
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

Shakespeare Speaks

As dead as a doornail: Lesson plan



The video to accompany this lesson plan can be found here:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/shakespeare/unit-1/session-3>

Aims: Students will...

- practise listening for gist and detail in the context of a short animation about Shakespeare's life, language and plays.
- understand the meaning, use and form of the phrase **as dead as a doornail**.
- be able to understand and use further idioms using the word 'dead'.

Lead in

- Introduce students to the characters Will (William Shakespeare) and Thomas Swann and explain that they are going to watch a short animation starring Will and Thomas.
- Start and pause the video at 00.11 seconds with Will writing and Thomas hammering. Put students into groups to discuss what they can see in this opening scene.
- Feedback and elicit key vocab: **a hammer, a nail, DIY, fix, a play, a playwright**.

Task A: Gist

- Set this gist question for students to answer as they watch the animation:

How does Thomas help Will with his new play?

- Play video from beginning to end.
- Ask students to compare their answers in pairs then check answer as a class.

Answer

Will sees Thomas hammering a nail into a door and it gives him the idea for the phrase **as dead as a doornail**, which he uses in his play Henry VI part II.

Task B: Detail

- Hand out worksheets (pages three-five of this lesson plan). Give students a few minutes to read the questions in Task B and then play the video again.
- Students discuss answers in pairs and give reasons. Then check answers together as a class.

Answers

- 1) What kind of play is William Shakespeare writing? **A history play.**
- 2) What is Thomas Swann's job? He's an actor. **(He's building, but this is not his job.)**
- 3) How is Shakespeare's character, Jack Cade, feeling? **Weak and hungry.**
- 4) What does Jack Cade threaten to do to his enemies? **He threatens to kill them.**

He says he will leave them all as dead as a doornail!

- 5) Where are William and Thomas going at the end of this video? **To the Duck and Whistle – their favourite pub.**

Task C: Language – As dead as a doornail

- Give students a few minutes to discuss answers to Task C in pairs.
- Play the narrator section from 02.23 to 03.05 for students to check answers. Check as class.

Answers

The phrase **as dead as a doornail**...

- 1) ...had the same meaning in Shakespeare's day as it has today. **True**
- 2) ...means: nearly dead. **False**
- 3) ...can only be used to describe people. **False**
- 4) ...can also be used for electrical items that don't work. **True**

Task D: Practice

- Students change partners and discuss questions in pairs / small groups.
- Check students are using **as dead as a doornail** correctly. In feedback you could highlight that this is a simile and elicit other examples of similes. (*as good as gold, as white as snow*)

Task E: Reading

- Students read the conversation and then discuss the gist question with their partner.

Answer

They are chatting about Alice's new boyfriend.

Task F: Dead idioms

- Put students into new pairs to match the 'dead' idioms with the definitions. Encourage students to use the context of the dialogue to help them.
- Check answers and ask concept check questions to clarify meaning.

Answers

1B 2E 3D 4C 5A

Extra practice ideas

- Practise the 'dead' idioms with a game from **Eight Vocabulary Activities**.
- Students to read the conversation aloud with their partner and then from memory.

Task G: Discussion

- Students mingle around the classroom and ask classmates these questions. Encourage students to give reasons for answers. Tell them to try and find at least one person who has the same answer as them and to ask follow-up questions.
- Students share interesting answers. Focus on any good examples of language and any errors you wish to correct with the class.

As dead as a doornail: Worksheet one

Task B: Detail

Answer the questions

- 1) What kind of play is William Shakespeare writing?
- 2) What is Thomas Swann's job?
- 3) How is Shakespeare's character, Jack Cade, feeling?
- 4) What does Jack Cade threaten to do to his enemies?
- 5) Where are William and Thomas going at the end of this episode?



Task C: Language - As dead as a doornail

True or false? The phrase 'as dead as a doornail'...

- 1) ...had the same meaning in Shakespeare's day as it has today.
- 2) ...means: nearly dead.
- 3) ...can only be used to describe people.
- 4) ...can also be used for electrical items that don't work.

Task D: Language practice

- 1) Can you remember who wrote the line 'Old Marley was **as dead as a doornail**'?
- 2) What do you do when your phone is **as dead as a doornail**?
- 3) What would you do if your computer / tablet was **as dead as a doornail**? Would you find it difficult to survive without it?



As dead as a doornail: Worksheet two

Task E: Reading

Sarah and Alice are in a restaurant having a chat. But what are they chatting about ?

Sarah

So, is your new man joining us for lunch?

Alice

No, he had a late night yesterday and is still **dead to the world**.

Sarah

That's a pity. I can't wait to meet him; he looks **drop-dead gorgeous** in that photo you sent.

Alice

He does. He normally **wouldn't be seen dead** in a suit and tie, but he looks fantastic!

Sarah

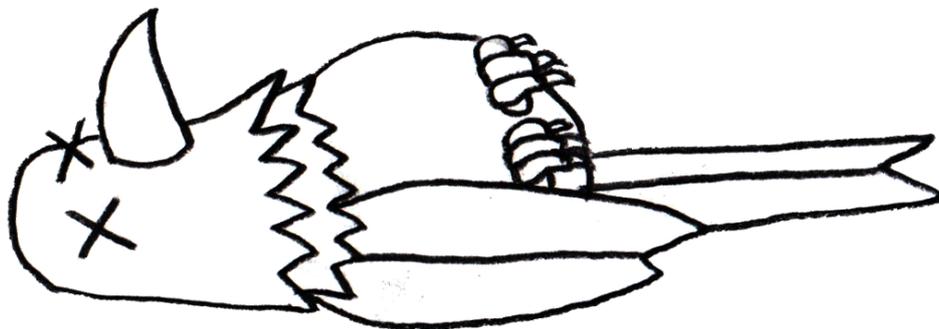
Yeah, he's a **dead ringer for** David Beckham!

Alice

Do you think so? Hey, you know he's got lots of lovely friends I can introduce you to...

Sarah

Over my dead body! I can find my own boyfriend thank you!



As dead as a doornail: Worksheet three

Task F: 'Dead' idioms

Now match the idioms with 'dead' with the definitions. Use the dialogue to help you.

1) dead to the world	A) very very attractive
2) wouldn't be seen dead...	B) sleeping deeply
3) Over my dead body!	C) looks very similar to...
4) is a dead ringer for...	D) I will never let that happen!
5) drop-dead gorgeous	E) would never do it (it would be too embarrassing)

Task G: Discussion

Ask your classmates these questions. Try and find one person who has the same answer as you.

- 1) What item of clothing **would you not be seen dead in** and why?
- 2) Which famous person do you think is **drop-dead gorgeous**? Why?
- 3) Are you a **dead ringer** for anyone? Who? Are any of your classmates or teacher a **dead ringer** for someone famous? (Be nice!)
- 4) When was the last time you were **dead to the world**?
- 5) In what situations would you say **over my dead body**?

