

Into the night: why walking in the dark is good for the soul

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

- What time does it get dark at the moment where you live?
- How often do you go out after dark? Why? (For work, to meet friends ...)

2 Key words

- a. Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

| | | | | | |
|----------|------|--------------|-------|------------|-----------|
| sharpen | pond | surroundings | eerie | favourable | landscape |
| mesmeric | lane | reluctant | clump | shadow | twinkly |

1. a narrow road, especially in the countryside _____ (para 1)
2. an area of land that is beautiful to look at or that has a particular type of appearance _____ (para 1)
3. a dark shape made on a surface when someone or something is between that surface and a light _____ (para 2)
4. all the things that are present in a place and that form the experience of being there _____ (para 3)
5. make stronger _____ (para 3)
6. a word to describe a group of trees or plants growing very close together _____ (para 8)
7. strange and mysterious, and sometimes frightening _____ (para 8)
8. an area of water similar to a lake but smaller _____ (para 8)
9. making you fix your thoughts completely on something so that you do not notice or pay attention to anything else around you _____ (para 8)
10. giving someone or something an advantage or a benefit _____ (para 10)
11. describing lights or stars that become brighter then weaker in a way that is not steady or continuous _____ (para 12)
12. not wanting or willing to do something _____ (para 12)

- b. Use some of the key words from task a. to complete these sentences.

1. The _____ on the wall looked like a monster.
2. She was having a good time, so she was _____ to leave.
3. The weather forecast is _____ for our garden party tomorrow.
4. The _____ music calmed the animals and sent them to sleep.
5. The farm was at the end of a long country _____.
6. The gardener planted a _____ of yellow flowers in the park.

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- 1 The lights from the cottage windows disappear as we walk along a dark country lane and take a footpath through a field into the countryside. Thick clouds prevent the moon from lighting up the way ahead. However, as my eyes begin to get used to the darkness, the landscape around me reveals itself in a new light.
- 2 Mount Caburn, an iron-age hill fort, looks like shadows against the sky. On the horizon is the outline of a tree bent by the wind, and sheep are sleeping at the top of the field. A fox cries, a pheasant crows and the air is full of a strong earthy smell.
- 3 “For most of human history, people lived in close contact with the land,” says Nigel Berman, my guide. His company, School of the Wild, organizes guided night walks on the South Downs. “In the past few hundred years, we have shut ourselves off from our natural surroundings. Walking at night is a powerful way of reconnecting. When your vision is reduced, your other senses are sharpened.”
- 4 Darkness is a thing we now fear. It has become a metaphor for evil and depression, a place kept away by electric lights. But in places where it is dark for much of the winter, people try to enjoy it rather than waiting for longer days. In the Arctic Circle in the winter, when the sun never rises and the Earth is dark for several months, the Norwegians simply put on warm clothes, put on a head torch and go to the hills.
- 5 As nights get longer, now is the time to go into the countryside, or walk across a deserted beach, to see starlit skies and moonlit rocks, see owls and bats, and breathe in the night air.
- 6 Nigel and I walk from the village of Glynde across the South Downs towards the town of Lewes. It’s a walk I know well by day, but at night, everything is different, and a familiar walk becomes a mini adventure.
- 7 When Nigel told me not to bring a torch, I was worried. I can’t remember the last time I used my night vision, and I’m not even sure how it works.
- 8 From the top of the hill, we descend past clumps of trees into the darker, hill-surrounded valley, walking towards the eerie light of a pond where we stop and sit down. I feel the breeze on my face, hear the rustle of leaves and, as I watch the clouds moving and slowly changing colour against the sky, it feels mesmeric.
- 9 Normally, at this time of night, I have a glass of wine in front of the television, but being out in the countryside is a purer form of relaxation. I forget about work and family tensions, and my mind calms.
- 10 Walking at night is not without risk, but with knowledge and preparation, it opens up a new side to walking. For example, it’s important to know your route by day so that you know what features to look for by night; to have good navigational skills; take the right equipment (hat, gloves, warm layers of clothes and a flask of hot drink); and choose a day with favourable weather.
- 11 I hear a deep unfamiliar sound, which Nigel tells me it is the “cronk” call of the raven. We continue walking and, having got used to the dark, the chalk path that leads up Saxon Down now appears to almost shine in front of us. We climb carefully, feeling our way on the uneven ground.
- 12 As we reach the top, Lewes appears below as a twinkly mass of lights, a sight I’d generally think of as welcoming. But in just a few hours, I have got very used to the dark and am now reluctant to walk back to the town. Walking at night is like discovering a new world on your doorstep.

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. In the past few hundred years, we have started to spend more time outdoors.
2. The author hears and sees new and unusual things on her walk.
3. The author would prefer to be at home with a glass of wine.
4. She is afraid of the dark and is happy to finally see the lights of the town.
5. In northern countries where it is dark for much of the winter, people stay at home all the time.
6. When you go for a walk in the dark, it's best to choose a walk that you know well.

4 The natural world

a. Complete the table with words and phrases from the text. Include any adjectives from the text, for example *deserted beach*.

| Landscape features | Animals and birds |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| | |

b. Circle the words and phrases you would like to learn, and write a sentence for each.

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5 Discussion

- How do you feel after reading the article? Does it motivate you to go for a walk in the dark?
- The guide says, 'When your vision is reduced, your other senses are sharpened.' Have you ever experienced this?
- The author says, 'Darkness is a thing we now fear.' Do you know anyone who is afraid of the dark?

6 Webquest

1. Find out about more ways to explore by night with these groups.
 - National parks are some of the best places to see the starry autumn and winter skies, and there are a number of dark-sky festivals that include organized stargazing walks. darks skies national parks.org.uk
 - The Bat Conservation Trust has groups across the UK and most run local bat walks. bats.org.uk
 - Ramblers groups offer group night walks. ramblers.org.uk
 - Many charities now run organized night walks to raise money. The original MoonWalk, organized by breast cancer charity Walk the Walk, now takes place all around the world. walkthewalk.org
2. Find out more about one of these places from the article and share your findings.
 - the South Downs
 - Lewes
 - Mount Caburn