



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 106

TOPICS

American folklore: Bigfoot; Who's on First?, to tear apart, Cliff Notes, to fall out of love

GLOSSARY

UFO – unidentified flying object; an alien spaceship; an object seen in the sky that one thinks might be used by non-human travelers

* That man says that a UFO landed in front of his house and took him to another planet.

folklore – the stories that a group of people tell to each other; the stories that are shared within a culture or community

* Native American folklore has a lot of stories about where the first humans came from.

Pacific Northwest – the Northwestern United States, usually Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and sometimes British Columbia, Canada

* It rains a lot in the Pacific Northwest.

hoax – a mean joke; a trick; something that is done to make someone believe something that isn't true

* Someone called the university and said that there was a bomb in the cafeteria, but it was a hoax.

sighting – a report of having seen something that is unusual or unlikely

* Do you believe in the sightings of the Loch Ness monster?

creature – animal; a living thing that can move; monster

* What kinds of creatures live in these forests?

comedy routine – a funny performance or act; a performance by one or more comics

* The comedy routine was very funny, and we spent all night laughing as we watched it.

duo – a pair; two people or things that work well together

* Not only do they act together, they're also a famous singing duo.



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nickname – a name that someone is called, even though it isn't his or her real name; a short or funny name that one is called by one's friends and family

* Her name is Rebecca, but her nicknames are Becky and Reba.

play on words – the funny use of a word or phrase that can have more than one meaning

* The comedian used a play on words as part of his joke, but the audience didn't get it.

to tear apart (someone or something) – to force two or more people or things apart; to make it impossible for two or more things to stay together

* Having high-pressure jobs and no time to spend together torn apart Jim and Leslie's marriage.

CliffsNotes (or Cliff Notes) – a brand of study guides where famous books and other academic information is explained simply in a small, yellow-and-black book

* Did you read Hamlet or just the CliffsNotes?

to fall out of love – to no longer be in love with someone; to realize that one no longer loves another person as one used to

* They had been married for 23 years, when one day, her husband told her that he had fallen out of love with her.

love at first sight – the feeling of knowing that one loves another person immediately after seeing him or her for the first time, without knowing anything about him or her

* When Imea saw Olaf across the room, she knew that it was love at first sight and she had to go talk to him.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow is a short story written by Washington Irving, an American writer, in 1820. In the story, a weak teacher named Ichabod Crane falls in love with a young woman and competes with a very strong, “rowdy” (noisy and violent) man “for her affection” (to get the woman to choose him as her husband). One night, they are all at a party. When Ichabod leaves the party, he is followed by the “Headless Horseman” (a man without a head who is riding a horse), who is a “ghost” (the spirit of a person that is left on earth after he or she dies) looking for his own head. Ichabod gets very scared, and leaves the town. The woman marries the other man, and the reader is left thinking that the other man might have been involved in scaring Ichabod away.

The story has “captured the imagination” (made people very interested and curious) of many readers. Many movies and “cartoons” (animated movies) have been made about Sleepy Hollow and the Headless Horseman. There is even a “Headless Horseman Historic Run” in the town of Sleepy Hollow, where a “descendant” (a person who lives after another person and is related to that person) of Washington Irving takes people on motorcycle tours of Ichabod Crane’s “path” (direction of going somewhere) out of Sleepy Hollow.

Some people “claim” (say that something is true, especially if it seems unlikely) to have seen the Headless Horseman. Many of these sightings occur around Halloween (a holiday on October 31, when there are supposed to be many ghosts).



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 106.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast English Café episode 106. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Be sure to go to our website at eslpod.com and take a look at some of the new features we offer on our website. You can also download a Learning Guide for this episode, which gives you the complete transcript of everything we say as well as the vocabulary words, definitions, cultural notes, and additional definitions that are not found on the audio portion of this episode.

Today we're going to talk about two things that most Americans know about, at least most Americans of my generation – of my age. One is "Bigfoot," the other is the famous comedy dialogue "Who's on First." These are both things that I think almost every American knows about, but you may not have heard of them or seen these things so we're going to talk about those today. We're also going to, as always, answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Back in the 1970s, when I was growing up, there were lots of programs on TV about strange "phenomena," strange things that would happen. These were shows that, as a child, I always found interesting. For example, there would be a television show about "UFOs," unidentified flying objects – people from other planets – and there would be television shows about whether they existed or not.

