



TOPICS

Famous Authors: Laura Ingalls Wilder; college secret societies; no one versus nobody versus anybody; Do you feel as though...?; rent versus lease

GLOSSARY

pioneer – a person who is one of the first to move to an area; a person who is the first to work in a particular field; a person who is the first to do something that later becomes popular or common

* Early pioneers had a difficult time just trying to build a home and stay alive.

homesteader – a person who becomes owner of land if he or she is willing to move to and farm an area in the middle and western part of the United States in the 1800s and 1900s

* Gina's grandfather was a homesteader to Iowa in the 1880s, and her family still owns a farm there.

deed – an official, legal document that shows the ownership of something

* When the government office burned down, many of the deed records for this area were destroyed.

to draw on (one's) experiences – to remember what one has done or what has happened to oneself in the past, and use that experience and knowledge for some purpose

* There were no doctors on the airplane, but Jean drew on her experience as a school nurse to help the dying man.

prairie – a large, open, grassy area, common in the middle of the United States

* Look across this prairie and you'll see very few hills or trees.

drought – periods of time with very little rain when it is difficult or impossible to grow plants for food

* The drought last year killed most of the grape crop, so buying grapes this year is very expensive.



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rerun – repeat showings of television shows; showing again a television show that has already been shown

* When I can't find a good TV show to watch, I usually watch old reruns of 1950s and 1960s shows.

skull – the bones of a person's head

* A baby's skull may seem to be shaped strangely when he or she is born, but it will change as he or she grows.

to tap (someone) – to select someone to do or have something

* Who do you think they'll tap to run for president in 2016?

old-boy network – an informal system of support among men who use their position or influence to help each other because they have attended the same school or college, or because they are from the same social class

* If you're not part of the old-boy network, it's difficult to get a good job in this industry when you graduate from college.

rumor – something that people say to other people even though it may not be true; information passed from one person to another that may not be true

* I heard a rumor that Jeff is dating Jessica Alba. Could it be true?

to deny – to say that something isn't true; to refuse to say that something is the truth or that something exists

* Stop denying that you took the last cookie. I can see cookie crumbs on your shirt!

no one – no person; not anybody

* No one told me that we were supposed to wear our uniforms to this event.

nobody – no person; not anybody

* It was just bad luck that the accident happened. It's nobody's fault.

anybody – any person; anyone

* Would anybody like to work this weekend for some extra money?

Do you feel as though...?" – a phrase used to ask if someone has a particular sensation, or a way of thinking, feeling, or seeing things

* When you're alone in the forest, do you ever feel as though someone is watching you?



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rent – for real estate, automobiles, or equipment to be used for a specific period of time in exchange for an amount of money

* The rent for this carpet-cleaning machine is \$30 per day.

lease – for real estate, automobiles, or equipment to be used for a specific period of time in exchange for an amount of money, usually requiring a formal written agreement and for a longer period of time, such as six months or one year

* I have a one-year lease on my apartment, so I won't be able to move before November.

WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Farmers' Almanac

In the time of Laura Ingalls Wilder, it was very helpful for farmers to have information that would help them grow crops. If you were a farmer and you were lucky, you would have access to a copy of the Farmers' Almanac.

The Farmers' Almanac is a book that is published in the United States each year, and it has been “in publication” (has continued to be published) since 1818. In each edition, you will find information important for “conservation” (protecting the natural environment) and “sustainable living,” which is, in part, growing food and raising animals that do not harm the land and that can be continued in the same way for a long period of time. But more importantly, the Farmers' Almanac has “practical” (useful) advice about growing plants for food, cooking, fishing, and other activities related to the land.

In the old days when people “lived off the land” (got their food by growing it themselves), the Farmers' Almanac gave them important “historical” (about the past) information concerning land, sea, and weather patterns, and “astronomical” (the branch of science related to the study of outer space, the universe, and more) data.

Weather “predictions” (saying what will happen in the future) has always been a big part of the Farmers' Almanac. The “publisher” (company that publishes something) claims that the predictions are 80 to 85 percent “accurate” (correct),



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although the publisher is very “secretive” (not wanting to reveal information) about how those predictions are made and will only say that they use “top secret” (very secret) mathematical “formulas” (equations; mathematical rules) to come up with those predictions. The U.S. “edition” (version) of the Farmers’ Almanac includes 16 months of weather predictions for seven “climate” (related to weather conditions) regions in the country. Each year, more than four million copies of the Farmers’ Almanac are sold.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 255.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café number 255. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. On it, you can visit our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional premium courses in business and daily English that you will enjoy, I think. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode, and every current episode. The Learning Guide contains lots of additional information, including a complete transcript of this episode, vocabulary words, definitions, sample sentences, cultural notes, and a comprehension quiz on what you're listening to right now.

