



## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 56

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### TOPICS

Day of the Dead, Desperate Housewives, work vs. job. vs. occupation, older vs. elder

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### GLOSSARY

**saint** – someone who is recognized by others, often a religious organization, as being holy

\* When we visited the churches in London, we saw a lot of statues of famous saints.

**grave** – a hole in the ground where a dead person is buried

\* We haven't been to this cemetery for years, but I think that his grave is over there under the tree.

**shrine** – a place, often a building, that is considered holy

\* When he's feeling troubled, he goes to that shrine on the top of the mountain to think and to pray.

**skull** – the bones of a person's (or animal's) head

\* I was always scared of the fake skull that my science teacher kept on his desk.

**desperate** – having a great need or desire for something; having no hope that a situation will improve

\* We're trying to quit smoking, but I'm feeling desperate right now for a cigarette.

**housewife** – a married woman whose main job is to care for her family and to take care of things related to the house

\* She isn't sure if she wants to quite her job after having children to become a housewife.

**suburbs** – an area, usually with a lot of housing, outside of the city

\* After they moved to the suburbs, they bought a more reliable car so they can drive to work in the city.



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**soap opera** – a television series that tells about the daily life of the same group of people over a long period of time, sometimes years

\* He eats his lunch in the employee lounge everyday at noon so he can watch his favorite soap opera on TV.

**melodramatic** – event or behavior that is more exciting or dramatic than in real life; exaggerated actions intended to make people feel very emotional

\* Don't be so melodramatic! Breaking up with your boyfriend isn't going to be the end of the world.

**Emmy Award** – awards given out each year to the best television show or actor or actress in the United States

\* I was so mad when my favorite TV show didn't win any Emmy Awards this year!

**work** – things that need to be done

\* After a tough week in the office, the last thing I want to do is work around the house.

**job** – a position that someone is paid to take or to do

\* The hiring committee loved you. If you want the job, it's yours.

**occupation** – a type of job

\* When we asked him his occupation, he said that he used to be musician but that he's now training to be a podcaster.

**older** – having more years than something, or a higher age than someone else

\* My birthday is this week, but I don't feel another year older.

**elder** – an old and wise person in an organization or community

\* Even though she had some good ideas, the elders in our community thought that she was moving too quickly.



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### WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

#### Murphy's Law

Murphy's Law is a popular funny saying or "adage" that means that if something can go wrong, it will go wrong. People use the saying Murphy's Law usually when something has happened that causes problems or failure. If you are giving an important speech and you arrive at the meeting without your notes, you may say, "It's Murphy's Law!" You mean that since there is a possibility for something bad to happen, it is certain to happen—and it has. People usually use this when they are disappointed or frustrated about the outcome of something.

There are many versions of this adage with the same idea, but a little different focus. Here are a few:

- You will always find something in the last place you look.
- No matter how long or how hard you shop for an item, after you've bought it, it will be on sale somewhere else cheaper.
- The other line always moves faster.
- Never argue with a fool. People might not know the difference.

Nobody really knows why these sayings are called Murphy's Law. Murphy is a fairly common last name in the U.S., but no one is certain which Murphy this law was named after. We do know that it is called Murphy's Law because the saying is in the form of an "axiom," or a scientific statement about something that is accepted as truth. Other scientific statements are also called laws, such as Albert Einstein's Law of Relativity:  $E = mc^2$ .



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café number 56.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 56. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

On today's Café, we're going to be talking about a popular celebration in many parts of the United States, something called Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead. We'll also be talking about one of the most popular television shows in the United States. It's called Desperate Housewives. And as always, we'll answer a few questions. Let's get started.

Remember to visit our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com). You can find information about our podcast and a copy of today's Learning Guide for this episode. It includes all the vocabulary and definitions we talk about, as well as additional vocabulary and definitions. In today's Guide, we talk about a very popular expression in English, Murphy's Law, so be sure to take a look at that

Our first topic today is the Day of the Dead, or Dia de los Muertos. The expression, Dia de los Muertos, is, some of you may know, a Spanish expression and the celebration of the Day of the Dead is something that comes from Latin American, from particularly Mexico. But, because there are so many Mexican-Americans - people who came from Mexico or whose parents or grandparents came from Mexico - now it has become a popular celebration in Mexican-American communities in many large cities, including Los Angeles. So, I thought we would talk a little bit about the Day of the Dead and what it is, for those who don't know.

