



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 73

TOPICS

Philadelphia, jury duty, canary in a coal mine, rule of thumb

GLOSSARY

jury – a group of people (usually 12) who gives the decision in a legal case in court

* The people in the courtroom were surprised when the jury only took 30 minutes to make its decision.

pool – a group of people from which a few are selected; a swimming pool; a small, shallow (not deep) area of liquid

* Last year, we only had 10 applicants for these summer jobs, but this year, we have a large pool of people to choose from.

hardship – suffering; not having something that is much needed, such as money or food; a very difficult situation that causes pain or suffering

* The university has scholarships for students who are under financial hardships.

to be excused – to be allowed to leave; to not be required to do something

* If you're done with your dinner, you may be excused from the table.

impartial – fair; treating each side the same

* Let's go ask Mom who should get to keep the toy we found. She'll be an impartial judge.

to get out of – to be released from doing something unpleasant; to no longer have the responsibility of doing something that is difficult or disagreeable

* You're very lucky to get out of going to the meeting this morning. It lasted three hours and I almost fell asleep!

verdict – the final decision in a legal case in court

* Everyone in the courtroom was shocked to hear the judge's verdict in the case.

trial – a time in court when the judge and jury hears and sees the evidence in a court case

* The woman's trial was delayed for two weeks, so that the prosecuting attorney could gather more evidence against her.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 73

cheesesteak – a long sandwich with thin pieces of steak (beef) and melted cheese

* How can you eat two Philly cheesesteaks for lunch and still be hungry?

diverse – having different types of people that represent different races, cultures, genders, and backgrounds

* In her speech, the company president credited the company's diverse group of employees for its fresh ideas and ability to think innovatively.

liberty – being free; being without many restrictions or rules placed on one by other people with more power or a higher position

* This organization is built on the idea that everyone has the liberty to make their own decisions.

canary – a small yellow bird that sings

* When I was 9 years old, my aunt gave me a canary as a pet.

coal mine – an area where coal (black rock used for fuel) is taken from the land

* Working in a coal mine is difficult work and can be very dangerous for inexperienced miners.

rule of thumb – a general rule or principle that can be used with many situations, but that may not fit each one exactly

* When my brother asked me for advice about how to break up with his girlfriend, I told him that my rule of thumb is to be honest and direct.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Jokes About Lawyers

In the United States, as in other countries, there are many different types of lawyers. However, lawyers in the US have one thing “in common” (the same). They often have a bad “reputation” and many people have negative opinions about lawyers. Some people say that lawyers are “ambulance chasers,” that is, they chase or go after people in bad or weak situations to get a “client” (customer). People also say that lawyers charging a lot of money—too much money—for their services. Others say that lawyers are “dishonest” or tell lies.

Of course this is not true for most lawyers, but there are a lot of jokes based on these negative opinions. Here are two:

Joke 1

A doctor and a lawyer are at a “cocktail” (formal evening) party. A man walks up to the doctor and asks him for advice about how to treat a pain in his arm. The doctor gives the man some advice. When the man walks away, the doctor turns to the lawyer and asks him, “What do you do when someone asks you for legal advice in a social situation?”

The lawyer replies, “I send them a bill for the advice I gave them.”

The next morning, the doctor arrives at his office and sends a bill for \$50 to the man with the pain in his arm. That afternoon, the doctor receives a bill from the lawyer for \$100!

Joke 2

Question: How can you tell when a lawyer is lying?

Answer: His lips are moving.

Finally, lawyers are known to be “litigious” (being too ready to sue). If you’re a lawyer, please don’t sue us because of these bad jokes!



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 73

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 73.

This is English Café episode 73. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

If you listen to this podcast but haven't visited our website recently, go to eslpod.com and take a look at some of the new things we have on our website. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode that contains all of the words, vocabulary, cultural notes and a complete transcript of this episode.

On this Café, we're going to talk about the City of Philadelphia. We've talked about other famous American cities in previous Cafés, and today will talk about the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We're also going to talk about jury duty, something that most Americans have experienced. And, as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started!

Our first topic today is the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania is a state located on the east coast of the US. It is one of the original 13 states in the United States, and probably the most important state in the early history of the US.

When Americans think of Philadelphia, they think of the Revolutionary War, back in the late 18th century. 1776 was the beginning, with the Declaration of Independence, when the American colonists - those who had come originally from - mostly from Great Britain - decided to become independent. And, of course, there followed a long war - the Revolutionary War - which ended in the American colonists winning and declaring - or beginning - a new country, which we now call the United States.

Philadelphia was a very important city in the early history of the US, and it's still an important city. It is the fifth largest city in the United States in terms of population. Although the population of Philadelphia has been going down in recent years, it's still a very large city.