On this Café, we're going to continue our series on famous authors, focusing on Laura Ingalls Wilder, who wrote the well-known Little House series of books that are very popular among children in the United States. Then we'll talk about secret societies or secret organizations associated in particular with colleges and universities. And, as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

This Café begins with a continuation of our series on famous American authors. Today we're going to talk about Laura Ingalls Wilder, who was born in the state of Wisconsin in 1867. Wisconsin is located in the upper Midwest part of the United States; it's just to the east of the state of Minnesota, our greatest state.

Wilder was born into what we would call a pioneer family. A "pioneer" (pioneer) is a person who is one of the first people to work in a particular area or to move into a particular area. It could be physical area, the pioneers that came out to the western United States for example. It could also be an area of intellectual interest or an area of business: "He was a pioneer in podcasting." That would be another way of using the same word. In American history, we use the word pioneer typically to refer to those who left the eastern states, particularly in the 19th century, and moved westward, that is to say, toward the west of the North American continent. They, of course, ended here in California – some of them did. Now, of course they were not the first people in this area; the Native American population, as well as in the southwest the Spanish population was



there first. But as the old saying goes, history is written by the winners, and we consider the pioneers, those first, mostly white Americans who went west.

Laura's father was a pioneer who moved the family many times, always going to live on new land where there were few other white people, but often there were many Indians or Native Americans. Laura's family was one of many homesteaders. Homesteading is a very important part of U.S. history, particularly in the 19th century. The Homestead Act, or law, of 1862 encouraged people to move westward as the United States expanded. It allowed people basically to pick an area of land, improve the land, for example by building a home and a farm, and then submitting paperwork to the government to get the deed to the land. A "deed" (deed) is an official, legal document that shows the ownership of something. So, the government had all this land, and it would give it to you if you went there and did something with it. They were, again, trying to encourage people to settle – that is to move into these otherwise unpopulated areas, at least unpopulated by whites. Many poor and middle-class Americans moved and became homesteaders. They typically did not have a lot of money so to go and to work the land, as we may say, and then to be able to own it was a great incentive. That is, it was something that would make them do something, that's what an incentive is. And homesteading is exactly what Laura's family was doing. My family homesteaded in North Dakota, some of my relatives, back in the 19th century. I don't know how successful they were. I do remember seeing pictures – old pictures from the late 19th century that my father had of these relatives of ours that were homesteaders.

Laura Ingalls Wilder's family was a homesteading one. Homesteading was a very difficult life, but it often was filled with many adventures – many exciting things. Later in life, Laura, who died in 1957 so she lived quite a long time, drew on those experiences to write her autobiographical novels. "Autobiographical" means about yourself. The phrase "to draw on experiences" means to remember what you have done or what has happened, and then use that experience and knowledge for some other purpose; in this case, to write a series of autobiographical novels.

Laura's novels are primarily children's novels, "intended" or meant for young readers. The Little House series of books – there were several – begins with Little House in the Woods, which was published in 1932 and covers, or discusses, the early part of her childhood. Other books in the series include the most famous one Little House on the Prairie (prairie). A "prairie" is a large, open, grassy area, very common in the middle of the United States – the Midwest.



Other novels included On the Banks of Plum Creek, By the Shores of Silver Lake, The Long Winter, and Little Town on the Prairie.

The earliest books are mostly about the fun experiences Laura had while helping her family. Since it is about her life, I think the novels are generally considered more popular among young girls. Certainly, I didn't read the books when I grew up, but I knew other students – girls who did. While the early books were about the fun experiences Laura had, her later books dealt with more serious topics, like fighting the Native Americans and "droughts" (droughts), or periods of time where there is very little rain and when it is difficult or impossible to grow plants or food.

The Little House series, as I say, is extremely popular among children, especially among young girls. It was made into a popular television show, Little House on the Prairie, which was "aired," or was shown on TV from 1974 to 1982. This was precisely in the years when I was in grade school and high school. It was a very popular show; everyone watched it, especially in mid 70s it was popular. Perhaps because America had gone through such a difficult time of transition in the 60s and early 70s they were looking for something calmer, something that went back to the old America and its ideals, and that perhaps contributed to the popularity of the TV series.

As I say, everyone watched this series when I was growing up. It was especially interesting for me because the Little House on the Prairie series takes place in Minnesota. Laura's family went to several different states, but in the Little House on the Prairie series focused on their time in Minnesota, in southwestern Minnesota. "Reruns," or repeat showings of the shows can still be seen on American television today. If you have a chance to read the books or see the TV series, it's a good way to learn about early American life in the late 19th century. The books, because they are written for children, are also a little easier to understand, and so you might find them both good for your English as well as good for your sense of history in the U.S.

