

Lesson 25: An Inspiring Teacher

High-school students Nate and Ralph are talking about Mr. Smith, their favorite teacher. Listen to their conversation and answer these comprehension questions:

Listening Comprehension

- 1. Which subject does Mr. Smith teach?**
 - a. biology
 - b. chemistry
 - c. psychology
- 2. Nate only passed the final because Mr. Smith...**
 - a. let him have extra time to finish
 - b. tutored him before the exam
 - c. was generous in his grading
- 3. Ralph says that Mr. Smith's classes are...**
 - a. challenging
 - b. easy
 - c. fun
- 4. Mr. Smith has been teaching for...**
 - a. 29 years
 - b. 45 years
 - c. 74 years
- 5. If Nate hadn't passed the test, he would likely have to...**
 - a. go to an inferior college
 - b. join the military
 - c. work for his father
- 6. What does Nate suggest doing for Mr. Smith?**
 - a. buying him a nice gift
 - b. having a party
 - c. writing a letter of appreciation
- 7. Ralph suggests...**
 - a. nominating Mr. Smith for an award
 - b. staying in touch with Mr. Smith
 - c. taking another class with Mr. Smith next year

Conversation Text

Ralph: I thought I was going to **flunk** chemistry for sure.

Nate: Ditto. I just barely **squeaked by** with a 66 on the final. The **saving grace** was that Mr. Smith gave me partial credit for a few of the answers.

Ralph: Mr. Smith is awesome. He really cares about his students. **I can't say the same about** most of our teachers.

Nate: I'm just **thanking my lucky stars** that I had Mr. Smith for chemistry, and not Ms. Johnson. She's a **stickler** for perfection.

Ralph: Or Mr. Potter. He just **drones on** without a break. But Mr. Smith always tries to **spice things up** with a joke or a game during class.

Nate: Let me tell you, when I got my final grades, I **breathed a huge sigh of relief**. If I'd failed that exam, I could have lost my scholarship. But I didn't, thanks to Mr. Smith.

Ralph: And I was completely **fed up with** chemistry and ready to drop the class, but he **went out of his way** to help and encourage me.

Vocabulary

flunk = fail (slang)

Ditto = me too (slang)

squeaked by = barely manage to win, pass, or survive something

I can't say the same about = in other cases it's different

thanking my lucky stars = extremely grateful for good fortune

a stickler = someone who insists on something and is not flexible

drones on = speaks continuously in a monotone voice

spice things up = make things more interesting, exciting, or fun

breathed a huge sigh of relief = was extremely relieved in that moment

fed up with = not willing to endure any longer

Nate: Did you know that he's seventy-four years old?

Ralph: No way! Mr. Smith can't be that old.

Nate: He told me he started teaching when he was 29, and he's been doing it for 45 years – so, **do the math**. Just think how many students he's helped over the years. How many lives he's changed.

Ralph: Yours, for one. If you'd lost your scholarship, you'd probably end up working in your dad's furniture factory.

Nate: That's a **dead-end job**. I don't even wanna think about it!

Ralph: And if I'd failed, I would've **gotten an earful from my mom**. Plus we'd both have to **make up the credit** in summer school.

Nate: Hey... why don't we do something nice for Mr. Smith? You know, to **give him props** for being such a great teacher.

Ralph: What do you have in mind?

Nate: Well, we can get the **gang** together and throw a surprise party. We'll sneak into school early Friday morning and set it up in the classroom.

Ralph: Sounds cool. We can also invite the other teachers. I'm sure they all **have a soft spot for** Mr. Smith; he's been at this school practically forever.

Vocabulary

went out of his way = made a special effort beyond normal responsibility

do the math = figure out the answer by yourself

dead-end job = a job with no possibility of advancement

gotten an earful from my mom = have to listen to a lot of criticism or lecturing

make up the credit = compensate for the academic course needed

give him props = express respect and recognition (informal)

gang = a group of friends (informal)

have a soft spot for = have a bit of special affection for

Nate: I can't believe our graduation is **just around the corner**. Soon Mr. Smith and everyone else in this place will be a distant memory.

Ralph: I'll really miss walking into his classroom and listening to him tell his **corny** jokes.

Nate: With that **goofy** bowtie he always wears. Aw man, now I've **got a lump in my throat**.

Ralph: I wonder if Mr. Smith **keeps tabs on** his old students? You know, through Facebook or something. We'll have to look him up.

Nate: Yeah. Come on, let's go plan that party.

Vocabulary

just around the corner =
very soon in the future

corny = ridiculous, not
very sophisticated

goofy = silly

got a lump in my throat
= feeling like your throat
is tight, as if you were
going to cry, due to
strong emotion

keeps tabs on = observe
over time

Vocabulary Quiz

Complete each sentence with a word from the box. Three words are not used.

breathed a sigh of relief

can't say the same

drone on

fed up with

give her props

goofy

got an earful from

has a soft spot for

just around the corner

keep tabs on

saving grace

spice things up

squeaked by

thanked my lucky stars

went out of her way

1. Glad to hear you got a ticket! I _____ - they were all sold out by the time I tried to buy one.
2. I thought I'd left my front door unlocked; I _____ when I got home and found that I hadn't.
3. We're completely _____ the terrible customer service from our internet provider, so we're going to switch.
4. Karen has really improved things in this department. I'd like to _____ for all the great work she's done.
5. My friend _____ his wife when she found flirty texts from another woman on his phone.
6. The librarian _____ to help me find every single book I needed for my research.
7. I'm involved in so many projects that I need an assistant just to help me _____ everything.
8. There's no way I'm wearing that _____ giant green hat.
9. My editor says the middle part of the book is kind of boring; she wants me to add more action to _____.
10. When I got a flat tire in the middle of the night, I _____ that my dad had taught me how to change a tire.
11. Your 30th wedding anniversary is _____! Do you have any special plans?
12. The whole team played terribly. Their _____ was that the goalkeeper managed to keep the ball out of the net.

Speaking Task

Talk about someone who has inspired you and had a major influence on your life. It can be someone who you know personally, or someone who you don't know but you look up to (admire). Record your answer at www.speakpipe.com/espressoenglish or send the MP3 to homework@espressoenglish.net for feedback!

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. b
2. c
3. c
4. b
5. c
6. b
7. b

Vocabulary Quiz

1. can't say the same
2. breathed a sigh of relief
3. fed up with
4. give her props
5. got an earful from
6. went out of her way
7. keep tabs on
8. goofy
9. spice things up
10. thanked my lucky stars
11. just around the corner
12. saving grace