

what do you do with a drunken sailor

What do you do with a drunken sailor is a question that echoes through maritime history and folk music alike. Originating from a traditional sea shanty, this phrase has captured the imagination of sailors, musicians, and enthusiasts for centuries. The song's playful yet practical lyrics explore humorous and sometimes clever solutions to managing a tipsy sailor aboard a ship. Beyond its musical roots, the phrase prompts curiosity about maritime customs, sobriety, and the history of sailors' lives at sea. In this comprehensive guide, we delve into the origins of the phrase, its cultural significance, and practical advice—both historical and modern—on how to handle a drunken sailor.

Understanding the Origins of "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor"

The Folk Song and Its Historical Background

The phrase is best known from the traditional sea shanty titled "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor." This song, believed to date back to the 19th century, was sung by sailors to coordinate work on ships and keep morale high during long voyages. Its lyrics describe various humorous and sometimes exaggerated solutions to dealing with a sailor who has overindulged in alcohol.

Sea shanties served both a functional and social purpose—they helped synchronize work and provided entertainment. The lyrics often contained practical advice, humor, and camaraderie, reflecting the sailors' daily lives. The song's catchy chorus and rhythmic structure made it a staple among maritime workers.

Cultural Significance and Evolution

Over time, "What do you do with a drunken sailor" has transcended its maritime origins to become a popular folk tune worldwide. It's frequently performed at festivals, maritime events, and in pop culture references. The song's humorous approach to a common issue among sailors—inebriation—made it memorable.

In addition to entertainment, the phrase and song have contributed to a broader conversation about discipline, health, and social customs aboard ships. While modern ships have strict regulations against drunkenness, the song remains a cultural touchstone, reminding us of maritime history's colorful and jovial side.

Practical Approaches to Managing a Drunken Sailor: Historical and Modern Perspectives

Historical Methods of Dealing with Drunken Sailors

Historically, sailors employed a variety of methods—some humorous, some strict—to manage intoxicated crew members. These practices reflected the tough and often humorous maritime culture.

1. **Rousing or Stirring:** Sometimes sailors would pour water or vinegar on the drunken individual to sober them up quickly.
2. **Physical Measures:** In some cases, sailors would gently shake or carry the sailor to prevent injury or ensure safety.
3. **Disciplinary Actions:** Excessive drunkenness could lead to confinement or punishment, especially if it affected the ship's operation.
4. **Humorous Routines:** Singing the shanty or engaging the sailor in humorous or distracting activities to sober them up gradually.

These methods, while effective to some extent, were often informal and rooted in the camaraderie and rough humor characteristic of maritime life.

Modern Strategies for Managing Intoxicated Individuals at Sea

Today, managing a drunken sailor—or any intoxicated crew member—adheres to strict safety protocols, health standards, and legal regulations. The focus is on safety, health, and dignity.

- **Monitoring and Assessment:** Ensure the individual is safe, breathing normally, and not at risk of injury or choking.
- **Hydration and Rest:** Encourage water intake and rest while avoiding further alcohol consumption.
- **Seeking Medical Help:** If intoxication is severe, or if there are signs of alcohol poisoning, immediate medical attention is necessary.
- **Preventive Measures:** Implement policies to limit alcohol consumption aboard ships and provide alternative entertainment and social activities.
- **Legal and Safety Protocols:** Follow maritime safety standards and company policies to

handle intoxication professionally.

Modern ships also emphasize education about alcohol's effects and promote responsible drinking among crew members.

Health and Safety Considerations When Handling a Drunken Sailor

Risks of Excessive Alcohol Consumption at Sea

Alcohol consumption can impair judgment, coordination, and respiratory functions, which are critical on ships. Excessive drinking can lead to:

- Accidents and falls
- Injuries to oneself or others
- Alcohol poisoning
- Disruption of ship operations

Given these risks, managing intoxicated sailors effectively is paramount for safety.

Best Practices for Ensuring Safety

To mitigate risks, follow these best practices:

1. **Stay Calm and Professional:** Approach the sailor with respect and patience.
2. **Assess the Situation:** Determine the level of intoxication and whether medical assistance is needed.
3. **Prevent Further Harm:** Keep the sailor in a safe, comfortable position, ideally lying on their side to prevent choking in case of vomiting.
4. **Monitor Continuously:** Check vital signs until help arrives or the individual recovers.
5. **Document Incidents:** Record what happened in case further action is required.

Humor and Tradition: The Cultural Impact of "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor"

The Folk Song's Lyrics and Their Meaning

The lyrics of the traditional shanty offer a humorous take on dealing with drunken sailors. Some common verses include suggestions such as:

- Shaving his belly with a rusty razor
- Putting him in the longboat till he's sober
- Sticking him in the scupper with a hosepipe on him
- Putting him in the bed with the captain's daughter

While these are playful and exaggerated, they reflect sailors' ingenuity and sense of humor in handling tough situations.

