



ESL Podcast 494 – Types of Story Endings

GLOSSARY

to head toward – to advance or progress toward something; to go in a particular direction

* The cars driving on this road usually slow down as they head toward the dangerous turns.

tragic – related to a book, story, or song that has a very sad and unhappy ending, often where people die

* Libby cried when she read the book's tragic ending.

twist – an unexpected change; something that happens suddenly and that changes the direction of a story

* The book is full of many interesting twists, so the ending was a big surprise.

satisfying – something that makes one feel good because it fulfills one's expectations; something that leaves one feeling full or complete

* On a cold winter day, beef stew is a satisfying meal.

sappy – too emotional; so emotional that something seems silly

* Becca loves watching sappy romances, but her husband prefers action films.

disaster movie – a movie about big natural disasters (earthquakes, volcanoes, etc.) or the end of the world

* Last week, I watched a disaster movie about a horrible disease, and now I can't stop thinking about it every time I hear someone cough!

catastrophic – disastrous; very bad, with a lot of suffering and death; terrible

* The civil war has had catastrophic consequences for the people who live in that country.

realistic – showing the world as it really is, without imagination; showing something how it actually is instead of how one would like it to be

* He wants to be a millionaire, but that's not very realistic, considering how quickly he spends money.

happily ever after – the way that most children's stories end, with everyone feeling happy and without any problems

* The prince saved the princess from the evil dragon, and they all lived happily ever after.



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series finale – the last show in a series (a group of shows with the same characters, where each show is another part of a long story)

* Did you see the series finale of Seinfeld, where all the characters ended up in jail?

cliffhanger – a chapter, show, or movie that seems to be incomplete and leaves people wondering what will happen next

* This week's show ended with a real cliffhanger. I can't wait to see the next episode!

resolved – complete; finished; decided

* Can you believe that their disagreement still hasn't been resolved? It looks like they'll continue arguing forever.

to leave (someone) hanging – to do or say something that makes other people want to have more information or know what will happen next

* Aren't you going to tell us about your date with Tina's brother? Please don't leave us hanging! We want to hear all about it.

to stay true to (something) – to remain consistent with something; to not change one's behavior or actions; to do what one has always done

* Gavin stayed true to his beliefs and refused to drink alcohol even though all his friends were doing it.

spirit – the group of ideas, opinions, actions, and beliefs that characterize a person or thing

* Even though the economy isn't doing well, the spirit of the company hasn't changed.

dark – dealing with negative, evil, secretive, or mysterious things

* He has a dark sense of humor that many people don't understand.

sequel – a show or movie that is a continuation of another show or movie; part two

* How many sequels are there to the movie Rocky?

either way – a phrase used to refer to two options at once, where only one of them will happen

* We can go to a restaurant or eat something at home. Either way, it will be nice to have dinner with you.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What would you expect from something that ends with a cliffhanger?
 - a) An ending that is very satisfying.
 - b) An ending where everyone lives happily ever after.
 - c) An ending that leaves many things unresolved.
2. What does Hamid mean when he says, “there was a twist near the end”?
 - a) Everyone started dancing.
 - b) One of the pages was missing.
 - c) Everything changed unexpectedly.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

twist

The word “twist,” in this podcast, means an unexpected change: “We all expected him to propose to Steph, so it was a strange twist when he proposed to Linda instead.” The phrase “a twist of fate” is often used to talk about things that happen in life through destiny, or something that is meant to happen: “He always says that missing the plane was a twist of fate, because that’s how he met his future wife.” The phrase “a twist of [fruit]” refers to small piece of lemon, lime, or orange that is put in a drink to flavor it: “I’d like a glass of iced tea with a twist of lemon, please.” In the 1960s, “the twist” was a popular dance where one rotated one’s body from side to side: “Do you know how to dance the twist?”

dark

In this podcast, the word “dark” is used to talk about negative, evil, secretive, or mysterious things: “The wars were a dark period in the nation’s history.” The word “dark” is normally used to describe a situation with little light: “How can you go running when it’s still dark outside?” The word “dark” can also describe something that is almost black: “Which shirt do you like better: the red one or the dark blue one?” Or, “They painted their bedroom walls a very dark color.” A person with “dark” hair or eyes has brown or black hair or eyes: “They thought their baby would have dark eyes, but they were actually blue when he was born.” Finally, the word “dark” can refer to sad or angry feelings or thoughts: “Whenever she has that angry expression on her face, I know she’s having dark thoughts.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Many Hollywood movies are “predictable” (easy to know what is going to happen), but that is part of the reason why they are so enjoyable for many people. In particular, there are two “typical” (very common) Hollywood endings.

