



ESL Podcast 413 – Talking About Intelligence

GLOSSARY

to be stuck with – to be forced to do or have something that one doesn't want or like

* Last week I went to a restaurant with my cousin, but she left early and I got stuck with the bill!

lab partner – the person with whom one works in a laboratory, usually as part of a science class

* Rebbi's lab partner spilled dangerous chemicals on his shoe.

airhead – a stupid, unintelligent person; a person who is dumb and/or cannot concentrate

* She's such an airhead that she came to work wearing two different shoes.

dense – stupid, dumb, and unintelligent; very slow to respond; not able to understand things easily

* I don't think I'll ever understand trigonometry. I'm just too dense!

gifted – with special intelligence and/or talents; very smart and/or very good at doing something

* Yvonne is a gifted student, so the teachers put her in the most difficult classes.

perceptive – someone who observes and understands things quickly

* Hama is very perceptive and always knows when other people feel sad.

to go far – to do well in life; to succeed; to do great things

* You're a great student, a terrific athlete, and a good friend. I know you'll go far.

not all there – distracted; always thinking about something else and never seeming to be in the present situation

* Hey, are you okay? I asked you a question this morning, but you weren't all there and you acted like you couldn't even hear me.

to stare off into space – to have one's eyes open but not really see the things around oneself because one is thinking about something else

* The teacher became angry when she saw that some of her students were staring off into space instead of listening to her.

quick on the uptake – a fast learner; quick to understand things

* Ana Rosa is very quick on the uptake and could already speak German well after living in the country for just 10 months.



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smart – intelligent

* Keiko is so smart that she's building a robot – and she's only 9 years old!

spacey – not concentrating on what is around oneself because one is thinking about other things

* Krzysztof is really spacey, always thinking about music when he should be working.

to ride on – to depend on; to be affected by

* Whether we get a cash bonus this year rides on how many sales we get this month.

to shape up – to improve; to do better; to begin to meet someone's expectations

* He's going to give the new employee one more week to shape up, but if she doesn't get better she's going to lose her job.

clever – smart and able to find new and creative solutions

* Some very clever scientists are trying to figure out how to make cars that run on water instead of gasoline.

to bet on (something) – to believe that something is or will be true, so much so that one is willing to lose some money or something else if it doesn't happen

* I wouldn't bet on having sunshine tomorrow. I think we should pack an umbrella, just in case it rains.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What word could be used to describe a very intelligent person?
 - a) Dense.
 - b) Gifted.
 - c) Spacey.
2. What does Andre mean when he says, “I hope he shapes up”?
 - a) I hope he exercises and gets healthier.
 - b) I hope he starts doing better in the class.
 - c) I hope he learns the shapes we’re using in the lab.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

dense

The word “dense,” in this podcast, means stupid, dumb, unintelligent, and not able to understand things very easily: “He seems too dense to learn to play this well.” The word “dense” also means thick and difficult to see through or walk through: “The air was dense with black smoke from the forest fires.” Or, “They had to use a knife to cut through the dense plants blocking the trail.” “Dense writing” is writing that is hard to understand, either because it is very technical or because it uses a lot of unnecessary words: “The professor thought that his dense writing made him seem intelligent, but it really just made it impossible for other people to understand what he wanted to say.”

to shape up

In this podcast, the phrase “to shape up” means to improve or to begin to do better: “Makiko’s parents said they would allow her to travel to see her friend this summer if her school grades shape up.” The phrase “to get in shape” means to become healthier by eating better and/or by exercising so that one has better physical performance: “Trey decided to get in shape by going to the gym every morning before work.” Finally, the phrase “to shape up or ship out” is used to tell someone that he or she must begin to do something better, or he or she will have to leave a place, job, or program: “Shape up or ship out! If your work doesn’t improve soon, the boss will notice and you won’t be working here much longer.”



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CULTURE NOTE

A man named Howard Gardner “developed” (created) a “theory” (an idea about how the world works) of “multiple intelligences.” His theory “recognizes” (or sees) that people have many different “kinds” (types) of “abilities” (things that people are able to do). Some people who are good at music, for example, are not good at math, but this doesn’t mean that they aren’t intelligent.

