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## TOPICS

Famous Americans: Tyler Perry; NASA; to think on (one's) feet; plural for iPod  
Touch and other proper nouns; recognition versus acknowledgement

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## GLOSSARY

**musical** – a type of play that has a lot of music, singing, and dancing

\* I'm not sure Cherisse is right for our musical. She can act, but can she sing and dance?

**adapted** – taking something and making it suitable for another purpose; for a story, book, or play to be made into a film, or for a story or book to be made into a play

\* The script for this film was adapted from a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

**uninhibited** – without feeling restricted; without feeling as though one has to be careful of one says or does

\* After two drinks, Eddie felt uninhibited and started dancing on the tables.

**recurring** – for someone or something to appear again and again; a character who appears over and over again in many different plays or movies

\* Jean has a recurring nightmare that she's being chased by a giant hot dog!

**to cross-dress** – for a man to dress as a woman or for a woman to dress as a man

\* Are you thinking of cross-dressing for the costume party?

**no-nonsense** – simple and straightforward; sensible; being very direct and saying things exactly as one sees them

\* Amil's management style is no-nonsense and he always gets the job done.

**to be nominated** – to have one's name be proposed or suggested for an award, but not necessarily to win it

\* Benoit was nominated to be president of the club, but he says he's too busy to do the job.



**space** – everything beyond our planet, such as the sun and moon and other planets

\* When you were little, did you dream of traveling in space?

**in orbit** – for a smaller object to be moving around a larger object; in motion circling a planet

\* It would be very frightening to discover spaceships from other planets in orbit around the Earth.

**shuttle** – space shuttle; a special kind of space vehicle designed to move people from one place to another, especially from the Earth into space

\* The shuttle completed its mission traveling between the Earth and the moon.

**launch** – the moment when a boat or vehicle is put into motion; when a space shuttle leaves the ground

\* The launch of the space shuttle was delayed because of bad weather.

**unmanned** – a vehicle that can move without a pilot inside it to direct or drive it

\* That weather airplane sent up to collect information about clouds is unmanned.

**to think on (one's) feet** – to think and react quickly; to not be nervous and be able to think or act under pressure; to be able to speak and reason well in unexpected circumstances

\* When the building caught fire, Xia was able to think on her feet and get all of the employees out of the office.

**recognition** – approval; being appreciated for something good that one has done or achieved; an awareness of something known or remembered

\* Although Dana helped her friend write his book, she never received any recognition for her work.

**acknowledgement** – a show of appreciation or an expression of thanks; recognizing something is true or a fact

\* We want to give you this prize as acknowledgement for your many contributions to the team.



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **The Play A Raisin in the Sun**

A Raisin in the Sun is a play by American “playwright” (a person who writes plays) Lorraine Hansberry. It first “debuted” (was performed for the first time) in 1959 on New York City’s Broadway, a street with some of the best theaters in the country. Typically, only the best and/or most popular plays are performed at the theaters on Broadway, so theater actors often talk about wanting to “make it on Broadway,” meaning they want to become successful “stage” (theater) actors.

A Raisin in the Sun was the first play written by an African American woman and the first play with an African American “director” (person who supervises the actors, crew members, and other workers on a film, TV show, or play) to be “produced” (organized for performance) on Broadway. The original stage production “starred” (had in its most important role) Sidney Poitier, the “acclaimed” (well-respected) actor. In 1963, Sidney Poitier was the first African American to win an Academy Award.

A Raisin in the Sun is about an African American family living in Chicago. The family is poor and the father of the family, Walter, is unhappy about their poverty. He wants to make more money and decides to “invest” (put money into something with the hope of earning more money) in the opening of a “liquor store” (a store that sells alcohol) with a man named Willy. Several members of his family are against this idea, at least “initially” (at the beginning), but he “goes ahead” (proceeds). The worst possible thing happens and Willy, his partner, “absconds” (runs away secretly) with his money.

The main themes in the play have to do with the difficulties of African Americans to “get ahead” (make advances), and what they must “surrender” or give up to achieve more success in America. Many schools “assign” (give as homework) this play for students to read, and there are several television and film versions of this well-known play.



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 237.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 237. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California. And it is a beautiful day when I'm recording this; sun is out, temperature is high, can't ask for more!

You can visit our website, I can ask you that, at [eslpod.com](http://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. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store as well as our ESL Podcast Blog.

