



TOPICS

Classic comic strips with a political/social commentary bent; child protection laws; uncalled for; state versus status; as though

GLOSSARY

comic strip – a group of drawn pictures inside one or more boxes placed side by side that tell a story, often using words

* Craig laughed out loud as he read his favorite comic strip in the morning newspaper.

bent – a particular interest; focus

* This magazine has a conservative bent about social and political issues.

commentary – talking about and giving one's opinion about things that are happening

* Did you read that economist's commentary about the lawmakers' new plan?

wry – using or expressing an opinion about something that one knows is bad, but that one also thinks is funny at the same time

* Pierre has a wry sense of humor, and I hope he doesn't say anything tonight that'll offend our guests.

editorial pages – the pages of a newspaper or magazine where people are invited to share their opinions, mostly about political and social issues

* These editorial pages are supposed to present opinions on both sides of an issue.

registry – a formal or official list of something

* This registry shows all of the items that were loaded onto the ship before it began its voyage.

sex-offender – a person who has broken the law by sexually abusing another person

* Public schools do background checks on job applicants to prevent hiring sex-offenders.



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parental consent – permission from one's parents

* Do you think teenagers under the age of 16 should be required to get parental consent to get married?

abused – a person or an animal that has been hurt in a serious way, either physically or emotionally

* When the doctor at the animal hospital examined the dog, she could see that it had been abused.

neglected – someone or something that is not being taken care of properly and is in danger of being hurt or damaged

* The house had been neglected for over 30 years and was falling apart.

suspicion – thinking that something might be happening, especially something bad, but one is not certain

* I'm not sure, but I have a suspicion that my boyfriend is planning a surprise birthday party for me.

uncalled for – referring to an action or speech that is not needed; unfair; unwelcome; done without reason

* Your remark about me being lazy is uncalled for. I worked as hard on this assignment as you did!

status – the condition of things at a particular time; the way things are at a specific time

* Can you tell me my father's status? He was taken to the hospital this morning.

state – condition of something; way of being

* Luis was in a state of shock when he found out he had won the lottery.

as though – as if; similar to

* Although Sam had lived in Paris as a child, he looked out of the airplane window as though he was seeing the city for the first time.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

The Twilight Series by Stephenie Meyers

Young adult novels are books written for older children and teenagers. This is a very large “market” (group of people who are likely to buy a product) and every once in a while, a book “comes along” (become available) that becomes a “blockbuster” (very, very popular).

One such book is called Twilight by the author Stephenie Meyers. Twilight is a “romance” (love story) between a human 17-year-old girl and a “vampire” (imaginary creature that drinks people’s blood and kills them). After her mother remarries, the girl, Bella, moves from her mother’s home in Arizona to the small town where her divorced father lives in Washington. She attends high school, and on her first day, she meets the vampire, Edward, who is also a high school student. They have an immediate “attraction” (interest) to each other, although a relationship between them seems impossible. As you can imagine, there are many problems with the situation that this attraction creates and many dangers for the girl Bella. Despite these dangers, their attraction and relationship develops in unexpected and interesting ways.

The popularity of Twilight “gave rise to” (was the reason for) a film of the same name in 2008 that was also very popular, especially with teenage girls. The author also “followed up” (continued) the first book with three “sequels” (books that continue the story): New Moon, Eclipse, and Breaking Dawn. Although the first book was published in 2005, it continues to be on many “bestseller” lists of the most popular books in the country. This series has also won many awards and has been translated into 20 different languages.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 193.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 193. 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 includes the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentence, additional definitions, comprehension questions, cultural notes, and a complete transcript of everything we say on the episode. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, with some additional courses in English, and read our ESL Podcast Blog.

