

### Queen's English is no longer spoken by The Queen: Mirren

The Queen's English has always been deemed the correct way to speak English. It is what many students are taught at school. However, according to the actress Dame Helen Mirren, it appears The Queen is slipping in the way she speaks. Dame Helen got an Oscar for her portrayal of Her Majesty in the 2006 movie *The Queen*. She is soon to return to the West End stage where she will be once again playing The Queen. This time she will star in a new play called '*The Audience*'.

The play is based on the monarch's weekly audience with the Prime Minister. Written by Peter Morgan, who wrote the original movie *The Queen*, the new production looks set to be a big hit in London's West End. Dame Helen claims that she has noticed subtle differences in how the Queen speaks after studying her voice for the role. The actress has to portray the Queen from the time she acceded to the throne, aged 25, through to her 80s.

Dame Helen describes her new role as "a challenge". She added, "Her voice has changed, and I can use that - she had a terribly posh voice when she was young. But even now the Queen, while she isn't quite dropping the ends of her lines - her grandsons do! There's a tiny bit of estuary creeping in there. I can use all that to signify the age range, and we'll come up with other things."

Mirren was initially apprehensive about taking on a role that reprised her role of The Queen. The play itself imagines the meetings, which are held in the strictest confidence, between the Queen and Prime Ministers from Winston Churchill to David Cameron. The play is about the history of Britain as much as it is about the relationships between Her Majesty and her Prime Ministers.

Dame Helen: "In the beginning, the Queen is the young, nervous, unknowledgeable one. But as she progresses through them, they become the nervous ones. She is the one constant, through a revolving door of Prime Ministers".

*The Audience* will be directed by Billy Elliot film maker Stephen Daldry and will run at the Gielgud Theatre from February.

**Category: Plays / The Audience / Queen's English**

**Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate**

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## EXERCISES

**1. Queen's English:** Do you speak the Queen's English? If not, what type of English do you speak? Go round the room swapping details with others.

**2. Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

**3. Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

**4. Vocabulary:** Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

**5. The article:** Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?
- c) **Discuss the article**

**Note:** The Queen's English is and was generally taught in Public schools. Upper class people (posh speaking people) are associated with speaking the Queen's English. People who work at the BBC in radio and television historically are known for speaking it. These days the BBC uses many different regional accents and worldwide English accents as well.

**6. British accents/dialects:** In pairs match the following British accents. Discuss together. **Note:** – there are many more regional accents – this is a selection! Add in two more of your own! Talk about the differences!

Accent	Area
1 Geordie	A East London
2 Estuary	B Newcastle
3 Mancunian	C Wales
4 London Popular	D Yorkshire
5 Scouse	E Liverpool
6 Brummie	F Norwich
7 Welsh	G Manchester
8 Cockney	H London
9 Yorkshire	I Birmingham
10 Norfolk	J Area east of London above and below the River Thames
Add in two more English accents you know about...	
1) _____	2) _____

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**7. Let's roleplay 1: Radio London:** In pairs/groups. One of you is the interviewer. The others are one of the following people. You are in the *Radio London* radio studio. Today's interview is about: *British accents*.

1	Someone from India	3	An American
2	An Australian	4	A Scots person

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to roleplay their interview in front of the class.

**8. Let's think!** In pairs. On the board write as many words as you can to do with '*West End plays*'. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

**9. Let's roleplay 2:** In pairs. You are in a bar in London. Start a conversation about '*British accents*'. Demonstrate some! *5 minutes*.

**10. Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

**Student A**

- 1) Name the actress.
- 2) Name the play.
- 3) Name the latest British Prime Minister.
- 4) Name the writer of the play.
- 5) The actress describes her new role as what?

**Student B**

- 1) Name the movie.
- 2) What is the new play about?
- 3) When does the new play start?
- 4) What is the name of the theatre it will be on at?
- 5) How old was the Queen when she acceded to the throne?

**11. Top plays/theatres:** In pairs/groups. Think of five top plays you know. Write them below. Then add five top theatres you know. Talk about them!

Top plays	Top theatres
1) _____	1) _____
2) _____	2) _____
3) _____	3) _____
4) _____	4) _____
5) _____	5) _____

**The teacher** will choose some pairs to roleplay their interview in front of the class.

**12. Let's write an e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: ***Different British accents***. Your e-mail can be read out in class.

