



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 39

TOPICS

Topics: Country music, July 4th celebrations, clever vs. smart, you formal vs. informal, college vs. high school, to ride vs. to drive, “Tell me about it!”, to throw in the towel

GLOSSARY

rural – countryside; not very close to a town or city

* The university he will attend is in a rural part of the state.

banjo – a musical instrument with strings with a long neck and a round body

* She sang while her husband played the banjo.

cowboy – a person, usually a man, who rides a horse and watches the animals, such as cows and sheep, while they move from place to place

* My uncle was a cowboy and taught me how to ride a horse.

stereotype – an oversimplified and often wrong idea of something

* One stereotype of an American is someone who is loud and self-important.

crop – plants that are grown for food

* This year’s cotton crop is the best we’ve ever had.

declaration – formal statement or announcement

* The organization’s declaration says that any player from any team can join.

fireworks display – a show with fireworks that explode slowly and fill the night sky with different colors

* The city celebrated its 100-year anniversary with a big fireworks display.

stripe – a long narrow band

* When he repainted his car, he asked for a red stripe to be painted on each side.

outdoors – in the open air; outside a building

* Summer is a good time to eat and play outdoors.



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corn on the cob – corn that is still on the long, round center part that it grows on

* Could you pass me some fried chicken and corn on the cob?

“Tell me about it!” – used when you agree with someone because of your own experience; there is no need for that person to tell you because you already know

* A - The concert was really great.

B - Tell me about it! I had front row seats.

sarcastic – trying to make someone else look foolish in a joking way; often a way to say unkind things about someone

* She said that my dress looked nice, but I know she didn’t mean it because she said it with a sarcastic tone of voice.

to throw in the towel – to give up; to drop out

* I’ve tried to fix this car for three days and it still doesn’t work. I’m ready to throw in the towel!

to stay with something – to continue trying or doing something

* If you stay with it long enough, you *will* learn to play the piano well.



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ENGLISH LEARNING TIPS

Pictures can often help you understand what you are listening to or reading. One good way to improve your everyday English is to read stories with pictures, such as comic books and graphic novels. (Graphic novels are longer books, often for adults, which have pictures and words like a comic book.) Comic books and graphic novels are not just for children, and they are not “too easy” for many intermediate students. They can be excellent ways to pick up new vocabulary in a fun and interesting way. Some can be very interesting and contain difficult vocabulary as well.

Comic books are often written at a low reading level, with simpler vocabulary. For beginning and intermediate students, comics such as Archie, Tom and Jerry, and Bugs Bunny are good places to start. They are written at a low reading level but still contain a lot of useful daily vocabulary. If you are more advanced, you may want to try comics such as Superman, Spider-Man, and Batman, all of which are written at a higher level but are still easy to understand because of the pictures and drawings. There are also many translated Japanese anime graphic novels in English that are written more for adults. Many of these have science fiction themes that adults can enjoy.



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast English Café Number 39.

This is the English Café Episode 39. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful city of Los Angeles, in the beautiful state of California. On today's Café, we're going to talk about country music, one of the most popular forms of music in the United States, in some places. We're also going to talk about the Fourth of July, which is a national holiday here in the United States. We'll talk about why that is. And, as usual, we're going to answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Remember you can get a complete transcript of this podcast along with the definitions of the words that we use, and sample sentences, as well as tips on learning English. All of this is available on our website in our Learning Guide at eslpod.com.

Our first topic today is country music. And, "country music," which is sometimes called "country and western music" is actually lots of different types of music that are popular in the United States. It originally comes from the southern United States, the southern states. And, when we say the southern United States, and sometimes just the South, with a capital S, we mean the states of Louisiana, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, perhaps even Texas and Virginia would be included in the South. Georgia is also a part of the South. But, this music, although it originally comes from the South, is popular in many different areas. It's very popular in rural areas of the United States. "Rural" is the part of the United States, the part of a country that is outside of the city, where there are farms, for example. So, it's a popular type of music, and many type(s) of people like it. It's again very popular, especially in the southern United States and in rural areas.

