

Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's story is for pre-intermediate learners. The name of the story is *Saint George and the Dragon*. You can find a transcript of the episode at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/George](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/George). That's [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/George](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/George). There, you can also download the episode as a PDF.

Today's episode is a legend that you can find in many cultures around Europe. Actually, the twenty-third of April is a holiday called St George's Day, which is why I'm releasing this episode now. So who was St George, and why do people celebrate him?

Well, a **saint** is a person who has been recognised as being very holy, very close to God. Saints are usually people who have died. The Church decides that they were very good and holy people, and so they make them saints. Some examples of famous saints are St Francis of Assisi, who founded the Franciscan Order of monks, and St Valentine, from whom we have Valentine's Day.

St George was a real person, but the legends about his life are so fantastical, so magical, that we think of him more as a character. The main legend about St George is that a dragon was attacking a city, and he came to save the city by killing the dragon.

By the way, a **dragon** is a magical animal, an animal that is not real. However, we find stories of dragons in all cultures around the world. Dragons can breathe fire and fly, and they like to eat people. Dragons like to collect treasure, gold and jewels, and hide it in their home. In *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys had several dragons.

What is interesting is that St George's Day is celebrated in very different ways in different countries. The flag of England is a white background with a red cross on it. This is different from the Union Jack, the flag of the UK. The cross on the English flag comes from St George, and St George is actually the patron saint of England. A patron saint is a saint who supports one activity or group of people. So St George is a very important figure, an important person, for English history and culture.

Despite this, very few people still celebrate St George's day in the UK. When people do celebrate, they might dress up as characters from the legend of St George, and do traditionally English things, such as morris dancing, a traditional English dance, or Punch and Judy shows, a traditional kind of English puppet theatre for children.

By the way, I should say here that, although these are parts of 'traditional' English culture, I have only seen morris dancing a few times, and I have never seen a Punch and Judy show in real life. Actually, I think morris dancing is a bit strange – you put bells on your legs and dance around so that the bells ring – and Punch and Judy shows send pretty bad messages to children. But if you're interested, I'll put some pictures and links in the transcript at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/George](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/George).

Morris dancing:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sArAC2_ow2k

Punch and Judy:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4iWoCJ_t24

In Spain, people associate St George with the Reconquista. The Reconquista was a period when Christian kingdoms fought to take back parts of Spain from the Muslim peoples who had taken them previously. In some regions, people celebrate St George's Day by

burning a model of a dragon and reenacting battles – doing theatrical versions of battles – that happened between Christians and Muslims in the past.

In Catalonia, however, St George's Day is more like Valentine's Day. Traditionally, boys give girls a red rose, and girls give boys a book. Well, I'd certainly prefer to get a book!

In Bulgaria, St George's Day takes place on the sixth of May and involves eating a whole lamb, because there St George is the patron saint of shepherds, people who look after sheep. They also believed that St George helped plants grow, and that he blesses the morning dew. **Dew** is the water that appears on grass in the night, and blessing is when a holy person gives something a special touch, for example when a priest blesses bread and wine in the Catholic church. So because they believed that St George blessed the morning dew, people in Bulgaria would go out and collect the dew on St George's day and wash in it.

As you can see, St George is a figure, a person, who means different things in different places. It's quite strange that European countries see St George as such an important figure in their own histories, because St George was born in Turkey and died in Syria Palaestina, which is now part of Israel. So he wasn't exactly European! But it is a good example of how powerful myths and legends can be.

Of course, there are many different versions of the story of St George and the Dragon, and mine is unique as well. You know I always like to change stories a bit and make them my own. Don't worry: no dragons were hurt in the writing of this story.

OK, I'll just explain some words that are in today's story.

A **kingdom** is a country ruled, led, by a king. These days, there are few kingdoms, because most countries are ruled by a president and a government. The United Kingdom is obviously a kingdom, but we also have a prime minister who holds much more power than the king. However, some countries like Brunei and Saudi Arabia have absolute monarchies, which means they are kingdoms that only have a king, and the king holds all the power.

A **desert** is a place where it is very dry and there is only sand. Some examples of deserts are the Sahara Desert and the Gobi Desert. Deserts usually have very little plant life in them, apart from small bushes and cacti.

Tame means to train an animal so that it can live with humans and do what humans say. For example, many people have to tame their dog so that it doesn't eat the furniture. In the circus, they used to tame lions to jump through rings and tame elephants to dance on balls, but they don't do this anymore.

A **well** is a hole in the ground that has water in it. People build wells so that they can easily access water. Wells usually have a round stone wall around the top, and you put a bucket into the well to take water out. Of course, these days most people get water from taps in their house, and never have to use a well.

