
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Who do you think you are?



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Alice

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Alice...

Neil

And I'm Neil. So, Alice, what do you see when you look at me?

Alice

Well, male, Caucasian, early 40s, short auburn hair, bushy eyebrows, thin lips...

Neil

OK. So that's how you see me? It sounds like a police report, and I'm not sure I like your observation about thin lips. **Caucasian** means white skinned and European, by the way.

Alice

And today the show is about **identity** – who or what a person is. And the way people see us forms part of our sense of identity, while another part comes from our **ethnic** – or racial – identity. So my question for you today, Neil, is: What percentage of the UK population described themselves as ethnically mixed? Is it ...

a) 0.9%?

b) 5.9%?

Or c) 9%?

Neil

OK... I think that it's a) 0.9%.

Alice

Well, we'll find out if you got the answer right or wrong later on in the show. Now, Neil, you are, of course, many more things than my physical description of you!

Neil

I'm glad to hear that. And it's true, that until you actually hear somebody speak, there are lots of things you can't know about them. For example, which country they're from, what language they speak...

Alice

Yes. So looking at me, what would you say, Neil?

Neil

I would say Alice that you're a typical English rose.

Alice

Thanks, Neil – and **English rose** describes an attractive girl with a pale delicate **complexion** – or skin colour – but you can't actually tell where a person is from by the way they look.

Neil

Yes, I suppose you're right. I have a friend who also looks very English like you, but she's a real ethnic mix. Her dad is German and her mum is Brazilian!

Alice

Well, let's hear from New York City actress and playwright, Sarah Jones, talking about her complicated ethnicity.

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Sarah Jones, actress and playwright, New York City

My family on my dad's side, my grandparents, are from the South. There's some Caribbean in there, black Americans from the South and the Caribbean, and then on my mother's side there are people from the Caribbean, from Ireland but you know Irish American, German American. People would ask me if I was adopted when they saw my mother's white skin – she's actually mixed but she's white from a distance, and I'm black from a distance.

Neil

Sarah Jones there. Well, Sarah has family from all over the world! I suppose the United States – and New York City, especially – is a real melting pot.

Alice

That's right. And **melting pot** describes a society made from people of different countries who live together and create a new shared culture.

Neil

And people think Sarah is **adopted** – or raised by parents who aren't biologically hers – because she looks so different to her mum.

Alice

But I expect Sarah sees herself as American. New York is where she was born and raised.

Neil

That's right. But her grandparents weren't. Do you think you change when you go and live in another country with people different to you?

Alice

Yes, I do. My neighbours are Turkish but they've lived in England for 45 years so they've integrated into our culture. They enjoy English things like... our TV soap operas, cooking turkey at Christmas, and drinking tea with milk.

Neil

And to **integrate** means to join a group of people, and often involves changing your habits and customs.

Alice

Yes. OK. So, Neil, to what extent does the way other people see us, actually change us? Let's listen to Julian Baggini, a writer and philosopher here in the UK and find out what he thinks.

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Julian Baggini, writer and philosopher, UK

It seems very evident that our sense of self isn't something that comes entirely from within. And of course we're affected by the way other people see us. And that's one of the most formative things in creating our sense of identity. I mean, I think it's kind of a two-way process that's ongoing. Our sense of who we are is always a response in part to how other people see us.

Neil

So Julian Baggini believes the way other people see us is **formative** in creating our sense of identity – or who we are. And formative means important for the development of something.

Alice

So if enough people see you as an English rose, you might start to see yourself as an English rose, even if you aren't ethnically English.

Neil

I'm not so sure. The friend I talked about earlier, she comes across as much more Brazilian than English in the way she behaves. She doesn't have the famous English reserve – but you'd never know it by looking at her.

Alice

And **reserve** means hiding what you're thinking or feeling. I think I'm guilty of English reserve. How about you, Neil?

Neil

No, I think I **wear my heart on my sleeve**, Alice – which means I make my feelings clear. OK, I think it's time for the answer to today's quiz question.

Alice

Okey-dokey, fair enough. I asked you: What percentage of the UK population described themselves as ethnically mixed? Is it ... a) 0.9%, b) 5.9% or c) 9%?

Neil

I said a) 0.9%.

Alice

Yes. And you were on the money today, Neil! Well done! According to a survey conducted by the BBC in 2011, when asked about their own ethnic origins, 0.9% of the UK population said they were mixed race, although it's thought that the real figure is 2% or more. Now, could you remind us of the words we heard today, Neil?

Neil

Sure. They are:

Caucasian

identity

ethnic

English rose

complexion

melting pot

adopted

integrate

formative

reserve

wear your heart on your sleeve

Alice

And that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Don't forget to join us again soon!

Neil

Meanwhile, visit our website: bbclearningenglish.com, where you'll find guides to grammar, exercises, videos and articles to read and improve your English.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary

Caucasian

white skinned and European

identity

who or what a person is

ethnic

racial

English rose

an attractive girl with a pale delicate complexion

complexion

skin colour, especially of the face

melting pot

a society made of people from different countries who live together and create a new shared culture

adopted

(describes) a child raised by people who aren't his or her biological parents

integrate

become part of a group of people, often changing your habits and customs in order to fit in well

formative

important for the development of something

reserve

hiding what you're thinking or feeling

wear your heart on your sleeve

make your feelings clear