And the term "country" or "country and western," as I said, also includes lots of different types of music. Some people think Country music all sounds the same and that's not true. There are lots of different kinds of country or country and western music. Bluegrass music, for example, is part of country music, music that is made with banjos. A "banjo" is an instrument; it sounds like this: (banjo playing). That's also considered country music. There's also music which was



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originally called western music, but again country and western, and now we just say, usually just say "country music" includes music about cowboys, music about people who work in the western part of the United States where there were lots of cowboys. A "cowboy" is a man who is in charge of keeping the animals from leaving the farm, from leaving the area where they are being used.

And, this is country and western music has lots of different types of music. A typical country and western song is difficult to define, but normally when you think about country music there is a stereotype. A "stereotype" is what people think is true but is usually a over generalization so you think that everyone is like that. "Everyone in Minnesota is always happy." Well, that would be a stereotype, not a true stereotype. So, stereotypes are not always true, but you assume it to be true for everyone. Well, there is a stereotype for country music that it's usually about a man who has lost his wife or lost his girlfriend and now he's sad and he's singing a song about how sad he is because he lost his girlfriend or his wife. His wife or his girlfriend left him, is the idea. And that's kind of a stereotype of a country music song.

Some of the most popular country music singers have been people like Dolly Parton. Dolly Parton is very famous in the United States. She is a country singer, actually a very good singer. She was also in a few movies back in the 1980's. Willie Nelson is also a popular singer. A man who is getting old now, but he is very popular as a country artist. A third one would be Kenny Rogers. Kenny Rogers had many popular country songs that sold a lot of records. He sold a lot of records with these country songs. One of Kenny Rogers' most famous songs is actually about a man who loses his wife, whose wife leaves him, and it's called Lucille. Lucille was the name of the wife. And so, if you ask an American to sing this song, most of them know it, they've heard it. It was very popular back in the, I think 1970's, might have been 1980's, and of course I will sing it for you, because I know that you want me to. (Jeff sings Lucille). Well, that's all you get. You'll have to buy my record, my album, my CD to hear the rest of that song. "You picked a fine time to leave to me" is kind of a joke line. "You've picked a terrible time" is what he's actually saying, "to leave me Lucille," his wife. He has four hungry children and a crop in the field. A "crop" is when you grow corn or wheat, whatever you grow on the farm is called your crop and he has a crop in the field that he has to go and get, and his wife has left him. So, a very sad song, but a very famous country song. Some of the most famous country singers are now not from the United States. One of the most famous ones is a singer from Australia



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by the name of Keith Urban, and so country music has become popular in other countries as well.

Our second topic today is the national holiday here in the United States, the Fourth of July. July 4th is American Independence Day and it celebrates the signing of the Declaration of Independence. A “declaration” is a statement usually telling other people what you think, what you believe. And, in this case, it was a declaration saying the American colonies were going to separate themselves from Great Britain, from England. And, of course, the English didn't like that idea, and so there followed the Revolutionary War, which of course was won by the people in the colonies, in the American Colonies, and who then formed the United States. But, the Fourth of July is the day that the Declaration was signed back in 1776.

Well, Fourth of July as a holiday here in the United States is usually celebrated by a parade. Individual towns, especially smaller towns, often have a Fourth of July parade, where you have the marching band; the marching band is the band usually from the college or high school who play music as they walk, and they walk through the parade, in the parade, I should say, playing music. And, of course, “to march” as a verb means in this case to walk. So, there are marching bands and there are always parades. There are also a celebration at night. There is fireworks, so there are fireworks, and “fireworks” always in the plural. “Fireworks” is when you have the lights in the sky and they shoot up – well, its almost like a bomb, but its not a bomb. It explodes and you see these wonderful colors. So, there's always a “fireworks display,” we would say, a fireworks display, or sometimes just a fireworks show on the Fourth of July.

