



TOPICS

Famous Americans: Grandma Moses; GED Tests, since versus from, is to do (something), calligraphy versus penmanship

GLOSSARY

folk – related to something that is traditional and popular among ordinary people from a certain area, especially in the country

* American folk music is often played on guitars, fiddles, and banjos.

rural – related to the country; not urban or suburban

* I grew up in a rural area where our closest neighbors were cows, not people.

sporadic – intermittent; happening occasionally or often, but not on a regular schedule

* The professor is frustrated with his students' sporadic attendance.

to pick apples – to go to a place where there are many apple trees and use a ladder to collect the apples

* They always go to pick apples together as a family in the fall.

naive – not sophisticated; simple; without very much real-world experience

* Ola is very naive and always believes whatever people tell him.

primitive – not modern or sophisticated; related to an early way of life that no longer exists in today's society

* In primitive societies, women carry their babies on their back most of the day and those babies rarely cry.

Moses – a biblical Jewish leader who led the Israelites out of Egypt when God parted the Red Sea

* According to the Bible, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, or laws, that all people are supposed to follow.

postcard – a small, thick, rectangular piece of paper with a photograph on one side and room to write a message and address on the other side, so that it can be sent through the mail without an envelope

* Please send us a postcard from Fiji!



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equivalency – same; having the same value, importance, or purpose as something else

* My language teacher told me that living in a foreign country for one year has the equivalency of six years of studying a language in one's own country.

dropout – a person who stops going to school before graduating, or who stops participating in an activity before it is finished

* Most high school dropouts make very little money because they don't have enough education to get a good job.

home schooling – the practice through which parents teach their children at home instead of sending them to a regular school

* Research studies show that home schooling does not prevent children from developing social skills.

is to do (something) – is supposed to do something; is planned or scheduled to do something

* The magician is to do a very exciting trick in the second half of tonight's show.

calligraphy – beautiful writing that is made with special pens and inks

* They addressed the wedding invitations with beautiful calligraphy.

penmanship – handwriting; the way that a person writes; the way that a person forms individual letters and words on paper

* Your penmanship is horrible! I can hardly read what you've written here.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Famous Americans with GEDs

Many high school dropouts “regret” (wish that one hadn’t done something, or feel bad about something that one did earlier) their decision to stop studying before they had earned their “high school diploma” (the piece of paper that one gets at high school graduation). They find that, without a diploma, they are unable to get good jobs. However, by the time they “make this realization” (have this understanding), they are often too old to go back to high school.

Fortunately, these individuals can decide to take a test of “General Educational Development,” or GED. The GED is also known as a “General Equivalency Diploma” or “General Education(al) Diploma,” but these terms are technically incorrect. Earning a GED means that the test-taker has high-school-level academic skills. Passing the GED exam requires getting a “score” (the number of points earned on a test) that is higher than that of 40% of graduating high school seniors.

Some of the people who earn a GED are high-school dropouts; others were home schooled. People who have earned a GED have the equivalent of a high school diploma, and are able to use the GED to get a better job or “enroll” (begin participating in a program) in college.

More than 15 million people have earned a GED, and many of them are famous. American pop singer Britney Spears and her sister, Jamie Lynn Spears, have GEDs. Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead and Tre Cool of Green Day are two other famous musicians who have GEDs. Actors Bill Cosby, Christian Slater, and Michael J. Fox have GEDs, as do Dave Thomas, the founder of Wendy’s restaurant, and even Ruth Ann Minner, the Governor of Delaware!



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 126.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café episode 126. 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. On it you can find a Learning Guide for this episode, as well as our ESL Podcast Store, which contains premium courses on business and personal English we think you'll be interested in.

On this Café, we're going to talk about a famous American of the 20th century, Grandma Moses – who she was, and why she is famous. We're also going to talk about the GED – what that is, who gets it, and why. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our first topic today is Grandma Moses. Grandma Moses was the name of a famous American painter of the 20th century. Her real name was Anna Robertson. She was born in September of 1860; she died 101 years later, in 1961. She's known as Grandma Moses because she started painting when she was in her 70s. She is usually "cited," that is, she is usually produced as evidence of how it is possible to start at something at a late age – at an older age, and still be good at that thing.

