



TOPICS

Apollo Theater; Famous Americans: Susan B. Anthony; to talk down to; to bail on; had better versus would rather

GLOSSARY

talent – performer; the person in a show who provides the entertainment

* If we don't get any good talent for our show, no one will pay money to see it.

to make (one's) debut – to have one's first performance; to be the first time one performs in front of an audience

* Sheila made her dance debut in last year's performance of Swan Lake.

jazz legend – a person who is very famous for singing or playing an instrument in jazz music, a type of music that began in the United States in the early 1900s

* This CD contains songs by all of the jazz legends you like.

to bill (oneself) – to advertise oneself in a particular way; to say that one is a certain thing in order to make people be more interested in oneself

* Ed bills himself as a technology expert, but he doesn't even know how to use basic computer programs!

executioner – a person whose job is to kill another person, usually because that person broke the law

* In the old western movie, none of the men wanted to be the thief's executioner, so they just put him in jail.

to revive – to make something popular and interesting again; to make something useful and functioning again

* If we revived the old downtown area, do you think businesses will start moving back in?

landmark status – something, usually a building, being recognized as important for historic or cultural reasons and that should be saved so that it stays the same as it used to be

* Someday, do you think it's possible that Dr. Jeff McQuillan's childhood home will gain landmark status?



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to play a pivotal role – to play a very important role; to do very important things in a particular effort or campaign

* The Governor's wife wrote all of his speeches and played a pivotal role in getting him elected.

suffrage – the right to vote in elections, when people are deciding who will serve in a public office or job, or which laws should be passed

* In some countries, the issue of suffrage is still being debated among the men in power.

wage equality – the idea that men and women should be paid the same amount of money if they are doing the same work

* Dora brought up the issue of wage equality in the office, showing evidence that men were being paid more than women for doing the exact same work.

temperance movement – an effort to make people not drink alcohol, usually for religious or moral reasons

* There isn't a strong temperance movement today, but there are many efforts to get people to not drink and drive.

to advocate – to speak out in favor of something; to do things to try to make something that one supports happen

* Bernard works as a children's advocate, trying to get laws passed to protect children and teenagers.

to talk down to – to speak as though talking to someone who is of a lower position, of less importance, or of less intelligence than oneself

* Jim talks down to me because I'm young, but I've done this kind of work for over five years.

to bail on – to abandon someone or something; to withdraw support from someone; to leave someone or something behind suddenly

* Sasha bailed on me at the party and I didn't have a way to get home.

had better – should; would be better to

* I'd better study for the test tomorrow if I hope to get a good grade.

would rather – with a preference for; prefer

* Would you rather see a movie or go dancing tonight?



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Vaudeville

In this podcast, we talked about the Apollo Theater. One type of act or entertainment that appeared at the Apollo Theater was vaudeville. “Vaudeville” is a type of theater entertainment that is “made up of” (contains) many different unrelated acts, but that are grouped together under one “bill” (program of entertainment). Vaudeville was one of the most popular types of entertainment in the United States from about the 1880s to the 1930s.

Many different types of acts could be included in a vaudeville show. You may hear fine classical musicians, playing classical composers like Bach, Beethoven, or Mozart. You may see dancers doing a “burlesque” show, where beautiful women wear beautiful clothes and slowly take each piece off as they dance “provocatively” (in a sexy way) to music. You may see animal acts, where animals have been “trained” (taught) to do special tricks. You may see actors doing short plays or “scenes” (parts of a play or show) or doing “imitations” (looking and sounding like someone else, usually someone famous). When you went to a vaudeville show, you never knew what you would get, but it was sure to be entertaining.

Although vaudeville shows are no longer very popular as “live” (not recorded) theater in the U.S., American television has a version of vaudeville called the “variety show.” Like vaudeville, a variety show has many short acts of different types of entertainment, with a “host” who performs, but also introduces the other acts.

Many famous singers and celebrities have had “variety specials,” which are “one-time” (not repeated) shows, usually put together to celebrate an important holiday, such as Christmas. Although vaudeville shows are no longer as popular as they once were, this type of entertainment lives on in variety shows and TV specials.