One of these multiple intelligences is “bodily intelligence.” This “refers to” (is about) one’s ability to move one’s body well and to do physical things. Athletes, actors, and “surgeons” (doctors who cut bodies to do surgery) all have high bodily intelligence. People with high “musical intelligence” understand music very well and are able to play instruments, sing, and/or write music,

Another one of the multiple intelligences is “interpersonal intelligence”. This refers to how people “interact” (or act with other people) with each other. People with high interpersonal intelligence enjoy working with other people and can easily understand other people’s thoughts and feelings. In contrast, “intrapersonal intelligence” refers to how well people know themselves. People with high intrapersonal intelligence are very “pensive” (spend a lot of time thinking) and enjoy being alone.

“Naturalistic intelligence” is found in people who like being outdoors in the natural world. They enjoy making things grow, taking care of animals, and paying attention to the weather.

Finally, people with high “spatial intelligence” are very good at “visualizing” (seeing in their mind) objects and how they work together. These people often become architects and engineers.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 413: Talking About Intelligence.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 413. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode, which will help you improve through your English even faster.

This episode is called "Talking About Intelligence." It's a dialogue between Andre and Josephine, where they're talking about how smart, or how intelligent, certain people are, and they'll use a lot of vocabulary related to smart or not so smart people. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Andre: Mom, I can't believe I got stuck with Matt as my lab partner in school.

Josephine: Matt? Do I know Matt?

Andre: He lives down the street. He's Mr. and Mrs. Kemp's son. He's a total airhead.

Josephine: Oh, I remember him. He was at your birthday party.

Andre: Yeah, when I was nine years old! That guy is so dense!

Josephine: Matt was always considered a gifted child. He seemed bright and perceptive, and his parents thought he'd go far.

Andre: If you ask me, he's not all there. Every time I look over at him in class, he's staring off into space. He doesn't seem like the kind who's very quick on the uptake.

Josephine: You know, some very smart people can seem spacey to the rest of us. Maybe he's just thinking when he stares off into space.

Andre: Maybe. All I know is that my science grade is riding on how we do in the lab, so I hope he shapes up.



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Josephine: I'm sure he will. And even if he doesn't, you're clever enough to still do well in the class.

Andre: Thanks, Mom, but I wouldn't bet on it!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Andre, who's talking to his mother, saying, "Mom, I can't believe I got stuck with Matt as my lab partner in school." The expression "to be stuck with" is a phrasal verb meaning that you are forced to, or have to do something that you don't want to do or don't like doing. Sometimes this happens because you, perhaps, were late or someone else didn't do their work and they gave it to you to do, then you are stuck with it; you have to do it even though you don't like it.

Well, Andre is stuck with a lab partner at school and he doesn't like him. A "lab partner" is someone in school who works with you in a laboratory, usually as part of a science class. In most science classes, or many science classes, you have two, three, or even four people – students – working on the same project; those are your lab partners. Often the teacher will assign students to their lab partners; they don't give them a choice. I remember when I was taken biology in high school I had a lab partner I didn't particularly like, but that's just the way it goes.

Josephine says, "Matt? Do I know Matt?" Matt is the name of his new lab partner. Andre says, "He lives down the street (meaning he lives close to our house). He's Mr. and Mrs. Kemp's son. He's a total airhead." When you call someone an "airhead" (airhead – one word), you're saying that person is stupid, that person is not smart, that person is dumb. This is an informal expression, of course. If you call someone an "airhead" you're saying that they're not very smart, or you're saying that they get confused easily or they don't remember things very well. Those are also possibilities for someone who is called an "airhead."

Josephine says, "Oh, I remember him. He was at your birthday party." Andre says, "Yeah, when I was nine years old!" Meaning that was a long time ago; he's obviously 15 or 16 now so nine years old seems like a long time ago. Andre says, "That guy is so dense!" To be "dense" (dense) is another word, again, for stupid, dumb, not very intelligent, not able to understand things very easily. Again, it's an insulting term; it's not a nice to say about someone, that they're dense. It's often used to describe people who you try to talk to and explain things to but they don't quite understand.