This, of course, is the week of Halloween. We did talk about Halloween last year on ESL Podcast number 73. So, if you're interested in learning more about the American custom of Halloween, which is, of course, the most popular celebration at this time of the year, then go to ESL Podcast number 73 on our website, and you can listen to that.

But, today we're going to talk about something related, in some ways, to Halloween, the Day of the Dead. The Day of the Dead is actually celebrated



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during the days after Halloween. Halloween is a celebration before a what would be called in the Catholic Church a holy day, which is the first of November. The first of November is considered All Saints' Day. A saint, "saint," is someone who's a very holy man or woman who has died, and on the first of November, the Christian churches - some of them, the Catholic Church - celebrates this day in honor of all of the saints. The term Halloween comes from an old expression, All Hallows Eve. Hallows is just another word for holy here, or we may translate it as All Saints' Day.

The day after All Saints' Day is called All Souls' Day in English. All Souls', "Souls," is a day when you pray for people who have died, but are not yet in heaven, at least that is the tradition in the Catholic Church. And, the Day of the Dead is sort of the Mexican version, the Mexican equivalent of All Souls' Day, although it is sometimes celebrated on both of the first and the second of November, and it's a time to celebrate the lives of those who have died, your friends or family members, and also to remember them.

One of the customs, one of the traditions of Dia de los Muertos - Day of the Dead - is to go to the place where the person is buried, to go to their grave, "grave," a grave is the place where someone is buried, and you bring gifts for the dead person. This is connected to a very popular custom in many different cultures, including ancient cultures, where you would bring gifts for the dead: food and other things that you think the dead may need on their...on their road after they have died. And, Dia de los Muertos does include this custom of bringing toys and food, sometimes pictures of the person who died. You can go to a grave to do that, where the person is buried, but it's also popular in some houses to have what we would call a little shrine. A shrine, "shrine," is a place where you honor someone. It's usually something associated with a holy place. And, many Mexican and Mexican-American families have small shrines to the people who have died, so they remember them by putting food, by putting other things there.

Day of the Dead is, in some ways, a happy occasion. It's a way of, you might say, making what would be a very sad occasion - death - somewhat happier. For example, it's common to write poems about the person who has died. These are sometimes called calaveras. Calavera is a word that means skull. Your skull, "skull," are the bones in your head after you have died, so you don't have your eyes or your teeth or your skin, it's just the bones. We call that - the head, with the bones only - we call that the skull. Your skull is still there even before you



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die, of course. You have those bones there. And, someone may say that they hit themselves in the skull. They hit the bones in the top of their head.

This custom of Day of the Dead has become more popular in cities such as Los Angeles, and in many other cities in the United States. Some families celebrate both Halloween and the Day of the Dead.

Our second topic today is something very different. It's the most, or one of the most popular television programs in the United States. It's called Desperate Housewives. To be desperate, "desperate" means that you have lost hope to improve a situation. You're in a very bad situation and you don't know what to do, and you are feeling very helpless, like you can't help yourself. This is someone who would be desperate. It often means that you do things you might not otherwise do because it is such a difficult situation. In fact, there's an expression, "Desperate times call for desperate measures." Desperate times - difficult times, a difficult period - calls for, or requires, desperate measures. Measure, here, "measure," just means actions or things that you do. So, when you're in a desperate situation, you sometimes have to do things that you would not normally do.

Well, the title of this show is called Desperate Housewives. A housewife - singular - "housewife," all one word, is a woman who normally stays at home during the day to take care of the house, to take care of, often, the children. The particular show here, Desperate Housewives, is a show about four women who live in what we would call the suburbs, or suburbia. The suburbs, "suburbs," are the areas around a big city. And traditionally, in the United States, the areas around the big city are often the most expensive places to live, the richest places to live. We sometimes call that area the suburbs or simply suburbia.

Well, these four women live in suburbia, and the show is about their lives. It's really what we would call a soap opera. A soap, "soap," opera, "opera." Now, opera is, you may know, when you have singing to classical music. Usually it's a type of play that you sing. Mozart and Verdi and Wagner are examples of classical music composers that wrote operas. But a soap opera is nothing like that. A soap opera is a television program that is very dramatic. We might even say it's melodramatic, "melodramatic." To be melodramatic means that it's serious - it's a drama, but things are somewhat exaggerated. So, someone wouldn't just say, "I love you," they would say, "I love you Maria. I want to live



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with you the rest of my life,” so they're very melodramatic. It's exaggerated; it's too much, in some ways, too much emotion.