**13. Sentence starters:** Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) I speak \_\_\_\_\_
- b) The Queen's English \_\_\_\_\_
- c) In my country \_\_\_\_\_

## DISCUSSION

### Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) What type of English accent do you speak?
- 3) Can you speak the Queen's English?
- 4) Should more people speak the Queen's English?
- 5) How were you taught to speak English at school?
- 6) In what accent would you address Her Majesty?
- 7) What was the last play you saw?
- 8) Which is your favourite theatre?
- 9) Which is your favourite play?
- 10) Have you learnt anything in today's English lesson?

### Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) Do you like to go to the theatre a lot?
- 3) Have you ever been to the theatre in London's West End?
- 4) Have you seen the movie *The Queen*? Explain.
- 5) What other film roles has Dame Helen Mirren starred in?
- 6) Have you ever been in a movie? Explain.
- 7) Are accents important to keep? Why? Why not?
- 8) What is an Oscar?
- 9) Will you be going to London to watch *The Audience*?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

## SPEAKING

Let's play a game: A visit to a theatre

*Allow 10 minutes – As a class / small groups – in a circle in a clockwise direction...*

**I went to a theatre and I saw...**

Repeat the previous things seen then add one more...

Forget one and you are eliminated!

The teacher can moderate the session.

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## GAP FILL: READING:

*Put the words into the gaps in the text.*

### Queen's English is no longer spoken by The Queen: Mirren

The Queen's English has always been deemed the (1)\_\_\_\_\_ way to speak English. It is what many (2)\_\_\_\_\_ are taught at school. However, according to the (3)\_\_\_\_\_ Dame Helen Mirren, it appears The Queen is slipping in the way she speaks. Dame Helen got an Oscar for her portrayal of Her Majesty in the 2006 movie *The Queen*. She is soon to return to the West End stage where she will be once again playing The Queen. This time she will star in a new play called '*The Audience*'.

The play is based on the monarch's weekly (4)\_\_\_\_\_ with the Prime Minister. Written by Peter Morgan, who wrote the (5)\_\_\_\_\_ movie *The Queen*, the new production looks set to be a big hit in London's West End. Dame Helen claims that she has noticed (6)\_\_\_\_\_ differences in how the Queen speaks after studying her voice for the role. The actress has to (7)\_\_\_\_\_ the Queen from the time she acceded to the (8)\_\_\_\_\_, aged 25, through to her 80s.

Dame Helen describes her new role as "a (1)\_\_\_\_\_". She added, "Her voice has changed, and I can use that - she had a terribly (2)\_\_\_\_\_ voice when she was young. But even now the Queen, while she isn't quite dropping the ends of her lines - her (3)\_\_\_\_\_ do! There's a tiny bit of (4)\_\_\_\_\_ creeping in there. I can use all that to (5)\_\_\_\_\_ the age range, and we'll come up with other things."

Mirren was (6)\_\_\_\_\_ apprehensive about taking on a (7)\_\_\_\_\_ that reprised her role of The Queen. The play itself imagines the meetings, which are held in the strictest (8)\_\_\_\_\_, between the Queen and Prime Ministers from Winston Churchill to David Cameron. The play is about the history of Britain as much as it is about the relationships between Her Majesty and her Prime Ministers.

*original*

*actress*

*correct*

*subtle*

*throne*

*students*

*portray*

*audience*

*signify*

*estuary*

*grandsons*

*challenge*

*role*

*posh*

*initially*

*confidence*

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## GAP FILL: LISTENING

*Listen and fill in the spaces.*

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Dame Helen: "In the beginning, \_\_\_\_\_, nervous, unknowledgeable one. But as she progresses through them, they become the nervous ones. She is the one constant, through a revolving \_\_\_\_\_".

## GRAMMAR:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

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Dame Helen describes her new role as "a challenge". She added, "Her voice has changed, and I can use that - (1)\_\_\_ had a terribly posh voice when she was young. (2)\_\_\_ even now the Queen, while she isn't quite dropping the ends of (3)\_\_\_ lines - her grandsons do! There's a tiny bit (4)\_\_\_ estuary creeping (5)\_\_\_ there. (6)\_\_\_ can use all that to signify the age range, and we'll come up with other things."

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**with**

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## SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	however	11	terribly
2	actress	12	challenge
3	signify	13	audience
4	estuary	14	subtle
5	grandsons	15	relationships
6	posh	16	confidence
7	original	17	initially
8	production	18	apprehensive
9	unknowledgeable	19	beginning
10	nervous	20	portray

### LINKS

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/theroyalfamily/9557858/Queens-English-no-longer-spoken-by-Queen-says-Helen-Mirren.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10534/Its-Queens-English.html>

<http://www.crisismagazine.com/2012/the-queens-english-no-more>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2056444/Dont-teach-Queens-English-foreign-language-students-linguist-urges.html>

### ANSWERS

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