

Catch Word #24 – Once in a Blue Moon

Transcript

Jessie: Hi everybody, this is Jessie...

Robin: And Robin...

Jessie: And you're listening to the Culips **Catch Word** podcast.

Robin: That's Culips, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Jessie: And, as always, if you want more information about this episode, or any of our episodes, just check out our website. And the Catch Word podcast is when we take one word or an expression and we look at it really closely.

Robin: We take an expression and we break it down, we give you the synonyms and similar expressions. Can you tell us what today's expression is?

Jessie: Yeah, today's expression is "**once in a blue moon.**"

Robin: "**Once in a blue moon.**"

Jessie: "**Once in a blue moon**" means "**not very often**" or "**rarely.**"

Robin: OK, and can you give me an example of how we can use this expression?

Jessie: Sure! Well, "**once in a blue moon**" means "**not very often,**" so we could say, "Since my cousin moved to Spain, I only get to see her **once in a blue moon** at family **reunions.**"

Robin: OK, so since she moved away you **don't** see her so **often** or you **rarely** see her.

Jessie: Exactly! I only see her **once in a blue moon.**

Robin: Do you have any other examples?

Jessie: Yeah! You could say, "I usually drink tea, but **once in a blue moon** I like to have a cup of coffee instead."

Robin: OK, so you drink tea every day, but **once in a while** or **every now and then** you drink coffee.

- Jessie: Exactly.
- Robin: That's it.
- Jessie: So Robin, do you know where the term "**blue moon**" came from?
- Robin: Actually, **I have absolutely no idea.**
- Jessie: Well, it's really interesting. It's actually a special name for the second **full moon** that happens in a month. So, a **full moon** happens about once every about 29 days, and most months are 30 or 31 days long, so sometimes one month can have two **full moons**, but usually it only has one. So it will have two **full moons not very often or rarely** and that's why we say "**once in a blue moon,**" it means "**not very often.**"
- Robin: OK! Do you know precisely how many times a year something like this might happen?
- Jessie: Yeah, I think it happens about once every two and a half years.
- Robin: Wow, that's really **not very often.**
- Jessie: But usually when we say "**once in a blue moon**" we don't mean once every two and a half years. It's just a general expression that means "**not very often.**" Most people actually don't even know what a **blue moon** really is.
- Robin: Indeed, indeed, indeed. I didn't know, actually.
- Jessie: Well, there you go!
- Robin: All right! So, when we have two **full moons** in a month does that mean that the second one is blue or is bluish?
- Jessie: No, it actually looks the same as any other **moon**.
- Robin: Oh, that's disappointing.
- Jessie: Yeah, I'm not really sure why they say it's blue.
- Robin: And you said that it happens once every two and a half years.
- Jessie: Yup.
- Robin: OK, so do you know when the next one will happen?

- Jessie: Yeah, and this is really cool. The next **blue moon** will happen on December thirty-first of 2009.
- Robin: OK.
- Jessie: So that's New Years Eve!
- Robin: That is pretty incredible.
- Jessie: I think it's two kind of rare things happening at the same time. So you will have to do something really special on next New Year's Eve so you can say that you did it **once in a blue moon**. So, Robin, what other expressions could we use that are kind of like "**once in a blue moon**"?
- Robin: Well, there's "**once in a while**." So, for example, **once in a while** I will visit my cousins in Russia. Or **every now and then** I'll go **stop in on** Brussels and check out my other cousins. Or "**occasionally**" is another one that we use as well. **Occasionally** I will play basketball.
- Jessie: With your cousins?
- Robin: With my cousins in Russia or in Brussels.
- Jessie: You have a lot of cousins.
- Robin: Yeah, I do, actually!
- Jessie: Some other similar expressions, they don't mean the exact same thing, but they're kind of similar. We could say "**once in a while**" or "**once in a lifetime**." So, "**once in a while**" is a little more common than "**once in a blue moon**." It could mean "once a week," "once a month," "**once in a while**." But "**once in a lifetime**" is more rare than "**once in a blue moon**." It means it only happens to you one time. Well, I think that about covers it for "**once in a blue moon**." Again, if you want to hear more about this episode or do some exercises or quizzes related to it, you can go to our website and log into Lipservice and our website is Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.
- Robin: Once again thank you for joining us. This has been Robin...
- Jessie: And Jessie...
- Robin: And we're signing off. Take care.

Detailed Explanation

Once in a blue moon

In case you missed the explanation in this episode, “**once in a blue moon**” means “**not very often**” or “**rarely**.” Something that happens **once in a blue moon** does not happen regularly.

As Jessie explained, the expression comes from the fact that a **blue moon** doesn’t happen **very often**. A **blue moon** usually happens once every two and a half years. The expression “**once in a blue moon**” does not have a specific time on it. It could mean once every couple months or once a year.

The next **blue moon** will be on December 31, 2009, and the one after that is predicted to be on November 21, 2010. It **doesn’t** happen **very often**!

Here are some more examples with “**once in a blue moon**”:

Hannah: Did you invite Angela to come out tonight?”

Rachel: Yes, but you know she only comes out **once in a blue moon**. I don’t think she will come.

Bob: Has Josh finished his report?

Sheila: No, he seems to finish reports only **once in a blue moon**.

