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## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 81

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### TOPICS

Earth Day; Dr. Seuss books; pronouncing sin, sing, hit, heat, and hate; about six o'clock versus around six o'clock; what I wouldn't give versus what I would give; I couldn't care less versus I could care less

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### GLOSSARY

**to observe** – to celebrate a holiday

\* Each December, Christians observe Christmas and Jews observe Hanukkah.

**activist** – a person who believes very strongly in something and tries to make society and the government change in certain ways to support those beliefs

\* Martin Luther King, Jr. was a strong activist for the equal treatment of African Americans in the U.S.

**grassroots** – community-based; something that is formed by individual people working together, not by a large corporation or organization

\* Grassroots organizations usually don't have very much money, but the people in those organizations have a lot of enthusiasm for what they do.

**agenda** – a list of things that people or an organization want; the purpose for an organization to exist

\* The organization's agenda includes making school lunches healthier and not allowing soda and junk food to be sold at elementary schools.

**to model (something) on (something else)** – to make something similar to something else; to use something else as the basis for creating something

\* We want to model our adult reading program on one that has been very successful in New York City.

**in the wake of (something)** – after; following something; coming after something

\* In the wake of last year's terrible airplane accident, many people are scared to fly.

**illustrator** – a person who draws pictures for a written text, such as a book; an artist who draws pictures to go with writings

\* Who is the illustrator for this children's book?



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**pen name** – a name used by an author who does not want to use his or her real name on a book or story

\* Samuel Langhorne Clemens' pen name was Mark Twain when he wrote a very famous book called "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer."

**to rhyme** – for two or more words to have the same sound in their last syllable.

\* Cat, bat, rat, and sat are all words that rhyme with mat.

**around/about (X) o'clock** – at approximately X o'clock; near a time, but not exactly at that time

\* I might be a little bit late, but let's try to meet at the library around six o'clock.

**at (X) o'clock sharp** – at exactly X o'clock, no earlier and no later

\* Students have to arrive to class at three o'clock sharp tomorrow. If they're even two minutes late, the teacher won't let them take the test.

**What I wouldn't give...** – a phrase used to show that one wants something very much and would do many things to get it, if possible

\* What I wouldn't give to know why Hattie decided not to marry Luis!

**I couldn't care less about...** – a phrase used to show that something is not very important, or that one has no interest in something

\* I couldn't care less about what Jenny had for dinner last night. Why does she always talk about such unimportant things?



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **Classic Detective Novels: Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys**

Many children and teenagers like to read “detective novels,” or books about the people (usually police officers) who have to “investigate” (research) crimes to find the criminal. Some “classic” (very famous and good-quality) detective novels include the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys “series” (a group of many books with the same characters).

The "Nancy Drew Mystery Stories" series was written for children and teenage girls. Nancy Drew is the “heroine,” or main female character, in each book. Nancy is a teenager who is very good at solving “mysteries” (stories where no one knows who did something bad or committed a crime). There are more than 100 books in the series, which began in 1930. The "Nancy Drew" books were originally written by Mildred A. Wirt Benson, but later many other people began writing them. Many movies and computer games have also been made about Nancy Drew and her adventures.

"The Hardy Boys" series was written for children and teenage boys. Two teenage brothers, Frank and Joe Hardy, are the “heroes” (main male characters) in the books. Their father is a detective, and the boys often help him with his work. The original series was written under the pen name of Franklin W. Dixon from 1927 to 1979, but it continued as the "Hardy Boys Mysteries" from 1979 to 2005. There are almost 200 books in the series.

The "Nancy Drew" and "Hardy Boys" series are an important part of American culture and a large number of Americans read them when they are young. Because these books were written for children and teenagers, they may be good choices if you’re interested in improving your English reading and you like mysteries. In recent years, lower level books written for children such as "The Nancy Drew Notebook" series still keeps the same characters, but are written at a lower English level. In these books, Nancy Drew is younger—she’s a child and not a teenager. These lower level books may be a good place to begin, if the regular series are too difficult.



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 81.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café episode 81. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com) and take a look at some of the new features we have on our website. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional courses for you. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode, which contains the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, cultural notes and a complete transcript of this episode.

We're going to start today by talking about Earth Day, and what that is in the US and in other countries. We're also going to talk about a very famous American author, named Dr. Seuss. And as always, we'll answer some of your questions. Lets get started!