To **pass out** means to go unconscious. When someone passes out, they fall over and it is like they are asleep. Passing out is quite dangerous. It happens when you don't have enough air or you have a big shock. For example, people might pass out in a car crash, or they might pass out when they hear that a family member has died.

A **knight** is a person from the Middle Ages who worked for a lord or a king. Knights wear heavy armour, clothes that protect them, they ride horses, and they fight for their lord or king. Knights fight using swords and shields. Sometimes, there are big competitions called jousts where knights ride horses and fight with long weapons called lances. In fairy tales, a knight often comes and rescues princesses.

Scratch is when you do this: [makes scratching sound]. Basically, you move your nails against something. You might scratch yourself because you are itchy. If a mosquito bites

you, then you will probably scratch the place where it bit you. Or maybe you don't like someone and so you scratch them. Cats like to scratch things a lot.

A **collar** is a small belt you put around your pet's neck. Dogs and cats wear collars so that people know who owns them. The collar usually has a tag on it, a small piece of metal that says who the owner is, where they live and what the dog or cat's name is.

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A big thank-you to my new patron, Venus, who has just joined at the Teacher's Pet level. For just \$10 a month you can also become a Teacher's Pet, one of my favourite students, and get mentioned in every episode.

And thank-you to my *other* Teacher's Pet patrons: Fabia Lin, Jana Švástová and Vera Kaufmann.

OK, so listen and enjoy!

Saint George and the Dragon

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful **kingdom** where everyone lived in peace. The kingdom was so rich that the king decided to move the capital to the **desert**. He wanted to show that they were so powerful, they could **tame** the hot desert sands. The capital was built with bricks of bright blue and yellow, and it had a deep **well** at its centre. From this well flowed all the water in the city, so it became a central square, with painted walls and a busy marketplace. The king was proud of his city. Nowhere else in the world could you buy such nice things, see such happy children and eat such delicious food.

But one day, a **dragon** flew down to the city. It landed in the square and opened its mouth. The people screamed and ran away. But no fire came out of the dragon's mouth. You may think: well what is the problem, then? A dragon that cannot breathe fire is no danger. But this monster had something far worse than the hottest fire: he had *horrible* breath. His breath smelt so bad that anybody who came near it **passed out** and didn't wake up for hours, or even days.

So very quickly, the square became empty, and the dragon lay down next to the well. 'O king! Come out and speak to me!'

The king was very scared, but he did as the dragon said. He held a wet towel over his face and stood very far away, but still, he almost passed out from the dragon's breath.

'W-what do you want, O powerful dragon? I can give you gold, silver, whatever you –'

'I have no need for gold and silver!' said the dragon. 'What I want is food. And don't give me any of that stupid rabbit food. I want *meat*.'

The king told his men to bring the dragon five sheep. They did so, and the dragon ate them up one by one. Oh, **their bleats filled the city that night!** The king hoped that the dragon would leave after he finished, but the next day, he simply **burped** and said, 'Another one.'

So each day, a sheep was brought to the dragon, and when they ran out of sheep, they brought him a cow instead. While this all happened, the king tried to solve the kingdom's problems. Because the dragon's breath went into the well, nobody could drink the water that came from it. So they had to buy water from other kingdoms and transport it into the city. But when the other kingdoms heard about the dragon, they no longer wanted to come there, and they charged higher prices, and soon the kingdom was running out of money, too.

Of course, many knights came to try and kill the dragon, but each one passed out before they could even scratch him, and the dragon happily ate them up. The king did not like this, but at least it meant that their cows lasted longer.

Then, one day, the king found out that they had run out of cows.

'There is no other option,' he said. 'We will hold a lottery with all the people in the capital, and the person chosen will go to the dragon.'

It was a horrible thing to do, but they had no other choice. The dragon grew angrier every day, and if he wasn't fed, he might use his breath to make them all pass out, and then eat all of them! Nobody could leave the city, either, because they couldn't afford the water to make the long journey through the desert.

So each day, a lottery was held, and they chose one of the people in the city to go and be eaten by the dragon. The king tried not to watch, not to listen, but he could not stop thinking about it, and at night he could not sleep.

One day, when the king saw which name had been chosen from the lottery, he almost threw up.

It was his daughter, the princess Sarea.

'No,' said the king. 'I won't allow it.'

But the people had already heard about the result of the lottery, and they were mad. Their husbands, their wives, their children had already been chosen and fed to the dragon. Why should the king be allowed to say no?

