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**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 147**

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**TOPICS**

Ask an American: Drive-in Theaters; to wind someone up, you don't say, how about you versus what about you

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**GLOSSARY**

**to wedge** – to fit into a thin and tall space; to put something into a thin and tall space that is too small

\* Can you wedge a piece of wood under the door so that the dust doesn't come into the house?

**talkative** – someone who likes to talk a lot; someone who often talks a lot

\* On the bus, Russ sat next to a talkative man who told him all about his life.

**to block (someone's) view** – to be in the way of someone trying to see; to have something in a place or position that prevents someone from seeing

\* I didn't enjoy the theater last night because there was a man with a tall hat who sat in front of me who blocked my view of the stage.

**to be in the comfort of** – to be comfortable in; to be in a situation where one feels comfortable and relaxed

\* Many people like to watch the ballgame in the comfort of their own homes, rather than to go to the sports park.

**sprawling** – spread out over a large area in an unplanned way

\* In the past 10 years, this has turned into a sprawling city with homes in every direction.

**cranky** – irritable; someone who is easy to make angry

\* Leona is cranky in the morning before her first cup of coffee.

**to disrupt** – to interrupt something by causing a problem; to stop something that is happen by causing a problem

\* The baby disrupted the concert by crying loudly and without stopping.



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**passion** – feeling a strong emotion; feeling a strong emotion that is difficult to control

\* Del has a passion for fishing and talks about his fishing trips to anyone who will listen.

**family fare** – something intended for children and adults; something that does not have a lot of violence or sexual content

\* Let's make sure there is a lot of family fare at the company picnic this year, since both employees and their families will be attending.

**second-rate** – poor quality; not very good

\* We thought we hired a good company to paint our house, but their work was second-rate.

**tinny** – having an unpleasant sound; having a thin, poor-quality sound

\* The speakers on your computer are very tinny!

**concession stand** – a place within a movie theater, community gathering, or sports event where people can buy food and drinks

\* Do you think they'll have hot dogs and hamburgers at that concession stand?

**fattening** – able to make you fat; something one drinks or eats that can make one fatter

\* Harold avoided fattening foods after losing more than 50 pounds.

**risqué** – with sexual content; something that surprises or shocks because it has something to do with sex

\* The words in this song are so risqué that the radio station decided not to play it.

**to wind (someone) up** – to tease or irritate someone; to make someone angry; to make someone feel nervous or anxious

\* Watching the scary movie got Belinda so wound up that she decided to sleep in her sister's room that night.

**You don't say!** – a phrase used to express surprise, similar to phrases such as "really?" and "you're kidding!"

\* - We got a letter today telling us that we won a new car!

- You don't say!



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **B Movies**

The term “B movie” is used for any movie made on a “low budget” (with little money) and very little advertising. Originally, B movies were used as the second half of a “double feature,” which is when you buy one ticket to see two movies. The second movie was usually considered “inferior” (not as good) in quality as the “feature” (main movie). They normally “ran” (time that it lasted) for about 70 minutes, which was shorter than the feature. From about the 1950s, there were fewer and fewer double features. However, low budget movies continued to be made.

Today, we use the term “B movie” to mean any movie that is made with little money. It is also used to refer to a particular “genre” (type; category) of film. Very popular B movies included “westerns,” which were movies about cowboys and American Indians (Native Americans) in the old days in the western parts of the United States.

Also popular genres among B movie makers were “science-fiction” and “horror” movies. “Science fiction” is a type of movie or book that is about an imagined future, usually involving new and interesting scientific subjects and technology. For example, a movie about “aliens,” people who live on other planets coming to Earth, would be science fiction.

“Horror” movies are made to scare or frighten the audience. Many B movies had low “production value,” which meant that their costumes, sets, and other materials were not high quality and may not be very convincing. However, even today, B movies have a large “cult” (not mainstream; small) following, and in some cities, you will find movie theaters that show B movies on the weekends, usually later at night.



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 147.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café episode 147. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

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This Café is going to be an Ask an American edition, but we're going to do something a little different. We're going to listen to someone explain a very important cultural institution in the United States, at least it was during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that's called the "drive-in theater." We'll listen to a news reporter talk about the drive-in theater at a native rate of speech and we'll stop and explain some of the more difficult vocabulary. As always, we'll answer a few of your questions as well. Let's get started.