There are some places that also have concerts on the Fourth of July. Washington DC, the capital, there's always a big concert on what's called “the mall.” Now, the word mall, usually people think of mall, they think of a shopping center, a place where you can buy things is called a mall. But, in Washington DC, the mall is actually the area, large area in front of the capitol, and there are lots of buildings on the mall. The famous museums in Washington DC, the Smithsonian Museums are all located on the mall. And so, they have a big concert there, and fireworks afterwards. Boston is also famous for its concert on the Fourth of July, and many people growing up like me, remember watching the Boston Pops Orchestra. And the “Boston Pops Orchestra” was people who played in the Boston Symphony Orchestra but they called it “Pops” because it was an orchestra that played more popular music, so they would always play popular



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music. And, the last song that you would always hear on the Fourth of July concert is called Stars and Stripes Forever. “Stars and Stripes” - the United States flag is made up of stars, 50 stars, and 13 stripes. A “stripe” is a narrow piece of something or a narrow color of something. The United States has 13 stripes, red and white, that represent the 13 original states of the United States. And so, there's a famous song called Stars and Stripes Forever, by an American composer by the name of John Phillips Sousa, and you may recognize the song if you hear it.

The Fourth of July is also a time for family parties, and it is very popular for people to have barbecue parties on the Fourth of July where they cook the food outside, outdoors we would say. “Outdoors” means outside of your house. And, they cook hamburgers and hot dogs and chicken and steak and all sorts of good things. Usually you have corn on the Fourth of July, what we would call corn on the cob. A “cob” is the stick that the corn grows on. And so, to have corn on the cob means you get the whole stick of corn, we call it the cob of corn, and you eat it right off of that cob or that stick. Mm, I'm getting hungry. But first, I'll answer a few questions.

Our first question comes from Grace. Grace is originally from Taiwan and now lives in New York City. She wants to know the difference between the word “clever” and “smart.” What's the difference between clever and smart? Both words can mean intelligent, someone who has a lot of intelligence is smart. However, we use the word clever usually to mean someone who is intelligent, but also who is very quick to learn something. We also use the word clever when we are trying to describe someone who may be intelligent, but uses their intelligence to do something perhaps not honest, something dishonest. The best example of this is probably from the Greek epic poet Homer who wrote The Iliad and The Odyssey. The Odyssey has the main character of Odysseus, or as they call him in Rome, Ulysses, and this was the person who you may remember after the Trojan War, the war of the Greeks against the city of Troy. Odysseus, or Ulysses, took ten years to get back to his home in Ithaca, the island of Ithaca. Well, this is a character in Greek mythology who was considered very clever. So, we would call him clever because he was able to think of things and get himself out of difficulty very intelligently. A smart person, if we use the word “smart,” we're usually talking about someone who is, for example, good in school. She's very smart; she is a good student. That's how we would use that word.



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Our next question comes from Uwe in Germany and the question here has to do with how we address people, how we talk to people in English using the "you" form of the verb informally, and formally. Well, many languages such as German, Spanish, French, many of the romance languages, Italian, Portuguese, and other languages have a different form of the verb if you are talking to someone who is a friend of yours, or someone who is in your family and someone who is your boss, or someone who is older than you, or a stranger. In English we do not have a different form of the verb to distinguish between someone you know; in Spanish it would be the "tu" form, and someone who you don't know, a stranger, or someone in authority, or someone older than you. We don't have a difference in the verbs. We instead use things like the titles of people, so we'll call someone Mister, Mister (Mr.) Smith, Ms. Kim, these would be ways of showing that person respect. So, we don't call them by their first name, we only use their last name with a title like Mister or Doctor or Ms. or Missus. Another way that we show respect sometimes is use the word, for a man, "Sir," or for a woman, "Ma'am." So someone may say, "Excuse me, ma'am" or "Excuse me, sir." If you are trying to ask someone a question on the street, you want to find out where the nearest bathroom is, and you say, "Well, excuse me, sir. Excuse me, ma'am, can you tell me...?" That's a polite way of addressing someone using the "you" form of the verb but adding something that makes it so that you are showing respect for that person. And, in English, we do it in an indirect way, not a direct way with the verb itself. At least that's for most of the cases where we have formal and informal.