The Song's Legacy and Modern Usage

Today, the song remains popular among folk musicians, maritime enthusiasts, and cultural festivals. It symbolizes the camaraderie of sailors and the humorous side of maritime life. The lyrics have been adapted and parodied, serving as a reminder of the importance of humor and tradition in maritime communities.

Conclusion: Managing a Drunken Sailor with Respect and Safety

Whether viewed through historical or modern lenses, handling a drunken sailor involves a mix of practical safety measures, respect, and understanding. Historically, sailors relied on humor and camaraderie, while today's maritime standards emphasize health, safety, and professionalism. The phrase "what do you do with a drunken sailor" continues to evoke the lively spirit of maritime tradition, serving as both a cultural reference and a reminder of responsible management.

By appreciating the origins of the phrase and applying best practices—whether in a historical reenactment, a maritime-themed event, or real-world safety scenario—you can ensure that dealing

with intoxicated crew members remains a safe, respectful, and even humorous experience. Remember, the goal is always to prioritize safety, dignity, and camaraderie, honoring the rich maritime heritage that the phrase embodies.

Meta Description: Discover the history, cultural significance, and practical tips on what to do with a drunken sailor. Learn about maritime customs, safety measures, and the folk song that made this phrase famous.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the origin of the song 'What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor'?

The song is a traditional sea shanty believed to have originated in the 19th century among sailors to coordinate work on ships and entertain during long voyages.

What are some common lyrics or verses from 'What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor'?

The song features humorous verses like 'Shave his belly with a rusty razor' and 'Put him in the longboat till he's sober,' offering playful solutions to a drunken sailor's predicament.

Is 'What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor' used in modern media or pop culture?

Yes, the song has been featured in movies, TV shows, and commercials, often used to evoke nautical themes or humor related to sailors and maritime life.

Are there different versions or variations of 'What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor'?

Yes, numerous versions exist with slight variations in lyrics and melody, as it is a traditional folk song passed down through generations.

How is 'What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor' typically performed today?

It is often sung as a lively sing-along or sea shanty session, especially in maritime festivals, choir groups, or online folk music communities.

What lessons or themes can be learned from the song 'What

Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor'?

The song humorously highlights themes of camaraderie, problem-solving, and the playful side of maritime life, reflecting sailor culture and humor.

Has 'What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor' been adapted for educational purposes?

Yes, educators sometimes use the song to teach about maritime history, music, and cultural traditions related to sailors and sea shanties.

Are there any modern reinterpretations or covers of 'What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor'?

Numerous artists and groups have recorded modern covers, blending traditional shanty styles with contemporary music genres like folk, rock, and pop.

Why has 'What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor' remained popular over the years?

Its catchy tune, humorous lyrics, and cultural significance as a traditional sea shanty have helped it remain a favorite among folk and maritime enthusiasts.

Can 'What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor' be used in modern team-building or group activities?

Absolutely, its lively chorus and humorous verses make it an excellent choice for group singing, fostering teamwork and a fun, communal atmosphere.

Additional Resources

[What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor? Exploring the Origins, Cultural Significance, and Modern Interpretations](#)

What do you do with a drunken sailor? This question, recurring as a chorus in the traditional sea shanty of the same name, has puzzled and amused audiences for centuries. Beyond its catchy melody and lively rhythm, the phrase invites a deeper exploration into maritime history, folk culture, and the ways in which songs capture the human experience. In this article, we delve into the origins of the shanty, its cultural significance, and how its themes resonate with contemporary audiences.

[The Origins of the Sea Shanty: A Historical Perspective](#)

[What Is a Sea Shanty?](#)

Sea shanties are rhythmic work songs sung by sailors to coordinate their efforts during strenuous

tasks aboard ships. These songs, characterized by their repetitive chorus and call-and-response structure, served multiple purposes: maintaining morale, establishing a rhythm for work, and fostering camaraderie among crew members. The song "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor" is one of the most recognizable examples, dating back to the 19th century.

Evolution and Roots

While the exact origins of "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor" are somewhat murky, scholars trace its roots to maritime work songs from the British Isles, especially maritime communities in England, Ireland, and Scotland. The song's lyrics and melody may have evolved over decades, influenced by sailors' oral traditions and the lively maritime culture of the Age of Sail.

Historically, sailors faced long voyages, often in harsh conditions, where singing served as both a practical tool and a social outlet. The song's humorous tone and focus on drunkenness reflect the sailors' experiences and attitudes toward heavy drinking—a common and culturally embedded aspect of maritime life.

The Role of the Shanty in Naval and Commercial Fleets

Sea shanties like "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor" played a crucial role in managing tasks such as hoisting sails, hauling lines, or steering the ship. The rhythm of the song helped synchronize efforts, making physically demanding work more manageable. Over time, these songs also became a form of storytelling, passing down sailors' tales, humor, and societal attitudes.

