



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 92

TOPICS

Fourth of July, Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, Schoolhouse Rock, will versus shall, to come off

GLOSSARY

preamble – a written introduction to a document or book; the written introduction to the U.S. Constitution

* The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution describes the most important principles in American government.

founder – a person who starts an organization, business, school, or government

* Who was the founder of Greenpeace?

to be in effect – to be valid; to be in use; to be the current rule or law that must be followed

* The new passport rules will be in effect beginning October 15.

to be on display – to be shown to the public; to be available for people to look at

* Some of Claude Monet's paintings are on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

to set (words) to music – to take words that have already been written and write music so that those words can be sung

* Tracy Chapman is a folk singer who sets her own poetry to music.

union – a group of states or countries that work together and share a central government

* Do you think that South American countries will ever establish a union like the European Union?

justice – fairness; the fair and reasonable treatment of people through a legal or community system

* A country needs to have a strong justice system to punish its criminals and protect its citizens.

domestic – within one country; not international

* Americans' domestic concerns include education, health care, and unemployment.



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tranquility – an environment or atmosphere of peace, quiet, and calmness

* Wayne lives in a big city, but on his vacations he searches for tranquility by going to places in nature.

welfare – the safety, happiness, and health of a person or group

* Many people believe that as a country's economy improves, the welfare of its citizens should improve, too.

liberty – freedom; not being overly controlled by the government or other people

* Do you think that citizens of this country have more liberty than other people do?

posterity – future generations; the people who will live in the future

* Dan keeps old photos and documents of his famous mother for posterity.

to establish – to begin something; to start a business, organization, school, or government

* Willamette University was established in 1842.

will – a word used to talk about future actions by putting verbs into the future tense

* When will Jeremiah finish his medical degree?

shall – an uncommon, formal, old-fashioned word used to talk about future actions by putting verbs into the future tense

* When shall we meet again?



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Schoolhouse Rock Videos and Songs

The Schoolhouse Rock “series” (group of related things) has almost 50 educational videos and songs. The Schoolhouse Rock videos and songs are mostly about language, science, money, mathematics, and America (history and government). The videos were “broadcast” (shown) on TV between 1973 and 1986. Many people who were children at that time remember the videos and songs “fondly” (very positively).

One of the most popular videos was “Conjunction Junction,” which taught children about “conjunctions.” “Conjunctions” are words like “and,” “but,” and “or” that join two parts of a sentence together. Each part of the sentence was drawn on one train car and the conjunction word was the “junction” (connecting piece) for the train.

One of the most popular videos about American government was “I’m Just a Bill,” which taught children about how laws are made in the U.S. government. A “bill” is the original idea that a congressperson formally “proposes” (suggests). Then there is a lot of discussion and voting and, eventually, the bill can become a law.

In the sciences, “The Body Machine” was a video that taught children to think about their bodies as machines that need good food to make energy to live. Another science video, “Interplanet Janet,” taught children about astronomy, the planets, and the solar system.

These songs are a lot of fun to listen to. You can find the “lyrics” (the words to a song) for all the Schoolhouse Rock songs at www.schoolhouserock.tv.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 92.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 92. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Be sure to visit our website at eslpod.com and download a Learning Guide for this episode. While you're there, you can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional courses that you may be interested in.

In this Café, we are going to talk about the Fourth of July. Since this episode is originally being released on the Fourth of July, we'll talk about the Preamble to our Constitution in the United States, what that is. We're going to talk a little bit about something that most Americans of my generation know about, something called "Schoolhouse Rock," and why that's related to the Fourth of July. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started!

The Fourth of July, you may know, is Independence Day in the United States. It's a national holiday; most people do not have to work today, and all of the government offices are closed. The Fourth of July is a celebration of our independence from the country of England. For more information on the Fourth of July, listen to last year's program about the Fourth of July: Café number 39, which you can find on our website.

This year, I'd like to talk about the U.S. Constitution. Now, the U.S. Constitution was not written until many years after the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence was the document that the original colonists who "broke away" from, or separated from, England had written "to declare," or to announce, their separation.

