
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

Shakespeare Speaks

Not budge an inch



Narrator

It's evening at the Duck and Whistle. William Shakespeare and his actor friend Thomas Swann are rehearsing the opening scene of Shakespeare's comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Thomas

I'll answer him by law. I won't budge an inch...

Will

Just a minute Thomas: Christopher Sly is drunk, but we do need to understand the words!

Thomas

You're criticising my acting, Will. Again.

Will

Thomas, Thomas. You're a great actor. A wonderful actor. But Thomas, can the audience please actually hear the words I wrote for your character to say...?

Thomas

The audience can see what's happening! I'm in the pub, I'm drunk, there's broken glass everywhere and -

Bess

Thomas Swann! If you've broken one of my glasses, I'll have your guts for garters...

Will / Thomas

No, no, no!

Thomas

Bess, it's in the play.

Will

The innkeeper - in the play, Bess - is going to call the police unless Christopher Sly pays for the glasses he broke. But Sly says he doesn't care about the police, he's entitled to be in the pub, and he's not moving.

Bess

Oh... well just you be careful. I won't have people breaking glasses in my pub.

Will

Of course, Bess. Now, Thomas. Please. Speak more clearly.

Thomas

No. I'm an artist, and I have to do it my way.

Will

Bess, please read the innkeepers lines. I'll be Christopher Sly. Thomas, just listen.

Bess

Alright Mr Will, the innkeeper's lines: I know my remedy. I must go fetch the third-borough.

Will as Christopher Sly

Third, or fourth, or fifth borough, I'll answer him by law.

I'll not budge an inch, boy. Let him come, and kindly.

Will

Now please Thomas, do it like that.

Thomas

I will not do it like that.

Bess

He's just like Christopher Sly isn't he Mr Will? He won't budge an inch either.

Narrator

We'll leave them there for now. Christopher Sly is just one of several stubborn characters in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare's early comedy about the battle of the sexes. The phrase **not budge an inch** is used these days to describe not only objects that won't move but also people who won't change their minds. Take Simon Walker, the director general of the British Institute of Directors, who said that the British chancellor George Osborne...

Clip 1

...must not budge an inch on the crucial job of deficit reduction.

Clip 2

That stupid dog refused to move. I kept pulling on the lead, but he wouldn't budge an inch.

Thomas

Will, it's my way or –

Will

Now look here Thomas -

Bess

Now stop arguing you two or I'll knock your heads together. Thomas, do what Mr Will says. It's his play.

Thomas

Grrrr. To budge, or not to budge: that is the question.