



# English Learning for Curious Minds



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## Episode #083

# The Mystery Of The Bermuda Triangle

## 25th August, 2020



[00:00:00] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle.

[00:00:30] It's a part of the Atlantic Ocean that some people believe is [exceptionally](#)<sup>1</sup> dangerous for ships, planes, and anything that [ventures](#)<sup>2</sup> into it.

[00:00:42] So today we are going to [lift the curtain](#)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> very much

<sup>2</sup> goes into

<sup>3</sup> tell the truth (about something)



## The Mystery Of The Bermuda Triangle

[00:00:45] We'll explain what it is, what people think has happened there, why people think it happened, and then we'll explain what other, perhaps more [reputable](#)<sup>4</sup>, more believe people, think actually goes on in the Bermuda Triangle.

[00:01:04] OK then, without further ado, let's get right into it.

[00:01:09] If you imagine the Atlantic Ocean, and draw a line from Florida to almost the middle of the ocean, to the island of Bermuda, then down towards Puerto Rico, this forms a triangle, and it covers an area of anything from 1 million to 4 million square kilometres of ocean.

[00:01:34] And until relatively recently, nobody really [thought much of it](#)<sup>5</sup>.

[00:01:40] It was just a piece of the ocean like any other, but in the past 50 years or so, it has developed a reputation as being a dangerous, [treacherous](#)<sup>6</sup> part of the ocean that has caused the disappearance and deaths of multiple ships and aeroplanes.

[00:02:02] It was popularised with the help of a best-selling book called The Bermuda Triangle, by a man called Charles Berlitz.

[00:02:12] If you recognise the name Berlitz, this author, Charles Berlitz was actually the grandson of Maximillian Berlitz, the founder of the famous language schools. Charles

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<sup>4</sup> trustworthy, having a good reputation

<sup>5</sup> think it is important or worth discussion

<sup>6</sup> extremely dangerous



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Berlitz did have a pretty strange upbringing, and it's interesting to mention this quickly because it does relate to language learning and is quite fun.

[00:02:37] So by the time he was a teenager, Charles Berlitz could speak 8 languages fluently. This wasn't because he was forced to study, or because the Berlitz family had some amazing gift for languages. But rather that his father [insisted](#)<sup>7</sup> that every relative and servant in his house spoke to him in a different language.

[00:03:04] His mother spoke to him in French, his father spoke to him in German, his grandfather spoke to him in Russian, and his cousins and [nannies](#)<sup>8</sup> would speak to him in Spanish.

[00:03:18] You can imagine that must have been very confusing for a little baby, and Berlitz later said in an interview that he just thought every person had a different way of speaking.

[00:03:32] Amazing, right? As someone who is trying to bring up a little trilingual baby at the moment, it's awesome to hear stories like this.

[00:03:41] Getting back to the Bermuda Triangle, Berlitz was clearly a [sensationalist](#)<sup>9</sup>, and his book on the Bermuda Triangle told the stories of unsolved mysteries,

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<sup>7</sup> said firmly, demanded

<sup>8</sup> people whose job it is to look after the children of a family

<sup>9</sup> reporting events to make them sound as strange as possible, even if they are not



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suggesting possible reasons for the disappearances of ships and planes in this area of the ocean.

[00:04:01] These reasons included alien **abductions**<sup>10</sup>, and that the ancient city of Atlantis is beneath the Bermuda Triangle, and **sucks**<sup>11</sup> ships and planes down.

[00:04:14] Now, these theories may sound hard to believe to you or me, but the book captured people's attention, and sold 20 million copies in 30 different languages.

[00:04:29] Before we **pass judgment**<sup>12</sup> on whether it was indeed aliens, Atlantis, or something else that caused the disappearance of these ships and planes, let's tell their stories because they are, if nothing else, **intriguing**<sup>13</sup>.

[00:04:47] Our first mysterious story is of a ship called the USS Cyclops.

