



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob: Hello I'm Rob – a Gemini. Welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm joined today by Neil.

Neil: Hi Rob. I'm a Virgo. So, what does that say about my **personality**? That's the group of thoughts, feelings and behaviours which make you who you are. It means I am supposed to be independent and **observant**!

Rob: Really? OK, observant – in other words, quick at noticing things. Well, as a Gemini, I'm supposed to be witty and **adaptable**!

Neil: I think that's true. You are adaptable, Rob. You get used to new things and situations very easily, I think.

Rob: Well, these characteristics we've mentioned are based on what **astrologers** say. And astrology is today's theme.

Neil: Astrologers are people who say they can find out about your personality, and maybe your future, by analysing the position of stars and planets the day you were born.

Rob: It's controversial. Many **astronomers** – the scientists who study the stars and planets – don't believe it's true, but some well-known people believe it's a very serious business. And I'll put a question to you about that.

Neil: People born under the sign of Virgo are said to be very precise. Hmm, I'm not so sure about that... But I'd better make sure everything I say today is very accurate so I fit the description!

Rob: OK. Let's see if you can answer this question accurately. Which of these famous people were publicly criticised when it came to light that they relied too much on horoscopes to take decisions? Was it:

- a) Margaret Thatcher
- b) Nancy Reagan or
- c) Michael Jackson

Neil: I think... I can remember this. I think it's Nancy Reagan, b.

Rob: OK. Are you sure?

Neil: I am.

Rob: OK. Well, you'll have to be patient because you won't get the answer until the end of the programme.

Neil: Now, let me read my horoscope for today...

Rob: Oh, you and your horoscopes, honestly, Neil! Do you know when newspapers and magazines started to offer horoscopes to their readers?

Neil: No, I don't.

Rob: Well, let's hear from Nicholas Campion, who teaches the cultural history of astrology at the University of Wales. What does he have to say about it? Campion, a Pisces, uses one particular word when he describes how people feel about their place in the universe. Which word is it?

Nicholas Campion, University of Wales:

*The newspaper horoscope was invented about 1930. There's a parallel between what was happening in astronomy at the time. In the late 20s, the idea that the universe is huge and expanding was discovered and popularised by the astronomer Edwin Hubble. This became a metaphor for the idea that we live on the edge of a distant corner of the universe and we are all very **insignificant**. At the same time we suddenly get these horoscope columns appearing which I see as a kind of **domestication** of astrology.*

Neil: Insignificant! It means of very little importance. He says that's how people felt when astronomer Edwin Hubble discovered how huge the universe is...

Rob: And this academic thinks astrology tried to bring this idea under control; it domesticated it. It brought it to our personal level, and made it all about routine, everyday events.

Neil: How interesting. It makes us think that the stars are all about us. Astrology tells us that the stars are all about *me*! I want to read my horoscope now!

Rob: Well, before you do that, you have to listen to what another specialist, this time a psychologist, has to say. Paul Rogers, a Sagittarius, teaches at the University of Central Lancashire, in the north of England.

Neil: A Sagittarius – he might be independent like me. Yes, go ahead!

Rob: OK. Well, he might spoil the fun you're having with your newspaper. Here he is:

Paul Rogers, University of Central Lancashire, England:

*People are misperceiving these generalised statements as being unique to their own personality. There are other counter biases that people fall prey to, for example, the confirmation bias. If you believe in something, you'll look for **evidence** to support that **belief** and you'll ignore evidence that rejects that belief.*

Neil: He talks about belief! Something which you think is true without much proof. He says that people who think horoscopes are true do so because the predictions seem to confirm what they already think about themselves.

Rob: Yes, people look for evidence – an indication that something they believe is true. But it's all in their mind and not in the stars themselves. People believe what they want to believe. They need some sense of control over life.

Neil: You know what? This is true. Believe in horoscopes or not, it's very comforting to have this sense of direction in life.

Rob: Everything seems so unpredictable! Here's something predictable: our quiz. Let's go back to it and see if you got the question right. I asked you which of these famous people were publicly criticised when it came to light that they relied too much on horoscopes. Was it Margaret Thatcher, Nancy Reagan or Michael Jackson?

Neil: I said Nancy Reagan.

Rob: And you were right. Nancy Reagan, wife of the late president Ronald Reagan, has long been interested in astrology. In 1988, she was criticised and ridiculed when it was revealed that she had consulted astrologers during her time at the White House.

Neil: I knew I was right because I'm always accurate!

Rob: Of course. Well done! Right, well, before we go, could you remind us of some of the English words we've heard today?

Neil: **personality**
observant
adaptable
astrologers
astronomers
insignificant
domestication
evidence
belief

Rob: Thank you, Neil. Well, that's it for this programme. Please join us soon again for 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English.

Neil: Here's one thing you can predict: we'll be back! Bye.

Rob: Bye bye.

Vocabulary and definitions

personality	the collection of thoughts, behaviours and feelings which make you who you are
observant	quick at noticing things
adaptable	someone who gets used to new things and situations very easily
astrologers	people who say they can find out about your personality, and maybe your future, by analysing the position of stars and planets the day you were born
astronomers	scientists who study the stars and planets
insignificant	of little importance
domestication	process of putting something under human control
evidence	(here) an indication that something you believe is true
belief	something you think is true without proof

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http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/general/sixminute/2014/07/140717_6min_star_signs.shtml

Story about astrology:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-25971921>