One popular topic for these shows was something or someone called "Bigfoot," usually spelled as one word: "Bigfoot." He is also known by a Native American name, which is "Sasquatch" (Sasquatch). Bigfoot, or Sasquatch, is part of what we could call American "folklore" (folklore). "Folklore" are traditional stories that are told; your grandfather tells your father, and your father tells you, and so forth. Usually when we talk about folklore, we're talking things that are either exaggerated or simply not true – things that people have imagined or made up. Part of that folklore includes this thing called "Bigfoot."

Now, Bigfoot is supposed to be like a big ape – like a big animal. People say he's between 7 and 10 feet tall, which would be up to 3 meters, so very tall. He is covered in dark brown hair so he looks like a big ape, like an animal that you would find in a jungle. He has a big head with very large eyes. The head sits on his shoulder so that you can't even see a neck.



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Now, Bigfoot is supposed to live in the Northwest part of the United States, out in the middle of the forest. The Northwest part is sometimes called the “Pacific Northwest,” it includes the states of Washington and Oregon, also the Canadian province of British Columbia could be considered part of the Pacific Northwest. Well, Bigfoot is supposed to live there, and there are people who say that they have seen Bigfoot. I remember watching a television show as a child, where they actually showed some movies – a film – that had Bigfoot in it at a distance. You couldn’t see him very well, but there was this tall, ape-like man in the movie.

Now, one of the interesting things about folklore stories like this is that many people, knowing that they aren’t really true, try to convince other people that it is true. And so, associated with Bigfoot have been a number of what we would call “hoaxes” (hoaxes). A “hoax” is when someone does something to make you believe something that isn’t true. For example, another common story in American folklore – modern American folklore – is that Elvis is still alive – Elvis Presley didn’t actually die! Well, some people try to create photographs on the computer to make it look like “Oh, there’s Elvis!” We even talk about “Elvis sightings.” A “sighting” (sighting) is when you see someone. Here in Los Angeles you can have movie stars sightings, where you see a famous movie star on the street.

Well, people have claimed to have sightings of Bigfoot, including, as I say, this movie that was once shown on television, or short film, but these are usually proven to be false – they’re proven to be hoaxes. Of course, that doesn’t mean that Bigfoot doesn’t really exist, however it would be unusual for an ape to live in a cold, wet area such as the Pacific Northwest when most apes live in warmer climates – Africa, Asia, or in nearby islands. There is no physical evidence for a Bigfoot-like creature in the U.S. The word “creature” (creature) usually is a term to describe an animal: this “creature” – this animal. But, you may want to still believe in Bigfoot if you like.

There are similar stories in other countries. In Scotland, for example, there’s a famous story of the “Loch Ness Monster.” This is supposed to be a monster that lives in a large lake in Scotland, and people say that they have seen this monster – this big animal – and have taken pictures of it! So, you can believe what you’d like. Maybe we can get Bigfoot to come on the English Café and give us an interview – if he speaks English!

Our next topic is also very well known to most Americans. It probably is not as common in other countries because it’s a series of jokes – it’s a dialogue, a comedy dialogue, what we would call a “comedy routine” – that was made



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famous in the 1930s and 40s by two famous American comedians, Lou Costello and Bud (Bud) Abbott, usually known as “Abbott and Costello.”

Abbott and Costello were a “duo” (duo). A “duo” is two people, usually working together as part of a comedy team. This duo worked in radio, in film, and in television. And, this one routine – this one comedy dialogue – that lasts about five or six minutes became their most famous comedy routine, so famous that they even went to the White House – to President Roosevelt’s house at the time – to perform this. They performed it on radio; they performed this comedy dialogue on television and in the movies.

In 1945 there was a movie called The Naughty Nineties, and that is one of the many versions of this dialogue. There were actually many different changes made over the years, but the 1945 version is considered the “classic,” the one that is the best.

“Who’s on First” is about two men who are talking about the names of the players on a baseball team. If you are unfamiliar with baseball, you can go back and listen to English Café number 50 – five-zero – back in September of 2006, when we explained baseball and the basic rules of baseball. In baseball, the “object” of the game – the purpose of the game, the goal of the game – is for the person to hit the ball and then to go from what we call “home base” to first base, second base, third base, and then back again to home base. So, the person hitting the ball is running around and touching what we call “bases,” which are small areas that are marked on the baseball playing field.

In the comedy routine these two men are talking about the baseball team and the names of the players on the baseball team. One person, Costello, is asking the questions, trying to find out the names of the people who are playing on the team. When we say “playing,” we mean who are in the different positions, the name of these players. However, the person answering the questions, Abbott, tries to explain to Costello the last names of these players, or the nicknames of these players. A “nickname” is a short name or an informal name that people call you.