[00:04:54] The Cyclops left Rio de Janeiro on the 16th of February, 1918, carrying over 10,000 tonnes of something called manganese ore, a type of chemical used to make weapons, amongst other things.

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<sup>10</sup> making someone come with you, especially by using force

<sup>11</sup> to pull (normally a liquid)

<sup>12</sup> form your opinion on

<sup>13</sup> interesting



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[00:05:10] The ship arrived at the island of Barbados, and then [set off](#)<sup>14</sup> towards the United States.

[00:05:18] But it never arrived. It completely disappeared, never even sending a message to [shore](#)<sup>15</sup>, or any kind of radio signal that it was in trouble.

[00:05:31] It just vanished, this huge, massive ship, along with its crew of 309 people.

[00:05:39] To this day, it remains the largest single loss of life in the US navy that isn't directly related to fighting, to combat.

[00:05:51] And weirdly enough, two of the sister ships of the USS Cyclops also were lost in the North Atlantic decades later, during World War II, while they were carrying the same kind of material.

[00:06:07] Now, there are obviously lots of things that could have happened here, from the most [plausible](#)<sup>16</sup> explanation that the ship was just carrying too much, it was too heavy, and it sank, or it was pushed over by a large wave, or even that it was sunk by the enemy.

[00:06:27] But, to Berlitz, and to those who believe in the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle, the story of the USS Cyclops is strange. Why would a seemingly functioning

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<sup>14</sup> leave (for somewhere else)

<sup>15</sup> the mainland

<sup>16</sup> believable



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ship just disappear like that? Why was there no signal to say that it was in trouble? To the conspiracy theorist, there are some unanswered questions.

[00:06:54] Moving on, our second incident that is often used as evidence for the mysterious powers of the Bermuda Triangle involves a ship called the Ellen Austin.

[00:07:07] The story goes that around 1880, the large passenger ship, Ellen Austin left for New York from Liverpool, full of people looking to [seek](#)<sup>17</sup> a new life in America.

[00:07:22] A few weeks into the trip, the captain saw another ship in the distance. He looked through his [binoculars](#)<sup>18</sup>, but the ship seemed abandoned.

[00:07:34] He thought, well that's strange, but was [cautious](#)<sup>19</sup> about getting any closer. It could be a pirate trick, and his focus should be on sailing onwards to New York.

[00:07:49] After a few days, and with this mysterious abandoned ship still floating near them, he ordered a small crew, a small group of men, to go and check it out. So they took a small boat, [boarded](#)<sup>20</sup> the larger one, and sure enough, they found it completely abandoned.

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<sup>17</sup> trying to find

<sup>18</sup> a handheld tool to help you see things in the distance

<sup>19</sup> avoiding risks

<sup>20</sup> gone onto another ship



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[00:08:10] This abandoned boat had a large amount of [mahogany](#)<sup>21</sup>, a valuable wood, still onboard, so the captain decided to keep the boat, and he could sell the wood for a profit when they got to New York.

[00:08:27] The crew that had got onto the [deserted](#)<sup>22</sup> ship remained there, and the two ships sailed on together.

[00:08:36] But shortly after, there was a huge storm, and the two boats got separated.

[00:08:43] After a few days, the mystery boat reappeared in the distance, and the captain ordered his men to sail towards it.

[00:08:53] But as they got closer, they saw that there was nobody on the boat. It was abandoned again.

[00:09:01] The captain was understandably [reluctant](#)<sup>23</sup> to send more men to the boat, but he was persuaded to do so by his crew. Another group of men got on a smaller boat, and they went out to the mystery ship, got on board, and took control of it.

[00:09:21] They then had this mystery ship under control, and the two ships [set off](#) together again. A few days later, a [dense](#)<sup>24</sup> [fog](#)<sup>25</sup> descended upon the two ships, and

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<sup>21</sup> a dark, expensive wood often used to make furniture

<sup>22</sup> without people in it

<sup>23</sup> not willing to do something

<sup>24</sup> difficult to see through

<sup>25</sup> cloudy air near the ground



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the captain lost sight of the other ship. The only thing that reassured him that the ship was still there was a bell that was ringing, so they could hear each other.

