



TOPICS

American Cities: Chicago; The Star-Spangled Banner; just versus only versus mere; to kick (someone's) butt

GLOSSARY

windy – with a lot of wind; with air that moves very quickly

* It's hard to keep an umbrella from blowing away on a windy day.

magnificent – wonderful; something that is very special and impressive

* The singer had a magnificent voice that impressed all of the judges.

skyscraper – a very tall building, usually with apartments or offices

* Do you feel safe living in a skyscraper on the thirty-fourth floor?

public transportation system – a way to move people throughout the city on shared transportation, without everyone having his or her own car

* The public transportation system in New York City allows most of its residents to get around in the city without owning a car.

gangster – a person who is in a gang (a group of people who do things that are against the law, usually to make money)

* In this old movie, the gangsters all wore dark jackets and hats so that it was more difficult for the police to see them on the streets at night.

Prohibition – the period of time from 1920 to 1933 when it was illegal to make and sell alcohol in the United States

* During Prohibition, it was more difficult, but not impossible, to buy alcohol.

league – a group of teams that play against each other, usually with one team beating all the others and winning a prize

* Sasha has played on this soccer league for four years and their team has won three out of the four years.

anthem – a song that officially represents a country

* Before the ball game, the announcer said, "Please stand as we play our national anthem."



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lyrics – words of a song; words that are sung

* Even though I've known this song for years, I've never listened carefully to the lyrics.

dawn – the early part of morning when one can just start to see the sun in the sky

* If we want to catch any fish, we'll need to go fish at dawn.

twilight – the last light of the day when the sun is going down in the sky

* This postcard shows the city at its most beautiful in twilight.

patriotic – loving one's country very much; showing support and loyalty to one's country

* Emil thought it was his patriotic duty to try to get others to vote.

mere – only; not more than a certain amount; a small amount

* This watch is a mere \$30 and is much cheaper than the real thing.

to kick (someone's) butt – to defeat someone; to use force to achieve a goal; to fight and hurt someone

* Their team has beaten us the past three years, but this year, we plan to kick their butt!



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

The Musical Chicago

Chicago is a Broadway “musical” (theater with singing), which was made into an award-winning movie in 2002. The musical was originally produced in 1975 and ran for 936 performances. It was “choreographed” (with steps designed for dances) by the famous Broadway choreographer Bob Fosse. In 1996, Chicago was “revived” (brought back for performances) and continues to run today, with over 4,500 performances so far. The movie version won an Academy Award, the most prestigious or highly respected movie award in the United States.

The story of the musical is interesting one. The musical is set in the city of Chicago in the 1920s and is about two women “murderers” (killers). The first woman, Velma, is a singer who murders her husband and her sister, when she finds out they are having an “affair” (sexual relationship). The second woman, Roxie, murders her boyfriend when she discovers that he has no intention of making her a “star” (famous performer) as he had promised. Both of their crimes are discovered and they are both put on “death row,” which is the section of a prison where people go if they are waiting to be killed for having murdered someone. While they wait to die, they both fight for the “fame” (being known and talked about by many people) that they have both wanted for so long.

Roxie “enlists” (gets) the help of a lawyer who is famous for his “showmanship” (ability to please a crowd of people) and she gets the fame that Velma had. In the end, the women realize that they need each other to get what they want.

Like other musicals, Chicago takes a serious subject and turns it into entertainment, but also “satire,” which makes a point or statement about our society. Chicago is a satire about “corruption” (dishonesty by people in power) of our system of justice and the idea of the “criminal celebrity,” someone who becomes famous because of a crime.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 153.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 153. 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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On this Café, we're going to continue our series on American Cities, focusing on Chicago. We're also going to talk about a song that is very important in American culture and history, our national anthem, [The Star-Spangled Banner](#). And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

This Café continues our series on American cities. Today we are going to talk about the city of Chicago, Illinois. Illinois is spelled I-L-L-I-N-O-I-S, but we do not pronounce the "s"; it's just "Illinoi," not "Illinois." Illinois is located in the north central part of the United States, and Chicago is in the northeast corner of the state.

