
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

What makes a superhero?



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Rob ... and ... is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's Super-Finn!

Finn

Hello Rob – it's just Finn here actually – I'm no **superhero**!

Rob

That's a shame. So you don't have any special **superpowers** – amazing skills and abilities that can be used for saving people and fighting against evil?

Finn

Well, lots of powers, but no superpowers. I'm afraid not. Superheroes, of course, tend to be **fictional** characters – they're made-up characters, who appear in comics and books and movies.

Rob

You mean characters like Batman, Spiderman and Wonder Woman. Do you have a favourite?

Finn

I do actually. Spiderman was my favourite when I was growing up. And he can climb up walls and I really wanted to do the same – I tried to climb up the walls in my house and sadly I failed because superheroes are fictional – they aren't real!

Rob

Well some real-life superheroes do exist and that's what we'll be talking about today and we'll be explaining some words related to superheroes. But first a question ...

Finn

Can I use my superpowers to answer this one?

Rob

You can try. What year did Superman first appear published in a comic book?

- a) 1930
- b) 1934
- c) 1938

Finn

My *spidey* sense tells me it's 1934.

Rob

I'll tell you if you're right or wrong at the end of the programme. Now let's find out more about some real-life superheroes. These are people who don't really have superpowers but they are doing something **extraordinary**.

Finn

So they are doing something special – but most importantly, they are doing something good.

Rob

People often describe someone who has done something brave, such as saving someone's life, as a hero. Firefighters are sometimes described as heroes because they often risk their lives to save others.

Finn

But heroes don't have to be **life-savers**. We sometimes describe a person with great intelligence or amazing abilities as 'our hero' – that could be a musician maybe or an athlete. It's someone we **admire** and look up to.

Rob

Well there's a man in Japan who's recently been described as a 'superhero'. To be honest, I don't think his powers are superhuman – that means a power that ordinary humans don't have – but what he does is rather unusual and he gives up his free time doing it.

Finn

Tell me more Rob.

Rob

This is Chibatman – named after the city of Chiba where he comes from. His **mission** – his purpose – is to make the people of the city happy.

Finn

That's a worthwhile mission.

Rob

It is. Chibatman has been spotted 'flying' through the streets of Chiba dressed a bit like

Batman and riding his custom-built three-wheeled Chibatpod. But why? Is he just a bit crazy or does he have **honourable** intentions?

Finn

You mean does he genuinely want to do some good and make things better?

Rob

Well, listen to what he says, speaking through a translator, and see if you can hear what his reasons are ...

'Chibatman' – Chiba superhero

I started doing this around three years ago. As for my reasons: during the great earthquake people forgot how to smile. I wanted to help bring the smile back and that's why I started.

Finn

OK, so because of the devastation caused by the earthquake and tsunami in 2011, he felt people had forgotten how to smile. So his mission was to get people smiling again. That's something we could describe as being 'honourable'.

Rob

What is interesting about him and other superheroes is they keep their identity **closely-guarded** – nobody knows who the real man in the costume is.

Finn

That's also true for another Japanese man who's been called a superhero. Mr Full Moon wears a costume to hide his identity when he goes around cleaning the streets of Tokyo.

Rob

Yes, he actually talks to people through a voice on his smartphone. He hasn't been employed by anyone to do this – he just claims he wants to keep the city's streets cleaner. We could call him a grime fighter armed with a dustpan and brush!

Finn

Very good – a 'grime fighter' – someone fighting dirt and dust!

Rob

Anyway, time now to see if your superpowers helped you answer today's question correctly.

Finn

Yes Rob, you asked me what year Superman first appeared in a comic book.

Rob

And you said 1934 and you were wrong. Superman first appeared in Action Comics #1 in June 1938. The character was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster and originally he wasn't a hero but a villain – the bad guy – but he was changed into a hero before he was published in the comic.

Now before you change into your costume, could you save the day by reminding us of some of the words we have heard today?

Finn

Yes, today we heard:

superhero
superpowers
fictional
extraordinary
life-savers
admire
mission
honourable
closely-guarded

Rob

Well, that brings us to the end of today's 6 Minute English. We hope you've enjoyed today's programme. Please join us again soon. Bye.

Finn

Bye.

Vocabulary and definitions

superhero	character in a film or story who has special strength and uses it to do good things and help other people
superpowers	extreme strength or abilities that most people do not have
fictional	invented / not real
extraordinary	special or very unusual
life-savers	people who give help to other people who are in a very difficult situation
admire	respect
mission	important job
honourable	morally good and deserving respect
closely-guarded	kept secret

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