[00:09:48] But the ringing of the bell grew **fainter**<sup>26</sup> and **fainter**, and then it just disappeared. The **fog** lifted, but this mystery ship was nowhere to be seen.

[00:10:04] It had just disappeared, with the group of men still on it.

[00:10:10] Now, if this story sounds too mysterious and weird to be true, it's probably because it is.

[00:10:19] Researchers have looked into it and there are a load of **factual**<sup>27</sup> **inaccuracies**<sup>28</sup>, from the fact that the route from Liverpool to New York wouldn't have taken you near the Bermuda Triangle, through to the fact that official documents don't have any record of any crew going missing.

[00:10:41] So there are a lot of problems with that story, but it remains an attractive story, and you can understand how it is tempting to believe it, despite the fact that there is a lot of evidence to suggest that there isn't much truth to it at all.

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<sup>26</sup> less strong and able to be heard or seen

<sup>27</sup> relating to the actual facts

<sup>28</sup> mistakes, errors



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[00:10:58] Another story that is often [cited](#)<sup>29</sup> to demonstrate the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle, despite the fact that where this [incident](#)<sup>30</sup> took place is the other side of the Atlantic Ocean from the Bermuda Triangle, is the story of a ship called the Mary Celeste.

[00:11:17] On the 4th of December, 1872, this ship was found just off the coast of the Azores, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. It had [set off](#) a few weeks before, from New York, and was on the way to Genoa, in Italy.

[00:11:38] There had been seven people on the ship. An experienced captain, called Benjamin Briggs, as well as his wife and two-year-old daughter.

[00:11:50] The ship had been carrying a lot of pure alcohol, in [barrels](#)<sup>31</sup> deep inside the ship.

[00:11:58] When it was found, the Mary Celeste was still in pretty ok condition. A little bit of damage, but nothing more than was normal for a ship crossing a [stormy](#)<sup>32</sup> ocean.

[00:12:12] However, the crew, the people on board were nowhere to be seen.

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<sup>29</sup> mentioned as a way of explaining something

<sup>30</sup> an event

<sup>31</sup> large, circular containers

<sup>32</sup> with strong wind and rain



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[00:12:18] The lifeboat, the small boat that you would use to escape from a ship if there's a problem, was gone. Disappeared, nowhere in sight.

[00:12:30] And Captain Benjamin Briggs, his family, and the lifeboat, have never been found.

[00:12:38] This case **puzzled**<sup>33</sup> everyone who looked at it. Why would an experienced captain abandon his ship, when it was in perfectly good condition?

[00:12:49] Especially in the middle of the ocean. The ship had enough food and drink to last 6 months, and was a very safe place to be. It made absolutely no sense, and people obviously tried to find explanations for what could have happened.

[00:13:09] Was the ship attacked by pirates, and they had killed the crew and then disappeared? That didn't seem **plausible**, because there were still a lot of valuables left onboard, and these would have been taken by the pirates.

[00:13:27] Was it some kind of trick by Briggs, the captain? Had he formed a **plot**<sup>34</sup> with the captain of the other boat, the one that found the Mary Celeste, and they would share the **compensation**<sup>35</sup> money from the insurance company? That seemed improbable, not very likely, and in any case, where would Briggs and his family have gone?

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<sup>33</sup> confused

<sup>34</sup> a secret plan

<sup>35</sup> money that is paid in exchange for something, often lost or stolen



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[00:13:55] Or was it something more [paranormal](#)<sup>36</sup>, some huge sea [squid](#)<sup>37</sup>, a monster that had taken the captain and his family? Obviously, that is quite [far-fetched](#)<sup>38</sup>, and nobody really took these theories seriously.

[00:14:15] What seems clear is that something must have happened that was frightening enough to cause Briggs to [abandon](#)<sup>39</sup> the ship, but to this day, we will likely never know what it was.