Grandma Moses was famous for her pictures of rural life in the United States. When I say "rural" (rural), I'm talking about outside the city, in the country where there are farms and fewer people. Grandma Moses was sometimes called a "folk artist." "Folk" (folk) often refers to popular, perhaps not as sophisticated kind of art, although that doesn't necessarily mean that it isn't very sophisticated. It's a phrase – an expression we use to talk about traditional, often rural, art forms. Certain kinds of folk music, for example, are created by and sung by non-professional musicians, although there are now professional musicians that play folk music.

Grandma Moses had what one writer described as "sporadic periods of schooling" when she was young. "Sporadic" (sporadic) means not very frequent – not on a regular basis. She may have gone to school one year, and then the next year not. This was not uncommon, especially for those that lived in rural areas of the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



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Grandma Moses, who, of course, was called at that time Anna Robertson, married and lived in Virginia and then moved to New York. Her husband died in 1927. After her husband died, she moved to her daughter's home in 1936, and it was then, after she had "retired" – after she had left her normal work on the farm – that she began to paint.

Initially, she copied what were called "illustrated postcards." A "postcard" is something you send someone that has a picture or a painting, usually of a place that you are visiting. These illustrated postcards were her first subjects; she would copy them. Eventually, however, beginning in the early 1940s, she started painting scenes from her own childhood – when she was a child, pictures such as "Apple Pickers." People who "pick apples" are people who take the apples and remove them from the tree. She also had a famous painting called "Catching the Thanksgiving Turkey." Thanksgiving, you may know, is a celebration each year where it is very popular for people to eat turkeys; this was a painting about someone on a farm catching the turkey for Thanksgiving.

These paintings by Grandma Moses gradually became more famous, and by the early 1940s she had exhibits and shows in different parts of the country. Throughout her time as a painter, she painted more than 2,000 paintings. Her style is sometimes called a "naive" style. "Naive" (naive) usually means innocent, but also, perhaps, uneducated, or not very intelligent, someone who doesn't understand everything very well. Later, art historians called it "American Primitive," meaning it had a certain popular folk quality about it.

She became very famous in the late 1940s and 1950s. In the early 1950s, she appeared on one of the most famous television programs of that time, called See It Now, by a journalist named Edward R. Murrow, who's considered one of the finest journalists of the 20th century on television.

Grandma Moses died in 1961. As I mentioned earlier, most Americans, when they think of Grandma Moses, think of the possibility of starting something later in life, and being able to do well at it. I personally find this encouraging, since there are many things that I would love to learn how to do, including painting. Right now, I'm working on the violin, which I'm not very good at. Fortunately, my wife has a good set of earplugs to put in her ears so she doesn't hear me! Maybe I'll be like Grandma Moses someday.

You may wonder why they called her "Grandma Moses." I think part of the reason is that Moses lived a very long time. Moses is a character – a person from the history of the Jewish people, who was "instrumental," that is, he was



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very important in helping the Jews leave Egypt. This is many thousands of years ago, of course. That's just my guess about why she got that name.

Our second topic is something called the “GED.” Most Americans know what the GED is. “GED” stands for “General Educational Development.” It is a certificate, or a diploma, for those who did not graduate high school, but have studied and taken a set of tests, called the “GED Test,” to get what we would call a “high school equivalency certificate.” Something that is “equivalent” is equal to.

The GED, then, is a series of tests – five tests about topics that you would normally study in high school. The GED is taken by people who did not graduate from high school, sometimes because they left school early – they didn't finish high school, or they were immigrants to the United States and didn't complete high school in their own country.

Generally, students over the age of 19 take the GED examinations, if they need to. If you are younger, you would just go to a regular high school.

Ninety percent of American students graduate from high school, so it's not a large percentage of people who take the GED. Of course, you don't have to take the GED if you don't want a high school diploma, but it is very difficult to get a good job, and impossible to study at a college or university unless you have at least a high school diploma or a GED certificate, which is the same thing.

The test was actually created back in the 1940s. It's important to remember that in the United States less than 50 percent of Americans graduated from high school before World War II. It was only after World War II that the percentage of American students who graduated from high school went above 50 percent. I have three uncles who were all teenagers during the late 1930s, and none of them graduated from high school. My father was the only male member of his family to graduate high school. So, it was not uncommon.