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The mother, Josephine, says, “Matt was always considered a gifted child.” In the school system in the United States, if you say someone is “gifted,” you mean they are supposed to have special intelligence or special talents. They’re supposed to be very smart, and in many schools there are special programs that are set up for these supposedly smarter children. Unfortunately in many cases, all of the parents think that their children are gifted, and so it sometimes doesn’t really mean anything. My parents never thought I was gifted, and they were right!

Josephine says, “He seemed bright and perceptive.” To be “perceptive” means you are able to understand things quickly, so it’s sort of the opposite of being dense. Josephine says Matt’s parents thought he’d go far. To “go far,” in this case, means to do well in life, to succeed, to do great things. My teacher said, “Jeff, you will go far.” Not all predictions come true!

Andre, however, disagrees. He says, “If you ask me (if you are asking my opinion), he’s not all there.” When you say someone is “not all there,” you mean that they seem to be thinking about something else all the time; they never seem to be focused on the present or current situation. They’re distracted; they’re thinking about other things: “he’s not all there.” That may be something that happens all the time, or it may be something that happens every once in a while. But here, Andre is saying that Matt is like this all the time. “Every time I look over at him in class,” Andre says, “he’s staring off into space.” To “stare” (stare) means to look at something, usually to look at it for a very long time. To “stare off into space,” however, means to have your eyes open, but you’re not really looking at anything in particular because you’re thinking. You’re thinking a lot, and your eyes are just sort of pointed in a certain direction. You’re staring off into space – you’re thinking about something else and not paying attention to what is happening around you.

Andre says Matt doesn’t seem like the kind who’s very quick on the uptake. To describe someone as “quick on the uptake” means they’re a fast learner; they understand things very quickly. Josephine says, “You know, some very smart people can seem spacey to the rest of us.” Some very smart, intelligent people can seem spacey. To be “spacey” is to be someone who stares off into space, who’s a bit of an airhead, who doesn’t concentrate on what is around them because they are thinking about other things. Josephine says, “Maybe he’s just thinking when he stares off into space.” Andre says, “Maybe. All I know is that my science grade is riding on how well do in the lab, so I hope he shapes up.” Andre is concerned that Matt, as his partner, won’t do his work correctly and they will both get a bad grade. He says his science grade is “riding on.” To “ride on”



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means to depend on, to be affected by something. So, you could say, “The amount of money I get at my work is riding on how many sales I can make this year.” It’s dependent on that thing. To “shape up” means to improve, to do better. Somebody says, “he needs to shape up,” they mean he needs to do better; he needs to meet the standards or expectations of this other person.

Well, Andre is hoping that Matt will “shape up” – he will get better so that his science grade doesn’t “suffer,” doesn’t go lower because of him. The word “shape” has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Josephine says, “I’m sure he will (I’m sure he will shape up). And even if he doesn’t, you’re clever enough to still do well in the class.” To be “clever” means to be smart, but specifically to be able to find new or creative solutions to something. We might describe, for example, a police detective – someone who tries to find the person who committed a crime – as being “clever,” smart, able to figure out a situation or understand a situation.

Andre says, “Thanks, Mom, but I wouldn’t bet on it!” To “bet on” something is a phrasal verb meaning to believe that something is or will be true. In fact, you are so sure that is going to happen that you are willing to “bet,” to gamble money, saying that this will happen. It’s a general expression meaning it probably won’t happen; you should not depend on that happening.

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

[start of dialogue]

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Andre: Maybe. All I know is that my science grade is riding on how we do in the lab, so I hope he shapes up.

Josephine: I'm sure he will. And even if he doesn't, you're clever enough to still do well in the class.

Andre: Thanks, Mom, but I wouldn't bet on it!

[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by our clever, very smart, and gifted scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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