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 233.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 233. 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. By becoming a member of ESL Podcast, you also help keep this podcast alive. You help keep me alive, and my dog. But I don't have a dog, so really, just me!

On this Café, we're going to talk about the Apollo Theater, which is in New York City and is one of the country's most famous music halls, or places where you can hear music. Then we'll continue our series on famous Americans, focusing on Susan B. Anthony, who helped make sure American women got the right to vote. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

This Café begins with a discussion about the Apollo Theater. The Apollo Theater is located in New York City. The original building, which was called Apollo Hall, was built in the mid-1800s, the middle of the 19th century. Originally it was a dance hall and a "ballroom," a place where people met to dance. The word "hall" just means a big building for large meetings; they could be to listen to music or to dance. At an American university, a hall is a name for a building where there are classrooms, or professors with their offices, are just about anything else. Hall is a very common word for a building at an American college or university. But, Apollo Hall was a dance building – a building where people came to dance. Later, the building became a theater, its name then became Apollo Theater, although today it is no longer a theater, it still has that name however. It's a little confusing!

Apollo Theater is in a New York City neighborhood known as "Harlem" (Harlem), which is an area where traditionally many African Americans have lived, and continue to live. During the 1920s and 30s, the area "witnessed," or saw what became known as the Harlem Renaissance. This was a period of time when many African Americans were moving north from the southern states, and this led to many developments in black, or African American arts, culture, and intellectual life. We often talk about certain poets, musicians, and so forth,



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intellectuals as being part of the Harlem renaissance. The most famous poet would be Langston Hughes. For many years, the Apollo Theater was the only theater that would hire – that would employ black “talent,” or performers. This was not only because the theater was in a “predominantly,” or mostly black neighborhood, but also because black artists were cheaper, so the theater didn’t have to pay as much money. Many theaters would not hire – would not allow black performers in their theaters due to the racism and prejudice that was more common in those decades.

Many famous musicians have performed at the Apollo Theater. Ella Fitzgerald, for example, one of the great jazz singers of the 20th century, made her debut when she was only 17 years old at the Apollo. The phrase “to make a debut” (debut) – notice we don’t say “de-but,” it’s “debut,” probably because it’s a French word. The phrase “to make a debut” means to have your very first performance, before you have become famous. We can talk about people having their debut; we can also talk about plays and pieces of music having debuts. If you’re not familiar with Ella Fitzgerald, listen to English Café number 150, or read our ESL Podcast Blog entry from July 21, 2008, where you’ll find a recording of her singing “Summertime” with another great jazz legend, a man by the name of Louis Armstrong. I called Armstrong a jazz legend; a “legend” is a person who is very famous for singing or playing or writing, in this case jazz music. Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong are definitely jazz legends who are very deeply, strongly admired by many people who like jazz music.

The Apollo Theater soon began to bill itself as a place “where stars are born and legends are made.” The phrase “to bill (yourself)” means to advertise yourself in a particular way. For example, a bank could bill itself as the safest place to keep your money, or an airline could bill itself as the fastest way to get across the country. These are ways that it advertises itself. The Apollo Theater billed itself as a place “where stars are born.” “Stars” are great performers in some area. “Legends,” we’ve already said, are similar, people who are very famous for their talent in a particular area. The Apollo Theater has, in fact, started or launched, we might say, many careers of famous musicians, including Ella Fitzgerald as I mentioned, but also Billie Holiday, Diana Ross and The Supremes, The Jackson 5 (the most famous member of which was, of course, Michael Jackson), Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Mariah Carey, and many, many others. So it’s a very important place for African American music – jazz, popular, and so forth – in the United States.



