



ESL Podcast 99 – Sitcoms and Game Shows

GLOSSARY

to kick back – to sit down in a comfortable way; to get calm, comfortable, or relaxed, usually after doing hard work

* After having a bad day, Eloy went home and kicked back on the couch and watched TV.

to flip on – to turn on something that uses electricity or another source of power; to turn on something that was stopped or off, like a television

* Katherine flips on the coffeemaker as soon as she gets up in the morning.

primetime – the time of night when most viewers watch television and when the most popular shows are on; the shows that come on during the time of night when the largest number of people watch

* The new primetime show came on at 9:00 p.m. and was watched by 10 million people.

coasts – the east and west coasts of the United States; the states that are on the eastern and western parts of the United States, next to the oceans

* Lorenzo loved the ocean and wanted to move to one of the coasts so that he could see the ocean more often.

rerun – a show that has been shown in the past and is being shown again

* If you watch television over the summer months, you'll be watching a lot of reruns.

syndication – a state or condition where television shows can be played on multiple stations or channels after its first showing, instead of being limited to one station or channel

* The program was in syndication, so even though it originally shown on channel 3, it now shown on channel 10.

quiz show – a television show or program where people are asked questions and win money or other prizes if they answer those questions correctly

* Tawanda enjoyed watching quiz shows because she liked to learn about different topics and enjoyed guessing the answers.

so much for – that ends it; a phrase used to show that a topic, goal, or idea could not be finished with success or finished the way one wanted

* When Joey broke up with his girlfriend, he said, "So much for that relationship. I wanted it to work out, but she did not feel the same way I did."



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national news – information about current events that are happening throughout the country or nation; a television program that gives information about current events happening throughout the country

* The national news talked about a big storm that happened in Florida before talking about political events that happened in California.

local – in one's community or city, or in areas that are nearby

* The local news mentioned that a bear got loose from the zoo.

gossip – rumor; talk or information that may or may not be true

* Carlotta heard some interesting gossip about her manager from some of the other workers, but she didn't know if the information was true.

sitcom – situation comedy; a television program that is meant to be funny and that shows the same group of characters doing ordinary or everyday tasks, usually lasting 30 minutes

* Sitcoms are Russell's favorite type of television show because he likes to laugh.

desperate – strongly wanting something and doing something bad or extreme to get it

* Marian did not want to drive in the rain, but she was desperate to buy more food for her baby at the store.

vowel – the letters A, E, I, O, and U

* There are three vowels in the word "important."



CULTURE NOTE

Typical Television Comedies

In a 2010 book called *What Americans Really Want...Really* by Dr. Frank Luntz, the “author” (writer) discusses what makes a popular television comedy show in the U.S. Here are his four of his “guidelines” (suggestions or rules) on what makes a good sitcom.

1. Hold up a mirror. “To hold up a mirror” means to put a mirror in your hands to see what you look like. This is exactly what Americans like to see in their sitcoms — themselves! Luntz says that people want “shows and characters they can personally relate to,” meaning programs and people that they can feel connected to. This may mean people of the same race or “geography” (location), or perhaps even the kinds of jobs they have.
2. Connect the dots. The expression “to connect the dots” means that you have to see the connection between things that may seem “otherwise” (normally) unrelated. For Americans, apparently they want the television show itself to connect the dots, meaning that they want the relationship between different events to be very obvious.
3. Relationships involving conflict. Nowadays, Americans no longer want sweet, innocent comedy. That is, they don’t necessarily want comedies where everything is nice and everyone gets along with everyone else. Instead, they want “conflict” (disagreement) among the characters. They want what we would call “an edge,” something that is a little “dark” (sad or tragic) but still “lovable” (something you can like or appreciate).
4. Home is where comedy lives. Americans like comedies about people in their homes rather than their office.



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 99: Sitcoms and Game Shows.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 99. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Today's podcast is going to be about televisions shows. We're going to be talking about game shows and comedies on American Television. Let's get started!