[00:14:30] There are all sorts of stories like this, of unexplained mysteries of ships disappearing in and around this part of the Atlantic, and people like Charles Berlitz have suggested that there is something mysterious and dangerous about this area, about the Bermuda Triangle.

[00:14:51] So, is there any truth to it at all?

[00:14:55] The reality is that ships do go missing in the Bermuda Triangle, but, statistically, they don't go missing any more in the Bermuda Triangle than anywhere else in the world.

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<sup>36</sup> impossible to explain with science

<sup>37</sup> a sea creature with a long body and tentacles

<sup>38</sup> unlikely to be true and (therefore) hard to believe

<sup>39</sup> leave



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[00:15:21] Lloyds of London, the large insurance market, has said that statistically, there is no higher risk of a ship sinking in the Bermuda Triangle than anywhere else in the world.

[00:15:23] It's a very busy part of the ocean, with thousands of ships passing through it at any time. It's also an area that is [prone](#)<sup>40</sup> to bad weather, hurricanes, huge waves, and tornadoes, which makes sailing difficult.

[00:15:42] And if a ship does [capsize](#)<sup>41</sup>, if it does fall over and sink to the bottom, then there are some incredibly deep parts of the ocean. Indeed, the deepest part of the Atlantic Ocean, a place called the Milwaukee Depth, is in the Bermuda Triangle. It's over 8,000 metres deep, almost as far below the surface as Mount Everest is tall.

[00:16:11] So if a ship does [capsize](#) and fall to the bottom of the ocean, it will probably never be found again.

[00:16:20] So, with all this in mind, it's unfortunate, but certainly not unexpected, that some ships will just disappear in the Bermuda Triangle.

[00:16:33] But we as humans don't like not understanding stuff.

[00:16:39] And the idea that something could just disappear and there's probably a logical reason but we will never know what it is, this is something that we are not good

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<sup>40</sup> likely (to do or have something)

<sup>41</sup> (of a boat) to turn upside down



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at processing, so this causes us to [latch on to](#)<sup>42</sup> other ideas, we prefer to believe that there must be some other explanation.

[00:17:02] We did an episode last month on QAnon, and there was one a few months ago on Conspiracy Theories. If you've listened to these two, you'll know that we, as humans, are just awful with uncertainty.

[00:17:18] We [seek](#) meaning in everything, and we [radically](#)<sup>43</sup> misunderstand the role of probability and statistics.

[00:17:27] We mistake [correlation](#)<sup>44</sup> for [causality](#)<sup>45</sup>. We see that ships have disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle, and believe that there must be something weird and [supernatural](#)<sup>46</sup> about that part of the ocean, instead of looking at the facts that it's a very large area, with lots of ships and frequent bad weather and it's probably quite likely that some will disappear.

[00:17:54] It's like looking at a road map of a country and saying that all the car accidents seem to happen on the roads. Of course they do, because that's where the cars are.

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<sup>42</sup> to want to believe (a theory)

<sup>43</sup> completely

<sup>44</sup> a connection between two things

<sup>45</sup> something that causes something else

<sup>46</sup> impossible to explain with science



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[00:18:06] Or, there was a map I saw the other day from someone putting out a theory that the 5G network was causing the Coronavirus in the United States. They showed two maps of the United States. One with the new Coronavirus cases, as [dots](#) on the map. And the other one with where the 5G network was being put down.

[00:18:30] They were almost exactly the same, and this was being used to show, [conclusively](#) that 5G causes the Coronavirus.

[00:18:41] However, these [dots](#), these marks on the map were just towns and cities. The map would have looked almost exactly the same if instead of 5G [masts](#), you put McDonalds, or traffic lights, or coffee cups, or almost anything.

[00:19:01] So, if you were looking for The Mystery of The Bermuda Triangle, I'm sorry to disappoint you. Any serious scientist, researcher, and most serious people agree that there is nothing particularly mysterious going on there.