The reason they are called soap operas is, we think, because some of the original shows of this type - some of the original dramas on American television, and on radio back in the 1930s and 40s - had commercials from soap companies. The idea was that women would like to watch these programs - these soap operas - and so the companies that would be selling things to housewives, such as soap companies to clean the house, would advertise, would have commercials on these programs.

The show, Desperate Housewives, is partly a soap opera and it's also part mystery. There are people who die on the program, and you don't know who die, or rather you don't know who killed them, so there's something of a mystery. And, all of the people, all of the women on the show have done something wrong. But, the idea is that they live in this beautiful place, they live in suburbia and you think that everything is great, everything is wonderful, but in fact, the truth is that there are all these terrible things going on. Many of the things that happen on the show get talked about, and this is one of the shows that people talk about at work during their break, during their lunch, on the Internet.

It's a very popular show. In fact, some of the actresses from the show have been nominated for what we call the Emmy, “Emmy.” An Emmy is an award that is given to the best actors, actresses and television programs in the United States. It's similar to the Oscars. The Oscars, “Oscars,” are given to the best movie actors, actresses and so forth.

So, you may have a chance to see this program, in fact, I know that it has been translated to other languages, and it may even be available in your country. I watched the first couple of episodes when it started a few years ago, and I don't really like soap operas very much, so I stopped watching it. I think my father watches it every week, however.

Now let's answer a few questions. Our questions today come from Goran, “Goran.” Goran is a doctor in Iraq. His first question has to do with the words work, job and occupation. All three of these words can mean something similar, but there are differences among them. Let's start with the word work.



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Work is normally a noun we use to describe the things that you have to do - the actions that you have to do. You may say to someone, “I have a lot of work,” “I have too much work.” This is what I say to my boss. I say, “Boss, I have too much work,” and she says, “That's too bad. Get back to work!” There, the expression get back to work means continue working, and that is the use of work as a verb. Someone may say, “I have to work,” again, that has to do the verb. Or, you can say, “I have work to do.” There, work is a noun. So, work are the things that you are required to do. It may be something that you are being paid to do. Someone is giving you money. Or, it may be something that you are doing for free. No one is giving you money. You can say, “I have work to do in my house,” “I have to paint the garage,” “I have to fix something that has broken,” that's work in your house. You can also have work where you are getting paid to do something.

We sometimes use work as a noun to mean the place where you work. You may say, “I have to go to work,” could mean I have to go to the place where I work - the company, the building. Someone may say, “I'm at work,” meaning I'm at the place where I work. So, work can mean the place that you do these things. Usually, when someone says, “I'm at work,” they mean they're being paid to be there. They're at somewhere where they are getting money. We also use that word, work, in a more general sense, such as schoolwork. It just means the things that you have to do.

A job, “job,” is usually something that someone pays you to do. It's a position in a company or an organization, and they give you money. So, when you say, “I have a job,” that means that you have a position. You work for some company or in some organization that gives you money. You can also use this word, job, to mean the tasks or the things that you have to do, and here it's similar to one of the uses of the word work. Someone may say to you, “What is your job?” - what do you do at your job? And you may say, “Well, I make podcasts,” for example; that may be my job. So, a job is a position, usually that you get money for.

An occupation is a general term that is related to job. It's the type or the kind of job that you have. For example, someone is a doctor; that is their occupation. You could be a doctor or a lawyer or a podcaster. Those are possible occupations, except that doctors and lawyers make a lot more money than podcasters. Believe me!





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The occupation, then, is the general term for the kind of job or the type of job you have. So, you might say, "I'm a doctor. I have a job at the central hospital. My work is to help sick people." Occupation is the general term, job is the specific position that you have and work is the thing or the things that you do on your job. So, thank you Goran, for that interesting question.

Sergie, "Sergie," originally from Russia, now living in Boston, in the United States, wants to know the difference between the word older, "older" and elder, "elder."

As an adjective both of these words mean the same, in most situations. They mean someone who has more years, has a higher age than someone else. So, for example, I am 25 - for example - and I have a brother who's 35, I would say that my brother is older than me. He is elder than me. However, the word older is much, much more common as an adjective. You don't hear the word elder as an adjective very often.

The word elder is more commonly used as a noun to mean someone who is older, but also someone who is respected, someone who is, perhaps, wise, who knows a lot of things and who is older than you are. We even refer to the elders of the community, which would mean the people who are oldest and who have the most knowledge, the most wisdom. These would be elders, as a noun. Thank you, Sergie, for that question.

That's all we have time for today. If you have a question, be sure to email us at [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto: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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