6 Absurd Pirate Myths

Or “How NOT To Be a Pirate”
#6 – All Pirates Talk Like…

Well, you know....
The Myth:

Quick -- do a pirate voice.

We don't care if you can't imitate any other accent in the world, if we ask you (or anyone else on earth) to talk like a pirate, you'll go, "ARRRRR, MATEY!"
The Truth:

Phrases like "shiver my timbers" and traditional pirate songs like "Fifteen Men on the Dead Man’s Chest" were made up by Robert Louis Stevenson for his novel Treasure Island, published in 1883 -- over 150 years after the end of the Golden Age of Piracy. We might as well tell you right now that 90 percent of all pirate tropes come from the same book: One legged pirates, squawking parrots, drunken mutinies ... all that stuff can be traced back to Treasure Island.

Yes, pirates did lose limbs in battle, mutiny on occasion and get drunk a lot, but Stevenson was the first to combine those elements into one package, creating the popular image of pirates.
#5 – Pirates & Eye Patches

Aye, Eye, Captain!
The Myth:

The eye patch is the single most recognizable feature of a pirate -- when putting together a Halloween costume, it can make the difference between “dangerous sea warrior” and “bad guy in a puffy shirt.” In every pirate movie there's always at least one crew member who wears an eye patch, usually due to some hideous disfigurement. Like the guy with the wooden eyeball in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series.
The Truth:

Actually, it looks like the only reason pirates wore eye patches was to keep one eye adjusted to darkness while boarding another ship. That's right: If this theory is correct, they only wore the patch before and during a raid.

Think about it: Pirates needed to be able to fight and ransack both above and below deck, and since artificial light wasn't a thing, it could get pretty dark down there. A guy could trip on a treasure chest or something. It takes the human eye several minutes to adjust to darkness -- however, this way, pirates could simply swap the eye patch and immediately be prepared to fight in the lower decks without constantly running into walls, which is something you'd probably want to avoid if you're carrying a cutlass.
#4 – The Skull & Crossbones
The Myth:

The classic Jolly Roger is so representative of pirates that we shouldn't even have to type the word "pirates" by now; a little symbol of a skull and some crossbones should suffice. The flag has been used in virtually every movie where pirates appear, ever, from the really old ones with Errol Flynn ... And Veggie Tales
The Truth:

Actually, if there was a pirate ship approaching and you saw a black flag waving, you were in luck: It meant the pirates were willing to give quarter. The real "Oh No, It’s Pirates!!" flag sported a decidedly more minimalistic "completely red" design -- in fact, historians believe that the term Jolly Roger comes from "jolie rouge," which is French for "pretty red".
#3 – Sailors Turn Into Pirates To Live a Life of Crime
The Myth:

Based on what we've learned from the singing pirates on *Peter Pan*, the life of a pirate was all about stealing, fighting and collecting booty, and therefore the decision to become one must have depended entirely on how much you enjoyed those things. *Pirates of the Caribbean* adds "ingesting massive amounts of alcohol" to the mix. Look at any pirate song and you'll see the same basic ingredients repeated over and over.
The Truth:

The overwhelming majority of pirates were honest sailors who ditched their jobs because the conditions were awful. Only a small minority became a pirate because they actually enjoyed being an outlaw. Being a sailor during pirate times was one of the worst jobs ever, and if they lived under British rule, most of them didn't so much "sign up" as "get kidnapped by the Royal Navy."
#2 – Pirates Buried Their Treasure
The Myth:

This is like the main thing that pirates do, right? Steal treasure, put it in a chest, bury it someplace and then draw a map to remind themselves where they left it? If we are to believe RPG games, the whole world is littered with treasure chests that someone forgot about -- and according to The Goonies, the map could very well be hidden in your attic.
The Truth:

Pirates did bury their treasure ... like three times. None of those three guys made a map, meaning that authentic pirate treasure maps have simply never existed.

Maybe if those guys had been more successful, treasure-burying might have caught on among pirates, but that doesn't seem to be the case. However, there were still persistent (unfounded) rumors that some of Captain Kidd's treasure was never found, and that was enough to capture the imagination of writers and painters everywhere.
#1 – Pirates Mostly Stole Gold
The Myth:

Pretty much every pirate movie we've mentioned so far involves some sort of massive stash of pirate gold: There's the room full of treasure in *The Goonies* ... The haunted gold cavern in *Pirates of the Caribbean* ... And the entire treasure island in *Treasure Island*. Often the entire plot revolves around getting or keeping the gold.
The Truth:

How about soap? Or food? Or candles, sewing tools and other horribly mundane household supplies? When a ship was taken by pirates, the loot was more often a cargo of salted fish or supplies going to the colonies -- and they were pretty OK with that.