Our topic this episode is drive-in theaters. As you might guess, a drive-in theater is a theater where you watch the movie from your car. A drive-in theater has a large parking lot, and in front there is a huge, very large screen where you can see the movie. Next to each car there is a little box that has the sound for the movie, so each car has its own speaker that you can use to listen to the movie.

Drive-in theaters began in the early 1930s in the United States, but really became very popular in the 1950s. It was especially popular in areas like Southern California, which had, and still do have, what we might call a "car culture," everybody drives everywhere. Drive-in theaters were popular in all parts of the country, however. I remember growing up we had a couple of drive-in theaters that were not too far from us. There used to be about 4,000 drive-in theaters in the 1950s; now there are only a couple of hundred left. Drive-in theaters were an important part of American culture, however, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the 1950s and 60s.

We're going to start by listening to a description of the theater – what you would find if you went there, what some of the benefits were to being in a drive-in theater, and what people did when they went to the movie theater – besides



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watching the movie! We'll listen to this description first, then we'll go back and explain the more difficult vocabulary. Here we go.

[recording]

At the drive-in, instead of wedging into a theater next to talkative strangers, crying babies, and large people blocking your view, you watched a movie in the comfort of your car, side by side with hundreds of other cars in a sprawling parking lot. You could bring your cranky baby along without disrupting anyone. Teenagers adored the romantic privacy of a dark automobile, to the point that some media referred to drive-ins as passion pits.

[end of recording]

The description, here, of drive-ins is read by one of reporters for Voice of America. He begins by saying that at the drive-in, instead of wedging into a theater seat next to talkative strangers – let's start with that first expression, "instead of wedging" (wedging). "Wedging" means to go into a very small space, to wedge something in a space means that there really isn't enough room so you have to sort of force it in there. As a noun, a wedge is something that you often use, for example, to keep a door open; it's a small piece of wood or plastic that you put underneath the door. That could be also called a wedge. As a verb, though, to wedge means to fit into a small space. So, the description here is that instead of wedging into a theater – into a theater seat, really – next to talkative strangers, crying babies, and large people blocking your view, you watched a movie in the comfort of your car. "Talkative" is somebody who talks a lot. When you say "he's very talkative," you mean he's talking a lot, maybe too much. Of course, if you are in a movie theater, you don't really want other people talking around you while the movie is going on. In fact, I don't go to movie theaters very often anymore, because I – maybe getting older – I just don't like and enjoy watching a moving when there are all these people that are talking around me. And, another problem now is, of course, people on their stupid cell phones talking while the movie is going on!

Anyway, in our story it says that instead of wedging into a theater next to talkative strangers, crying babies, and large people blocking your view, you watched a movie in the comfort of your car. To "block" means to prevent you from seeing – to "block your view," that is, would mean to prevent you from seeing. So, somebody sits down in front of you with a big head or lots of hair, or like me, a big head but no hair, then you can't see the movie screen. So, instead of doing this, you can watch a movie in the comfort of your car. "In the comfort



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of” means in a very comfortable place: “In the comfort of my living room, I will watch the baseball game.” I don’t have to go to the stadium.

You watch the movie in the comfort of your car “side by side,” meaning right next to, hundreds of cars in a sprawling parking lot. The adjective “sprawling” (sprawling) means extending out for a long, long distance; something that goes and takes up a lot of land – a lot of space. In an American shopping center, at least in some areas, there’s a large building, and then next to the building there is a sprawling parking lot – a huge parking lot that takes up lots of room. Well, that’s what you would find in a drive-in theater, a sprawling parking lot.

You could bring, to the movie, your cranky baby without disrupting anyone. You could bring the cranky baby along, we would say. To “bring along” means to bring with you. “Cranky” (cranky) is an adjective describing someone who’s not very happy, who, in the case of a baby, would be crying all the time, making a lot of noise. A cranky person is an unhappy person. So if your baby was cranky it was okay, you could still bring them to the theater because they would be in your car and they wouldn’t be bothering other people next to you – you wouldn’t disrupt anyone. To “disrupt” someone means to bother them, to interrupt them, to cause them problems especially with noise.

