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## ENGLISH CAFÉ – 252

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### TOPICS

Famous Authors: Raymond Chandler; the Pony Express; to be involved in versus to be involved with; to make sense; hard on its heels

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### GLOSSARY

**genre** – a category of movies, books, music, and more; a style of art

\* You'll find a CD you'll like in our store, no matter which genre of music you prefer.

**free time** – the time away from work when one can do whatever one wants, usually doing activities that one enjoys doing

\* In his free time, Christoph likes to build furniture with his own hands.

**hobby** – activity that one enjoys doing, usually in one's leisure time

\* Kayla's hobbies are gardening and watching foreign films.

**to make ends meet** – to make just enough money to pay for one's basic bills, without having much or any money left over

\* With two young children, Bella is working two jobs to make ends meet.

**screenwriter** – a person who writes scripts for movies; a person who writes the written plan and dialogue for movies

\* As an actor, do you try to memorize every word that a screenwriter writes, or do you say more than what is written on the page?

**unsentimental** – not expressing emotions and feelings; not feeling sadness or tenderness; not having strong feelings about the past

\* This TV show is an honest and unsentimental look at how people survived during the long and difficult war.

**cynical** – distrustful; believing that people are basically selfish and care most about their own interests

\* I'm cynical that this charity really gives 100% of the donations it receives to help the poor.



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**relay** – with one person traveling a certain distance to reach the next person who is waiting, who then travels a distance to the next person, and then the next, until the entire distance has been traveled

\* During the relay race, one of the runners fell and the team came in fifth place.

**wiry** – a person who is very thin or lean, but very powerful

\* Joseph may be thin, but he's wiry and can lift much heavier boxes than you may think.

**orphan** – a child whose parents have died

\* When Jimmy's parents died and he was left an orphan, his aunt and uncle became his new guardians.

**can-do** – a strong feeling of optimism and the belief that anything is possible and one can do anything and everything

\* Starting a new business requires a can-do spirit, and a willingness to work long hours.

**trademark** – a distinctive name, symbol, or logo that a manufacturer or business uses to identify its product

\* We want our trademark to represent low prices and high quality to the consumer.

**to be involved in** – to have a part in something; to participate in something

\* How long has Gian been involved in musical theater?

**to be involved with** – to have to do with someone or something, such as a group or organization; to be connected to something

\* How long has Gian been involved with the L.A. Musical Theater Company?

**to make sense** – to be able to understand something; to be the wise or practical thing to do

\* It makes more sense for me stop at the market on the way home from work, rather than for you to make a special trip.

**hard on (one's/someone's) heels** – being very close behind and coming closer all the time; coming very soon after something else

\* Hurry! The police are hard on our heels!



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **The Pinkerton National Detective Agency**

In books and movies, the private investigator is often “portrayed as” (given the image of) a romantic character, involved in solving mysteries. In real life, private investigators, or P.I.s, are professionals who do a “wide array” (many different kinds) of work.

In the United States, P.I.s often work for attorneys or lawyers in “civil” cases, where people are suing each other, often for money. P.I.s also work for insurance companies to investigate suspicious “claims,” or requests by people who say that they should be paid money because of something bad that happened to them or to their property. P.I.s are also hired by individuals to investigate personal matters, often in “divorce” (ending a marriage) situations, where evidence of “adultery” (having sexual relationships with someone not your husband or wife) or some other “wrongdoing” (illegal or dishonest behavior) would be useful in court.

In the U.S., the first and perhaps most well-known private detective agency was the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, which was “founded” (started) in 1850. Allan Pinkerton, the founder, was famous because he had put a stop to a “plot” (plan) to “assassinate” (kill) Abraham Lincoln, during the period between when Lincoln was elected and when he “took office” (officially began his time as president). Because of this, the Pinkerton Agency was hired to provide “armed” (with weapons) security service for President Lincoln.

The Pinkerton Agency also became a major part of “labor disputes,” or disagreements between company owners and their workers. Large companies hired Pinkerton detectives to “infiltrate” (become secret members of) the unions. “Unions” are organizations created by workers to try to get their bosses to provide better pay and better working conditions. Some of the major companies and big bosses hired the Pinkerton Agency to discover union plans and to try to stop their activities.