On this Café, we're going to continue our series on famous Americans, focusing on Tyler Perry, who is a famous actor, movie director, film producer, and writer, although you may not know much about him. We're also going to talk about NASA, which is the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. 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 Americans. Today we're going to talk about Tyler Perry, who is a well-known actor, movie director, film producer, and writer.

Tyler was born in New Orleans (or what some people pronounce as *New Orleans*), Louisiana, which is a state located in the south central part of the United States. He was born in 1969. Although he is pretty young (just a little over 40 years old), he already has had a lot of success in his career. His movies have made almost 400 million dollars and he himself made 75 million just in 2008 alone – so, a little bit more than my salary!

Tyler is a screenwriter. A "screenwriter" (one word) is a person who write plays and movies, or things are going to be filmed – things that will be on a screen. The "screen" is what you watch when you are watching your television or watching a movie. Tyler has written 12 plays, including Diary of a Mad Black Woman, Meet the Browns, The Marriage Counselor, Laugh to Keep from Crying, and more. There is a lot of singing in the plays, so some people call these musicals. A "musical" (musical) is a type of play that has a lot of music, singing, and dancing. Examples of musicals would be West Side Story, from the early



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1960s; Les Misérables; and, again talking about a U.S. musical, Oklahoma. Most Americans have heard of these musicals; almost everyone knows the first line of the title song in the play Oklahoma: [Jeff sings]

*Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweeping down the plain...*

Although that song was written for a musical, it actually is the official state song of the State of Oklahoma, which is in the central middle part of the United States, almost right in the middle. But we're talking about Tyler Perry.

Many of Tyler's plays have been adapted into movies. "To be adapted" means for a book or play to be made into a film, where the movie has the same characters and main ideas, although some things may have been changed to make the story shorter or more appropriate for sharing through a movie.

Interestingly, Tyler puts his name in front of all his movies. So, instead of calling his film Diary of a Mad Black Woman, he calls it Tyler Perry's Diary of a Mad Black Woman. That particular movie, which was his first movie, was very successful, making him more than 50 million dollars in the theaters. So, if you are making 50 million dollars on every film, I guess you can put your name in front of it! More recently, Tyler worked with a very famous television personality, Oprah Winfrey, to produce a movie called Precious: based on the novel "Push" by Sapphire; that's actually part of the title, too. This movie, Precious, won several awards this year, in 2010.

Tyler is also involved in television. He has a show on television called – what else – Tyler Perry's House of Payne (Payne). The show is about three generations of African Americans who live together. Another of Tyler's shows is called Meet the Browns (the family's last name is Brown). It's a "sitcom," or situation comedy, which began in early 2009.

Tyler also wrote a book called Don't Make a Black Woman Take Off Her Earrings: Madea's Uninhibited Commentaries on Love and Life. "Earrings" are pieces of jewelry that mostly women, but also men sometimes, wear on their ears. So the title, Don't Make a Black Woman Take Off Her Earrings, means don't ask her to remove them. The second part of the title is Madea's Uninhibited Commentaries on Love and Life. "Uninhibited" means without feeling restricted, without feeling like you can't do something. Shy people often feel inhibited when they are speaking with other people. They don't feel comfortable speaking with others, so they don't. However, you may know that sometimes drinking a little



alcohol helps people become uninhibited, or feel more comfortable doing and saying things they wouldn't normally do. That can be rather dangerous, too; you have to be careful! Tyler's book talks about uninhibited commentaries on love and life, meaning the book is full of ideas, thoughts, reflections about love and life. These are expressed freely, meaning they're not restricted in any way. The book was published in 2006 and was on the New York Times Best Seller list (a list of the books that are selling the most that week) for 12 weeks. This character Madea appears in many of the Tyler Perry movies; it's a fictional character, not a real person.

Most of Tyler's characters are African American, or black, and, as I said, there is this one "recurring" character, a character who appears over and over again in many different plays and movies by Perry. The name of the character is Mabel "Madea" Simmons. Now here's the interesting thing: Madea is actually played by Tyler himself. So Tyler Perry basically uses "cross-dressing," which is to dress like a woman if you're a man, and I suppose, dress like a man if you're a woman. Tyler says that the character of Madea is based on one of his aunts; it's "based on" meaning it is taken from – it is like one of his aunts. Madea is very straightforward – no-nonsense. The idea that you are "no-nonsense" means you are very direct, you say exactly what you are thinking.