Finally, he says that teenagers adored the romantic privacy of a dark automobile. To “adore,” here, just means to love, to like a lot. So, they liked the romantic privacy; “privacy” is being by yourself. So, you were inside a dark car with your girlfriend or boyfriend; you were by yourself. That, of course, allowed them to kiss – to be romantic with each other. “Teenagers adored the romantic privacy of a dark automobile to the point that some media referred to drive-ins as passion pits.” “To the point that” means it was so common that this became a popular way of describing drive-in theaters. “To the point that some media (some newspapers, television, magazines) referred to (or described) drive-ins as passion pits.” A “pit” (pit) is normally a large hole in the ground; a pit can also be the hard center of a piece of fruit, like a peach; a peach has a pit inside (pit). Here, the term just refers to a place where there are lots of teenagers, in this case, who are in their cars, doing what teenagers might do in their cars with their boyfriends and girlfriends, kissing and so forth. “Passion” refers to a sexual emotion, and that’s what we are talking about when we describe them as “passion pits,” they’re concentrated places with lots of teenagers who are trying to be romantic with their lovers. Let’s listen again.

[recording]



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[end of recording]

I should also mention that the word “pit” is also associated with racing cars. When cars go round and round a track racing each other sometimes they have to stop, and the places where they stop are called “pit stops.” So perhaps “passion pit” also is a term that relates to the fact that we are talking about automobiles – about cars.

What kind of movies did you watch at a drive-in theater, and what was the experience like? In this next section, we’ll hear a description of what kind of movies you saw and what were some of the things that you would see at a drive-in theater besides the movie. Let’s listen.

[recording]

The movies themselves mostly ranged from family fare to second-rate monster, space, and action thrillers. The sound that squawked out of the little speaker that you attached to your car window was tinny at best. But the drive-in’s concession stand did offer a full and fattening menu of fried food, sodas and candy – and of course, popcorn.

[end of recording]

We begin by hearing about the kinds of movies that you could see at a drive-in theater. The movies ranged from family fare to second-rate monster, space, and action thrillers. To “range from something to something else” means that this was the variety, this was the kind of thing that you would have. For example, you go to a restaurant and you could say they have a “range of foods” – their foods range from pizza to steak, and everything in between. So, there’s a large variety. When you went to a drive-in theater, at least in the 50s and 60s, sometimes you would see what we might describe as “family fare” (fare), meaning movies that were for a family, second-rate monster, space, and action thrillers. “Second-rate” means not very good. Sometimes people talk about “B movies,” these are movies that are not very good in terms of their quality. They would be “thrillers,”



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they would be movies that had a lot of excitement, like the Indiana Jones movies for example. They would be monster, space, and action thrillers. “Monsters” are imaginary beings that are large and tend to destroy things. King Kong, for example, was a monster; Godzilla was a monster in the movies. Space movies, movies about space – about outer space, the moon and the stars – and action thrillers, movies that had a lot of excitement, a lot of action in them. The Bourne Identity, the movies about Jason Bourne, these are thrillers – action thrillers.

When you went to the drive-in, you would park your car next to a little box, and the box is where you could hear the sound of the movie. In the description, he describes the sound that squawked out of the little speaker. “Squawk” (squawk) means to make a noise, but not a very nice or pleasant noise. It might be the way you describe the noise that a duck makes, or another animal. So, this sound would come out of the little speaker that you attached to your car window, and it was considered tinny at best. “Tinny” (tinny) means that it sounded very low in quality; it sounded like it didn’t have any of the low sounds. The low sounds would be the bass (bass), and the high sounds are the treble (treble). That’s how we might describe them. So, a sound that is tinny is one that doesn’t have a lot of bass and doesn’t sound very good. When he says that the sound was tinny at best, meaning that that’s the best you could describe the sound; it could actually be worse than that.

The drive-in’s concession stand offered a full and fattening menu of fried foods, soda, and candy. The “concession stand” is the place in a movie theater where you go and you buy things to drink and eat. We also use that term, “concession stand,” if you are at a stadium where you are watching a baseball or a football game; you could go to the concession stand and buy some hot dogs. In the movie theaters, the concession stands offered a full and fattening menu. “Fattening” means they gave you food that would make you fat; that included fried food, sodas, candy, and the most famous food you will see at a movie theater, popcorn. Let’s listen again.