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 252.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 252. 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 about famous American writers – authors. We're going to focus today on one of my favorite authors, Raymond Chandler. We're also going to discuss something that most Americans have heard of from American history, and have a very romantic notion about, we might say, and that is the Pony Express, which was an early mail delivery service in the U.S. And, as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

This Café begins with our series on famous American authors. Raymond Chandler is our author today. Chandler had a great deal of influence on American literature – a lot of influence on American literature, particularly in the genre of the private detective story. A “genre” (genre) is a category or a style of art. You could have, for example, comedy or tragedy in literature. Here, we're talking about a particular genre called the mystery – the detective story. A “detective” is someone who tries to find out the truth about something, often to find secrets that other people have. Private detectives are not police officers; they're merely people who usually have a license from the government to be a private detective, it allows them to do certain research and investigation into other people typically. The world of the private detective has become a popular topic for novels, especially in last 100 or so years. Chandler was famous for his detective stories, and we'll talk about some examples of that in a minute.

Raymond Chandler was born in Chicago in 1888. Chicago is in the state of Illinois, which is in the central northern part of the U.S. President Barack Obama lived and worked in Chicago for many years. When Chandler was 12 years old, he went to Great Britain (to England) with his Irish-born mother. The father had



abandoned the family; the father had left the wife and child. And so the family (the mother and the son) moved to England, where Raymond began to attend what in England is called a public school. Here in the United States, we'd call it a private school; that is, it's not a school run by the government. Chandler attended this school beginning at the age of 12. It was a rather well known school; other famous writers had attended it including E.M. Forster and P.G. Wodehouse. There, we presume (we guess) Chandler learned to become a writer.

After he graduated from school he became a British citizen. Remember, he was an American citizen because he was born in Chicago. And, he became a government worker. However, he was dissatisfied, he didn't like working for the government, so he decided, instead, to become a journalist. He became a reporter for two newspapers: the Daily Express, which is a London newspaper, and another newspaper called the Western Gazette. However, he was not a very reporter – he was not a very successful journalist. A “journalist” is someone who write stories for the newspaper or a magazine. Chandler began to write romantic poetry in his “free time,” that is, outside of his job. Writing poetry became a hobby for him. A “hobby” is something we do that we usually don't get paid for, something for fun.

In 1912, Chandler returned to the United States, and in 1913 he settled in Los Angeles, California with his mother. When we say he “settled” here, we mean he moved here and decided to live here. When he got to Los Angeles he worked several different jobs to make ends meet. “To make ends (ends) meet” means to make just enough money to pay for your basic needs, your basic bills, without having very much money left over. Chandler did many different small jobs, we could say, here in Los Angeles. Finally, in 1917 he joined the Canadian military to fight in World War I, and he became a “bookkeeper” an accountant, someone who keeps track of or keeps a record of money for a company. He also fell in love and eventually married a woman who was 18 years older than him, somewhat unusual. Usually here in Hollywood – here in Los Angeles, it's the older man that marries the younger woman, but this was the other way around. However, Chandler had difficulty maintaining a steady job (that is, keeping one good job) in part because he liked to drink too much; he was really an alcoholic. He would also not go to work; he was often absent, and that didn't help him keep his jobs either.

Finally in 1933, Chandler decided that he was going to be a writer and write stories. He started writing short stories; the first one was published in 1933. His



first novel, titled The Big Sleep, was published six years later in 1939, right before the beginning of World War II. Now remember that during the 20s and the 30s they were lots of stories about gangsters – about professional criminals, and many other writers began to write stories about this world. Raymond Chandler decided that he would also write about the criminal world by making his main character a detective – a private detective. His first novel was so successful that he was hired by the movie studios to be a screenwriter. A “screenwriter” is someone who writes the scripts for movies and for television shows. Chandler continued however, in addition to being a screenwriter, to write mysteries for the rest of his life. Several of his books became movies, including The Big Sleep. The most famous novels by Raymond Chandler had the fictional character, the private detective, called Philip Marlowe. Marlowe was a tough, heavy-drinking (like Chandler) detective who worked here in Los Angeles in the 1930s and 40s. In the movie based on the novel The Big Sleep, Philip Marlowe was played by the great American actor Humphrey Bogart.

