



TOPICS

Route 66, playground games for children, on time versus in time, counting seconds using Mississippi, to knock (oneself) out

GLOSSARY

allergy – a medical problem where one gets sick after touching or eating something

* Many people have allergies to cat hair.

a frog in (one's) throat – the feeling of having something in one's throat and being unable to talk clearly; to be unable to speak clearly without coughing first to clear one's throat

* The presenter had a frog in her throat because she was nervous, but after she coughed and drank some water she was fine.

route – a numbered freeway or highway that lets one get from one place to another

* Drive south on Route 39 for about 30 miles until you get to Springfield.

interstate – a large freeway that travels through two or more states

* Interstate 5 takes drivers through California, Oregon, and Washington.

prosperous – wealthy; with a lot of money; rich; successful

* Only some of the people who found gold in California became prosperous.

to get (one's) kicks – to enjoy something; to make oneself happy by doing something

* Dimitry gets his kicks by going surfing every weekend.

to celebrate – to praise someone or something; to say good things about someone or something

* On Veterans Day, Americans celebrate the men and women who have fought in wars for their country.



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to be “it” – to be the person who has to run around and touch or catch other people in many children’s games

* Ryan touched his friend on the shoulder and then ran away, shouting, “Now you’re ‘it!’”

playground – an outdoor area where children play on swings, slides, and other large pieces of equipment

* Does this park have a playground where children can play?

to freeze – to stop moving

* The deer froze in the headlights of the approaching car.

chalk – small sticks of white or colored powder that are used to write or draw on chalkboards, sidewalks, or streets

* The children wrote, “Welcome home, Daddy!” in big letters with pink chalk on the street in front of their house.

footwork – the way that one moves one’s feet, especially when dancing or playing sports

* Everyone was fascinated by the dancer’s complicated and beautiful footwork.

in time – before something is due; before a deadline; before something else happens

* Please be home in time for dinner.

on time – when something is due; at the moment of the deadline

* Will you be able to finish writing the report on time?

to knock (oneself) out – to do something to one’s full enjoyment; to begin doing something, usually without another person’s participation

* If you want to spend all day in the kitchen making a big holiday meal, knock yourself out. I’d rather go to a restaurant.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

On the Road by Jack Kerouac

On the Road is a “novel” (long book) by an American writer named Jack Kerouac. He wrote the novel in just three weeks in 1951. It is “autobiographical” (about the author’s life) and it has an unusual style known as “stream of consciousness” (a type of writing that is written as a person thinks, without the organization of most other styles of writing).

The novel is about the “road trips” (driving vacations, often across the country and usually in a car) that Jack made with his friends while they were young over a period of seven years. The boys don’t have very much money, but they go from New York City to San Francisco and even Mexico City and many places in between. In the end they return to New York City, but they have many “adventures” (exciting and interesting experiences) “along the way” (during their trip). They meet many people from other “social classes” (groups of people with certain education and amounts of money) and learn from their “interactions” (the way that one relates to another person) with them.

Although the novel is autobiographical, Jack changed the names of many of the people and places in the novel. Other “references” (words and phrases connected to other words, phrases, people, or places) are “tied” (connected) to real people and places.

Many other writers, musicians, and poets say that they have been “influenced” (affected) deeply by On the Road. Many people believe that it is one of the best American novels ever written. In fact, Time magazine included On the Road in its list of the 100 best American novels written between 1923 and 2005.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 108.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 108. 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. Take a look at our new ESL Podcast Blog, where several times a week we post additional messages and small lessons on English on our website. You can also take a look at our new ESL Podcast Store and some new courses we have in the store, including one about English for business meetings. And, of course, you can download a 8 to 10 page Learning Guide for this episode as well.

In this Café, we're going to talk about perhaps the most famous freeway, or highway, in the United States, Route 66. We're also going to talk about some typical games that children play at school when they are young. And as always, we'll answer some of your questions. Let's get started.

