
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

Shakespeare Speaks

Strange bedfellows



Narrator

It's late in the evening. William Shakespeare is visiting his actor friend Robert Harley.

Robert Harley

Will! Just one moment... I have to rescue the cat. It likes to sleep with the chickens and it gets locked in the henhouse... come on kitty...

Will

The cat sleeps with the chickens? That's unusual.

Robert Harley

It's strange, but they seem quite happy together. So, Will, I've read your new play *The Tempest* and I'm very excited about all the magic, the music and the monsters, and my character, Trinculo, the lost traveller: it's a wonderful part. His meeting with Caliban: it's very interesting.

Will

Ah, yes, Caliban. Neither man nor fish – a weird sort of creature.

Robert Harley

You put them both in a storm...

Will

Yes: it's an old trick but it's a good way to bring them together. Trinculo needs shelter and the strange, well, almost monstrous Caliban is wearing a gaberdine: a large coat, big enough for both of them. Trinculo gets under it, safe and warm from the storm.

Robert Harley

But Trinculo isn't happy...

Will

He's feeling very miserable. He actually says: *Alas, the storm is come again! My best way...*

Robert Harley as Trinculo

Alas, the storm is come again! My best way is to creep under his gaberdine; there is no other shelter hereabouts: misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows.

Will

Ohh, I do like that line: Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows. When times are hard, people do things they don't normally do...

Narrator

We'll leave them there for now. Shakespeare lived in a time of discovery – strange new lands and creatures, so the mysterious island of The Tempest appealed to Shakespeare's audience as both exciting and scary. These days, the phrase **strange bedfellows** describes two people or groups that are connected in a particular activity, even though they are very different and are not usually seen together. It's often used for political alliances. For example, a July 2015 report from US broadcaster Fox News described Israel and Hamas as **strange bedfellows** when they both wanted to stop the growth of so-called Islamic State in Gaza. The headline was:

Clip 1

Israel, Hamas strange bedfellows when it comes to reining in ISIS in Gaza.

Narrator

Strange bedfellows is useful for all sorts of unlikely partnerships.

Clip 2

You think Miley Cyrus and Michael Bublé should write a song together? Well, they'd be strange bedfellows... but it might just work.

Robert Harley

Now Will, it's getting late and there's a storm coming. You must stay with us tonight. You can sleep in the henhouse – or you can share a bed with the Harley family.

Will

Hmmm... To bed or not to bed: that is the question.