April 22nd is Earth Day in the United States, and in many other countries. Earth Day, which was originally called "Environmental Earth Day," was started by a senator - a US senator, one of the government representatives in the United States. Every state has two senators, and the senator here was Gaylord Nelson, who was a senator from the state of Wisconsin. Wisconsin is next to Minnesota, in the north-central part of the US.

The first Earth Day was on April 22nd, 1970. It is a celebration and a reminder of how important it is to take care of the earth. When we talk about environmentalism, we are talking about people who are concerned about the water and the air and the land, and making sure that we keep these things clean.

It started here in the United States and it moved to other countries as well. It's now observed, or celebrated, each year by more than 175 countries. Notice the use of that verb, "observed." "We are going to observe Christmas on December 25th," or "We are going to observe Memorial Day on the last Monday in May." When we say we "observe a holiday," or "observe a special day," we mean that is the day we are going to celebrate or participate in the activities for that special day or holiday.

Senator Nelson was what we would call "an activist" - "an environmental activist." "An activist" (activist) is somebody who is very interested in one particular topic,



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and tries to get people to support him - to try to get political support. Normally, this comes from what we would call “the grassroots.” The expression “grassroots” (grassroots) means from the bottom; the root (root) of something is the part of, for example, a tree that is underneath the ground. It’s like the foundation. So, “the grassroots level” means from the average person, not directed from somebody high up in the government.

So, many activists try to get support at the grassroots level. In this case, Senator Nelson was trying to get support for the environmental agenda. The word “agenda” (agenda) is one we use to mean the important issues for that topic. So for the environment, the environmental agenda may include keeping the water clean or stopping global warming.

The celebration of Earth Day was somewhat interesting because it was modeled on the Vietnam War protests of the 1960s and 70s. When we say it was “modeled (modeled) on something,” we mean that was the example that was used. You could, for example, say, “I am modeling my podcast - my new podcast - on ESL Podcast.” So, I’m going to take ESL Podcast as an example, and create a new podcast. I’m not, but that’s an example how you would use this expression “to model something on something else.” So, the Earth Day was originally modeled on the protests - the people who were against the American involvement in Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s.

Now, Earth Day is celebrated as a way of reminding us why it is important to take care of the earth. It is something that has caused changes in laws here in the United States in the wake of the first Earth Day, meaning after the first Earth Day or something that was caused by the first Earth Day. That’s the expression “in the wake (wake) of.” After that first Earth Day, or in the wake of the 1970 Earth Day, the US government passed some important laws to try to protect the water and the land and the ocean and the air.

Now, Earth Day is, as I said, observed in more than 170 countries. If you are interested, you can go to [earthday.org](http://earthday.org) and get more information. Of course, it’s important to protect our environment, and Earth Day is a good reminder of that.

Our second topic is somewhat different; it’s not a political topic. It’s a topic about children, and actually about one of the most famous authors - American authors - of books for children, and that is man who we call Dr. Seuss (Seuss).

Every American child knows who Dr. Seuss is, and has read Dr. Seuss’s books. Dr. Seuss’s real name was Theodore (Theodore) Geisel (Geisel). He died, oh,



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about 15 years ago. He was a famous illustrator. “An illustrator” (illustrator) is someone who draws illustrations, like cartoons, for example.

Dr. Seuss, which was not, as I said, his real name, it was his pen name - (pen) name, meaning the name he used on his books. Jeff McQuillan is my real name, not my pen name. But, Dr. Seuss is a pen name, and he wrote many famous books for children. One of them was called “The Cat in the Hat.” A lot of Dr. Seuss books have rhymes - the words sounds similar; they’re rhyming books - “The Cat in the Hat,” “Green Eggs and Ham.”

One of the most famous of his books was “How the Grinch Stole Christmas.” The Grinch (Grinch) was a bad character, who wanted to stop people from celebrating and being happy at Christmas, and that was the name of this person in Dr. Seuss’s story. Now, people use the word “grinch” to mean anyone who tries to stop you from celebrating, or doesn’t want you to be happy and celebrate holidays like Christmas.

As I said, Dr. Seuss used a lot of rhyming text. His work became very popular among children. He wrote and illustrated more than 40 books, and his books have sold more than a half a billion copies. That’s more than 500 million copies of his books have been sold. That is even more than the “Harry Potter” books, which are very popular in English for children, and in other languages.