Many romantic comedies have a “guy-gets-girl” ending. The “guy” (a young, single man) and a “girl” (a young, single woman) meet in some way and go through many changes in their relationship. At some point during the movie, it seems like they will never “be together” (spend the rest of their lives together), often because one of them makes a big mistake or because they fight all the time. But in the end, the guy almost always “gets the girl,” meaning that they realize that they love each other and become boyfriend and girlfriend, or husband and wife.

In another typical Hollywood ending, “the good guy triumphs over the bad guy.” The “good guy” is the main character, and the one whom viewers want to see succeed. The “bad guy” is the “villain,” or the character who does bad things and creates problems for the good guy. Many Hollywood movies create “tension” (suspense; a feeling of worry and wanting to know what will happen) by having the good guy and the bad guy fight, often making it look as if the bad guy will win. But he “hardly ever” (almost never) does. In most Hollywood movies, the good guy “triumphs” (wins) over the bad guy.

Sometimes Hollywood movies combine these two “themes” (main ideas): first the good guy triumphs over the bad guy and then the good guy gets the girl. And everyone lives happily ever after

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 494: Types of Story Endings.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 494. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Go to our website at eslpod.com to download a Learning Guide for this episode. The Learning Guide will help you improve your English even faster by giving you all of the vocabulary words and definitions, sample sentences with each of the main vocabulary words we discuss on this episode. You'll also find cultural notes, comprehension questions, additional definitions, and a complete transcript of everything we say on this episode.

We're talking, in this episode, about "story endings," the way that a movie or a play or a novel might end. It's a conversation between Hamid and Rachel, and we will use a lot of vocabulary that you might use to describe the ending of stories. Let's begin.

[start of dialogue]

Hamid: I just finished a really good book. I thought the characters were headed toward a tragic ending, but there was a twist near the end, and everything turned out well. It was so satisfying!

Rachel: It sounds sappy to me.

Hamid: It wasn't sappy at all. It was just a happy ending. I know what you like. You like those disaster movies with catastrophic endings where everyone dies.

Rachel: At least that would be more realistic than everyone living happily ever after. I just saw the series finale of my favorite TV show. You know what they did? They ended the series with a cliffhanger. Nothing was resolved.

Hamid: That's horrible! How could they leave people hanging like that? Weren't you just a little mad?

Rachel: No, I wasn't. The ending stayed true to the spirit of the show. It was a dark show and the ending was equally dark.



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Hamid: Well, I bet they ended the series that way so they could make a movie sequel.

Rachel: Yeah, maybe, but I don't care either way. Life doesn't end neatly and neither should a good story.

Hamid: Remind me never to read any stories you write or any movies you make!

[end of dialogue]

Hamid says, "I just finished a really good book. I thought the characters were headed toward a tragic ending, but there was a twist near the end, and everything turned out well." To "head toward (something)" means to advance or to progress toward something, to go in a particular direction. "He is heading toward the door," he is walking – he is moving in the direction of the door. Hamid said the characters, he thought, were headed toward a tragic ending. Something that is "tragic" is usually very sad, very unhappy. Often a person dies when there is a tragic ending. Hamid said, however, that there was a twist near the end. A "twist," here, means an unexpected change, something that happened and suddenly the story changed completely. "Twist" has several different meanings in English however; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Hamid says the ending "was so satisfying." Something that is "satisfying," here, means something that makes you feel good, because you were expecting something good and then something good happens – it was very satisfying. You can also have a meal that is satisfying – food: "Oh, that was so good, it was very satisfying. It made me full."

Rachel says, "It sounds sappy to me." "Sappy" (sappy) means too emotional, so emotional that it may seem a little silly, a little not serious. Hamid says, "It wasn't sappy at all. It was just a happy ending. I know what you like. You like those disaster movies with catastrophic endings where everyone dies." A "disaster movie" is a movie about some terrible thing that happens, such as an earthquake, a volcano; usually some sort of natural disaster, but it could be something that is made by man – made by humans. It could be the end of the world. There was a famous movie that was called in English Armageddon a few years ago; that's a disaster movie. Titanic is, in some ways, a disaster movie, although it was also, I guess, a romance. I don't know; I'm one of the four people in the world who never saw the movie Titanic. Hamid says that these movies have catastrophic endings. Something that is "catastrophic" is something that is disastrous; it's similar to disaster. The noun would be "catastrophe." Here, the



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adjective is “catastrophic,” very bad, a lot of death, a lot of suffering, something that is terrible.