With almost three million people, Chicago is the third largest city in the U.S. There are, in fact, almost 10 million people in the "metropolitan area," or the area surrounding the city, making it the third largest metropolitan area in the United States as well. New York and Los Angeles are numbers one and two.

Chicago is sometimes called the Windy City, and if you ask people in the U.S. about Chicago, that's a term they will be familiar with. Something that is "windy" (windy) has a lot of "wind" (wind), or air that moves very quickly. Chicago is very windy because it is built next to Lake Michigan, which is one of the five, what we call, Great Lakes, five large lakes that are in that north central area of the U.S. The Great Lakes are the biggest group of freshwater lakes on the earth. When we say they're "freshwater," we mean they are not salty like the oceans.

Some people believe Chicago is called the Windy City because of the weather there. Other people say that it refers to the politics of Chicago in the 19th century,



when there were a lot of politicians that would give speeches. An informal, somewhat negative description of a politician giving a speech is that they are “blowing a lot of hot air,” or “blowing a lot of wind,” in this case, and that is where Windy City comes from. No one, of course, is quite sure exactly what the meaning is, or the origin of it is; everyone just calls it the Windy City.

Chicago is fairly “wealthy,” or rich city with many businesses. One part of the downtown is called the Magnificent Mile. “Magnificent” (magnificent) means wonderful or something that is very special or impressive. The Magnificent Mile has some of the world’s tallest buildings, and some of the best restaurants and stores. Chicago has many “skyscrapers,” or very tall office buildings. In fact, Chicago has the tallest skyscraper in the U.S., which is the Sears Tower. It is not the tallest building in the world, of course, but it is the tallest skyscraper in the U.S. Chicago is also known as a center for arts; the Art Institute of Chicago is one of the U.S.’ best art schools, and is located there. Chicago also has several famous universities, beginning with the University of Chicago, a private university that is famous for many of the economists who had an impact on the United States’ political system in the 20th century, and there are several other universities there as well.

The airports in Chicago are some of the biggest and busiest in the world. Chicago, unlike Los Angeles, also has a good “public transportation system,” a way to move people throughout the city on shared transportation, without everyone having to own his or her own car. The system in Chicago is called the “L” (written just with the capital letter L) and it’s the third busiest metro system in the country. Riding the L lets people move through downtown Chicago very quickly.

If you ask people what Chicago is famous for, other than being the Windy City and it’s L, they may also say “gangsters,” because in the 1920s, Chicago became very well known for its gangsters. A “gangster” (gangster) is a person who is in a gang, or group of people who usually do things that are against the law, usually to make money. Back in the 1920s, during “Prohibition,” or the period of time when it was illegal to make and sell alcohol in the United States, gangsters made a lot of money by making and selling illegal alcohol. One gangster, Al Capone, became very famous for fighting against the government. Today people still talk about Chicago-style politics as a type of politics that isn’t entirely legal or isn’t entirely, we might say, clean. Chicago has a bad reputation for its politics, at least in the 20th century, or in the early and mid parts of the century.



Sports fans love Chicago because it has teams in each of the major league sports. A “league” is a group of teams that play against each other. Chicago has the Chicago Bears for American football, the Chicago Bulls for basketball, the Chicago Blackhawks for hockey, and the Chicago Cubs and the Chicago White Sox for baseball. The Cubs are famous for never having won a World Series in the last hundred years. They’re one of the oldest baseball teams in the United States, but they have not won the big championship, what we call the World Series, since 1908, I believe.

Many people’s favorite food is also from Chicago. Chicago has something called “Chicago-style pizza,” which is also called “deep-dish pizza.” Deep-dish is pizza that is made with a very thick layer of “dough,” or the bread that’s in a pizza. Chicago-style pizza uses a lot of oil and has a lot of calories, so it is not very healthy, but it does taste very, very good! Chicago-style pizza is an American tradition now; you will find deep-dish, or Chicago-style pizza, in every city nowadays. Chicago’s also for its ribs – its barbequed ribs. If you go to Chicago and visit, you’ll want to get some Chicago-style pizza and some barbequed ribs. “Ribs” are bones of an animal that you eat the meat off of.

