



ESL Podcast 374 – A Graduation Ceremony

GLOSSARY

Pomp and Circumstance – a song played at graduation ceremonies; the graduation song

* “Pomp and Circumstance” played while the graduates entered the gym and took their seats.

graduates – students who are receiving a degree; students who have finished their studies and who have earned a degree

* The graduates threw their caps up in the air when the graduation ceremony was over.

to file in – to enter a place in a single row; to enter a place with one person walking behind the other, looking in the same direction

* The students filed into the lunchroom one by one.

cap and gown – typical clothing worn at graduation ceremonies that consists of a hat with a flat top and a thin coat with wide sleeves; the attire all students in a graduating class must wear

* Since the school’s colors were orange and black, the graduating seniors had to wear black gowns and orange caps at the graduation.

dean – the head of a school; the director of a certain division of studies at a college or university

* The Dean of Fine arts is in charge of the art, theatre, and music departments.

commencement speaker – the important guest who gives the speech at a graduation ceremony; a well-known person who delivers a speech to students during the graduation ceremony

* The former mayor of New York City was the commencement speaker at this year’s graduation.

valedictorian – the student with the highest grade point average in his or her class who gives a speech at the graduation ceremony; the highest ranking academic student in a graduating class

* Because I received “A’s” in all my classes in high school, I was the valedictorian.

cum laude – graduating with honors; a special award given to students who graduate with grades above the average

* Jamie is graduating cum laude because of his excellent academic record.



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honors – reward for what students achieved during their time as a student; special recognition for a student who received excellent grades

* Because he spent so much time studying in college, he is graduating with honors.

dignified – honorable; respectful; having a feeling or image of respect and seriousness

* We all have to behave in a dignified manner when your mother's boss comes over to our house for dinner.

shenanigans – secret or dishonest actions; a trick; a prank; a playful act

* You kids better stop your shenanigans in the swimming pool before somebody gets hurt.

rowdy – wild; out of control; loud and noisy

* The crowd got rowdy when the two hockey players began to fight.

offensive – insulting; angering; annoying

* As a lawyer, do you find this cartoon about a dishonest lawyer offensive?

diploma – a certificate which shows that a student has completed a level of schooling; a document a student receives when he or she has finished high school or college

* She hung her medical school diploma on her office wall so that her patients could see it.

beach ball – a ball of many colors filled with air which floats on water; a ball filled with air used by children for games at a beach or a swimming pool

* The kids threw the beach ball into the water and then swam to it as it floated away.

tassel – a bundle of loose threads that hangs down from a graduation cap; an ornament made of strings that is connected to the top of a graduation cap

* The tassel was half red and half white to match the school's colors.

shame on them – a phrase used to show one's displeasure at the actions of others who have done something one does not like

* Shame on them for throwing eggs at their teacher's house. They know better than that.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What shenanigans are the students performing at the graduation?
 - a) They are blowing whistles.
 - b) They are throwing a beach ball around.
 - c) They are standing on top of their seats.

 2. How does Rafael think April feels about her daughter being valedictorian?
 - a) She must be proud of her daughter.
 - b) She must be upset with her daughter.
 - c) She must be ashamed of her daughter.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to file in

The expression “to file in,” in this podcast, means to enter a place in single file rows or to enter a place in one long line: “All of the customers filed into the movie theatre.” The expression “to file in” can also mean to put in or to store in, usually papers or other office-related items: “She filed all of her bills in a desk drawer.” “To file” means to arrange in order, often according to size or the alphabet (from A to Z): “The banker filed the checks from the highest amount check to the lowest amount check.” Finally, “a file” is a small tool used to make fingernails shorter: “Her fingernails were getting long so she used her file to shorten them.”

honors

In this podcast, the word “honors” means special recognition for a student who received excellent grades in a subject or a reward for what a student has achieved during their time as a student: “You must be very proud that both of your daughters graduated with high honors.” “Honors” can also be used to describe an advanced class that only excellent students are allowed to take: “She was invited to sign up for honors math because of her superior test scores.” The word “honor” means honesty or integrity: “He is a true man of honor and we can trust him to make important decisions affecting all of us.” Finally, “honor” is a title of respect for judges used when speaking directly to the judge: “Your honor, may I make a statement to the court?”



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CULTURE NOTE

Graduation from high school is one of the most important days in a teenager’s life in the United States. When “seniors” (students in their fourth and final year of high school) graduate, many parents will have a party for them. Parents and the graduates invite family, friends, and teachers. The parents of the student usually “serve” (offer; give) food, drinks, and cake.