Now let's turn to our next topic: secret societies on college campuses. Oooh! Sounds very scary, doesn't it? Well, a "society" is an association or an organization – a group of people who have organized themselves to meet and do regular activities together because they share some interests or characteristics. For example, there are many societies, like the American Cancer Society or the American Audubon Society, which are open to anyone who meets certain qualifications and is willing to pay for membership. Other societies, however, are



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closed, they're more secretive, we could say, and those are the kind we're going to focus on today.

Secret societies have always fascinated – interested people. You have the Masons, for example, in Europe and in North America. The whole Free Mason movement you may be familiar with. These are adults who are part of this special organization that is very secretive, very exclusive. We have similar organizations in some American universities, especially elite – that is, very selective universities. I'm talking about Yale and Harvard.

The most famous secret society at a university in the U.S. is Skull and Bones. Skull and Bones was “founded” or created in 1832. A “skull” (skull) is the bones of a person's head. The “logo” or defining image of Skull and Bones is a drawing of a skull above two bones that are in an x-shape, with the number 322 below this drawing. Why 322? Well, I guess that's part of the secret!

Each year, Skull and Bones selects 15 new members from the junior class, students who are in their third year of college studies. The day this happens is called Tap Day. “To tap (someone)” normally means to very gently or lightly touch someone's shoulder with one finger in order to get his or her attention. But “to tap” can also mean to select someone to do something or to have something. We might say, “The general was tapped to lead the army.” She was selected to lead the army. People are selected or tapped to be part of Skull and Bones. Typically, these are very powerful, or influential perhaps is a better word, students on campus or at the university. For example, they might be involved in college political organizations, the Yale newspaper, sports, other leaders of organizations.

The “Bonesmen” as members of the secret society are known, or called, meet every Thursday and Sunday night during their senior year in school. Women were first allowed into Skull and Bones in 1991, but it is still a male-dominated organization and the members are still known as Bonesmen – not Boneswomen. Bonesmen doesn't really have any other meaning.

Many of the Bonesmen have become quite famous later in life. They include former U.S. Presidents William Taft, George H.W. Bush, the first President Bush, and George W. Bush, the second President Bush. There are also many presidential political advisors and important leaders in federal government agencies that were once members of Skull and Bones. Of course, you could say



that's true generally for students who have gone to elite universities such as Yale and Harvard.

Some people refer to Skull and Bones and other similar secret society as old-boy networks, because they tend to be very “exclusive” inviting only very wealthy or powerful people to join. The phrase “old boy” is popular in England, in British English. It's not as popular as it was at one time. It can be used to refer to another gentleman – another man in a friendly way. It can also mean someone who was a student at a particular university. In an American context – in American English, “old-boy” means exclusive, often male, white, and rich.

The people in these secret societies are sometimes thought to be part of this old-boy network. These people are often very closed, meaning they don't interact with people outside of their old-boy network, at least professionally. That's the image people have; I'm not sure if that's true. These secret societies are primarily found at the what we would call Ivy League schools. “Ivy” (ivy) is a kind of plant that grows up the wall and is common especially in some of the older universities in the eastern part of the U.S. Another name for a university, or when people are talking about the university is Ivy Tower. Well, the Ivy League is a group of some of the oldest, some of the best universities in the United States, although not all of the best ones. They provide a very strong and, in some people's mind, prestigious education. There are eight Ivy League schools including, in alphabetical order: Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, and Yale.

American universities have many different groups and societies. We've talked about the Greek system of fraternities and sororities before, in English Café 204. You can listen to that if you're interested in other kinds of groups on campus at the university. You may remember that fraternities are groups for men; fraternity comes from the Latin word “frater” meaning brother. Sororities are for women; the name comes from the Latin word for sister. The Greek system is sort of a secret society, but not in the same way as, for example, Skull and Bones. Perhaps a better word would be exclusive organizations; that is, not just anyone can join a certain fraternity or sorority – and may not want to in my case. Well, maybe the sororities – maybe! Anyway, the secret societies are somewhat different; they're exclusive but they're also secretive – they don't tell people what they're doing. Whereas the Greek system, fraternities and sororities, are exclusive but not secretive.



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Because these secret societies are secretive, there are a lot of rumors about them. A “rumor” (rumor) is something that people say to other people even though it may not be true. We often talk about celebrity rumors, rumors about famous actors and actresses, famous personalities. There are many rumors that members of Skull and Bones steal important objects, and especially the bones of famous people. Is that really true? Hmm, probably not; but people like to have rumors, it makes things more interesting.