Philip Marlowe appears in several of the Chandler novels. Another well-known novel by Chandler was called Farewell, My Lovely. In this novel, the detective Marlowe is hired to find a young lady named Velma. The search for her becomes linked or connected to a robbery and Marlowe ends up, or becomes involved in many what we might call near-death situations involving drugs and violence, situations where he almost dies. It’s an excellent novel. I read it just a few months ago actually, and found it to be very entertaining. There is a lot of old vocabulary that we don’t use very much any more in Chandler’s novels, of course, they were written in the 1930s, and 40s, and 50s. Farewell, My Lovely was also made into a movie (In the United States, it was called Murder, My Sweet) in 1944.

Another one of Chandler’s famous novels is called The Long Goodbye. In this novel, Marlowe is again investigating the disappearance of someone – another person. This time it’s the writer – the character named Roger Wade. Now, Wade suffers from alcoholism; again, you notice the common theme of alcohol in Chandler’s writings. The writer is eventually found in a detox facility. A “detox” (detox) facility or place is where people go to – or used to go to try to stop drinking, to cure or at least to treat their alcoholism. Nowadays, these detox (which is short for the detoxification) centers are called rehab centers. Rehab is short for rehabilitation, the idea that they are going to become better again, they’re going to be able to function in life again. There are many of these rehab centers here in Los Angeles, as you can imagine. Actually, Minnesota is also rather famous for also having lots of rehab centers.



Anyway, getting back to the novel The Long Goodbye, Marlowe finds Roger Wade, the writer, in one of these detox facilities. He continues to stay involved, however, with the Wade family, but over time he realizes that they may be involved in the murder of another friend of his, a man by the name of Terry Lennox. I won't tell you how the story ends, but it has a very exciting ending.

Many of Chandler's novels include references to places here in Los Angeles; you can go and visit some of these places. Some of them, however, he invented; they're not real places, some of them are. His novels also contain a lot of references to drug and alcohol addictions, where someone is unable to stop taking drugs or stop drinking and it begins to affect their behavior. Many readers believe that these references to drugs and alcohol represent the real difficulties that Chandler had in his own life. His stories also express a lot of what we might call social criticism, where he's criticizing some the attitudes of American society at that time. Some critics now say that Chandler's novels show that he had a dislike of other groups, including women, blacks, and homosexuals (gays). Other critics, however, say that this was merely part of the culture of the time that Philip Marlowe represented. So, it depends on how you look at the question. There's the additional problem of attributing (that is, saying that something belongs to someone else) the idea of the character – the character's opinions to the actual author. In other words, just because someone writes a book where the characters says a certain thing doesn't mean that the author – the writer actually believes that him or herself.

Chandler was one of the first writers of a new literary genre (that is, style), which became known as "noir" (noir), which comes from the French, meaning black. These are dark movies, movies about crime, about the worst that human beings can do. It's also sometimes called "hardboiled" fiction. When you take an egg and you put it in boiling water for several minutes, the egg it becomes hardboiled; it becomes hard, completely solid. The idea here is that this is a tough kind of film or a tough kind of novel. The word "noir" gets applied to literature, but it can also be used for movies.

There tends to be in these hardboiled crime fiction novels of the sort that Chandler wrote a very unsentimental view of crime, of violence and of sex. When we say something is "unsentimental," we mean it doesn't express feelings or emotions; it's somewhat cold. Hardboiled crime fiction, then, is very tough; the characters – the people in the novels are very tough. This genre also became known as "pulp fiction" because hardboiled crime stories were first published in





magazines known as pulp magazines. “Pulp” (pulp) is a very inexpensive, cheap, thin paper that some magazines used, some still do. Pulp is used in making paper, and the idea of pulp fiction is fiction that was popular, not necessarily good fiction however. You may be familiar with the movie with John Travolta called Pulp Fiction, directed by Quentin Tarantino, from the 1990s. That movie was, in some ways, a reflection of this noir view, this hardboiled view of the world of crime. Other authors that are part of the noir genre would include Carroll John Daly, and perhaps more famously Walter Mosley, who is still around and writing novels also set in (that is, also taking place in) the city of Los Angeles.