The family, friends, and teachers who attend the party bring the student a gift that will help the student in the future. Most students receive money as a gift, but other gifts are intended to help the student as he or she “strikes out on their own” (become independent). Some students get jobs and move out of their parents home, while others prepare to go to college, often in another city or state. For these students, gifts can include such things as computers, televisions, microwaves, dishes, bedding, or “mini-refrigerators” (a refrigerator about one quarter the size of a regular refrigerator and will fit in a small space).

After graduating, many students will take a graduation trip. Students plan the graduation trip with their friends from their “graduating class” (students graduating together in the same year). Students like to go to places that are warm such as California and Florida.

Since the legal drinking age in the U.S. is 21 in most states and most high school graduates are around 18 years old, some students like to travel to other countries, such as Mexico, where the minimum “drinking age” (age at which it is legal to drink alcohol) is 18 or there is no drinking age “restrictions” (limitations) at all. In these countries, graduates can “legally” (allowed by law) be served alcohol.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – a



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 374: A Graduation Ceremony.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 374. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

You can visit our website at eslpod.com to download a Learning Guide for this episode. The Learning Guide is an 8 to 10 page guide that gives you all of the vocabulary, definitions, new sample sentences using all of the vocabulary we go over here on the podcast, comprehension questions, additional explanations of vocabulary, cultural notes, and a complete transcript of this episode.

This episode is called "A Graduation Ceremony." It's a dialogue between Rafael and April talking about a typical American graduation from a high school or college. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Rafael: They're playing Pomp and Circumstance and the graduates are filing in. Do you see your daughter? I don't see my son.

April: No, we're too far from the field and everybody is wearing a cap and gown. It's hard to see who's who.

Rafael: Oh, there's the dean and I think that's the commencement speaker behind her. You must be really proud of your daughter. I know I would be if my son were valedictorian.

April: I'm very proud of her, but your son is graduating cum laude, with honors. Those are great accomplishments.

Rafael: It's a proud day for both of us. I just hope that the graduates will keep this a dignified ceremony. I don't want to see any shenanigans.

April: What do you mean?

Rafael: Last year when my other son graduated, a group of rowdy students started singing an offensive song as the graduates went up to get their diplomas.



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April: Hey, what's that over there?

Rafael: Where? Oh, that's a beach ball! How dare they throw a beach ball around while the dean is speaking!

April: Don't look now. Those students are doing something strange with their tassels.

Rafael: Shame on them! Shame on every one of them!

[end of dialogue]

Rafael begins our dialogue by saying, "They're playing Pomp and Circumstance and the graduates are filing in." Rafael and April are actually at a graduation ceremony. "Graduation" comes from the verb "to graduate," which means to receive your degree or receive your certificate at the end of studying at a college or a high school or any other school. The noun is "graduate," and that would be the person who is graduating, so when Rafael refers to the "graduates," he's talking about the students, the boys and girls or men and women, who are graduating. "Pomp and Circumstance" is a traditional song that is played at American graduation ceremonies. It was composed by the British composer Edward Elgar in the late 19th, early 20th centuries. "Pomp" (pomp) refers to a public ceremony, often a very beautiful or grand ceremony, and that's what a graduation ceremony is, at least for the people who are graduating. "To file in" means to enter a place, usually in a single row; that is, one person after the other, looking in the same direction, walking in the same direction in a line. The "circumstances," here, are that the graduates are filing in; they are walking into the auditorium or stadium, wherever the graduation ceremony is being held.

Rafael says to April, "Do you see your daughter? I don't see my son." April says, "No, we're too far from the field and everybody is wearing a cap and gown." Graduation ceremonies are often held in sports stadiums, so the graduates are actually down on the field where, for example, the soccer and football players might normally play. You need a big place to hold all of the graduates and their families, who want to go to this ceremony. Graduation ceremonies are very important to most families in the United States, both high school and, to a lesser extent, college. A "cap and gown" is the traditional clothing that is worn at a graduation ceremony. The cap goes on your head; the gown is like a long dress that you wear. The colors of the cap and gown often depend on the school. Most cap and gowns are black, but sometimes they are different colors to represent the school colors.