What happened was that many of these teenagers – these young people went off to war – went to fight in World War II, and when they came back they wanted to continue their education and get better jobs, and so the Army – the United States Army created these series of tests. They're now used, as I said, by people who have dropped out of school. To “dropout” means to leave school early, without finishing. It's also used by people who are immigrants to the United States and want to get a high school diploma. It's sometimes used by children who are “home schooled,” people who educate their children at home, which you can do legally in many places in the United States.



About 15 million people have taken the GED exam, since it began, and passed. About one out of every seven Americans has a GED certificate instead of a high school diploma; the rest have normal high school diplomas. About one out of every 20 college students, or five percent of all college students, got a GED first. Many people get a GED and don't get any higher degree, but they need at least a GED for many jobs. For example, if you want to become a police officer, you need to have a high school diploma or a GED. The same is true for many other government jobs.

The youngest age you can take the GED is 16. Most places require that you be 17 years or older, however. As I said before, the majority are students who are out of the high school age – they're 19 or older – who take this exam. In most states, it's not possible to go to high school if you are over 19 years old. Part of the reason is that you don't want older students, in their 20s, in the same classrooms as 15 and 16-year olds; that could create some problems.

The GED is a wonderful program; it allows anyone to come and take an exam and get their high school diploma, and it is widely available. You can take the exam from most local school districts. The exam is not easy; it requires that you study the same kind of topics you would study in high school in order to pass it.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from José (José) in Spain. José wants to know the difference between “since” and “from” when you are talking about dates or time.

“Since” we use when there is a beginning of something. For example: “We have been doing ESL Podcast since July of 2005” – it began in July in 2005. “Since we arrived, there have been a good deal of visitors here.” “Since we arrived” – beginning at the time that we arrived, so there's one beginning point.

“From” can also be used in a similar way: “from the time we arrived.” Usually, however, “from” is used with another preposition, “to.” So for example: “From 2003 to 2005, I was working at a different the job at the Center for Educational Development.” “From” and “to,” there's a beginning and an ending point. You could also say “from 2005 to the present,” meaning today. “From 2005 to the present, I have been working on ESL Podcast.”



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So, “since” would be used if you have just a beginning date: “I have studied Spanish since 1981” – I continue to do so. If there’s a beginning and an end, you would use “from” and “to”: “From 1999 to 2001 I lived in Phoenix, Arizona.”

Jacek (Jacek) in Poland wants to know how we use the expression “is to do (something).” For example, he heard on the radio “The president is to speak about this event.”

“Is to do” is anticipated to do something; it’s expected that he will do something. Or simply, he will do something in the future. It’s a little more formal; you will hear it in newscasts and more formal reading material. It’s used to announce some important event or speech. For example: “The Secretary General of the UN is to address the General Assembly next month.” To “address” means to talk to – to speak to. That’s how we would use this “is to do to,” or “is to” plus the verb: “My wife is to tell me whether I will be sleeping on the couch or in the bed tonight later this afternoon.”

Vanya (Vanya), from an unknown country, wants to know the difference between “calligraphy” (calligraphy) and “penmanship.” Let’s start with “penmanship.”

“Penmanship” refers to your “handwriting,” how you are writing your letters and numbers on a piece of paper. That’s a general expression; sometimes people will say, “He has bad penmanship.” Doctors, for example – medical doctors have the reputation, in the United States, of having bad penmanship – they write something, and you can’t read what it says.

“Calligraphy” is more formal, what we would call “decorative” writing. “Decorative” comes from the verb “to decorate,” which means to make pretty, to make beautiful, to make more sophisticated. Calligraphy is usually done with a special pen or a brush. A “brush” is what you use to paint, for example. Calligraphy is very formal; you would see calligraphy on, for example, an invitation to a formal event, such as a wedding.

Calligraphy usually requires a lot of practice and special training. Most people don’t know how to do calligraphy; everyone, however, has some type of penmanship – some ability to write letters and numbers. But, calligraphy is a fancy, formal, special kind of writing.

If you have a question, formal or informal, email us at eslpod@eslpod.com. We’ll try to answer it on the Café. We can’t answer everyone’s questions, but we’ll do the best we can.



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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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