Hamid is saying that Rachel likes these disaster movies that have terrible endings. Rachel defends herself by saying, “At least that would be more realistic than everyone living happily ever after.” She says: well, that may be true, but at the very least I can say, in my defense, that these movies would be more realistic. “Realistic,” here, means showing the world as it really is, showing something how it actually is rather than how you might like it to be. This is, according to Rachel, more realistic than everyone living happily ever after. This is an expression; “to live happily ever after” means that everything ends up being happy; there are no big problems. Children’s stories – stories for young children usually end “happily ever after,” everything is resolved, everything is happy – because no one likes to read a sad story, except Rachel, I guess!

Well, Rachel says, “I just saw a series finale.” A “series finale” is the last show of a certain television series. Here in the United States, television dramas can last for years and years, sometimes three years, five years, even 20 years. But eventually, these television shows – these series are ended (they’re canceled; they’re stopped) and the last show is always a very important one, and everyone who likes the show will watch this “finale.” The “finale” of something is the last thing, the end of something.

Rachel said she “just saw the series finale of my favorite TV show.” She says, “You know what they did? They ended the series with a cliffhanger. Nothing was resolved.” A “cliffhanger” is a chapter or a television show or a movie that seems incomplete; it leaves people wondering what they will do next, what will happen next. This is very common for movies that you know they want to make additional movies about the same topic, so a movie like the X-Men or some of the Star Trek or Star Wars movies. These often have cliffhanger endings; something happens but it’s not completely resolved, you’re not sure what’s going to happen. This is a very common technique in movies and in television shows and in books. Rachel says in this cliffhanger nothing was resolved. “To resolve” means to complete, to finish, to decide something: “They resolved their argument.” They were fighting, they were discussing something, and then they resolved it; they came to a conclusion.

Well, this cliffhanger had nothing resolved; there were still the problems of the series that were remaining. Hamid says, “That’s horrible! How could they leave people hanging like that?” “To leave (someone) hanging” means to say or do something that makes other people want to have more information, want to know



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what will happen next. A “cliffhanger” leaves people hanging; it leaves them waiting for the next episode or the next movie or the next chapter or book.

Rachel says that she wasn’t mad. She says, “The ending stayed true to the spirit of the show.” “To stay true to (something)” means to be consistent with something, not to change your behavior or your action. To do what one has always done, this is “to be true to (something).” “Spirit,” here, means the opinions, the actions, the beliefs of a person or a thing. When Rachel talks about “the spirit of the show,” she means that the ideas, the opinions of the show, the way the show was developed, the thought behind it. Rachel says that it was a dark show and the ending was equally dark. When we talk about the ending of a story being “dark,” we mean that it is negative; it is mysterious, perhaps even a little evil, a little bad. That’s “dark.”

Hamid says, “Well, I bet they ended the series that way so they could make a movie sequel.” A “sequel” is a continuation of a show or a movie or a book; it’s like a part two or part three of something. Many popular Hollywood movies have sequels; I mentioned before the Star Wars movies, there were many different sequels. There’s also something now called a “prequel,” which is a movie that takes place before the time of the original movie. This has also become very popular; Star Trek and X-Men both have had prequels recently.

Rachel says, “Well, maybe, but I don’t care either way,” meaning I don’t care what happens. “Either way” is a phrase used to refer to two options at once, but only one of them will happen. Somebody says, “We could go to a movies or we could go to the beach,” and you say, “Well, I don’t care either way,” either option – either choice is okay for me.

Rachel explains that life doesn’t end neatly and neither should a good story. “Neatly,” here, means where everything is taken care of, everything is clean and resolved. Hamid says, “Remind me never to read any stories you write or any movies you make!” Hamid doesn’t like the way that Rachel likes her story endings; he wants to have happy endings that are resolved.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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Hamid: Remind me never to read any stories you write or any movies you make!

[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by someone whose stories are never sappy or tragic, but they often have a twist, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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