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Of course, the audiences don't always like everyone who performs at the Apollo Theater, so the theater used to have a man named "the executioner." Normally an "executioner" is a person whose job it is to kill another person, usually because that person broke the law. So when the government has what is called a death penalty, where you can be killed if you commit a very serious crime, there has to be someone who actually does the killing, and that person is the executioner. We really don't have executioners anymore; nowadays people are killed in other ways rather than having some individual person shoot them or do something else to kill them. Of course, somebody has to do the things that make it possible to kill the person, so I guess in some ways we still have executioners. Well, in the past you would often see executioners kill people for the government by cutting off their head, for example, in a public square or plaza. The executioner at the Apollo Theater did not kill anyone; instead, he had a "broom," which is a tool that you use to clean floors – to sweep floors, to brush the dirt away. The executioner would use this broom to keep the performers off of the stage if the audience members had made it clear that they didn't like the performer. So if someone stands up and starts singing, and everyone in the audience hates the singing they may make noises; they may go: "Boo! You suck! You stink! Get out of here!" and then the executioner would come out and push the person, if you will, off of the stage. I'm glad ESL Podcast doesn't have an executioner!

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Apollo Theater began to "decline," it became less popular. In 1975 it actually became a movie theater, but in 1983 it was revived. When we talk about something being "revived," we mean that a person or a thing is somehow brought back to life. For example, a doctor might be able to revive a person who has stopped breathing; they get him breathing again. When we talk about buildings or neighborhoods or, in this case, the Apollo Theater reviving, we mean that we're making it more popular again. It's becoming a place where people go; it is coming back to life.

The new owner of the Apollo Theater in the early 80s make sure that the theater received landmark status with the government. When a building is called a "landmark" (landmark), we mean that it has been officially recognized by the government as something that is important for historic or cultural reasons, and therefore you can just take the building down. The building has to be "preserved" we would say, saved for future generations.

The Apollo Theater is now owned by the State of New York – by the government in the State of New York. It is currently undergoing – it is currently receiving a 65



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million dollar refurbishment. “Refurbishment” is when you go in and you make the building better, more beautiful, stronger, safer, perhaps more comfortable. Many famous people, including former President Bill Clinton, were at theater when it reopened and it has once again become very popular and an important part of New York City culture. A concert called “A Great Night in Harlem” (remember, Harlem is the neighborhood where the theater is located) is held there every year, and you can hear many famous musicians perform. The money that they bring into the theater on that particular day is used to help support jazz and blues musicians – people who play jazz music and blues music, both forms associated strongly and coming from the African American community in the U.S.

So if you have a chance to go to New York City, you might want to try to enjoy a performance at the Apollo Theater. I have been to New York a couple of times; I have never been the Apollo Theater, but maybe now I’ll go!

Now let’s turn to our next topic, our series on famous Americans. Today I’m going to talk about perhaps one of the most famous women in U.S. history, Susan B. Anthony. Susan B. Anthony was born in the State of Massachusetts (which is in the northeast part of the U.S., it’s where the city of Boston is located) in 1820. She played a pivotal role in women’s rights in the United States. The phrase “to play a pivotal (pivotal) role,” means that she had a very important part – she did some very important things in this particular area: women’s rights. For example, Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, has played a pivotal role in the growing use of personal computers. Steve Jobs has helped as well!

Susan B. Anthony, then, played a pivotal role in women’s rights, and particularly in what we call “suffrage” (suffrage). Suffrage means the right to vote in elections, when people are deciding who is going to be the next mayor or governor or president, or which laws are going to be approved.

Susan B. Anthony’s first job was as a teacher, but when she realized that the men teachers – the male teachers were earning, or making about four times as much as the female teachers for doing the exact same job, she began to fight for wage equality. “Wages” are the amount of money that you make at your job. “Equality” is the idea that you should be equal with other people. So she tried to make sure that women were making as much – were receiving the same wages as men in that particular school.



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Later, she stopped teaching and became involved in another great social movement, which we'll perhaps talk about on another Café, called the "temperance movement." The temperance movement in the United States tried to get people to not drink alcohol, usually for religious or moral reasons. She was also involved in another great moral struggle that many religious people were involved in, the anti-slavery movement, the movement to end slavery, which is the keeping of human beings as property. Her involvement in these movements – these efforts gave her confidence that she needed to begin speaking in public and sharing her own views on other things with other people. So she got her training, you could say, in the temperance and anti-slavery movements.