[recording]

The movies themselves mostly ranged from family fare to second-rate monster, space, and action thrillers. The sound that squawked out of the little speaker that you attached to your car window was tinny at best. But the drive-in’s concession stand did offer a full and fattening menu of fried food, sodas and candy – and of course, popcorn.

[end of recording]





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You may wonder why drive-in theaters are not as popular anymore. Well, there are a couple of reasons. One is that people began renting movies, when you could start to rent movies on videocassette, and now on DVD, it was so much easier to go see a movie, now, by just staying home. Color television became more popular in the 60s and 70s. So there were a lot of changes in the society that caused drive-in theaters to become less popular. When I was in high school, drive-in theaters were not very popular; it was probably the beginning of their decline – of their decreasing popularity. Drive-in theaters usually had what we might describe as “risqué” movies, during the 1980s especially. “Risqué” (risqué) means sexually suggestive or with sexual content. So, these would be movies that teenage boys might want to go watch, and that was really the reputation of drive-in theaters. I have to say that although I lived near drive-in theaters, I never actually went to a drive-in theater in high school, probably because I didn’t have a car – and because I didn’t have a car, I didn’t have a girlfriend, so there was no good reason to go!

Most of the drive-in theaters closed, and they became shopping malls or other kinds of businesses. Sometimes houses were built where the drive-in theater used to be. Nevertheless, drive-in theaters are definitely an important part of American culture, even if they are no longer as popular as they once were.

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Jose (Jose) in Spain. Jose wants to know the meaning of the expression “to wind someone up.” “To wind” (wind) – notice how it is pronounced; the same spelling (wind) can also be pronounced “wind” as a noun. As a verb, however, we pronounce the word “wind.”

“To wind,” or “to wind up,” is a verb we use when talking about, for example, an old watch. Watches before we had small batteries were “wound up.” You had to move the little button on the side of the watch back and forth several times to wind the watch up, and as you wound the watch up, the mechanism inside – the parts inside – would get tighter, would have more tension, and that would allow the watch to work correctly.

So, “to wind a person up” – “to wind someone up” would mean, in some cases, to get them very excited, to get them very emotional. That’s how the expression would be used in American English. In British English it’s often used to fool somebody, to make a joke at someone else’s expense – that is, to make a joke that is about another person. If someone says in Britain, “He’s winding you up,”



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they mean he's playing a joke on you or making a fool of you. In U.S. English, however, the term is generally used to mean to excite someone. We often say, "He was all wound up" – he was all excited about something.

Our next question comes from Wakana (Wakana) in Japan. Wakana has a question about two different expressions. The first is the expression "You don't say!" This is an idiom, or idiomatic expression in English that means "no kidding," or "really?" For example, someone says, "I just won the lottery. I won a million dollars," and you say, "You don't say!" You're saying "Really, is that true?" You are expressing surprise about something.

This expression is a little old-fashioned; it's not as popular anymore. It's something you might hear an older person say – even older than me! You might often hear this expression as a joke, to be, what we would say, sarcastic; someone is pretending to be surprised. For example, someone says to you, "Look, I cut my hair," and you say to them, "You don't say! I thought you lost a fight with your cat," meaning your cat had eaten your hair and that's why it looks so bad. That would, of course, be a very insulting thing to say to someone, but it's an example of how you would use it sarcastically. Fortunately, I don't have to worry about haircuts or cats – I don't have hair, and I don't have a cat! I actually don't like cats very much. I know some of you probably love cats; I'm not what you'd call a cat lover.

Anyway, our next question has to do with the expressions "How about you?" and "What about you?" These are usually used to mean the same thing; you're asking about someone's opinion or someone's situation, and comparing it with your own situation. They are used in casual situations – casual conversation. For example, I say, "I'm hungry. How about you?" You're saying "are you hungry, too?" – "are you also hungry?" You could also say, "I'm hungry. What about you?" You're asking if the other person is hungry, and probably if you want to go somewhere to get something to eat. You could also use it at the beginning of a sentence; you could say, "How about you Jason? Will you vote this year?" Or, "What about you? Are you going to vote?" In many situations, you can use a shorter version of this question; you can just say, "You?" For example: "I'm really thirsty. You?" meaning "Are you also thirsty?" Or, "I'm going to the museum this afternoon. You?" or "And you?" You're asking if they are doing the same thing.

If you have a question or comment, you can email us. Our email address is [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto: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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