The word Philadelphia - the name Philadelphia - comes from the Greek, which is normally translated the City of Brotherly Love - brotherly coming from the word brother. The City of Brotherly Love was started - or founded - by some religious people called the Quakers, "Quakers." The Quakers were a small group of



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 73

Christian people, who came to Pennsylvania - what is now the state of Pennsylvania - and founded - or began - the City of Philadelphia.

I say that the City of Philadelphia was very important in the early history. The first Constitutional Conventions were held in the City of Philadelphia, and Philadelphia was the capital of the United States - the first capital of the United States - until the year 1800, when the new capitol was built in a new city, which we call Washington, DC, or the District of Columbia.

But, Philadelphia was actually our first capital, and when most Americans think of Philadelphia, they think of Benjamin Franklin, who was one of the early Revolutionary leaders. Benjamin Franklin is considered like a wise uncle, and he's considered one of the better writers and thinkers, certainly one that has a very American outlook. Franklin lived in Philadelphia, and participated in some of the early meetings of the Revolutionary leaders.

If you visit Philadelphia, you'll probably want to visit the place where the Constitutional Convention was held, and that's called Independence Hall - it's now called Independence Hall. You'll also want to see a famous bell that is associated with the American Revolution. A bell, "bell," is something that you usually have in a large, tall tower such as a church tower, and you ring the bell. It sounds something like this [audio of bell ringing]. That's a bell.

In Philadelphia, there is a Liberty Bell. Liberty, "liberty," means freedom. The Liberty Bell is famous because it was used during the Revolution to call people to come to the center of the town - to Independence Hall - to hear news of important events, the most important of which was the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776. So, it is a symbol of the American Revolution.

The Liberty Bell is also interesting because it was used when famous people died, George Washington, for example. The bell was rung - they made a noise with the bell. But, the bell eventually cracked. When we say something cracked, "cracked," we mean that it broke. And now, the bell is no longer used because it is cracked, but it is still a very famous symbol of the American Revolution.

Philadelphia is also famous for being a very diverse city. When we say a place is diverse, "diverse," we usually mean it has different ethnicities or different races, in this case, whites, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans. Philadelphia has a very mixed population.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 73

Philadelphia is also famous for a certain kind of food called the Philadelphia cheesesteak. This is the most famous kind of food that comes from Philadelphia. Sometimes it's called a Philly, "Philly," cheesesteak. Philly is a short name for Philadelphia. The Philadelphia cheesesteak is a sandwich that has pieces of steak - of beef - that are put in a long piece of bread - it looks a little like a hot dog - and on top of the steak you put three different kinds of cheeses. So, the Philly cheesesteak is the most famous food that comes from that city.

If you ever have a chance to visit Philadelphia, I think you'll enjoy the historical sites there. It's only an hour by train from New York City, so if you're in that area, you might want to visit a little bit of American history.

We mentioned the US Constitution, which is the legal document that is the foundation of the American government - the national government. One of the things that you will find in the US Constitution is a statement saying that if you are arrested for a crime, you have a right to a trial by jury. A trial, "trial," is when you go to the court in front of a judge, and the government accuses you or says that you've done something wrong. The verb that we would probably use is they charge you with a crime.

Part of that process - part of that trial - if it's a criminal trial, is the selection and use of a jury. A jury, "jury," is a group of people who are selected from the general population, and they decide whether you are guilty or innocent. Traditionally, juries have 12 people in them. In the US, for a federal crime, you have a right to a jury, for state crimes as well - crimes that are part of the state court system.

So, the trial by jury is part of the American legal system. Now, how do you get the people to be part of the jury? Well, that's where we come into the idea of jury duty. Duty, "duty," is obligation - something you have to do, and if you're an American citizen, you could be asked to serve - or to be on - a jury. We normally used the verb to serve on a jury.

What happens is that the local government usually picks at random, meaning not necessarily because of any reason - they pick like a number out of a hat - they pick your name from a list of citizens who live in that area, and you get what's called a summons, "summons" - a jury summons. And a summons is a legal document that says you have to come to the court - the place where the trial takes place - we normally call it a courthouse. You have to come to the courthouse and be part of the jury pool. The jury pool, "pool," is a group of people who might become jurors. A juror, "juror," is a person who is part of the



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 73

jury. So, you will get a letter - I have gotten a couple of letters. You have to go down to the courthouse and wait to see if the judge will select you to be on the jury.

Most people don't like jury duty, even though it is an obligation of being a citizen of the United States. Most people consider it inconvenient, and they try to get out of jury duty. To get out of something means to escape it - to not have to do it. You could say, "I'm trying to get out of work today by listening to ESL Podcast and not telling anyone." You're getting out of - you're not participating - not doing, usually not doing something you are supposed to do.