Gunawan is originally from Indonesia, but he's also living in Germany, in Berlin, and he has a question about the words "college" and "high school." What's the difference between a college and a high school in American English? Well, in some countries the word "college" is used to mean the same as a high school. It's often a place where you go if you are going to be studying at the university, it's before you get your Bachelor's Degree. In the United States, the word "college" only means after high school. "College" and "university" are used pretty much the same. So, if someone says, "I'm going to college," that means that they're probably 18, 19, 20 (sometimes older) years old and they are going to the university, they have already finished high school. High school is just those grades, usually between nine and twelve. Sometimes we include what's called "junior high school" beginning at grades seven through twelve. That's high school in the United States system, and so we don't use "college" unless we mean "university."



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Tai in Vietnam has a question and he wants to know the difference between the verbs "to ride" and "to drive." When do you use "ride," and when do you use "drive?" We use the verb "drive" when we're talking about a car or a truck. The person who is controlling the car is the driver and he or she is driving the car. So, "drive" is used for cars and trucks. For a bicycle or a motorcycle, we would use the verb "ride," - "I ride a motorcycle, I ride a bicycle." Now, you can also use "ride" with another preposition to mean to be in the same vehicle. For example "I ride in the car" means that I'm not the one driving, I'm sitting next to the driver or in the back seat. So, you can also ride in an airplane, you're not flying the airplane, notice the verb is "to fly" if it's an airplane; we don't say, "we drive an airplane" we say, "we fly an airplane." But, most people don't fly the plane, they're not controlling the plane, they're sitting in the plane, we would say they are riding in an airplane. You can ride animals, you can ride a horse, for example, just like you ride a bicycle. Although with a horse, you can also say you "rode on a horse" and if you weren't controlling the horse that's probably the expression you would use. For other means of transportation, a bus, for example, there is a driver of the bus, but most people ride in the bus. You can also say "I ride the bus" without the preposition and again it just means that you are in the bus, you are not actually driving it. A train, we don't use "drive" for a train; you can ride on a train. The verb for the person who controls the train would probably be "conduct" because a train has a conductor and that's the person who is in charge of the train. So, thank you, Tai, for that question.

Next question comes from Wachira in Thailand and the question is about the expression, "Tell me about it!" "Tell me about it!" If you said it like that, what does that mean? Well, let's say that you are working very hard and someone else comes in who has also been working very hard and says, "Boy, I'm really tired" and you say to them, "Tell me about it!" What that means is you don't need to tell me about it, it's not necessary. I know already, from my own experience, I know what you are talking about; you don't need to tell me. But, we don't say, "don't tell me about it," we say "Tell me about it!" And, it's also meant as a joke meaning you don't have to tell me about it. We're being a little sarcastic. To be "sarcastic" means that you are making a joke, you are making fun of a situation, you don't really mean what you say and in this case when you say "Tell me about it!" that's an informal way of saying you don't need to tell me, I already know, I understand. So, thank you Wachira for that question.

Our final question comes from Marat; not sure exactly where Marat is from. I'm going to guess from France just because of the famous painting by David called



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The Death of Marat in English. It's a famous painting of a French revolutionary who was murdered in his bathtub. And, there's a painting of him by the painter, David. Well, that's not a very nice thought, is it? Well it's a very beautiful painting. And, Marat, wherever you are from, you have a question about the expression "to throw in the towel." The sentence Marat wants to understand is, "I was ready to throw in the towel, but I stayed with it." "To throw in the towel" means to give up, to say I'm quitting, I'm stopping. Usually, if you are doing something difficult and you decide that it's just too difficult to do, you're going to quit, you're going to throw in the towel. In this sentence, the person says, "I was ready to throw in the towel, but I stayed with it." "To stay with (something)" means to continue with it, not to stop. Usually, even if it's difficult, you continue doing it, you "persist." That's the same as to stay with, to continue with something even if it's difficult. So, thank you, Marat with that question, wherever you are.

If you have a question, you can email us at eslpod@eslpod.com and ask your question. We cannot answer everyone's question. We get many questions every week, but we will certainly try to answer as many as we can. From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you, as always, for listening. We'll see you next time on the English Café.

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