Some universities, including Harvard, actually deny that they have secret societies. “To deny” means to say something is false, is not true. However, the students believe there are secret societies on campus. These societies themselves want to remain secretive, so they don’t tell anybody about them. Of course, it’s hard to prove a secret society exists if no one in the society tells anyone about their society. Why do they want to stay secret? Probably because it adds a certain mystery, it makes people more interested in them. And, if they weren’t secretive, they wouldn’t be the topic of this English Café!

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Piotr (Piotr), that’s how “Peter” would be spelled in Poland. Piotr wants to know the differences in the terms or phrases “no one,” “nobody,” and “anybody.” All of these words or terms are indefinite pronouns. They are words that take the place of a noun, that’s what a pronoun is, but they do not refer to a specific person or a specific thing.

“No one” and “nobody” – by the way, “no one” is two words (no one); “nobody” is one word (nobody). Both mean not anybody, no person. Some people say that “no one” is more formal, but you can use one for the other. For example: “No one can see the car on the street.” “Nobody can see the car on the street.” There is no person who can see the car on the street. You could say, “Nobody remembers what time the party starts.” Or, “No one remembers what time the party starts.” So “no,” obviously, is the negative; it’s no specific or no person.

“Anybody” (one word) is any person; we could also say “anyone,” which is one word (anyone). For example: “Anybody can see the car on the street.” Any person, all people, that is. “Does anybody remember what time the party starts?” Is there a person here who remembers?

As I said, “no one” and “nobody” are negative forms, so you don’t use another negative in the sentence. You would not say, “There is not nobody here,” you



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can't do that in English. You can only, typically, have one negative in a clause. So if you want to use a negative form – another negative form, you would have to use the affirmative, or positive form, in this case “anybody.” “There is not anybody in this room.” That's the same as “There is nobody in this room.” Notice that there's no “not” in the second example. You could say, “I cannot find anybody to help me,” or, “I can find nobody to help me.” They mean the same thing.

“No one,” “nobody,” and “anybody” are all singular, so they take a singular form of the verb. Because they are singular you would expect the other personal pronouns in the sentence also to be singular, for example: “No one wants his credit card stolen.” The “his” can refer, in the traditional use, to both a man or a woman. However, it's become common in some places to use a plural pronoun even though “no one,” “nobody,” and “anybody” are singular, so you would say, “Nobody wants their credit cards stolen.” Some people tried to avoid this by saying, “Nobody wants his or her credit card stolen.” There isn't, I think, agreement about which of these forms should be used. Some people think one is wrong, and others think the other one is wrong.

Carlos (Carlos) in Peru has a question about the expression – or question “Do you feel as though...?” For example: “Do you feel as though you are learning English?” Well, “feel” here means do you have a sense of something; it can also mean do you have an opinion about something. The phrase “feel as though” refers to your opinions, the way you think about something. You could also say, “do you feel like.” “Do you feel like you're learning English?” “To you think you're learning English?” “Does it seem to you you're learning English?” All of these mean the same as “Do you feel as though you're learning English?”

“Feel as though” can also refer to what you're physically feeling: “I feel as though I am going to get sick.”

Finally James (James), originally from China now living in the state of North Carolina in the southeastern part of the U.S., wants to know the difference between “lease” (lease) and “rent” (rent).

Both of these words can be used in real estate when we're talking about property – buildings and houses – to mean that you agree to use them for a certain amount of time, paying a certain amount of money to the owner. So you don't own the house or the apartment, you rent the apartment. Or, we could say you lease the apartment from the owner. Both verbs can also be used with other



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things, such as cars: you rent a car, you lease a car. You can also use it for other equipment or even spaces, such as you're going to have a wedding reception – a party for the people who went to your wedding. You could rent a place to have your party.

In general, “rent” is for a shorter amount of time, and “lease” is for a longer amount of time. That's not always true, but in general it's, I think, true. We also tend to use one verb or the other depending the specific thing or situation. For example, we talk about renting a house or an apartment. That's much more common than saying I'm leasing a house or apartment. We also tend to use “rent” for automobiles – for cars. You're going on vacation and you decide to rent a car. “Lease” is used for automobiles also, but usually it's for a longer period: “I'm going to lease the car for six months,” or “two years.”

“Lease” is also a noun that refers to the agreement that you and the owner sign giving the conditions of the contract: the price, what you're leasing or renting, and so forth.

The two words as verbs, then, are generally interchangeable; you can use one or the other. However, as a rule, we tend to use “rent” for shorter periods of time, “lease” for longer periods of time, and we tend to use one or the other depending on what it is that is being rented or leased.

If you feel as though you don't know something about English, you can ask us. Just email us at eslpod@eslpod.com. We don't have time to answer all of your questions, and we are not able to answer questions by email, but we'll do our best to include them in a future English 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.

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