[start of story]

When I want to kick back and relax, I usually flip on the TV and see what's on. Primetime begins at 8:00 PM on the coasts in the United States, but there are plenty of reruns and shows in syndication between the time I get home from work at five and eight o'clock. I like to watch quiz shows like Jeopardy or Who Wants to be a Millionaire? I actually tried out once to be on Jeopardy, thinking I could be the next Ken Jennings! But I didn't pass the test. So much for trivia.

The national news is on at 6:30 in L.A., and there is lots of local news before and after that. Between six and seven there are Hollywood gossip shows like Access Hollywood and Entertainment Tonight, as well as some sitcoms. One of my favorites is Seinfeld, the ultimate comedy program about nothing. Of course, there are some old favorites, too, such as MASH and Friends. When I'm feeling really bored or really desperate, I'll turn on Wheel of Fortune and watch somebody buy a vowel.

[end of story]

We are talking about popular American television in this podcast and I began the story by saying that, "When I want to kick back and relax, I usually flip on the TV and see what's on." Couple of expressions there – "to kick back," two words – "to kick back" means, really, the same as relax, just sit down, not to do anything very difficult. "To flip on" (flip) (on) – "to flip on the TV" means simply to turn it on, two separate words "flip on," and "to see what's on" means simply to see what programs are currently showing on television. Someone might ask, "What's on TV tonight?" – meaning what programs are showing tonight.



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I said that, “Primetime begins at 8:00 PM on the coasts in the United States.” “Primetime” (primetime) is the time when the new shows, the most current programs, comedies, and dramas, are on. “Primetime” in the United States is usually three hours long every night and that’s where the most important or most popular television programs are shown. “On the coasts,” that is, on the west coast of the United States, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego etc., and on the “East coast” of the United States, New York, Washington, Boston, Atlanta, the primetime or most important shows are on between 8:00 PM and 11:00 PM. In the middle of the United States, in the central part of the United States, primetime is usually on at 7:00 PM – from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM, but here in Los Angeles, it begins at 8 o’clock. And I said that even before that, there are plenty of “reruns and shows in syndication.” A “rerun,” all one word, (rerun) is a program – a television program that has been on before but now it’s being shown again. Sometimes it could be three, four, or even five years old but they’re still showing those same programs. “To rerun” means, of course, to run it again or to show it again. When we say a show is in “syndication,” we mean that this is a program -- a television program that individual television stations across the country have bought, have purchased in order to show on their station. The opposite of “syndication” or “syndicated programs” would be “network programs,” and “network” (network) – “network programs” are one of the programs that come from the five major companies – five major networks in the United States.

I said I liked to watch “quiz shows.” A “quiz (quiz) show” is a show where they ask questions about some general knowledge topic, history or politics, and people try to answer the fastest and the get points or money if they answer the questions correctly. Two of the most popular that have been around for many years – one is called “Jeopardy.” “Jeopardy” has been around for 20, 25 years, perhaps more, and it’s a daily program, 30 minutes, where host of the program – Alex Trebek is his name – he asks questions for – there are three different people. Now, the interesting thing about jeopardy is that he doesn’t actually ask a question, he gives an answer and then you, as the person playing the game, have to ask a question so, for example the answer he will show you is “Sacramento” and the question would be, “What is the capital of California?”

“Who Wants to be a Millionaire” is more traditional – a traditional game show where one person asks a question and there’s only one person that -- who is playing the game. They’re not competing against or playing against anyone else and each question gets more and more difficult until the most difficult questions, if they get them right – all the other ones right, is worth a million dollars. Very few people a million dollars on “Who wants to be a Millionaire.”



