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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute English

### The language of wine



This is not a word-for-word transcript

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**Sam**

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Sam.

**Rob**

And I'm Rob.

**Sam**

Rob, would you describe yourself as a wine **connoisseur**?

**Rob**

If you mean am I someone who enjoys wine and knows a lot about it, then no – although the 'enjoy' part is true – particularly a nice glass of red.

**Sam**

Of course, wine might not be everybody's cup of tea – not something they like – but wine has been an important part of history and language.

**Rob**

And even if you don't drink alcohol, wine can be used as a commodity you can invest in and sell at an auction.

**Sam**

And that brings me on to my quiz question, Rob. In 2018, a bottle of wine dating back to 1774 sold at auction in eastern France for a record-breaking price. Do you know how much it was sold for? Was it...

- a) \$20,800
- b) \$120,800, or
- c) \$220,800?

**Rob**

I know wine can fetch a high price – but not as high as some of those options, so I'll say a) \$20,800.

**Sam**

I'll reveal the answer later on. But let's talk more about wine now. A glass of the stuff can be sipped and savoured or just glugged.

**Rob**

**Glug** is a good word, meaning drink in large gulps or mouthfuls - not something a wine expert would do. For some people, drinking and serving wine is almost an art-form.

**Sam**

If you go to a restaurant, there might be a **sommelier** – a person whose job is to serve and give advice about wine. They may have had years of training to learn about the different types of wine and the individual flavours or aromas, known as **notes**.

**Rob**

This job has fascinated journalist and author Bianca Bosker. She wrote a book called 'Cork Dorks'.

**Sam**

And here she is talking on the BBC World Service programme The Why Factor describing her fascination with sommeliers...

**Bianca Bosker, writer and author**

These were people who had taken wine, which I always thought of as a thing of pleasure, something you turn to after a long stressful day, and turned it into something approaching **sheer** God-awful pain. They licked rocks, trained their **palates**, they divorced their spouses to spend more time reviewing flash cards - they had hired voice coaches and memory coaches, they took dance classes to learn how to move more gracefully across the dining room floor.

**Sam**

Like me, Bianca thought drinking wine was a pleasurable activity – something that helped her relax after a long stressful day. So she was surprised at how sommeliers turned this activity into “something approaching **sheer** God-awful pain.”

**Rob**

The word **sheer** is used to emphasise the amount of something – or to mean 'nothing but'. She thought the work of a sommelier was nothing but pain – they seemed to dedicate their life to wine!

**Sam**

One thing a sommelier does is train their **palate** – this is their ability to distinguish and appreciate different tastes – and identify types of good wine from their taste. I guess this is quite important.

**Rob**

But divorcing their spouses does sound a bit extreme! I'm afraid I wouldn't take it so seriously - I'll stick to drinking poorer quality, cheap red wine – sometimes called **plonk!**

**Sam**

Well, Rob, cheap wine doesn't always have to be poor quality. Interestingly, there is some evidence that shows we only think wine tastes better because it's more expensive.

**Rob**

Ah yes, this is research Hilke Plassmann from INSEAD Business School in France spoke about on the BBC World Service's Why Factor programme. She's been looking into what influences consumer behaviour...

**Hilke Plassmann, from INSEAD Business School in France**

The price tag affects that region in your brain that **encodes** your liking of the taste, so in other words, you not only think that you like the more expensive wine more, you feel you like the more expensive wine more, because your brain region that encodes this feeling is influenced by the price tag.

**Sam**

So, our brain is possibly playing tricks on us. When we see the price tag on a bottle of wine, our brain **encodes** the information and tells us how it should taste. **Encodes** means changes the information into something that we can use or understand. Drinking more expensive wine makes you *think* it tastes better. So perhaps, when buying supermarket wine or wine in a restaurant, it may be better telling yourself that the cheaper option is OK!

**Rob**

I'll drink to that! But I wonder how that most expensive bottle of wine ever sold at auction tastes? The one dating back to 1774 that you asked me about.

**Sam**

So you thought it sold for \$20,800, but sorry, Rob, that's too cheap. It was in fact sold for \$120,800. I assume it wasn't drunk.

**Rob**

I hope not. Well, I think I'll stick to my plonk for now, Sam. **Plonk** was one of our vocabulary words today and describes cheap, poor quality wine.

**Sam**

We also mentioned a **connoisseur** – someone who enjoys a particular thing and knows a lot about it.

**Rob**

A **sommelier** is someone who serves and gives advice about wine in a restaurant

**Sam**

**Sheer** is a word used to emphasise the amount of something – or to mean 'nothing but'.

**Rob**

A **palate** describes someone's ability to distinguish and appreciate different tastes.

**Sam**

Finally, **encodes** means changes information into something we can use or understand. But now we're out of time so 'cheers' everyone.

**Rob**

Thanks for listening and goodbye.

**Sam**

Goodbye.

## VOCABULARY

### **plonk**

cheap, poor quality wine

### **connoisseur**

someone who enjoys a particular thing and knows a lot about it

### **sommelier**

someone who serves and give advice about wine in a restaurant

### **sheer**

word used to emphasise the amount of something; nothing but

### **palate**

describes someone's ability to distinguish and appreciate different tastes

### **encodes**

changes information into something we can use or understand