The Constitution was written several years later, and the beginning of the Constitution contains something called the "Preamble." The "preamble" (preamble) is like an "introduction," it is something that goes before the main document. You may recognize "pre" (pre) to mean something that goes before, and the "Preamble" is the beginning, it goes before the rest of the U.S. Constitution.

The Preamble is a single sentence – long sentence – which tries to describe why the original founders of the United States – the people who started the United



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States – were writing this Constitution. A “founder” (founder) is someone who begins an organization or begins a new country. So, the founders of the United States wrote this “Constitution,” this document that described the government and how it would be organized.

The U.S. Constitution is considered the “highest,” or most important, law in the United States. It was “adopted,” or became official, back in 1787 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia was our first capital city in the United States. It is one of the oldest written Constitutions that is still in effect in the world. When we say something is “in effect” (effect), we mean that it is still “followed,” it is still being used as the official law.

You can actually see a copy of the U.S. Constitution if you go to Washington D.C. – the original paper – the original Constitution. It is on display in the National Archives. When we say it is “on display” (display), we mean you can go and see it; it's, like, in a museum. The National Archives is the building in Washington D.C., our “present,” or current, capital, where you can find many important historic documents.

The Preamble to the Constitution is one long sentence, and it contains some difficult information – some difficult vocabulary. Most Americans, especially of my generation, know the Preamble. Not necessarily because we memorized it in school, but we watched television. And on the television, on Saturday morning, when most kids watch TV – they watch the cartoons, the animated cartoons on Saturday morning – during the Saturday morning cartoons, back when I was a child in the 1960s and 70s, one of the television stations, the American Broadcasting Company, “ABC” we call it, had a special series to teach children things about American history, and math, and social studies – geography, that sort of thing.

These were short two or three minute videos that they would play in between the cartoons, with the commercials. These became very well known, and very well loved by many people of my age, and one of these short videos was about the Preamble to the Constitution.

All of these videos had music, so they were like songs. And so, many of us “memorized,” can remember, the Preamble to the Constitution because we learned it as a song. Kind of a strange way of teaching, but it is something that, as I said, many Americans of my age can remember very well.



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You can still see some of these Schoolhouse Rock videos on the Internet. The name of the videos was “Schoolhouse Rock.” “Schoolhouse” (one word) is an old word to describe a small school. Back many years ago, there were many small schools in the “rural” parts of the United States, the parts away from the city. And, many times, every child, no matter how old they were, would be in the same room. These were called “one-room schoolhouses.”

The Schoolhouse Rock – like rock music – was an attempt to teach children some basic ideas in a fun way. The Preamble then, was, we would say, “set to music.” When you “set (set) some words to music,” we mean that you have music that goes along with the words, usually as a song.

The Preamble begins, “We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union...” “In order to form,” or start, “a more perfect union” (union). The word “union” has a couple of different meanings; here, it means a group of states that will be part of one country. There is also a union in Great Britain: a union between England, and Scotland, and Wales. But here, we’re talking about a union of individual states.

So, the Preamble goes, “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union,” or a better union, “establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.”

Let’s talk about some of that more difficult vocabulary. “We the people...in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice...” “Justice” means that things are going to be fair, that we will have fair and just laws. Notice the verb “establish” here just means to put something in place, that’s one of the purposes of the Constitution.

Another purpose is to “insure domestic tranquility.” “To insure” means to make sure. “Domestic” refers to inside the country; it’s the opposite of “foreign.” “Foreign” would be outside the country; “domestic,” in this case, means inside the country. “Tranquility” (tranquility) is similar to “peace,” or “calm.” So, the Constitution is going to “insure domestic tranquility,” that there is calm and peace within the country.

It will also “provide for a common defense,” an army and a navy that would defend all of the states. It will “promote the general welfare.” “Welfare” (welfare) is another word that has a couple of different meanings. Here, it means the



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general health and life of the people who live in the country, that is, in the United States. “Welfare,” nowadays, also can refer to help that the government gives poor people, that’s sometimes called “welfare.” But here, it just means the good health and good life of the people who live in the country – in the U.S.