I have to begin our Café today by apologizing for my voice. I have been having some problems recently with allergies. An "allergy" (allergy) is when your body reacts negatively – in a bad way – to, for example, dust or what we call "pollen" (pollen), little pieces of a plant or flower. I have allergies, meaning that sometimes during the year I have problems with my nose, my throat, sometimes with breathing. I'm not telling you this because you are my medical doctor, but just to let you know that my throat is a little funny sounding today – my voice is a little funny sounding today because I have been having some problems with my allergies. So, I hope I don't sound like a frog! We have the expression "there's a frog in my throat." A "frog" is a small animal – a green animal that jumps and makes a very low sounding noise. In English, the sound a frog makes is "ribbet, ribbet." Someday we'll have to do animal sounds in English. It's an interesting topic because there are different animal sounds in different languages even though it's the same animal.

Today's first topic is Route 66. A "route" (route), also pronounced "route," is a road or a path that goes somewhere. Someone may ask you, "Do you know the route to San Francisco?" – do you know which freeways and streets to take to get to San Francisco? Here the word route is used as the name of a road, so it's like a freeway or a highway.



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Route 66 is probably the best-known highway, or freeway, in the United States because it was one of the first major, or important, federal, or national, highways in the United States. It began back in 1926, not too long after cars became popular in the United States. It started in Chicago, Illinois. It went through several states, including Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Route 66 ended in Los Angeles originally.

It was important in American history because many people during the 1930s, when there was an economic depression around the world – when the economies of the world were doing very badly, many people lost their jobs during this time – during this period of economic depression, many people moved west and they used this freeway, Route 66, to get to California to find a new job.

In the mid-1930s, Route 66 was extended to Santa Monica, California, which is right next to the ocean, not too far from where I live here in Los Angeles. Route 66 doesn't end in the ocean however; it ends about a half a mile before you get to the beach.

Route 66 was used for many years as an important freeway. However, during the 1960s and 70s the United States built a number of what we call “interstate” freeways. “Interstate” means between the states. The U.S. government, beginning really in the 1950s with President Eisenhower, built these freeways to connect the entire United States together. Route 66 was an older freeway, and in about 1985 or so, the U.S. officially decommissioned Route 66. To “decommission” means that they officially removed it from the list of freeways in the U.S. highway system.

Route 66 is famous; it's sometimes called “the Main Street of America” because many businesses and towns became prosperous after Route 66 opened. “Prosperous” means they made a lot of money. I called Route 66 “the Main Street of America”; “Main Street” would be the most important or principal street. Almost every city and town in the United States has a street called “Main Street,” and the expression is often used to refer to the most important part, or the typical part, of a town or a city.

Another reason Route 66 became so famous is that there was a popular American song written in 1946 called “Get Your Kicks on Route 66.” “Kicks” rhymes with “66.” The expression “to get your kicks” (kicks) means to have fun – to have a good time: “Get Your Kicks on Route 66.” It was a popular song, and it was first recorded by the great American singer, Nat King Cole. It has also been



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recorded by many, many other musical groups, including the Rolling Stones, Chuck Berry, Van Morrison, and others.

“Route 66” is a great song. The song mentions, or talks about, several different towns and cities on Route 66. The title of the song is probably the most famous part of the song; I will sing it for you: [Jeff sings] “Get your kicks on Route 66!” It’s important that the word “route” be very high, and of course, my voice is not really perfect for that kind of singing.

“Route 66,” the song, is all about what we may call the romance of traveling by car. The United States, as you may know, is a large country. It takes days and days to drive from one side of the country to the other, so the automobile has always been an important part of popular culture. And “Route 66” is one of those songs that celebrates, or praises – says good things about – automobile travel in the U.S.

Our second topic today is playground games. These are games that American children play when they are young. The “playground” is the place where children play, usually in a park, or perhaps next to a school. Children’s games are different from country to country. Here are a couple of games that most American children know and that are popular, at least when I was a child – back before electricity was invented!

The first one is Red Light, Green Light. Many childhood games – many games played by children – use something, a concept called “it.” If you are “it” that means you are the person who has to do something in order to continue the game. Someone says, “You’re it!” during a childhood game, it means now it’s your turn to do something, and if you don’t do something correctly, you will, many times, be out of the game.