On this Café, we're going to talk about comic strips, some famous comic strips in the United States. "Comic strips" are the part of the newspaper where they have drawings with funny stories, usually. We're also going to talk about some comic strips that are about politics and social issues. After that, we'll talk about laws that protect children in the United States. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

We begin this Café by talking about perhaps one of the more popular parts of a newspaper, called the comic strips. A "comic strip" is a group of pictures, usually three or four, maybe five small pictures in a little box that are side by side (next to each other) that tell a small story, usually using words but not always. American newspapers print comic strips next to each other on a page in a section called "the comics." On Sundays, these sections are usually in color and are often two or three pages long. During the week, Monday through Saturday, they are usually on one single page, in black and white.

You might be familiar with some of the classic or traditionally popular comic strips in the United States. One of the most famous is Peanuts, which is the comic strip created by Charles Schultz. The famous characters from Peanuts include Charlie Brown and his dog, Snoopy. More recently, there is a comic strip called Garfield, about a lazy, fat cat. I thought all cats were lazy, but Garfield is a particularly lazy cat – a very lazy cat! Today we're going to talk about some classic comic strips that are not necessarily for children. In the United States, at least, most of the people who read comic strips are children or teenagers. Unlike in other countries, comics are not very popular among adults. The exception would be comic strips or cartoons that have a political or social commentary bent.



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Normally the verb “to bend” (bend) means to make something that is straight change shape so that it begins to fold. You might, for example, bend your knees or your back to pick something up from the floor. However, when I say some comic strips have a particular bent (bent), I mean they have a particular interest or focus.

The bent of the comic strips we’re talking about today is political or social commentary. “Commentary” means talking about things that are happening, often to say that they are bad or sad, or going well. Political commentary might talk about things that are happening in politics, in the government. Social commentary would talk about social issues, things that are important to people in society, such as human rights or education. Normally you would expect political and social commentary in more serious parts of the newspaper, and of course you will find that on the opinion pages, or the editorial pages, as they’re called, but some comic strips also have a political or social commentary bent.

One very popular comic strip that has political commentary is Doonesbury. Doonesbury has many characters and it follows them through their lives as they grow older. It also includes many political characters, like U.S. presidents.

The comic strip was created by a man named Garry Trudeau in 1970. I remember in the early to mid 1970s when Doonesbury became very popular, and many newspapers were printing his comic strip, I didn’t always understand it because I didn’t always understand the politics back then. But I did read it frequently in high school, and by the time I got to that age I was able to understand the political commentary of Doonesbury.

Doonesbury uses a lot of what we would call wry humor. Being “wry” (wry) means that you know something is bad, but you also think it’s funny at the same time. For example, a Doonesbury comic strip might use wry humor to talk about the poor quality of education in the United States, or at least what some people think is the poor quality, but it will do it in a way that is funny.

Other political cartoons appear on editorial pages of the newspaper, as I mentioned, these are the sections where people are invited to share their opinions about political and social issues. However, Doonesbury is usually printed in the comics because it isn’t a regular editorial cartoon, it’s closer to a comic strip. There are editorial cartoons that are usually just one frame, we would say (one box); they don’t normally tell a story in three or four pictures like a comic strip.



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Another popular comic strip is Calvin and Hobbes; it's a good example of a comic strip with social commentary. It is about a young boy named Calvin and his stuffed animal, a tiger, named Hobbes. A stuffed animal is a small, soft toy or doll that looks like an animal. Children like to play with their stuffed animals, and many children talk to them as if they were alive. In the comic strip, Hobbes appears to be a living tiger only when Calvin can see him. When other characters see him, Hobbes looks like a regular stuffed animal.

This comic strip shows the adventures that Calvin and Hobbes have while Calvin is growing up, although he never gets any older in the comic strip. That, by the way, is fairly common; in comic strips the characters don't get older usually, they just stay the same age. In this particular comic strip the creator, a man by the name of Bill Watterson, uses the comic to comment on current events, things that are happening in the news, as well as problems with education, environmental protection, and so forth.