The Constitution will also “secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” “To secure” is similar to “insure,” to make sure, to get “the blessings” – the good things – “of liberty” (liberty). “Liberty” is another word for “freedom.” We have, in the United States, the Statue of Liberty, given to us by the country of France in the 19th century. You have probably seen pictures of the Statue of Liberty: a woman holding a light – holding what we would call a “torch” (torch).

Well, in the Preamble, we are talking about securing the good things about freedom, or of freedom, “of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” “Posterity” (posterity) means the people who come after us, our sons and daughters, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren, and so forth. It is what will come after you. So, the writers of the Constitution are saying we want to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and everyone who comes after us in history, to our “posterity.”

“Therefore,” the Constitution’s Preamble continues, “we do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” “To ordain” (ordain) is an old, not very common verb, which here means to begin; to start; to approve. We also use this word, “ordain,” in a religious sense. When we talk about someone becoming a “minister,” a leader in a church, or a priest in a church, we used the verb “to ordain,” they are given certain powers. The Constitution is going to be established, “to establish,” as we said before, means to put into place; to begin.

So, that’s the Preamble of the Constitution. Now we’re going to hear the song from the original Schoolhouse Rock, which is how I and many other people can remember this long sentence. You can actually hear the original – see the original Schoolhouse Rock if you go to YouTube and just search for “Schoolhouse Rock” and “Preamble.” I’ll also put a link on our website. If you go to eslpod.com and click on the name of this Café, English Café number 92, I’ll have the web address so that you can find this video. But, I also want you to hear the song, and so here, as special musical guest of the podcast, we have Dr. Lucy Tse, who’s going to sing the song for you. I will also be part of the singing; you will hear me in the background, behind Lucy.

Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you Lucy Tse!



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Lucy...Lucy? Oop, wait a minute. She's decided not to sing it, so I guess I will have to sing it myself. Are you ready?

[Jeff sings] We the people, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America, for the United States of America.

[recording of wild applause]

Thank you. Thank you very much! And now, we'll answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Carlos (Carlos) in España – in Spain. Carlos wants to know the difference between “will” and “shall.”

In the United States, we generally use the word “will” for the future tense, for talking about something that “will happen,” is going to happen in the future. You don't use or hear the word “shall” in U.S. English as often; it's much less common. It is usually only used in legal or government documents; in other words, “shall” is more formal in American English. You'll also see “shall” used in older books, in older writings, but most people, when they are talking about the future, will say, “will.” So, for example: “I will go to the store this afternoon.” You would not hear people say, “I shall go to the store this afternoon,” that would sound too formal.

The Governor, however, our Governor here in California is, as you may know, the Terminator – I mean, Arnold Schwarzenegger! He might say, in an official speech, “On this day, I shall declare that the people of California will pay no more taxes.” Instead of saying, “I will declare,” or announce, he may say, “I shall declare.” So, it's for more formal English.

Joyce (Joyce) from...I'm not sure where, has a question from our culture note in Learning Guide number 219, from episode 219 of our regular podcast.

In that culture note, we used the verb “to come off” (two words). “To come off” means to appear, to appear differently than what is intended. In the culture note, we say that when flirting or dating someone in the U.S., it is important to use compliments to show your interest and to make other people feel comfortable about spending time with you. I do this all the time!



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Compliments can make the other person feel like you are paying attention to them. But don't "overdo" it, or try to do too much. You don't want to "come off," or appear, "desperate," or like someone who needs or wants something very, very badly.

So, that was the use of the verb "to come off" in the Learning Guide. Another example would be: "Do you think I'll come off as too eager if I told my boss I'm happy to work longer hours and on the weekends?" "Do you think I'll come off" – "Is that how I will appear, too eager?" "To be eager" means to want to do something very badly – a lot. So, "to come off" means that other people have an opinion of you – think that you are something that you are not trying to be; that would be "to come off."

There's another expression, "come off it," which means "Stop being silly. Don't try to tell me that; I don't believe you." It would be similar to "No way!" – "Come off it!" Usually, you would say that to someone when you are saying that they should stop doing what they are doing, or that you don't believe what they are saying to you.

If you believe what we're saying to you, then be sure to come back and listen to our next English Café.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Happy Independence Day from ESL Podcast!

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