



TOPICS

Vampires; The Second City (comedy group); to sway versus to persuade versus to convince; get a life!; to ramp up

GLOSSARY

vampire – a person who has died, but still walks around and continues to exist by biting the neck of a living person and drinking that person's blood

* I tried to sleep after watching a vampire movie, but I kept thinking that something was touching my neck!

to suck – to pull something into one's mouth by creating a vacuum (getting rid of the air so that there's lower pressure inside your mouth than outside of it)

* Ginger said that she was six years old before she stopped sucking her thumb.

stake – a long, pointed piece of wood; a piece of wood that is pointed on one end, which is pushed into the ground to support a tree or a part of a fence

* The tomato plant is falling over. Let's put a stake behind it to support it.

genre – a type of art, writing, poetry, film, or music that is all about the same thing; major categories or types of art, literature, film, or music

* What genre of music do you like to listen to while you're relaxing?

trilogy – a group of three related novels, plays, films, or albums

* We rented the McQuillan Trilogy and plan to watch all three films about Jeff McQuillan's life in one afternoon!

to be torn between – to be unable to decide which of two things one wants to have

* I'm torn between these two jackets. Which one do you like better?

to slay – to kill someone in a violent way; to murder someone by using violence

* The hero in this film charges into the room and slays all of the bad guys.

craze – a fad; something that is very popular, but usually only for a short period of time

* Jano loves the reality TV craze because he likes watching how other people live their lives.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 227

to crave – to want something very badly; to feel a great need for something

* Bethany has lived in another country for nearly a year and craves all kinds of food from her childhood that she can't get there.

improv – improvisation; creating and performing something without preparation; making things up while standing on the stage and while the audience is watching

* Are you writing a speech to give when you accept your award, or will it be improv?

to rehearse – to practice before performing something in front of an audience

* Okay, everybody, we need to rehearse this play as many times as possible before our performance next week.

scripted – written words of a play, movie, or television show

* Did you know that nearly everything the television news anchors say during the broadcast is scripted?

to sway – to influence someone to make the decision that one wants them to

* Don't be swayed by the low price. This is not a good, reliable car to buy.

to persuade – to move someone to a particular opinion or course of action

* Do you think you can persuade your boss to give you Friday off from work so we can go out of town this weekend?

to convince – to bring someone to a course of action or opinion through strong argument or proof

* Good luck trying to convince Mom and Dad to let you borrow the car to go to a party!

get a life! – an insult meaning that someone's life activities (such as hobbies, job, social activities) are so boring or meaningless that the person can hardly be said to be living a real life; an insult telling someone to stop what they are doing and/or to go away

* Stop following me around everywhere! Get a life!

to ramp up – to quickly increase the power, speed, or efficiency of something

* Our company is ramping up its advertising to try to attract more customers.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Open Mic

Large cities in the United States tend to attract a lot of performers of every kind, who are trying to “make it big” (become successful and well known). For people who are just “starting out” (beginning their careers), performing at “open mike” shows is one way to get practice and “exposure” (become known by the public).

“Open mic” (also spelled “mike”) is a type of show where the people in the audience may perform on stage. “Mic” or “mike” is short for “microphone,” which is a device that performers use to make their voices, music, or other sounds louder. At a typical open mic, the performers sign up “in advance” (before the show) for a time “slot” (period). Often, signing up is on a “first come, first served” basis, which means that you have to sign up early before all of the slots are taken.

There are several different types of open mics. The most popular are comedy shows and musical performance shows. Less common now are poetry open mics, where people read their own original poetry to the audience.

At open mics, there is usually an MC, which stands for “master of ceremonies.” He or she is a person who “warms up” (gets people interested and excited) the audience and who introduces each performer.

Since the quality of an open mic shows are “unpredictable” (not known beforehand), audience members usually pay nothing or a very small fee to watch the show. Often, the audience members include the performers’ friends and family who come to support them. Still, open mics can be very entertaining and are a great way for an “up and coming” (still trying to become successful) performer to get valuable experience.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 227.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 227. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com. Download this episode's Learning Guide, an 8-to 10-page guide we provide for all of our current episodes that gives you some additional help in improving your English. Also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, which has additional courses in English, and check out our ESL Podcast Blog, where we post, a couple of times a week, some new, interesting information about English.

On this Café, we're going to talk about vampires and some very popular books, movies, and television shows about vampires. We're also going to talk about a comedy group called The Second City. And, as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

This Café begins with a discussion of vampires. A "vampire" (vampire) is a fictional or imaginary – a made up person who dies, and after they die their corpse (corpse) – which is the body of the person after they die, we call it a corpse – the corpse is able to get up and still walk around. Vampires, according to the legends, "survive," or continue to exist by using their long teeth to suck blood out of the neck of a living person, at least according to the European folk tales – the fictional stories that were traditionally told in Europe. "To suck" (suck) here means to pull something into your mouth by creating a vacuum or by getting rid of the air so that there's more pressure in your mouth than outside of it. For example, if you drink through a straw you're sucking the liquid up through the straw. In the same way, according to the stories, a vampire has to suck the blood out of a person's neck after they bite it.