The comic strip tries to talk about problems in American society. For example, in one comic strip Hobbes comments how strange it would be if machines controlled humans instead of humans controlling machines. Calvin then says, "Hey! What time is it?? My TV show is on!" The idea here is that the machine is actually controlling our lives because Calvin needs to go and watch television: the television is controlling his time. We think about how we control our computers, but in some ways our computers control us: they require us to check email, for example.

The names of the characters in Calvin and Hobbes are somewhat interesting. You may know that John Calvin was a famous theologian in the 16th century; Thomas Hobbes was a famous English philosopher in the late 16th-early 17th century. Why he chose these two names, I don't know.

Both Doonesbury and Calvin and Hobbes are political and social commentary style comic strips. Of course, understanding humor in another language is one of the most difficult things to do. If you try reading these comic strips you may understand the language, but you may not understand the political or social references that are included. All humor – all political and social humor usually relies on knowing other things about the society and culture, and they use these things to make the joke funny. You can try, however, to take a look at these comic strips; they're very popular in the U.S. Doonesbury has been around for almost forty years. If even if you don't understand the political humor, you might want to take a look at some comic strips anyway. Comic strips written for children are usually a little easier in terms of the language, and they can also be



very interesting, easier to understand, also, because of the pictures that go with the words. So, reading comics is actually an excellent way to improve your English vocabulary. The good thing about comics is that there are many different kinds about many different topics; it's easy to find one that you would be interested in.

We're going to stop reading the comics now and talk about a much more serious topic: laws that protect children in the United States. The United States has many different types of what we call child protection laws. These are laws that are specifically designed to keep children safe, to prevent crime involving children. One of these laws, or types of laws, is called the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act. This was a law that was passed or "enacted," made into law in 2006.

Among other things, this law creates a registry of sex-offenders. A "registry" (registry) is a list of something. A "sex-offender" is person who has broken the law by sexually abusing another person. Under the law, sex-offenders, after they are released from prison (after they are no longer in jail), have to provide information about where they are living. Many states take that information and they put it on a website. Parents, if they are interested, can look at the registry of sex-offenders to find out whether any of these sex-offenders live in their neighborhood; they can even see the sex-offender's photograph, name, address, birthday, and information about where that person works. The idea would be that parents would then know who is a former criminal in their neighborhood and keep their child away from that person. One of the problems with sex-offenders is that they often commit crimes again and again, even after they are out of prison. Some people worry, however, that having this information on a website isn't fair to the criminal. Many people, however, are very glad to have it; they believe it can be used to help protect their own children. There have been legal arguments about whether these sorts of laws are appropriate, but they are very popular and I expect that they will probably continue.

Another law, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, passed in 1998, doesn't let people and businesses collect personal information through the Internet from children who are less than 13 years old. It also "restricts" or puts limits on the type of marketing (the type of advertising) that companies can use to reach children. For example, companies are not allowed to ask children under the age of 13 to sign up for a service on their website unless the company gets parental consent. "Consent" is permission, "parental" means from the parent, so "parental consent" means permission from their parents.



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Other child protection laws were created to help children who are being abused or neglected. An “abused” child is one who is being hurt, either physically or emotionally; it may be something sexual as well. A “neglected” child is one who is not taken care of properly, a child who isn’t being fed or clothed properly, or taken care of in some other way. These laws allow the government, in very serious cases, to take the children away from the family and put them in some other facility or with another family.

Many child protection laws have made it so that people who work with children must report (or must tell someone) their suspicions of child abuse and neglect. The verb “to suspect” means that you think something might be happening, especially something bad, but you’re not 100 percent sure. “Suspicion” comes from the verb “to suspect.” A “suspicion” is a noun, it refers to your thought or opinion that there is something wrong here, there is something going on. If a teacher, for example, sees a child, one of their students, who’s acting differently, or perhaps a child has “bruises,” or marks on their body showing that perhaps someone hit them, they are required in most states by law to tell someone about what they suspect (about what they saw), including the police.

