



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

Blaming Others With a Goat: A 'Scapegoat'

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And now, *Words and Their Stories* from VOA Learning English.

Many of our English expressions come from our interactions with or observations of animals. Today we talk about an animal that gets blamed for a lot of bad things – a goat!

To be more exact, we are talking about a scapegoat.

A scapegoat is a person who is the receiver of blame and anger about a situation. Often the anger is without reason. So, if someone is unfairly blamed for something, that person could be called a scapegoat.

“Scapegoat” combines the English words “escape” and “goat.” The word has an interesting history. But before we hear that, let’s hear the word used in some examples.

Just because Tabitha had made mistakes in the past, she became the scapegoat in her family for everything that went wrong. But in fact, her sisters did worse things than she did.

The builder of a new apartment building became the scapegoat for changes to the neighborhood. Houses became more expensive and poorer people began moving out. But in reality, wealthy people had been moving into the area for many years.

Now, let's talk about the **origin**: Where does this word come from?

Experts with Merriam Webster say "scapegoat" is connected to religion. On the dictionary's website, they explain that on a certain religious holiday, ancient Hebrews would **sacrifice** one goat and lead another one into the wilderness. The goat sent to the wilderness carried all the **sins** of the people.

So historically speaking, a scapegoat is an actual goat that takes on the sins of others. In other words, the goat carried the sins of other people away with it.

In our modern usage, a scapegoat is someone who bears the blame for others.

In English, there is another word that has a similar meaning. A "fall guy" is someone who is blamed for something that someone else did. The word "fall guy" suggests that the person was set up for something they did not do.

Here's an example:

Lawyers for the defendant argued that their client was being set up by her boss. She was simply a fall guy for her boss's crimes. He was the real guilty party.

And that's all the time we have for this *Words and Their Stories*. Until next time ... I'm Anna Matteo.

Anna Matteo wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

origin – *n.* the point where something begins

sacrifice – *n.* something offered as a religious act : an act of giving up something especially for the sake of someone or something else

sin – *n.* an action that breaks a religious law : an action that is or is felt to be bad

We want to hear from you. Do you have a similar expressions in your language? In the Comments section, you can also practice using any of the expressions from the story.

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