These traditional stories also say that vampires have to stay out of sunlight. In other words, they usually are just walking around at night. The only way to kill a vampire is to put a "stake" (stake), or a long pointed piece of wood, right through their heart. Obviously vampires aren't real, but they are part of the European, and now American imagination.

Historically, many cultures have had fictional stories about vampires, especially in Eastern Europe. In 1897, an Irishman named Bram Stoker wrote a novel



called Dracula, which is about a vampire named Count Dracula, where count is a title – a royal title like lord or lady. The novel became very popular; it's now considered by some people to be a “classic” in English literature, an important piece of writing. Some people say that, not me, but some people!

Dracula “inspired,” or began what we could call a vampire genre, where a “genre” (genre) is a type of art, writing, poetry, or music that has something in common, or are all about the same thing. So genre, for example, could include science fiction. That would include all of the books and movies about people traveling to other planets, or traveling in the future. These would all be part of the science fiction genre. When I talk about Dracula inspiring a vampire genre, I mean that there were many books and television shows and movies made about Dracula after it was published. Dracula is the first, at least in the U.S., in English important or influential vampire story.

Although all books and movies in the vampire genre are about vampires, obviously, there is a lot of variation among them, meaning they are all a little bit different. In some of them, the vampires are evil and must be killed. In other stories, the vampires, or at least some of them, are actually very kind. They don't want to hurt or kill humans, and they don't like the situation they are in. A common theme, or a main idea, in these vampire stories is for a young woman to fall in love with a vampire, and then either the woman become a vampire herself, or she has to learn to live with, or deal with, her feelings – her romantic feelings about this vampire.

The American novelist Anne Rice wrote a series of books called The Vampire Chronicles. A “chronicle” is a story – a long story over many years. The first and most famous of Rice's books was called Interview with the Vampire, written in the 1970s. In that book, a 200-year-old vampire is interviewed by a reporter who becomes interested in the life of vampires, and ultimately asks to become a vampire himself. But the vampire...well, I won't ruin the story for you. If you like vampire stories, you can read the book, or see the movie with Tom Cruise. I believe Tom Cruise is actually a vampire in real life! I'm not sure about that, somebody told me.

Anyway, Ann Rice's books started a very popular series of books in the vampire genre. There's another one called The Vampire Diaries, which was written by an American living here in California; her name is Lisa Jane Smith. It's a series made up of two “trilogies” (trilogies), or groups of three books each. A trilogy is when you have three books about the same story. There's also one additional book in addition to these two trilogies, that would make – what – seven books.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 227

They're all about a popular high school girl, who, of course, falls in love with twin brothers who are both vampires. She couldn't decide which one she was going to fall in love with, so she fell in love with both of them. The brothers, of course, fight for her love, and she is torn between them. "To be torn" (torn) between two things" means you're unable to decide which of the two things you want to have. Some people are torn between their work and their family; they have a hard time deciding how much time they should spend on their job versus how much time they should spend with their family. Of course, they should spend more time with their family! The main character in Smith's Vampire Diaries is torn between the two vampires. Once again, I won't tell you what happens at the end in case you want to read these books yourself. I sure know I don't!

Charlaine Harris is another American author, living in Mississippi, which is in the southeast part of the U.S. She wrote a series of novels called The Southern Vampire Mysteries, and there was a TV series made from these books called True Blood. I think it's still on television; it began in 2008. It shows how vampires and humans are able to "co-exist," or live together, without killing each other – I guess!

Yet another vampire story is Buffy the Vampire Slayer, which was a popular television series between 1997 and 2003. To "slay" (slay) means to kill or to murder someone. In the TV series, there are young women, particularly Buffy, who have the job of fighting against vampires – so the vampires are evil in this story. The young woman named Buffy is a high school student; she tries to have a normal life with her friends, but of course, she has to spend a lot of her time killing vampires – which is probably better than studying in high school, in many cases, I'm not sure!

The most recent craze in the vampire genre is a book and movie called Twilight. A "craze" (craze) is like a fad, it's something that is very popular, usually for a short period of time. Twilight was first a series of four novels written by yet another American author, Stephenie Meyer. And then, they made a movie called Twilight that was released in 2008. There's another movie, I think it's called New Moon, from the second book of the four-books series. Twilight is about a high school girl who falls in love with a vampire, but in this case the vampire is a good vampire. The vampire doesn't want to hurt other people. So he drinks animal blood, even though he craves human blood. "To crave" (crave) means to want to eat or taste something very badly; you really want to taste it. The noun is "craving" (craving). You can say, "I have a craving for apple pie," or "I have a craving for at McDonald's hamburger, I really want one right now." Actually, if



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 227

you eat a McDonald's hamburger you could turn into a vampire, so you have to be careful about that. You'll have to ask...uh...at McDonald's if that's true or not...it could be true! Anyway, Twilight became incredibly popular in the U.S. and around the world. It's been translated into 300,000 languages. Twilight is especially among high school girls. Sometimes they will dress up as the characters when they go see the movie or are waiting to buy the newest book.