I’ve been to Chicago a couple of times; it’s about eight hours driving from where I grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. My niece went to school there and my nephew is in Chicago right now, studying at one of the universities there. So, I’ve had a chance to visit Chicago; it’s a beautiful city and a nice place to visit in the summertime. Don’t go to Chicago in the winter, it’s much too cold – come to Los Angeles instead!

Our second topic today is the national anthem – the national song of the United States: The Star-Spangled Banner. An “anthem” is a song that officially represents a country. National anthems are played for many different events. At the Olympics, for example, the winning, or gold medal team or winner gets his or her national anthem played. In the U.S., our national anthem is The Star-Spangled Banner. The word “banner” means flag, here. “Spangled” (spangled) means covered with something, especially something that is shiny or full of light. So the Star-Spangled Banner means a star-covered flag and it’s a phrase used to describe the official flag of the United States, because the blue part, in the top left corner, has 50, now, stars.

The Star-Spangled Banner was made the United States’ official national anthem in 1931, but the song was written and became popular much, much earlier. Today it is sung at official government events and, more commonly, before a sporting event. Even at high school baseball games, someone sings the national



anthem or at least they play a recording of it before the first ball is thrown. In fact, it's sort of a joke in that the national anthem is always played at the beginning of a baseball game as well as other sporting events, but especially baseball, and right after the anthem is sung everyone claps and says, "Play ball!" which is what the referee or umpire (one of the judges for the game) says to get the game started.

The "lyrics" or words for the song are from a poem written by a man named Francis Scott Key in 1814. Key saw a fort (or a fortress) being attacked by British ships during what we call here in the U.S. the War of 1812. This was in 1814, two years later. The "melody," or the song's music was actually taken from a British drinking song, a song that people (usually men) sing when they, well, drink a little too much. The Star-Spangled Banner is very difficult to sing because it has a wide "range," meaning that some notes are very low and some notes are very high. You can see I'm not very good at it!

I'm not going to sing the song for you, but you can find recordings of it online. Well, actually, I am going to sing the song for you – I know you want me to! I'm going to sing the words, and then we'll talk about what they mean.

O! say can you see by the dawn's early light...

My voice is a little off today; I apologize! It starts by saying, "O! say can you see (in other words, "Hey! can you see"), by the dawn's early light...." The "dawn" is the early part of the morning, when the sun is just beginning to rise. So, can you see with this dawn's light – the "dawn's early light." What are you being asked to see? Well, the next line says:

What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming.

You're asked to see what we so proudly hailed. To "hail" something means to greet something, in this case. The "twilight" is the opposite of the dawn; it's at the end of the day. So the first line is asking if you can still see, with the light of the early morning, the thing that we greeted and saw in the sky yesterday – last night, when there was still some light to see. So, can you still see what we saw last night. It continues:

Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight...

Well, what is it that you are looking at? Well, you are looking at something that has broad stripes and bright stars. The "broad stripes" are the lines – the 13



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lines on the American flag. The “bright stars” are in the top left corner, representing the different states in the United States. Obviously, back in 1814 there were fewer stars. The words “perilous fight” refer to a very difficult fight. In this case, it was a battle between the British and American forces. “Perilous” is something that is dangerous. So, “Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight...” The next line is:

O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming.