Perry has won many awards for his work. They include awards for Outstanding Actor in a Theatrical Film, Outstanding Writing for Theatrical Film, and Outstanding Achievement in Screenwriting. "Screenwriting" is the act of writing the dialogue – the words for the movie, or for a television show. Perry has also been nominated for many other awards. To be "nominated" for an award means that your name is proposed or suggested for an award; it does not mean that you win it.

There are some other actors and directors who don't like Tyler Perry's approach to making movies about the African American community. They criticize him for using "stereotypes," that is, common ideas that people have that are often false about a certain group. But his movies, his TV shows, his books continue to be very popular. As I say, he's a very rich man, even if you have never heard of him or seen any of his movies. His work is very popular with the black, or African American, community in the U.S.

Now we're going to jump to our next topic, that's the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, what we commonly call NASA (NASA). NASA was created in 1958 to lead the United States' efforts in exploring space. "Space,"



which we sometimes call outer space, refers to everything beyond our planet: the sun, the moon, other planets, other solar systems, black holes, stars; all of these are part of what we call space.

There was a famous television show that was later made into some movies, you may know it; it's called Star Trek. In the beginning of the television show the person who plays the captain is announcing what this show is about, and he begins by saying, "Space, the final frontier." A "frontier" is an unexplored area, a part of the world, or in this case a part of the universe that we do not know anything about. Well, that is what NASA is supposed to do; it's supposed to explore space.

NASA's "mission" statement, its reason for existing, is "to improve life here (on Earth), to extend life to there, to find life beyond." In other words, NASA wants to make life better for people here on planet Earth, to find ways for people to live in other parts of outer space, and, if they exist, to find other forms of life outside of Earth. It's rather an "ambitious" statement, meaning they're trying to do quite a bit!

NASA's very first project was called Project Mercury, like the planet Mercury. It was, however, designed to find out whether humans could "survive," whether they could live without dying, in space. In 1961, Project Mercury sent an "astronaut," someone who goes into outer space, by the name of Alan Shepard. He was in space for seven minutes during that first space flight, and of course, he survived so the answer was yes, you could survive in space. The next project, Project Gemini, prepared NASA for sending people to the moon. President John F. Kennedy famously announced at the beginning of his term in 1961 that the United States would send a man to the moon by the end of that decade, meaning by the end of the 1960s. And, you probably know, he was right.

After Project Gemini came Project Apollo, or simply the Apollo Program. This was the NASA effort that actually sent humans to the moon. On July 20, 1969, the spaceship known as Apollo 11 landed on the moon and astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin took the first steps of humankind on the moon. They found out it was not made of cheese! That's an old story people used to say, probably mostly as a joke. I don't think anyone really believed the moon was made of cheese – well, I thought it was made of cheese for a few years when I was younger! But, it was not made of cheese, and this first space landing was a





major success for NASA, an important accomplishment. There were other Apollo flights afterwards, but the last Apollo flight occurred in 1975.

I was, let's see, I was, um, five and half years old when NASA first landed on the moon with the Apollo Program. I remember that landing, as does anyone who was probably over the age of five in 1969. It was an amazing thing to see on the TV. After that, we would watch the other Apollo missions – the other Apollo spacecraft go up to the sky – go up to the moon. It became part of growing up in the early 1970s in the U.S.

The next major project for NASA was something called Skylab. This was a “space station,” a special laboratory in outer space where scientists could live for longer periods of time and conduct scientific research. Skylab was in “orbit,” meaning it was going around the planet Earth, beginning in 1973 up to 1979, and it was visited by astronauts three different times. Of course, you may remember there was some problems with Skylab, and eventually it fell back down to Earth, specifically to the Indian Ocean and parts of Western Australia. So if you live in Western Australia, maybe you have a piece of Skylab in your home!

Well, NASA more recently, beginning in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 90s, has concentrated on its Space Shuttle program. A “shuttle” (shuttle) is a vehicle that goes from one place to another, and then back, and continues to go back and forth. When you come to an airport in the United States, you can take a shuttle to your hotel. If the hotel is close to the airport, they will send a bus, which they call a shuttle, that will pick you up and then take you to your hotel.

The Space Shuttle was designed to go up into space, but then to come back down and land like a plane, and be reused. So unlike the previous spacecraft – the Apollo, for example, or the Gemini spacecraft – the Space Shuttle program was supposed to be, if you will, a recycling program in that you would use the Space Shuttle over and over again.

