

BBC Learning English

6 Minute English

20 December, 2012

End of the world?



- Alice:** Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English: we'll be talking about a story in the news and learning some vocabulary along the way. I'm Alice and joining me today is Kaz. Hi Kaz.
- Kaz:** Hi there Alice.
- Alice:** Now, if you're listening to this programme on the 21 December 2012 or after, then I'm very happy to say that the world hasn't ended.
- Kaz:** Alice, what do you mean the world hasn't ended?
- Alice:** Well, according to the ancient Mayan civilisation, the people who lived in Central America 4,000 years ago, the world was supposed to end on December 21, 2012.
- Kaz:** I see. Well, thank goodness they got the day wrong.
- Alice:** It's very interesting though, because the ancient Mayan calendar said December 21 2012 marked the end of a 5,000 year cycle. We'll find out more in a minute, but first my question of the day. Kaz, December 21 is an important day in the calendar because it is usually the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere.
Now, what's the word in English for this? Is it:
a) the winter **equinox**
b) the winter **solstice**
c) midwinter
- Kaz:** I'd say midwinter.
- Alice:** Well, as usual, we won't hear the answer until the end of the programme. Now let's find out more about the Mayan people and their calendar, which dates back over 5,000 years. Professor Pedro Yac, from Guatemala, held a ceremony on a beach in Havana, Cuba, to mark the end of the Mayan calendar cycle. December 21, 2012 may not mark the end of the world, but Yac hopes people will use it as a day to think about what is important in life:
- Professor Pedro Yac:**
*Enough of the culture of fear. We should stop planting fear. Not in the present generations, not in the future generations. We have to **return to our roots**. We are the children of mother earth. When we forget this everything becomes complicated.*
- Alice:** So, Professor Pedro Yac says he hopes humanity returns to its roots – to think about where we came from, how we were created.
- Kaz:** He says people are children of **mother earth** – the earth is considered to be the source of all living things.

Alice: And he thinks that when people forget where they come from, everything becomes complicated.

Kaz: Interesting. He says we should stop planting fear – spreading fear.

Alice: What's really interesting is how many people believe that the end of the world will happen soon. According to a poll by Reuters IPSOS earlier this year, nearly 10% of people believe that the end of the world is nigh - is coming. Here are two interesting pieces of language to listen out from the next speaker. "Humanity's time on earth is up", which means people will die out, and "Doomsday". What's Doomsday Kaz?

Kaz: Doomsday is the name given to the day the world will end.

Alice: Here's reporter Tom Santorelli:

Reporter Tom Santorelli:

*Last May a Reuters IPSOS poll found that nearly 10% of people worldwide go along with the interpretation that humanity's time on earth is up. The Doomsday prediction has **spawned a glut of** films and books on the subject.*

Alice: Reporter Tom Santorelli says the Doomsday prediction has spawned a glut of films and books about the end of the world. A glut of – it means a lot of.

Kaz: And he used the verb 'spawned' – we usually hear that in the terms of frog spawn, the thousands of little eggs a frog lays, which grow very fast.

Alice: And as the world hasn't ended, I wonder what we can conclude from the end of this Mayan calendar cycle. Here's archaeologist Richard Hensen, who says it marks a new era – a new period in time.

Archaeologist Richard Hensen:

What we see is a new era. We are privileged to witness and enjoy the end of one era that started 3,114 years before Christ. It's rare to have an opportunity like this to experience a very important date.

Alice: Archaeologist Richard Hensen, who says we are privileged, fortunate, to witness and enjoy the end of one era, and experience a new one.

Kaz: He says it's rare to have an opportunity like this to experience a very important date.

Alice: Now, that question I asked you at the beginning of the programme, Kaz. What's the name in English for the event that usually happens on or around December 21 every year in the northern hemisphere?

Kaz: And I said midwinter.

Alice: Well, it's a bit of a trick question. Midwinter can be around December 21, but we usually think of it as a longer period of time. And the winter equinox doesn't exist. Equinox means that the day is the same length as the night – so that usually happens in March and September. So the answer I was looking for is 'the winter solstice'. It's the day when the sun at noon is at its lowest altitude above the horizon.

- Kaz:** I see. So, that usually occurs in the northern hemisphere sometime around December 21.
- Alice:** Yes that's right. And before we go Kaz, could you read us some of today's words and phrases?
- Kaz:** I'd be delighted. We heard:
equinox
solstice
return to our roots
mother earth
spawned
a glut of
- Alice:** Thanks Kaz. And please join us again soon for more 6 Minute English from bbclearningenglish.com.
Bye for now.
- Kaz:** Bye.

Vocabulary and definitions:

equinox	date when day is the same length as the night
solstice	when the sun is at the highest or lowest position relative to the equator
return to our roots	to go back to where we came from, to think about how we were created
mother earth	the creator
spawned	released a large number of
a glut of	an excessive amount

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