I mentioned that the word “noir” can be applied to books and novels; it can also be applied to movies. This is called film noir. “Film noir” are movies that often have what we might call cynical attitudes and sexual motivations. To be “cynical” means to be bitter, to be angry, to be distrustful – you don’t trust anybody else. These films are often characterized by low lighting, they tend to be very dark; they’re usually set in the city – they are “urban,” that is in a big city; and they often have private detectives.

Towards the end of his life Chandler became depressed, especially after his wife died in 1954. He had always had a problem with drinking – with alcoholism, and he began drinking again. He never really recovered. He died in 1959 here in California in a town north of San Diego (about, oh, an hour and a half from Los Angeles driving) called La Jolla; he’s buried there. Although he was a British citizen after he moved to England, he got his American citizenship back a few months before he died. Raymond Chandler, then, one of the more interesting novelists, especially from the city of Los Angeles.

Let’s move on and talk about our second topic, which is the Pony Express.

The Pony Express is known to most Americans; we hear about it in school, but not very many people understand what really it was. The Pony Express was a fast mail delivery service in the United States. It helped people communicate across the continent – across the large country of the United States before telegraphs were invented. The “telegraph” allows you to send electronic communications over a very long distance using wires. The Pony Express, however, was an attempt to use horses to deliver mail back and forth quickly between different parts of the country. Although it is very famous in U.S. history, the Pony Express was actually only in service (meaning it only existed) for a little more than one year, from April 1860 to November 1861, primarily between the





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city of San Francisco, which is located in the northern part of California, and the city of St. Joseph, Missouri, which is located in the center of the country.

The Pony Express used “relays” (relays), which is where you have one rider go a certain distance, and then there’s another rider with his horse that goes the next distance, and so forth. You probably have seen relay races, for example, in the Olympics where you have four people running, one after the other, on the same team.

The goal of the Pony Express was to provide faster mail service. There were about 190 riders, men who rode the horses, who were spaced approximately 10 miles apart. When I say they were “spaced” I mean there was one man each ten miles. That man would then take the mail 10 miles to the next rider, who would take it 10 miles to the next rider, and so forth, hence it was a relay.

The Pony Express was a private company, it was not part of the U.S. government, but they hoped that they would provide good service so that the government would give them work – would give them a contract. It wasn’t cheap to send mail using the Pony Express. It cost about five dollars to send a half an ounce. Compare that now in the United States; it costs, I think, 44 cents to send one ounce. It also took about 10 days typically for your letter to arrive using the Pony Express service. Before the Pony Express, mail that was sent for example from New York to San Francisco was put on a ship that had to go all the way around the tip of South America back up to San Francisco, and that could take up to 30 days. So, 10 days was at least a lot less time.

If you were a rider on the Pony Express you earned 25 dollars a week. The Pony Express company used to have advertisement for riders, and the advertisements said “Wanted (meaning we are looking for): young, skinny, wiry fellows, not over 18. Must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred.” Well, someone who is “wiry” (wiry) is someone who is very skinny, very slim, but also is powerful – is strong. The Pony Express wanted strong, lightweight people, because they would be riding horses, and you wanted someone who didn’t weigh very much so that the horse didn’t get tired more easily. They also said that they wanted fellows. “Fellows” is just an old word for people – for men, for guys. There’s a little joke at the end of their ad when they say that they prefer orphans. An “orphan” is someone – a child whose parents die. They’re saying, in other words, but this is a very dangerous job and that you may lose your life, so it’s best not to have a lot of strong family connections.



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The Pony Express had what we would now call a can-do attitude for many Americans. “Can-do” describes a feeling of optimism, a belief that anything is possible, that you can do anything. Promising to deliver the mail in less than 10 days was a can-do idea; the Pony Express was going to it get done.