The first Space Shuttle was called the Columbia, and that was put into space in 1981, the year I graduated from high school. I was not invited to go on the shuttle; I don't know why! The Space Shuttle unfortunately had some disasters. In 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger was destroyed after launch; it exploded. “Launch” (launch) is when the spacecraft leaves the ground. The explosion of the Challenger was a very sad day in NASA's history. I did not see it live; I wasn't watching the television at the time, but of course saw it later. I was in





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college by that time. Unhappily, all seven astronauts were killed. There was a second disaster in 2003 when the Space Shuttle Columbia broke apart, killing, again, all seven astronauts. For that reason, the Space Shuttle had something of a bad reputation, and it certainly hurt NASA considerably in terms of the confidence that the American people had in it.

NASA continues to work on mostly “unmanned” programs. These are space vehicles that don’t have any people inside them. The unmanned vehicle is operated “remotely,” from a distance. There’s been some talk of NASA developing a program to go to Mars, or to go back to the moon. But right now, the government doesn’t have a lot of extra money, and it’s probably unlikely that you will see another major program by NASA, at least in the next 5 to 10 years.

Now let’s answer few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Mohamed (Mohamed) in Egypt. Mohamed wants to know the meaning of the phrase “thinking on your feet.”

“To think on your feet” means to be able to think and react to something very quickly. You don’t get nervous even though there may be a lot of pressure or stress on you; someone who is able to speak very well without a lot of preparation, even when, for example, the question being asked or the topic is not one they had prepared. “To think on your feet” doesn’t necessarily mean that you are telling the truth, however. You may just say something that sounds true.

Javier (Javier) in Mexico wants to know the correct plural of some popular Apple pieces of equipment, specifically the iPod Touch. There’s a general rule for what we call “proper nouns,” nouns that are names of, in this case, a commercial product. The normal rule for forming plurals in English is to add an “s” sound at the end: you have one dog, you have two dogs; you have one chair, you have two chairs, and so forth. For certain words, this “s” sound is not just the letter “s,” it’s also “es,” especially when a noun ends in “s, sh, ch, x, or z.” So for example, “church” ends in a “ch,” so we would say “one church, two churches,” with an “es” at the end. “Dish” ends in “sh”: one dish, two dishes. “Cineplex,” a place where you can go to see a movie,” the plural is “cineplexes” because it ends in an “x”. So, “x, z, s, sh, and ch” take the “es” for the plural. So, for iPod Touch it would be iPod Touches.

Normally the last word in a commercial product’s name, if there is more than one word, is what you put the plural on. Now you’ll probably think of an example



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where this isn't true and email me and say "But wait, what about this one Jeff?" and you'll probably be right. But, I think that rule is a pretty good one to use. For example, I use a MacBook Pro; if I owned two of them I would say "I have two MacBook Pros," with an "s" at the end of the second word. I would not say "MacBooks Pro," and you would not say "iPods Touch."

Finally, Luc (Luc) in Belgium wants to know the difference between "recognition" and "acknowledgment." Both words can mean the same: to get attention, approval, or credit for doing something good. So, someone may say, "In recognition of your work, I'm going to give you a gift." They could also say, "In acknowledgment of your work, I will give you a gift." You're telling them they did something right; often you are recognizing it publicly, in front of other people. That's "to acknowledge" or "to recognize" as verbs, or "recognition" and "acknowledgment" as nouns. That's one possible way of using them.

There are a few other uses that are slightly different for these two words. "Recognition" can also mean that you remember something: "I recognized him at the party; he's the same person I saw yesterday." There was recognition there. "To recognize" can also mean to begin to understand: "Frank recognized that he would never be able to go on a date with Mary." He recognized that fact; he started to understand it the 10<sup>th</sup> time she said no!

"Acknowledgment," or the verb "to acknowledge," can mean that you are saying to someone – you are indicating something has happened, and you are aware that it has happened. "He acknowledged my letter." He said yes, I received your letter. He didn't say anything else; it was just an acknowledgment. We would not say "recognition" there; you could only say "acknowledgment." "To acknowledge" sometimes also means that you are saying that you understand that another person has authority, or another person has thing right to do something. You may say, "I acknowledge your right to walk on the public sidewalk." I acknowledge it; I say yes, that is true, you can do that. "Acknowledge" can also mean admitting to something: "I acknowledge that I was the one who put a piece of paper on your back that said 'kick me'," I acknowledge it; I am the one who did that. Often we use that verb, or that idea when we did something wrong – like putting a piece of paper on someone's back and writing the words "kick me!"

If you have a question or comment, we'll try to answer that on the podcast. We don't have time to answer everyone's questions, but we'll do our best. Our email address is [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com).



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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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