Lyrics and Themes: Deciphering the Song's Content

Analyzing the Lyrics

The chorus of the song poses a recurring question:

What do you do with a drunken sailor?

The verses suggest various humorous and pragmatic solutions, such as:

- Shaving his belly with a rusty razor
- Putting him in the longboat till he's sober
- Stick him in the scupper with a hosepipe on him

These lyrics showcase a playful, if somewhat rough, humor rooted in maritime life. The song's lighthearted tone masks underlying themes of discipline, camaraderie, and the social role of alcohol among sailors.

Underlying Themes

- Humor and Camaraderie: The exaggerated solutions serve as comic relief and reinforce bonds among crew members.
- Alcohol and Social Life: Drinking was integral to sailors' routines, providing relief from the hardships of sea life.
- Discipline and Practicality: The humorous suggestions sometimes reflect real practices or

humorous exaggerations about how sailors managed drunkenness.

Cultural Significance and Impact

The Song's Journey into Popular Culture

Although originating as a work song, "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor" has transcended its maritime roots. It gained popularity in the 20th century through folk music revival movements and has been covered by numerous artists across genres. Its upbeat rhythm and catchy chorus made it a staple in music circles, maritime festivals, and even mainstream media.

The Role in Maritime Heritage and Folklore

The song serves as a cultural artifact, offering insights into the social life of sailors during the Age of Sail. It embodies the humor, resilience, and communal spirit of maritime communities. Many maritime museums and historical societies include it as part of their collections to illustrate sailors' cultural practices.

Modern Interpretations and Uses

Today, "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor" is often performed at festivals, recreated in historical reenactments, or used in popular media to evoke a nautical atmosphere. Its lyrics are sometimes adapted or parodied, reflecting contemporary sensibilities and humor.

The Song's Relevance Today

Lessons from Maritime Traditions

While the song's themes may seem humorous or antiquated, they underscore important aspects of social cohesion, the importance of morale, and the role of music in communal work environments. Modern workplaces that involve team efforts, such as construction or emergency services, sometimes adopt singing or rhythmic chants to boost morale and coordination.

Cultural Appropriation and Sensitivity

As with many traditional folk songs, modern audiences should approach "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor" with awareness of its historical context. Some lyrics or themes may not align with contemporary values regarding alcohol consumption or social behavior. Respectful adaptation and understanding of its origins are essential.

Contemporary Adaptations

Musicians and artists continue to reinterpret the song, sometimes updating lyrics for modern audiences or using it as a teaching tool in cultural history. Its enduring popularity highlights the universality of music as a means of social bonding and storytelling.

Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy of a Nautical Classic

What do you do with a drunken sailor? The question, playful and provocative, encapsulates a bygone era of maritime life but also resonates across time as a symbol of humor, camaraderie, and the human tendency to find levity amid hardship. From its origins in the bustling decks of 19th-century ships to its place in modern folk festivals, the song exemplifies how music preserves history, culture, and community.

Whether viewed as a historical artifact or a lively tune to sing in the present day, "What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor" remains a testament to the enduring power of song to connect generations, tell stories, and evoke the timeless spirit of the sea.

[What Do You Do With A Drunken Sailor](#)

what do you do with a drunken sailor: What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor?

Unexpurgated Sea Chanties Douglas Morgan, 2013-08 There is nothing like a good sea shanty—or chanty, as it was originally called—to transport one to a different time, place, and mood. After all, few have a more powerful need to relieve boredom, weariness, fear, and loneliness than sailors. And a classic, generations-tested shanty can do just that—with humor, nostalgia, and often lasciviousness all at once. Whether at land or sea, the good fun of shanties is hard to contain. Sing them a few times, and you naturally want to learn more about them. *What Do You Do With A Drunken Sailor?* offers not only the lyrics of traditional shanties but the accompanying lore and history as well. Sung for as long as sailors have shipped out to sea, shanties are the collective creative work of seamen needing to ease the hardships of long sea voyages. Generations of sailors adapted the songs to their own needs and culture, forming a link from the age of oar and sail to the nuclear-powered navies of today. Compiled, annotated, and researched by accomplished storyteller Douglas Morgan, a longtime naval officer and author of the acclaimed thriller *Tiger Cruise*, *What Do You Do With A Drunken Sailor?* is a witty, fascinating, and unrestrained collection of more than twenty sea shanties—the perfect book for anyone with a hankering to sing and learn more about classic songs that have soothed generations of struggling souls. With more than 60 illustrations and explanations of naval terms and custom—including some of the bawdier parts of a sailor's life—*What Do You Do With A Drunken Sailor?* promises insight into military life and literature and, most important, provides hours of good-humored amusement.

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