Well, I think we've said enough about the vampires. Our second topic is a comedy group called The Second City. The Second City is an improv group. "Improv" is short for "improvisation," which is the ability to invent things – make things up as you are performing. So you don't have a script, you simply stand up and are able to invent things – funny things, jokes and so forth – as you are talking.

The improv group is in Chicago, which is sometimes called the Second City – used to be called that, anyway. It started way back in 1959, and has since had a very important impact on comedy television and comedy movies in the U.S.

As I mentioned, improv means that you don't memorize the things that you're going to say; you don't, that is, "rehearse," or practice them many times. You don't have a script; you just stand up and you start acting.

Good improv comedy requires that the actors and comedians be very creative and able, obviously, to think very quickly. They have to react to what the other actors do, and be very flexible. They may have to change what they thought they were going to do based on what somebody else does, if you have two or more people in the improv scene.

A group of undergraduate students at the University of Chicago started the Second City Theatre. The University of Chicago is one of the better private universities in the United States, not as famous as Harvard and Yale, but still a very good school. Anyway, these students started the theater group, where comedians/actors produced shows that were a combination of improv as well as "scripted scenes," scenes where everything was written out in a script. You can go to Chicago today and see a show at the Second City Theater. You'll see some performances where the actors have studied what they're going to say, and others where they are doing improv.

Second City Theater has grown a lot since it was first opened. There are now Second City Theaters in other cities, including Toronto, Canada and beautiful Los Angeles, California. There's also a Canadian television channel called Second



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 227

City Television, and there are Second City Training Centers in Chicago, Toronto, and Los Angeles, where if you are a comedian or an acting student, you can go and actually study improv. When I was growing up, there was a television show on called Second City TV, where you could see some of these actors in the Second City group performing.

There have been many famous comic actors and comedians that studied through this Second City Training Center. They include Tina Fey and Chris Farley. Tina Fey is a popular female comedian and writer. Chris Farley was a popular comedian, who has since passed away – since died. Mike Meyers was also a Second City graduate. In fact, there have been probably a few dozen famous graduates of the Second City program. Many of them went on to work for another comedy program called Saturday Night Live, which is a popular weekly comedy TV show in the United States.

The Second City and its performers have won many awards for their work. Even if you don't have a chance to see them "live," that is, in-person you can probably find some videos of their performances online.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Sean (Sean) in Taiwan. Sean wants to know the meaning of the words "sway," "persuade," and "convince." All three words have similar meanings.

"To sway" means to influence someone to have a different opinion. Somebody's thinking about buying a new car, and you try to sway their opinion; you try to change their opinion so that they should buy an old car – a used car.

"To persuade" also means to change someone's opinion, someone's view, or what someone is planning on doing. "He persuaded his girlfriend to marry him." He made her change her mind, or made her take a particular position – which she'll probably regret!

"To convince" means to bring someone, through a very strong argument, to a certain opinion or action. It's a little more forceful. Some people use "convince" when they are using an intellectual or rational argument, versus "persuade," which might be more emotional. But that's not necessarily the use that everyone makes of these two words. They usually used as "synonyms," meaning they mean basically the same thing.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 227

Our next question comes from Shrief (Shrief) in Egypt. Shrief wants to know the meaning of the informal expression “get a life!”

“Get a life,” when someone says it to you, is actually an insult; it’s a negative expression. The idea is that your life, maybe your hobbies, your boyfriend, or your wife, your job, your social activities are really boring and meaningless or stupid, and therefore you don’t have a really good life. Or perhaps you haven’t been very successful in your life. A woman says, “I went out on a date with a man yesterday who’s 30 years old, and he has never had a full-time job. He lives with his mother, and spends all of his time watching television. I told him to get a life!” meaning he doesn’t really do much with his life now. Again, it’s an insulting expression.

It became popular in the 1980s and 90s. But although it’s an insult, it’s really a joking way that some people may speak to their friends. It does mean that’s really boring, or I can’t see why you’re interested in that. So you have to be careful when you use this; you would only use it with someone who you knew you were not going to get angry by saying it

Finally, Michal (Michal) in Poland once knew the meaning of the phrasal verb “to ramp (ramp) up.”

“To ramp up” means to quickly increase the power, the speed, or the efficiency of something. “We need to ramp up production,” we need to increase the pace; we need to start making things faster – producing things. Or, “I need to ramp up my studying if I’m going to pass this test.” I need to do more of it; I need to increase the amount. “Airports have ramped up security since September 11th, 2001.” They have increased it, they have made more things, done more things, they’ve work harder at it. All of these are possible meanings.

“To ramp up” in the business world usually means to start producing things faster. If a company sells a product and it becomes popular, more people want to buy it, so the company needs to ramp up its production. It needs to make more of these things.

If you have a question or comment for us, you can email us. Our email is eslpod@eslpod.com. We can’t answer all of your questions, but we’ll do the best we can here on the Café.

From Los Angeles California I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on the English Café.



English as a Second Language Podcast
www.eslpod.com

ENGLISH CAFÉ – 227

ESL Podcast's English Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan and Dr. Lucy Tse, copyright 2010 by the Center for Educational Development.