

# Who do you save from the Mediterranean Sea?



**New Internationalist Easier English**  
**Ready Intermediate Lesson**

This lesson



grammar: yes/no questions

# Amel and Gerard



Who are they? Ask questions about them when the answer is yes or no.



## Match:

- 1) drown
- 2) lifeguard
- 3) shipwreck
- 4) volunteer
- 5) charity
- 6) dinghy
- 7) jet-ski
- 8) survive
- 9) rescue
- 10) binoculars
- 11) prosecute

a) someone who protects people from danger at sea

b) not to die



d) die under water

e) a lost boat

f) organisation which helps people



h) save someone from danger

i) someone who does a job without pay

j) A cartoon illustration of a pair of black binoculars. k) to see someone as a criminal and take them to court

# How much did you get right?



Amel al-Zakout is a Syrian artist. She nearly drowned in the Mediterranean Sea after her boat turned over on the way to Greece. Gerard Canals is a volunteer lifeguard. He was part of the rescue operation. In October 2015, a boat was shipwrecked many kilometres from the coast of Lesbos. Amel al-Zakout was one of those in the water. She was a young Syrian refugee. She travelled from Turkey that day on her way to meet her partner in Germany.

Gerard Canals is a Spanish lifeguard. He was the first to arrive on a jet-ski. He normally used it for beach rescues of holidaymakers. He and his team of three volunteers saved the lives of 242 passengers.

Four years after the shipwreck, Amel and Gerard speak together for the first time. Who do you think is speaking?

**1)Amel or Gerard?:** I'm happy to see you again. I remember seeing you from the sea. I remember your face very clearly. I don't know how much you remember about that day – 28 October – when a boat sank with 303 people on board?

**2)Amel or Gerard?:** It's impossible to forget that day – it was our first shipwreck. Usually we had rubber dinghies with 50 people. We weren't expecting such a big wooden boat. It was a terrible experience - there were so many people in the water, and so few rescuers and it was impossible to help everyone. So, we had to start choosing.



What do you think the answers are? Then read to check:

- 1) Some children died. True/false?
- 2) Amel helped a girl to survive. True/false?
- 3) There were 10 people in the sea. True/false?
- 4) The rescue took more than 3 hours. True/false?
- 5) Amel was in the sea for more than 3 hours.  
True/false?
- 6) It was Gerard's first year as a lifeguard. True/false?
- 7) Gerard rescued more people on that one day than  
all the days before. True/false?



**Gerard:** When we arrived, I saw children with their faces down already, floating in the waves. And I saw mothers in the sea with their children tied to their chests with plastic. They didn't want to lose them in that boat with so many people – but the children were drowning under the water and they didn't know. It was so terrible.

**Amel:** I remember people in the water were fighting to hold on to rubber rings. I had one and I lost it because people tried to hold on to it. There was a girl in a ring and she asked me to hold her because she was scared. And I'm sure that's why I survived. I wanted to ask – you were the first to arrive, how did you know about the shipwreck?

**Gerard:** Our volunteer lookouts called us. I picked up the binoculars and saw hundreds of orange spots in the sea – the boat was gone already. We started Open Arms a month before, and I brought the jet-skis from Spain two days before. I remember the rescue lasted at least three and a half or four hours. And when we finished, it was dark. We had no lights on the jet-skis and we were so very tired.

**Amel:** I was in the water for four hours. Yes, it was night. After I was rescued, I woke up when we reached the port and I thought, 'What time is it?' It was like a dream.  
Did you have drownings like this every day?

**Gerard:** No, only once before, as a lifeguard. I'm 38 now, I've been a lifeguard since I was 19. But in one day in Lesvos I rescued more people than in all my time working on the beach.



What do you think the answers are? Then read to check:

- 1) Every Italian government thinks the people who rescue the refugees are committing a crime. True/false?
- 2) The government decided to prosecute Gerard. True/false?
- 3) Gerard was in prison for a month. True/false?
- 4) Amel thinks the government doesn't want to help the refugees at all. True/false?
- 5) Because the rescue boats are there, more refugees try to come to Italy. True/false?
- 6) Gerard thinks the government would help white people more quickly. True/false?



**Amel:** It's hard for me to understand but I know they are prosecuting rescuers. How could that happen? And why?

**Gerard:** Yes, I would say it's funny but of course it's not funny at all. We've been doing the same thing since the beginning. But it depends on the government. One government sees us as criminals and another government works with us. They are two sides of the same thing. In 2016, the Italians told us exactly where the boats were and organized which ports to take people to. And everything was easy. But then, they decided to close the borders inland. And they thought the way to close the borders at sea was to take away the rescue boats. The military ships disappeared and the Frontex [EU border] ships only operated 30 nautical miles from Italy.

And then they started prosecuting the NGOs. In 2018 they stopped me and kept one of our boats for over a month. They charged me and two others for 'helping human trafficking'. In the end they couldn't prove it, nothing happened. They think more refugees are trying to come because they know we are there.

**Amel:** But this is terrible. When I took the trip, I didn't think about rescue. But you were there, thank God. No-one thinks about this when they are refugees. It sounds like Europe prefers dead bodies to live people.

**Gerard:** Yes, that's how it is. The bodies will be washed up on the Libyan shore. Or just disappear. They just want to stop people coming and if one of the ways is to let people die at sea, that is what will happen.

But we know more refugees did not come because of us. Because for a time there were no rescue boats at sea – and people still came in their rubber dinghies and small wooden boats. We know because when they stopped our boats, we flew our planes instead.

Eventually, we got our ships released and we went back out. But it's hard to operate. Our ships can dock, but not easily. On our last three rescues, it took 48 hours to dock when it should take 12 hours. If I rescued white people from a cruise ship or a sailing boat, you can be sure I would dock in just a few hours and from the closest port.

And the coastguard doesn't always call us. Recently there was a shipwreck near Lampedusa and the Italians didn't tell us. And they knew we are ready and can move fast and we have a lot of space on our boats.

You are a lifeguard and you have come to rescue people from the sea. Who would you rescue first, second, third, and so on? And why?

- a) A 90 year old woman
- b) A man you know is a doctor
- c) A 3 year old girl
- d) A mother with a young child
- e) A man with two children holding onto a plastic banana
- f) A woman who looks like a strong swimmer



# Homework

**Read the original article:**

<https://newint.org/features/2019/12/09/who-do-you-save>