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April says, “It’s hard to see who’s who.” It’s hard to tell who is who on the field. Rafael says, “Oh, there’s the dean and I think that’s the commencement speaker behind her.” The “dean” is, in this case, the head of the school – the director of the school. Sometimes the dean is just the director of a certain division within the school. So, the University of Southern California has a school of education, it has a school of medicine, it has a school of law, and each of those schools has their own dean – their own leader. “Commencement” is another word for graduation. It means to begin, and in this case, the graduates are beginning their new life after school. It’s traditional in many schools to have one famous or well-known person – sometimes a graduate of the school from many years ago, sometimes not – who “addresses,” or who gives a speech to everyone. Presidents, senators, actors and actresses, other famous people are often invited by the university or school to come and give the commencement address – the commencement speech, and that person would be the commencement speaker.

Rafael says, “You must be really proud of your daughter. I know I would be if my son were valedictorian.” April’s son is – or rather her daughter is valedictorian. The “valedictorian” is the person – the student – who has the highest grade average, what we would call their “grade point average,” or “GPA.” Often, the valedictorian gives a speech at the graduation ceremony. So, it’s the highest achieving student in a graduating class. The second highest is called the “salutatorian,” but the valedictorian is the very best student. I was never the valedictorian of any of my graduating classes!

April says, “I’m very proud of her (of her daughter), but your son is graduating cum laude, with honors.” “Cum laude” is a Latin expression which means, literally, with praise or with honor. To graduate cum laude means that you were one of the best students. In many universities, there are three levels of honors. Cum laude is the lowest level, magna cum laude is the second highest level, and the highest level is summa cum laude; that’s someone who graduates with highest honors. So you have with honors, with great honors, and with highest honors. Some universities don’t use that system; they just say that you graduated with honors, with distinction. It’s a way of saying that you were one of the best students. The word “honor” has a couple of different meanings; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

April says, “Those are great accomplishments.” “Accomplishments” are when you do something that is very good; it’s a high level of achievement. Rafael responds by saying, “It’s a proud day for both of us.” They spend all their time here complimenting each other’s child – it’s getting a little annoying! Rafael says, “I just hope that the graduates will keep this a dignified ceremony.” “To be dignified” means to be respectful, to be honorable, to be serious. It’s often the



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case at American graduations where the students like to get, well, a little too happy; they start to do things that are not necessarily very dignified. Rafael says, “I don’t want to see any shenanigans.” “Shenanigans” are tricks or jokes, often secret or dishonest actions. Another word for shenanigan would be a “prank” (prank), where somebody does something that’s supposed to be funny, often in public.

April says, “What do you mean?” Rafael says, “Last year when my other son graduated, a group of rowdy students started singing an offensive song as the graduates went up to get their diplomas.” “Rowdy” (rowdy) means wild, out of control, very loud and noisy. American college students are often rowdy, especially if they have been drinking! Rafael says that last year they sang an offensive song. Something that is “offensive,” here, means insulting, something that would make other people angry. These students sang an offensive song when the graduates went up to get, or receive, their “diplomas,” or certificates that show that they have completed their schooling. The typical ceremony has the students go up and receive a certificate from the president of the university or the principal of the school.

April says, “Hey, what’s that over there?” Rafael says, “Where? Oh, that’s a beach ball!” A “beach ball” is a large plastic ball filled with air that is often used by children in a pool – in a swimming pool, or at the beach to play with. For some reason, it’s popular at some American graduation ceremonies for the students to try to have fun, and so they have a beach ball that they hit up in the air like a volleyball, and it goes around the stadium. This happens all the time. When I was a professor and I would be forced to go to the graduation ceremonies of the students, this would happen very frequently.

Rafael says, “How dare they throw a beach ball around when the dean is speaking!” April says, “Don’t look now. Those students are doing something strange with their tassels.” The expression “don’t look now” means, in fact, “look now.” It’s usually used to indicate that something bad is about to happen or is happening. The “students are doing something strange,” April says, “with their tassels.” A “tassel” (tassel) is a group or bundle of loose threads or strings that hang down from the top of your graduation cap. Usually they’re made of a certain color that represents your school, and when you graduate the tradition is that you move them from one side of your cap to the other to indicate that you have graduated.

Rafael says, “Shame on them!” He’s saying to the students who are making fun that he is not happy with them. “Shame on you” or “shame on them” is a way to



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show that you disapprove of – you dislike what someone else is doing. It's a very strong expression of disapproval.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by Dr. Lucy Tse, who graduated with honors from college!



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

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