So, Abbott is explaining the nicknames of the players, and it’s very confusing because the nicknames of the players are “Who,” “What,” “I Don’t Know,” “Why,” “Because,” “Tomorrow,” “Today,” and “I Don’t Give a Darn”; those are the nicknames of the players. So on first base – remember there’s home base, first base, second base, third base – on first base the name of the player is Who. On second base the name of the player is What – just like my name is Jeff. This is



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very confusing, you can imagine, when Costello begins to ask Abbott questions: “Who’s on first?” And Abbott says, “Yes, Who is on first.” You see, Costello thinks he’s asking a question, who is the person – what is the name of the person on first – and Abbott thinks he’s giving the name because the person’s nickname is Who.

So the name of this comedy routine is “Who’s on First.” It’s what we would call a “play on words” in English. The funny part of it is that this confusion continues for four or five minutes, where Costello is trying to get an answer to his questions. Abbott thinks that he’s giving him answers to the questions because the questions all are related with “Who, and “What,” and “I Don’t Know,” and the other names of the players.

I’ll put a link on the website. If you go to eslpod.com, click on this English Café, number 106. It will take you to a page with the topics and the words that we are talking about in this episode. On the bottom of the page I’ll put in a little link to YouTube, where you can actually see this comedy routine. I’ll also put in a link to the words so that you can follow along. Like a lot of comedy, it goes very quickly – they talk very quickly, so it’s sometimes hard to understand. I’ll just read the first couple of lines, or first part of this dialogue:

Costello asks, “Who’s on first?” Abbott says, “Yes.” Costello says, “I mean the fellow’s name!” (The “fellow” is the man – what is the fellow’s name?) And Abbott says, “Who!” Costello thinks he’s asking a question and says, “The guy on first!” Abbott says again, “Who!” Costello, getting frustrated now, says, “The guy playing...” Abbott interrupts him to say, “Who is on first!” Costello says, “I’m asking you who is on first!” Abbott says, “That’s the man’s name.” Costello says, “That’s whose name?” And Abbott says, “Yes.”

You can see the confusion continues. It’s quite funny if you watch it and understand this is the basis – this is the reason for the joke is this confusion over using these words – “who,” what,” “I don’t know” – as names rather than as question words or statements. So, take a look at the video and the transcript, and see if you enjoy it. Most Americans have seen it many times, and now with the miracle of YouTube, you can see it too!

Now let’s take a few minutes to answer your questions.

Our first question comes from Alvaro (Alvaro) in Brazil. Alvaro wants to know the meaning of the expression “to tear apart.”



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“To tear (tear) something apart (apart – one word)” means for someone or something to use a very strong force, to use something to separate two people or two things that are close together or have a good relationship with each other. For example: “Dan and Maria were married very happily. But when they had problems with money, it tore them apart.” “Tore” (tore) is the past tense of “tear.” Or, you could say, “These two lawyers worked together for 10 years. But now, their disagreement is tearing them apart” – it’s separating them; they are no longer close to each other as professionals.

You can even use this expression about yourself. You can say, “It tears me apart that so many people don’t care about the environment.” “It tears me apart,” when you use it that way it means “it troubles me a great deal.”

Michele (Michele) from Italy has a question – two questions, first about something called “Cliff Notes.”

“Cliff Notes” is the name of a set of summaries of well known books published by a company here in the United States. Cliff Notes are summaries and analyses of famous – usually famous works of fiction. So for example, if you go to the store, they’ll have a whole section – in a bookstore – with Cliff Notes. They’re usually yellow and black. You can buy these summaries; many students will go to the store, or now go online, and get these summaries so they don’t have to do their homework. They don’t actually have to read the book; they can just buy the Cliff Notes.

So every American student knows what Cliff Notes are; they’re these short summaries of great literature that most students use to avoid reading the actual book. I, of course, never used Cliff Notes – and if you believe that, well, you don’t know me very well!

Michele’s second question has to do with the expression to “fall out of love.” To “fall out of love” means that two people stop loving each other. The opposite of “falling out of love” is “falling in love.” You can say, “I saw the beautiful girl walking down the street and I fell in love.” We would call that “love at first sight” – the first time I saw her. Many songs use this as a theme: [Jeff sings] “The first time ever I saw your face.” Of course, I only sing that now to my wife! That’s to “fall in love,” or to “fall out of love.”

If you have a question, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com.



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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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