“O'er” is an old, poetic way of saying “over” – over the ramparts. A “rampart” is a pile or a small hill of dirt that soldiers build to protect themselves against the people they are fighting against. Remember, we are watching the flag; we are watching the flag gallantly stream over the ramparts. “Gallantly” means bravely, to “stream” means to fly. The flag flies; you can see it in the wind. So, what this is saying here is that we are able to see the flag continuing to fly over the ramparts that the soldiers built. Meaning, of course, that they did not lose, that the soldiers are still fighting, or at least have not lost yet. The next line says:

*And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.*

“And the rockets' red glare...” A “rocket” is something that you use in a battle to shoot at someone else, something like a bomb. The “glare” is the light, so the red light, probably from fire, that comes from shooting these rockets at the other side. “The rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air...” To “burst means to explode, so they are bombs exploding. So while you are looking at this flag, there's all this military action taking place. “Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.” In other words, even though there was all of this fighting, that fighting represents the fact that the American side had not yet lost; they were still fighting.

Francis Scott Key, who wrote the lyrics for this song, was watching a fort – a military installation being attacked at night, and this part of the poem, or lyrics, shows that he knew the U.S. flag was still there because he could see the fire from the rockets and bombs and he knew that the fighting was continuing. If the fighting had stopped, that would mean that one side had won, and if the British won, well, you couldn't see our flag anymore because they would take it down. The last two lines, then, are:

*Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*



Play ball! No, sorry, that's what we say at the baseball game!

Let me explain those last two lines. "Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave..." To "wave" means to fly, to stream. Is, in other words, the flag still flying over – o'er – the land of the free and the home of the brave, or courageous. So in this part, the lyrics are asking whether the flag – the American flag – still flies over the land of free people and the home of brave, or courageous people.

Now that you understand the words, you can understand why this patriotic song was chosen for our national anthem. The word "patriotic" is used to describe something or someone that loves its country very much. Francis Scott Key's lyrics show how much he loved his country and how worried he was about his country during this fighting. But, you'll be happy to know, the United States won that war and the flag continued to wave (or fly). And so...what? What was that? Lucy is – Lucy is asking me to sing the whole song again for you. So, because she's asking, of course I have to say yes. So we'll hear it one more time, and then we'll answer a few of your questions.

*O! say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming.
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming.
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

Our thanks to the U.S. Marine Corps Band for providing the music. And now, your questions.

I spent so much time singing, I didn't leave us very much time for questions, but we'll take a few here.

Harald (Harald) in Austria wants to know how we use the words "just," "only," and "mere."

"Just," "only," and "mere" can all be used when we want to express something that is not more than a certain amount, but each word is slightly different in how we use it. "Just" is usually when we are making a positive statement. For example: "These jeans cost just 20 dollars." "Only" tends to be more neutral, not



conveying either positive or negative meanings usually. “This website is for members only” – exclusively. “Merely” (merely) can convey or give us the idea that the speaker doesn’t actually approve of something – doesn’t like something. For example: “Her boss treated her like she were merely a child, rather than an adult.” She was just a child – she was only a child. But when you say she was “merely” a child, there’s some sense that the person who is saying this doesn’t really approve of what happened.

However, sometimes these words are used interchangeably, meaning one for the other. It is possible to say, “These jeans only cost 20 dollars.” You could even say, “These jeans cost a mere 20 dollars.” Notice we use “a” in that case, the indefinite article: “a mere 20 dollars.” So, there is some similarity in meaning here, and sometimes you will see different words used in different contexts.

Our next question comes from Gingle (Gingle) in Canada. Gingle wants to know the meaning of the expression “to kick someone’s butt” (butt). This is an expression that means to defeat someone, to fight someone and hurt them. This is a very informal expression. Some people don’t think it’s polite to say that someone “kicked their butt,” or “kicked his butt,” so you should probably only use this when you are talking to someone you really know well. “Butt,” of course, refers to the part of your body that you sit on, when you’re in a chair. There are other words for that part of your body, and those words are sometimes used in this expression as well. You could say, “I’m going to kick his...” and then the word that is spelled A-S-S. We try to keep it clean here on ESL Podcast!

Sometimes people will use the expression “I kicked butt,” meaning I was very successful, I was very able to do something; I won very decisively, very easily. You could say, “Jeff kicked butt on The Star-Spangled Banner.” Well, not really!

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on the English Café.

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