These, then, are some of the laws that exist in the United States to help protect children, something we all I think can agree is a worthy goal – a goal that is worth the effort.

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Peter (Peter) in Canada. Peter wants to know the meaning of the expression “that was uncalled for.”

Something that is “uncalled for” is an action or words that were not needed, that were unfair, that were done without a good reason. For example, if you are staying awake all night studying, and then your friend says, “Oh, you’re so lazy,” you could say, “That’s uncalled for,” meaning that was unfair and wrong.

“Uncalled for” is used as an adjective however, not as a verb. It’s almost always used about some sort of behavior or action; it’s not used to refer to a person. It implies that something is not only not needed but that something is wrong or unfair. So for example, your girlfriend slaps you in the face (takes her hand and hits the side of your face), you could say, “That’s uncalled for,” that action is uncalled for. I hope that doesn’t happen to you!



Falk (Falk) in Germany wants to know the difference between “status” or “status” [different pronunciation] (status) and “state.”

“Status” is the condition that things are, usually as they relate to a larger project or range of possible conditions. For example, if you are in the hospital and you are sick, you could be very sick, you could be a little bit sick, you could be getting better. Those are various conditions you could be in, from very serious to not very serious. Someone who is asking about how you are may say, “What is his status?” or “What is her status?” meaning how is she doing now. The idea of a status is that it can change over time, you can get better or worse. “Status” can also refer to your position in the larger society. People who work as doctors and lawyers have very high status in American society. People think they are very good; they look up to them, we might say.

The word “state” implies a similar idea; it’s a description of how things are at this moment. However, the difference between “state” and “status” is that with “state” you’re asking about the condition of things right now – of the situation, but it is not expected that that situation would change. You’re not talking about how it may be getting better or getting worse. So you might say, if you walk into a house that is very dirty, you might say, “How did this house get into this state (in this condition)?”

“Status” usually refers to something that you expect to change, something that you believe was probably different before and may be different in the future. You are, in some ways, expecting some sort of progress or movement when you ask about status. So for example, a patient in the hospital (someone who is sick), we would talk about that person’s status because we expect it to change, maybe every hour or every day. With “state,” you don’t expect things to change, although they might.

Finally, Roberto (Roberto) in Italy wants to know the meaning of a very common expression in English: “as though.” For example: “It is as though time stood still.”

“As though” means the same, normally, the expression “as if.” It is used to describe a condition that is not true but is used to make a comparison. For example: “Sam studied as though his life depended on it.” His life doesn’t actually depend on it, he’s not going to die if he doesn’t get a good grade in his class, but he studied as though his life depended on it. It’s not a true situation, it’s not a real situation, but it is used to compare one thing to another. For example: “You act as though you didn’t want me to go to the party.” You’re not saying the person doesn’t want you to go to the party, but they are acting that



way. “He smiled as though he knew exactly what she was thinking.” He doesn’t know exactly what she is thinking, but he smiled as though he did. So, it’s an imaginary, if you will, situation. “The dog ran through the house as though he was on fire.” The dog wasn’t actually on fire, that’s not true, but he ran as if or as though he were on fire. We use “as though” to make these kinds of comparisons. When we use them, we know that those things aren’t true.

You can also use “as though” when you’re not sure if something is true, you think it might be but you’re not sure. For example: “My brother talks as though he knew a lot about this topic.” I’m not sure if he knows or doesn’t know, but he talks as though he knew.

Notice, also, that the verb after “as though” is in the past tense, even though we’re talking about something in the present: “My brother talks as though he knew,” not “as though he knows.” However, I have to say that nowadays it is quite common in conversational English for people to use the present tense in both parts of the sentence, for people to say for example: “My brother talks as though he knows something about this topic,” using the present tense instead of the past tense.

If you have a question or comment, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com. We don’t have time to answer all of your questions, but we’ll try to answer as many as we can.

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

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