Jamie: I want to have some chocolate cake. It’s only **once in a blue moon** that I eat desserts.



Remember a **blue moon** is not actually blue. A blue moon is a second **full moon** in one month. A **full moon** is when the **moon** is full, like in this picture.

A photo of a **full moon**.

Similar expressions to “once in a blue moon”

We don't really have other idiomatic expressions like this one. But we have other, more literal, ways to express the same idea.

In this episode we mentioned, “**not often**” or “**not so often**” or “**not very often.**”

Example:

Greg: I do **not** go outside **very often** in the winter.

Another similar way to express this idea is “**rarely.**”

Example:

Tannia: I **rarely** see my good friend Suzanne anymore.

“**Occasionally**” is a little bit stronger than “**rarely**” but it still means “**not very often.**”

Example:

Jean: I watch movies **occasionally**, when something really interests me.

A more idiomatic expression is “**once in a while.**”

Example:

Barbara: She only gets to visit **once in a while** because she is so busy.

And another idiomatic expression that means the same thing is “**(every) now and then.**”

Examples:

Every now and then I see him around the city.

OR

Now and then I see him around the city.

Reunion

A “**reunion**” is a meeting or gathering of people that only happens **once in a while**. We have **reunions** with people that we have not seen in a long time.

This comes from the verb “to reunite.” A **reunion** serves to bring people together who have not been together recently.

The most popular **reunions**, like we mention in this episode, are family **reunions** (when you see all the family that you haven't seen in some time) or school **reunions** (when you reunite with all the people that you went to school with).

For example, some families have a **reunion** once a year. Maura's extended family (this includes people like parents' cousins, etc.) has a big **reunion** once every 10 years.

High school **reunions** often happen 25 years after graduating in North America.

I have absolutely no idea

This expression, “**I have no idea**” means “**I don’t know.**” “**I have (absolutely) no idea**” is a strong version of “**I don’t know.**” It means you really, really don’t know. You do not even **have a** small **idea** about the subject. We can also say, “**I don’t have a clue.**”

Robin says to Jessie that he **had absolutely no idea** about the origins of the expression “**once in a blue moon.**” People often are not sure where the expressions we use come from.

Here are a few more examples:

Holly: Were you surprised to see Linda?
Sofia: Yes, I **had no idea** she would be there.
Paula: Did you **have any idea** that we were planning a surprise party?
Ingrid: No, I **didn’t have a clue.** I was really surprised.

Stop in on

Robin says that he sometimes **stops in on** his family in Russia and Brussels. “**To stop in on**” means to visit for short time. “**To stop in on**” is a casual visit and is often unplanned.

For example:

She was in my neighbourhood, so she **stopped in on** me last week.

I **stop in on** my old workplace whenever I can.

Robin says that he **stops in on** his family in Russia and Brussels. Do you think that Robin really does this? Do you think that Robin really has family in Russia and Brussels? If you have family in far away countries, when you visit them it is usually planned and not just for a short time!

Here are some other slang expressions for a short, unplanned visit similar to “**stop in on**”:

- To stop in
- To stop by
- To drop by
- To drop in
- To drop over
- To come by

- To swing by

There are so many, actually!

Once in a lifetime

The expression “**once in a lifetime**” is different from “**once in a blue moon**” and the other synonyms. “**Once in lifetime**” means almost never, like once in your whole life.

Once-in-a-lifetime experiences are really special because they are positive experiences that **do not** happen **often**.

A **once-in-a-lifetime** experience might be meeting your favourite celebrity or winning a trip to an exotic country. It will probably only happen to you once (if it happens more than once you are VERY lucky!)

An example:

Karen: Travelling to Africa was a **once-in-a-lifetime** experience.

Fred: It was so great to have front-row seats at Celine Dion’s concert!

Jack: For sure! It could really only happen **once in a lifetime**.

One grammar mistake

Jessie says, “So, you’ll have to do something special on Next New Year’s Eve” but this isn’t correct grammar.

She should have said, “So, you’ll have to do something special next New Year’s Eve” or “So, you’ll have to do something special on New Year’s Eve next year.”

Quiz (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)

1. I only see Jon _____.

Please fill in the blank above.

- a) once of a blue moon
- b) once on a blue moon
- c) once in a blue moon
- d) once in a green moon

2. What are some synonyms for “once in a blue moon”?

- a) often, always
- b) rarely, not very often
- c) once every three years
- d) once a week

3. What are popular types of reunions?

- a) for work
- b) for families and schools
- c) for cats and dogs
- d) for houses

4. What is a real blue moon?

- a) the second full moon of the year
- b) the first full moon of a month
- c) the second full moon in a month
- d) a half moon

5. Where does Robin say he has cousins?

- a) in Russia and Brussels
- b) in Russia and Barcelona
- c) in Brussels and Paris
- d) in Barcelona and Brussels

6. Harry: I don't see Karen very often. I see her once in a blue moon.
Greg: Oh really? Me neither. I see her _____ at the gym.

Please fill in the blank above.

- a) then and now
 - b) every time
 - c) every now and then
 - d) evenly
7. Which expression is used for very special experiences that only happen once?
- a) once in a life
 - b) one-timer
 - c) one lifetime
 - d) once in a lifetime

Answers: 1.c 2.b 3.b 4.c 5.a 6.c 7.d