[00:19:19] Yes, there are many stories of ships disappearing that we can't explain.

[00:19:25] But explaining that with sea monsters, Atlantis, or aliens [abducting](#) sailors does seem like a little bit of [a stretch](#).

[00:19:36] The grandfather of this [paranormal](#) theory, Charles Berlitz, certainly has [a lot to answer for](#). His stories of the [paranormal](#) activities in the Bermuda Triangle do make for excellent stories, but at the end of the day he should definitely be placed in the 'fiction' section of the bookshop, not the 'geography' one.



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[00:20:01] OK then, that is it for The Bermuda Triangle.

[00:20:05] If you were [in two minds](#) about whether The Bermuda Triangle was actually any more dangerous than any other part of the world, I hope that this has put your mind at rest.

[00:20:17] As always, I would love to know what you thought of today's episode. Are you one of the 20 million people who has read the Bermuda Triangle?

[00:20:26] Or even if you aren't, do get in touch and let me know what you thought of today's episode.

[00:20:31] You can email hi - hi@leonardoenglish.com

[00:20:37] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English

[00:20:42] I'm Alastair Budge. You stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

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## Key vocabulary

<b>Word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Exceptionally</b>	very much
<b>Ventures</b>	goes into
<b>Lift the curtain</b>	tell the truth (about something)
<b>Reputable</b>	trustworthy, having a good reputation
<b>Thought much of it</b>	think it is important or worth discussion
<b>Treacherous</b>	extremely dangerous
<b>Insisted</b>	said firmly, demanded
<b>Nannies</b>	people whose job it is to look after the children of a family
<b>Sensationalist</b>	reporting events to make them sound as strange as possible, even if they are not
<b>Abductions</b>	making someone come with you, especially by using force
<b>Sucks</b>	to pull up (normally a liquid)
<b>Pass judgment</b>	form your opinion on
<b>Intriguing</b>	interesting



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<b>Set off</b>	leave (for somewhere else)
<b>Shore</b>	the mainland
<b>Plausible</b>	believable
<b>Seek</b>	trying to find
<b>Binoculars</b>	a handheld tool to help you see things in the distance
<b>Cautious</b>	avoiding risks
<b>Boarded</b>	gone onto another ship
<b>Mahogany</b>	a dark, expensive wood often used to make furniture
<b>Deserted</b>	without people in it
<b>Reluctant</b>	not willing to do something
<b>Dense</b>	difficult to see through
<b>Fog</b>	cloudy air near the ground
<b>Fainter</b>	less strong and able to be heard or seen
<b>Factual</b>	relating to the actual facts
<b>Inaccuracies</b>	mistakes, errors



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<b>Cited</b>	mentioned as a way of explaining something
<b>Incident</b>	an event
<b>Barrels</b>	large, circular containers
<b>Stormy</b>	with strong wind and rain
<b>Puzzled</b>	confused
<b>Plot</b>	a secret plan
<b>Compensation</b>	money that is paid in exchange for something, often lost or stolen
<b>Paranormal</b>	impossible to explain with science
<b>Squid</b>	a sea creature with a long body and tentacles
<b>Far-fetched</b>	unlikely to be true and (therefore) hard to believe
<b>Abandon</b>	leave
<b>Prone</b>	likely (to do or have something)
<b>Capsize</b>	(of a boat) to turn upside down
<b>Latch on to</b>	to want to believe (a theory)
<b>Radically</b>	completely



## The Mystery Of The Bermuda Triangle

<b>Correlation</b>	a connection between two things
<b>Causality</b>	something that causes something else
<b>Supernatural</b>	impossible to explain with science
<b>Dots</b>	very small marks
<b>Conclusively</b>	without any doubt
<b>Masts</b>	tall poles
<b>A stretch</b>	something that is hard to believe
<b>A lot to answer for</b>	to be responsible for a lot of bad things
<b>In two minds</b>	to not have decided

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*What did you like? What could we do better?*

*What did you struggle to understand?*

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