People try to get out of jury duty because, first, you may not get paid. Companies - private companies - do not have to pay you for the days that you are serving on a jury - that you are sitting. That's another verb that we use, to sit on a jury. The government usually pays its employees, so many of the people who are jurors are government employees. But, private companies don't have to pay you anything. Now, some do. The company cannot fire you because you are on jury duty, but they don't have to pay you.

Jury duty also requires going to the courthouse, which can be very inconvenient. And of course, you have to sit and listen to the trial, and at the end of the trial you have to meet with the other jurors and make a decision. We call that decision a verdict, "verdict." A verdict is the decision that a jury makes about whether someone is guilty - whether they did the crime - or innocent - whether they did not do the crime.

One way of getting out of jury duty is to be excused due to hardship. Hardship, "hardship," is the same as difficulty. Sometimes people will say, "This is a financial hardship," meaning it will cause me problems - difficulties - when it comes to making money. To be excused from something means that you are no longer required to do it - you are allowed not to do it.

The judge can excuse you from jury duty if you have a good reason. People try to come up with reasons why they should be excused. One reason they may be excused is because the judge thinks that they are not impartial. To be impartial, "impartial," means that you are neutral - that you won't have any prejudices or biases - you won't favor one side over the other for reasons that are not related to the trial.

I, when I was on jury duty, saw many people who tried to tell the judge why they should not be on the jury. Sometimes it was for financial hardship; sometimes it



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 73

was because they said that they would not be impartial. For example, if the trial is about someone who - a man who has been hitting his wife - beating his wife - and one of the jurors was involved in a situation like that in her own home, the judge may excuse her from jury duty because she is not impartial. She may be influenced by her past experience.

I was excused from jury duty, not because I tried to get out of it, but because the trial involved the use of some psychological tests on the person. And, because I had some experience with some of these tests they thought that I might not be impartial, and so I was excused from jury duty.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Jean-Daniel, "Jean-Daniel." I'm not sure exactly where Jean-Daniel is, somewhere in the world! His question has to do with an expression, "canary in a coal mine." This is an old expression in English; let's start by explaining the individual words first.

A canary, "canary," is a type of bird - it's a very small bird. Coal, "coal," is a black, hard substance - material - that you will find in a mountain, and people burn the coal for energy. It's still a popular energy source in the United States, in some places. A mine, "mine," is when you dig a hole in the mountain in order to get coal, or diamonds, or some other material from the mountain.

Canaries were used in coal mines because they were able to smell and were sensitive to a certain dangerous kind of gas that you find these coal mines; it's called methane gas, "methane." If a canary breathed in the methane gas, the canary would die. It is a dangerous gas because people - humans - can not smell it, but it can still kill them. So, they used to put canaries in coal mines, according to the expression, and if the canary died, that was an indication that there was methane gas and it was very dangerous, therefore people had to leave the mine right away. If you saw the small bird - the canary - die, you knew there were going to be problems.

We use this expression now to mean an indication of something that is going wrong - something bad is happening, even though you can't see it. For example, in the past few years, the prices of homes have gone up in the United States, and in California, they have gone up very quickly - 100 percent. Houses were selling very quickly, then about six or eight months ago, the number of houses being sold started to slow down. So, if you are a person who sells houses - what we would call a real estate agent - and you start having problems selling your



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 73

houses, you may say that there's a canary in a coal mine, meaning that the price of houses is going to get bad in the near future. You know this because the number of houses you are selling is going down, that means the prices may also go down. So, the canary in the coal mine is the lower number of houses being sold. It's an indication that something bad is going to happen.

Our second question comes from Jehudi, "Jehudi," from Columbia. Jehudi wants to know the meaning of the expression "rule of thumb." Rule, "rule," of thumb, "thumb."

A thumb is what you have on your hand - you have two thumbs. These are the smaller or smallest fingers, you can think of them. The rule of thumb, however, refers to a general rule or general principle that you can use in many different situations, but may not fit this particular situation exactly.

For example, my wife likes to make changes to our house in order to make it look nicer, but I have a rule of thumb: if it's not broken, don't fix it. In other words, my rule is we shouldn't change anything unless there's something wrong with it. The actual expression we would probably use it is "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Ain't is informal English for, in this case, isn't. Well, my rule of thumb then, is different from my wife's rule of thumb, where she wants to change things to make them better.

Another example: if you have a new job and you have a question about how much you are going to be paid, you may ask one of your coworkers - your fellow employees. She may not know the exact answer, but she says, "As a rule of thumb, we usually ask Barry, our office accountant, when we have questions about how much we are being paid." "As a rule of thumb" here means as a general rule - in this kind of situation, this is what we normally do.

If you have a question or comment, be sure to send us an email. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on the English Café.

ESL Podcast's English Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan. This podcast is copyright 2007, by the Center for Educational Development.