Dr. Seuss’s books are so popular that one in every four American children, according to one thing I read, gets a Dr. Seuss book as their first book, and almost every child in the United States gets a Dr. Seuss book eventually. Dr. Seuss books are for very beginning readers, so children who are five, six, seven years old. The language is, and the stories are aimed at, or are for younger children.

Some of Dr. Seuss’s books have actually been made into movies. “How the Grinch Stole Christmas” starring Jim Carrey, a comic actor, was a very popular movie back in the year 2000. There was another movie called “The Cat in The Hat,” also based on, or from the Dr. Seuss book, which did not do very well in terms of popularity.

One of the reasons why Dr. Seuss’s books are popular is because he made them very easy to read. One of his books only has 50 words - different words - in the entire book. He also, as I said earlier, liked to use rhymes, which the children often like. So, if you have a chance, especially if you have a child who’s interested in learning English, you might want to get the Dr. Seuss books.



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They're certainly an important part of American culture, and have been in the last 50-60 years.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Huang (Huang) in China. Huang wants to know the difference between some words in terms of their pronunciation, for example, the word (sin) and the word (sing). The first word, (sin), is pronounced "sin." A sin is something bad or wrong that you do. It is a religious term, usually. The second word, (sing) is sing. So we have sin, sing; sin, sing. Sing is what I love to do, and am not very good at - singing.

There are other words that are difficult to pronounce in English. Huang wants to know the difference between the pronunciation of the words (hit), (heat) and (hate). The first word, (hit), is hit; the second word, (heat), is heat; and the last word, (hate), is hate. So we have hit, heat, hate; three different vowels, hit, heat and hate. So, I hope that helps Huang in understanding these different pronunciations.

Our next question comes from Nepal. Rita would like to know what's the difference between the following two expressions: "around six o'clock," and "about six o'clock." What's the difference between "around a time," and "about a time?"

Well, both "around" and "about" mean approximately; close to; near that time but not exactly. If someone says, "We're going to leave around five o'clock," they mean maybe five minutes to five, maybe five minutes after five, but not necessarily exactly at five o'clock. If you're going to leave exactly at five o'clock, you would say, "We're going to leave at five o'clock sharp" (sharp).

Both of the phrases, "around" and "about," mean pretty much the same thing. In thinking about how I use words, "around" might be even less specific than "about," but for most people, I think, we use these two words to mean the same thing. "Around six o'clock," "about ten o'clock," they both mean close to but not exactly.

Moving over from Asia to Europe, Robert in Germany would like to know the difference between the expressions "what I wouldn't give," which I used in podcast number 238, and "what I would give," without the negative. So, we have "what I wouldn't" - negative - would not give - and "what I would give." What's the difference between these two things?



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“What I wouldn't give” is the one that is more popular, and is usually the - considered the correct form. The expression, “what I wouldn't give,” means I want something very much; I would do anything to get this; I would give up, or sacrifice a lot, such as working very hard in order that, or so that I can get this thing. “What I wouldn't give for a trip to Hawaii,” means I really want to go to Hawaii; I would do many different things to get to Hawaii.

“What I would give” is used by some people to mean the same thing, but it is not as common. The best way to give this idea is to use the expression “what I wouldn't give,” with the negative.

There are other expressions like this, where they become popular and people start using them differently. Another example of this is “I couldn't care less.” This expression is when you are saying I don't care about something; it's not important to me. “I couldn't care less who wins the World Series in baseball,” that's not true actually, but that's an example. “I couldn't care less.”

Well, that expression some people use without the negative to mean the same thing - “I could care less who wins.” It means the same thing as “I couldn't care less,” but “I couldn't care less” is the original and the more correct expression. The same is true here, “what I wouldn't give” is the more popular and more correct expression. But, because these expressions become popular, they get changed by people as they use them.

I want to thank Lucy Tse for helping us produce this podcast. Dr. Lucy Tse does a lot of the - most of the preparation for our podcast and the production. I'm just the person who talks in front of the microphone. So thank you Lucy, for your wonderful work, as always.

What I wouldn't give to get an email from you, asking some more questions for ESL Podcast. You can email us at [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com).

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

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