangerous
Controversies	discussions and disagreements
Distance themselves	stay away from
Suicides	the acts of people killing themselves
Uplifting	pleasant, hopeful
Brutality	extreme violence
Patriotically	in a way that showed love for the country
Budget-conscious	careful about spending money
Shift	change, move
Handful	small number
Narrative	story
Spectrum	range of options
Boom	increase in popularity
Comic books	illustrated books
Accessible	easily liked and obtained

Squeezed	limited, pressed
Accessibility	the fact of being easily liked and obtained
Gore	blood and violence
Snapped up	bought quickly
The turn of the century	the time when the previous century ended and the next began
Morality	standards of good or bad behaviour
Poisoning	damaging, harming
Reckless	dangerous
Rampant	wild, uncontrolled
Encourage	make them more likely to do it
Incentive	reason, motivation
Left out	not included
Robbery	the crime of stealing
Overstatement	the action of describing it as more important than it really was
Single-handedly	without help from anything else, alone

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Fabric of society	the order or culture of society
Addicted	extremely interested in
Equivalents	things that have the same meaning

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com