What happened to the Pony Express? Well, it wasn’t able to make enough money, and a couple of other events happened that didn’t help it. It wasn’t able to get a government contract, to begin with. Secondly, the United States entered into a civil war right after the service began – the War between the North and the South. Finally, the telegraph (which I mentioned earlier, which is the ability to send electronic messages over long distances using wires) had arrived in the western part of the United States, and was therefore the fastest way to transmit messages – much, much faster than using the Pony Express. So for a variety of reasons, the Pony Express was put out of business (that is, they stopped). However, the idea of the Pony Express continues to live on in the American imagination, this idea that you were able to create a system to get mail from one side of the country to the other in such a fast timeframe.

The term Pony Express is actually trademarked by the United States Postal Service. A “trademark” is when a business registers its official name or some symbol of the company. ESLPod is trademarked in the United States; that prevents other businesses from using our name. I think it is sort of funny that the modern U.S. Post Office has trademarked this name, Pony Express, to use for one of its fast delivery services. It’s often a joke when people say that the letter took so long I thought was coming by Pony Express. In other words, in some ways the expression Pony Express means the opposite of what it meant originally. Now, it is often used to mean slow mail service. And that, of course, describes mail service in many countries, including the U.S.

Now let’s move on and answer some of the questions you have sent us – not by Pony Express, but by email!

Our first question comes from Ryo (Ryo) in Japan. The question has to do with the difference between the expression “to be involved in” and “to be involved with.”

“To be involved in (something)” means to participate in something, to have a part in something. For example: “My brother was involved in a car accident last week.” He wasn’t, actually. But, the idea is that he was part of it, he was there. “To be involved with” usually is when we are talking about a group or an



organization. To be connected with something is another use of that expression. “Julie was involved with the ski club at her school.” Or, you could say, “I don’t like my friend being involved with that group or organization.”

The difference between these two expressions is somewhat small, and many people would use one for the other. The main difference is this: we use “involved in” when we’re talking about having an active part in something, and we use “involved with” when we are talking about a connection between you and some group or two different groups. One additional meaning of “involved with” is when we are talking about two people who may be romantically connected, especially when the two people are not married, who have some kind of relationship, however. “My friend does not want to go on a date with you, he’s involved with Maria.” He is in some sort of romantic with Maria.

Ruslan (Ruslan) in Russia wants to know the meaning of the expression “to make sense.” Well, “make sense” can have a couple of different meanings. First, it can mean to be able to understand something. “This doesn’t make sense to me” means I don’t understand this. “Make sense” is also used to describe something that is wise, something that is smart or practical to do. Usually, we use the expression “it makes sense.” “It makes sense that we first go to the beach, and then we go to dinner.” That’s the logical, we might even say sensible thing to do. So, the expression “they don’t make sense together,” for example two people who are dating perhaps, one is 70 years old and the other is 20 years old – it happens here in Los Angeles all the time. We might say about them “they don’t make sense together,” and we would be using the second definition. It’s not a smart combination; it’s not practical. Or you might say, “Don’t try to make sense out of everything,” meaning don’t try to understand everything, so it’s more of the first meaning, of understanding. Or you might say, “Life doesn’t make sense to me,” which is from a song by the singer Pink. That means that life is difficult for her to understand – probably because her name is Pink, just a guess!

Finally, Vlad (Vlad) in Brazil wants to know the meaning of the expression “to be hard on its heels” (heels). “Someone is hard on his heels,” what does that mean? It means to be very close behind someone, to be coming closer all the time, or to be coming very soon after a given event. So, it can mean physically behind someone: “I was running around the block and my brother was hard on my heels.” He was right behind me. It can also mean, simply, to come after something in terms of time: “The snow fell hard on the heels of the cold temperatures that began last night.” One happened right after the other.



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If you have a question or comment, email us. Our email address is [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com).

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. We're running a little long today, I apologize. Thanks for listening, though. Come back and listen to us next time on the English Café.

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