The princess heard about this, and quietly left the city to go pray. She had cried every day since the dragon came, but today she felt strangely calm. This was the right thing to do, she thought. She would show the city that they were strong.

As the princess sat on the sand and prayed, a knight rode by on his horse. She thought he was coming to try and kill the dragon, so she said, 'The dragon's that way,' and pointed at the city. 'But I wouldn't try it. None of the other knights could even scratch him. I don't think *anything* can kill it.'

'A dragon?' said the knight, whose name was George. He sniffed. 'Ah yes. I can smell it. But I wonder why you want to kill him. Dragons are terribly useful. Difficult to tame, though. But they can carry heavy things, fly you—'

'Useful? That dragon has turned our water bad, eaten our sheep, our cows and our people! In fact, he is going to eat me today!'

'I am sorry,' George said. 'I did not realise this dragon was causing such problems. And it would be a shame if he ate such a beautiful girl. Let me go and deal with him.'

And before Sarea could respond, George rode into the city. She ran after him, but waited outside the square. She could not hear much of what was happening, but it didn't sound like fighting. In fact, he was *talking* to the dragon. Could it be that this man was a monster, that he was working with the dragon?

A few moments later, there was a loud THUMP, and then George walked out of the square whistling.

'Is it dead?' said Sarea hopefully.

'Oh no,' said George. 'Like I said, that would be a waste. He's passed out, and I put a collar around his neck. When he wakes up, he'll do whatever I say.'

Sarea couldn't believe that he was serious about taming the dragon, but she was so happy that she said, 'Oh!' and went to kiss the knight's cheek.

But when she came near George, she smelt his breath, and it was *awful*. She passed out, and landed with a THUMP on the ground.

'Oh dear,' said George.

George had beaten the dragon the same way the dragon had beaten the city: he had used his bad breath. Every day, George ate an onion for breakfast, garlic for lunch and blue cheese for dinner. It was very useful for taming animals, but not so helpful for his love life.

George went into the square and waited for the dragon to wake up. When he did, he roared at George, but the knight said, 'Uh, uh, uh. Remember, I can make you pass out with one breath. See that collar around your neck? It's to make sure you're a good dragon. If you're good, I'll let you take it off.'

The dragon was angry, and was about to bite George's head off, but then George opened his mouth, and the dragon smelt that mix of onion, garlic and blue cheese.

The dragon fell to the ground. 'Fine! You have tamed me. For now...'

George took the dragon inside the castle and told the king what had happened. The king and his men opened all the windows, stood very far away from George and his dragon, and tried to breathe as little as possible, but still, they cried from how bad the two smelt.

'You know, this is a beautiful city,' said George. 'I think I'd like to stay here, if that's alright.'

'No, no!' said the king. 'We, uh, we're all too afraid of the dragon still... If that collar broke, what might happen? No, it's better that you leave. In fact, if you leave, I'll make you a saint!'

'A saint? What do you think of that, boy?' George said to the dragon, who he had named Bartholomew.

'Mmm,' said Bartholomew. George was scratching him behind the ear, which he liked very much.

'Alright,' said George. 'I accept. "Saint George"! I like how it sounds.'

So the king quickly – very quickly – sainted George, and the knight left the city with his pet dragon.

When the princess woke up and found out Saint George was gone, she cried.

'Don't worry, my dear,' said the king. 'There are plenty of handsome knights for you to marry.'

'No, I'm not crying because I'm sad! I'm crying because I'm so happy he's gone! Father, he smelt worse than your feet!'

Saint George travelled with the dragon through the desert, and finally they came to a river.

'Well,' said George. 'Now that I'm a saint, I suppose I should baptise you.'

'"Baptise"? What does that mean? Is it painful?'

Saint George laughed and pushed the dragon into the water.

'There! You're baptised.'

The dragon growled and pulled Saint George into the water. They played and fought for hours. Finally, Saint George explained why baptism was important. He had given the dragon a real name, like a good Christian.

'Now God knows that you're called Bartholomew as well.'

'Oh,' said the dragon. 'Well then, you should've baptised me sooner! I went around so long with God thinking I didn't have a name. How embarrassing.'

When they got out of the river, the water was a much darker colour than before. Further downstream, there was a village, and the people who collected water from the river that day wondered why it suddenly smelt of onions and old cheese.

And so Saint George saved the kingdom and found his dragon. Every day they prayed together three times, and whenever they came to a city, people locked their doors and shut their windows.

‘You poor thing,’ said Saint George to Bartholomew. ‘They’re still scared of you!’
But really, they all saw that the dragon was just a big dog with a collar around his neck.
It was Saint George they were afraid of.

THE END

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