

Telling fact from fiction

A couple of years ago, a UK television station asked 3,000 young people a series of questions about famous factual and fictional people. They wanted to discover if people knew which of the people really existed. Here are descriptions of three of the people. How many of the names do you know and which of them do you think are real people?

The opening film at this year's 63rd Cannes Film Festival is Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood*. The film is based on the story of Robin Hood, the famous outlaw who is still a national hero in England because he 'stole from the rich to give to the poor'. One of the first references to Robin Hood is in the 14th-century poem *Piers Plowman*. According to later ballads, Robin lived in Sherwood Forest with his band of merry men: Little John, Friar Tuck, Will Scarlet, Much the Miller's Son, and Alan a Dale. Robin's greatest enemy was the Sheriff of Nottingham and the city of Nottingham is expecting an increase in tourism after the new film is released. Maybe some of the tourists will be arriving at Robin Hood Airport, Britain's newest airport.

This summer marks 100 years since the death of Florence Nightingale. She was named after the city of Florence in Italy where she was born on 12th May 1820. When she was 24, she decided to become a nurse. It was during the Crimean War (1853–1856) that she became known as 'The Lady with the Lamp' when *The Times* newspaper described how she visited the injured soldiers at night, carrying a lamp. In 1860 she started one of the very first nursing schools at St Thomas's Hospital in London. Her work is still remembered today and International Nurses Day is celebrated around the world on her birthday.

Our third famous person is Sherlock Holmes, who has also been the subject of a recent film. The world's favourite detective was famous for his powers of observation and logical reasoning. In fact his work is still a source of inspiration for forensic scientists. Born in or around 1854, Holmes studied at Cambridge University. From 1881 he ran a private detective agency from his flat at 221B Baker Street, London. He usually worked with his good friend and biographer, Dr. John H. Watson. He's famous for saying 'Elementary, my dear Watson.' although he never used those exact words. If you go to Baker Street in London today you'll find a plaque showing the place where Sherlock Holmes lived.

1 Decide if these famous people are real or fictional. Write *R* for real and *F* for fictional.

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|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 ___ Cleopatra | 4 ___ Sir Walter Raleigh |
| 2 ___ King Arthur | 5 ___ The Three Musketeers |
| 3 ___ Robinson Crusoe | 6 ___ Winston Churchill |

2 After reading the article, do you think these people are real or fictional?

- 1 ___ Robin Hood
- 2 ___ Florence Nightingale
- 3 ___ Sherlock Holmes

3 Match the names with the people and then explain what they refer to.

Baker Street	Cambridge	Crimea	Dr. John H. Watson	Nottingham
Piers Plowman	Sherwood Forest	St Thomas's	The Times	

Robin Hood

Florence Nightingale

Sherlock Holmes

4 Answer the questions.

- 1 Robin Hood was a criminal. Why do you think he's considered to be a hero?
- 2 Why will more tourists probably visit Nottingham this year?
- 3 Where does Florence Nightingale's first name come from?
- 4 When is International Nurses Day?
- 5 Approximately how old was Sherlock Holmes when he started his detective agency?
- 6 If he never said 'Elementary, my dear Watson', why do you think people associate the expression with him?

5 Read the results of the survey mentioned in the article and complete it with the numbers.

27	51	58	65
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According to UKTV, the TV station that carried out the survey, King Arthur is the fictional figure that the most people in Britain (a _____ %) believe existed. Half of those surveyed (b _____ %) believed that Robin Hood lived in Sherwood Forest during the 14th century. Over a quarter (c _____ %) thought Florence Nightingale was fictional, and more than half (d _____ %) believed that Sherlock Holmes lived and worked at 221B Baker Street, London. The fictional character was in fact created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the 1880s, and the address doesn't exist.

6 Compare the results from the survey with the class results.

7 Choose one of the people from exercise 1 or choose another person. Write a short description of the person without mentioning their name.

8 Read your description to another student. Can they identify the person? Do they know if the person is real or fictional?

Glossary

- ballad** (*noun*) - a long poem that tells a story
- band** (*noun*) - group
- forensic** (*adjective*) - using scientific methods to solve crimes
- injured** (*adjective*) - hurt in an attack or accident
- merry** (*adjective*) - happy
- nurse** (*noun*) - person who looks after ill or injured people
- outlaw** (*noun*) - a criminal who moves from place to place
- plaque** (*noun*) - a piece of stone or metal with information
- reasoning** (*noun*) - process of thinking about something
- release** (*verb*) - to make a film available to see