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I mentioned that I “tried out” to be on Jeopardy. “To try out,” two words (try out) – “to try out” means that I wanted to be on the program and so I went and I took a test to see if I could be on the program. “To try out” as a verb, in general, means whenever you want to be part of – usually a team, sometimes it may be a play, for example, and I’m trying out for the part of Hamlet, Shakespeare’s Hamlet – means I go to the theater and I do some acting and see if they’ll select me to be the person who plays Hamlet. Well, you can try out for a sports team, you can try out for a play. I tried out for the game show, the quiz show, “Jeopardy,” thinking I could be “the next Ken Jennings.” “Ken Jennings” is a person who won, I think, 2.5 million dollars on the game show “Jeopardy.” He was on for weeks and weeks.

Well, I didn’t pass the test and I said, “So much for trivia.” The expression, “So much for,” means that we’ve given up on it, we’ve no longer have any hope for it. You may hear someone say, “Well, I went to the store and they didn’t have what I wanted. So much for that,” meaning I’ve given up. I don’t want to do that again. “So much for trivia.” “Trivia” (trivia) – “trivia” is small facts, little facts, not very important, knowing the capitals of all the 50 states in the United States would be “trivia.” I said that the national news comes on at 6:30 here in Los Angeles and each of the major networks – well, at least three of the five major networks have a national news show that is 30 minutes long every night. There’s also, of course, local news programs, “local news” here in Los Angeles and in most cities in the United States.

Between 6 and 7 at night here in Los Angeles, there are Hollywood gossip shows on. “To gossip” (gossip) means to talk about other people, usually something about their private life, and Hollywood gossip shows, of course, would talk about famous stars, famous movie stars, and television stars. The two shows that are most popular that have been around for many years on American television are “Access Hollywood” and “Entertainment Tonight.” There are also some “sitcoms” on during the 7 to 8 o’clock hour. A “sitcom” (sitcom) stands for “situation comedy” and it’s a comedy show that has some sort of story. Usually we’re following a group of people, for example, the famous sitcom from the 1990’s was “Friends” and “Friends” was about 6 young people living in New York City and that was a comedy show. That was a sitcom. One of the most famous sitcoms from the 1990’s that is very popular still in the United States is called “Seinfeld,” and Seinfeld was the name of the star of the show and it was a show about four people – single people living also in New York – New York City, and the famous joke on the show was that it was “a show about nothing,” meaning there wasn’t any strong theme of the show. It was just about the lives of these four people, and it was a very popular, very funny comedy show.



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The other comedy shows that are popular or have been popular include “Friends,” which is also in other countries, in other languages. It’s been translated. You might have seen “Friends” in your own country. And the one that was very popular in the 1980’s is called “MASH” (mash). “MASH” was a show about doctors during the Korean War. It’s kind of a strange situation to have a comedy about but it was a very, very popular show in the 1970’s and 80’s, but people still watch the show in “reruns,” meaning many television stations still show these programs like “Seinfeld,” “Friends,” and “MASH” even though they are no longer making new shows or new episodes. I said when I feel really bored or really “desperate” – “to be desperate” means that you’ve done everything else you can do and you have no other choices, no other options. When you’re desperate – when I’m desperate I turn on “Wheel of Fortune.” “Wheel of Fortune” is another quiz show. It’s a game show where they spin a big wheel and the wheel has different amounts of money on it and the game is to guess a bunch of words, usually an expression or a phrase, but they only give you one letter at a time and you have to guess what the word is. I don’t really like it very much but it has been popular for 15, 20 years in the United States. One of the things they do on the show is you can guess any sort of consonant but if you want a vowel, you have to take some of the money you have won and “buy a vowel.” So, I say at the end of the story, “I watch somebody buy a vowel” because that’s something that’s always happening on the show. Someone will buy an “A,” an “E,” an “I,” an “O,” or a “U” so they can help them guess what the word is. I’m very bad at that sort of game which is probably why I don’t like it.

Now let’s listen to the story this time at native rate of speech.

[start of story]

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[end of story]

From Los Angeles, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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