Well, in Red Light, Green Light the “it” person stands at one end of the playground while everyone else is at the other end of the playground, so they’re on opposite sides. The “it” person then turns his or her back to the others so he’s looking in a different direction, and says, “Green light!” Then the players – the other children – have to run as fast as they can towards this “it” person. If the “it” person turns around and says, “Red light!” everyone has to stop right where they are; we would say everyone has to “freeze,” meaning you can’t move your body – any part of your body. If someone doesn’t stop, then they have to go back to the beginning, to the other side of the playground or the field. The first person who reaches the “it” person becomes the next “it” person. That’s Red Light, Green Light. Of course, “red light, green light” refers to the lights on a street, on



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the intersection where two streets cross. Red light means stop, green light means go.

Another popular game played, especially by girls, is hopscotch (hopscotch). In hopscotch you have squares that are marked into the ground, usually with chalk. “Chalk” is what you use to write on a blackboard; here you use the chalk to make squares on the ground. The object of the game – the goal of the game, the way to win the game – is to jump with one foot or two feet in the difference squares. You have to jump in a certain way, depending on where the squares are. There’s usually one square, and on top of that there are two squares next to each other, and then one square, and then two squares, and so on, and you have to jump in a certain order in order to win the game. That’s hopscotch. It’s important, in hopscotch, when you are jumping through the squares that your foot not touch one of the lines.

Hopscotch is actually a very, very old game. It came from Great Britain, and was probably something that the Romans used when they were in the island of what we now call England more than 2000 years ago. It was probably a game that was played by the soldiers in order to improve their physical strength – to improve their, what we might call, “footwork” (footwork) – how well they use their feet. The verb “to hop” (hop) means to jump – to jump up and down.

Well, enough of children’s games, now let’s answer some of your questions.

Our first question comes from Elisabeth (Elisabeth) in Switzerland. Elisabeth wants to know the difference between “in time” and “on time.”

“In time” has a couple of different meanings; one is “in the future.” For example, “The baby does not walk by herself right now, but she will in time” – in the future. Another use of “in time” means before a certain time limit is reached or expires. For example, “I want to get home today in time for the start of the baseball game on television” – I want to arrive home before the game begins, I want to arrive home “in time.” You could also say, “I arrived at school in time to take the test” – I arrived there before the test began, and so I was able to take it. I probably would fail it, but at least I took it!

“On time” means to be punctual, meaning you do something at the time you are supposed to, that it is supposed to be done, or that it should be done. For example, “The plane departed from the airport 20 minutes late, but it arrived on time in Los Angeles.” It arrived “on time” – it arrived at the time that we were expecting it to arrive.



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Won (Won), from I'm not sure where, says he is a big fan of the television show in the U.S., Lost, and he saw a couple of characters – a couple of the people on show, the actors – saying, “One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi, four Mississippi, five Mississippi,” and he wanted to know what this meant.

“Mississippi,” you may know, is the name of a long river that goes from Minnesota to Louisiana, down to the Gulf of Mexico; “Mississippi” is also the name of a state. But when we use “one Mississippi, two Mississippi,” we are simply counting. We use the word “Mississippi” because it’s a long word, and it takes approximately one second to say it. For example, if you are telling your children that it is time to go to bed – for them to go to bed – you may say, “I want you in your beds by the time I count to 10. One Mississippi, two Mississippi...” and so forth. By the time you get to “10 Mississippi,” 10 seconds will have passed, and your children will, of course, not be in bed!

Finally, Simkin (Simkin) from Russia wants to know the meaning of the expression “to knock yourself out.”

“To knock (knock) yourself out” means to go ahead and try something – to feel free to try something. For example, you may be standing in front of a video game, and you are trying to get a high score and you are not doing a good job. Your boyfriend or girlfriend says, “Let me try to play,” and you say to her, “Knock yourself out,” meaning go right ahead, feel free, I don’t mind, I don’t care. Or you’ve been trying to get your computer to work correctly, and someone says, “I think I can fix it.” You say to them, “Knock yourself out” – go ahead.

The expression, when it is used in boxing, means to hit someone else and make them unconscious, so that they go down on the floor. Usually we use this, to knock someone else out – “I’m gonna knock you out” means I’m going to hit you and make you fall down to the ground and go into a state of unconsciousness. This used to happen to me all the time when I would go to the bar and ask the girls to dance with me; I would get myself knocked out!

If you have a question or comment for our English Café, you can email us. Our email address is 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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