Soon she began to "advocate," or speak out – speak publicly in favor of women's rights. In 1852, she made her first public speech for women's rights at the third annual National Women's Rights Convention, a large meeting of women who were trying to get equality under the law, as part of the American legal system. In 1868, she began to publish a weekly magazine – a weekly journal called The Revolution, which supported suffrage for not only women, but also African Americans. During the 19th century and through the first part of the 20th century, women were not allowed to vote in the United States. This was not unusual for many democracies, but it was something that many people disagreed with and tried to change, which they did eventually.

In 1872, Susan B. Anthony was arrested by the police for having voted in the Presidential Election, even though it was illegal for women to vote. That's why they arrested her; they put her in jail. When the case went to trial, when it went before a judge, she made a very "eloquent," or very well-delivered, well-spoken speech. However, she was still "convicted," she was found guilty, meaning she had broken the law. She didn't have to go to prison, but she was supposed to pay money to the government, what we would call a "fine" (fine), but she never did. Overall, this trial of Susan B. Anthony helped because more people found out about her and about her arguments.

She died in 1906 at the age of 86. Unfortunately for her, this was 14 years before American women actually received the right to vote, when the 19th Amendment – the 19th change to the U.S. Constitution was passed in 1920. However, Americans recognize the importance of her work fighting for women's suffrage in the 19th century. In fact, you can go to a bank and you can get a special coin, a one-dollar coin, that was made during the years 1979 to 1981 and again in 1999, which are called the Susan B. Anthony Dollars. So normally,



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dollars in the United States are pieces of paper, one-dollar bills we call them. But this was a one-dollar coin, something that is very common in other countries but not common here – that is, a coin that has a larger value. Her face also appeared on U.S. postage stamps, the kind of thing that you put on a letter to mail it, in 1936 and in 1954.

Almost every American who's grown up in the United States knows about Susan B. Anthony; we learn about her at school. And now, you know a little bit about one of the most famous advocates for women's rights in the U.S.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Michal (Michal) in the Czech Republic. Michal wants to know the meaning of the expression “to talk down to (somebody).”

“To talk down to (someone)” means to talk as if you thought that person was less important than you, was in a lower position, or perhaps was less intelligent than you are. When someone is talking down to someone else, the person talking is treating the other person as if they were lower than them, less important than them, or, again, not quite as smart as them. Of course, this is not a nice thing to do; it's considered rude. You certainly don't want to talk down to anyone.

Rene in Germany (Rene) wants to know the meaning of the phrasal verb “to bail on (someone).” “To bail (bail) on (someone or something)” means to abandon that person or thing, to leave it, to withdraw your support for him, her, or it. For example: “My friend Julie promised to drive me home after the party, but now I can't find her. I think she bailed on me.” She left without me – which was not very nice Julie, really. Call me, I'm not happy! You could also bail on a class in school: “My biology class was really boring today, I decided to bail on it.” I left it early.

There's a related expression: “to bail out,” it actually has to rather different meanings. “To bail out” is another phrasal verb that can mean to jump out of a plane. For example, if the plane is going to crash, you bail out of a situation, you jump out of the situation. “To bail out” can also mean to help someone financially. For example, your brother loses his job and he needs to pay the loan on his house, you bail him out by giving him money so he can pay his loan. You're helping him by giving him money. That's another meaning of to bail out. But “to bail on” is an informal phrasal verb meaning to leave or abandon.



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Alexandre (Alexandre) in the country of Brazil has a pronunciation question. He wants know how to pronounce the words (year) and (ear). The first word, meaning 12 months is pronounced “year.” The second word, meaning the thing that you hear with on the side of your head, is “ear.” Year – ear; year – ear. Notice the “y” sound before the “ear”: year versus ear. They are very close; it’s sometimes difficult, especially if someone is talking very quickly.

Finally, Ravo (Ravo) from the country of Madagascar wants to know the difference between the expression “I’d better do something” and “I’d rather do something.”

When we say “I had better,” or “I’d better” we mean that we should do something, we would be better off, our situation would improve if we did this thing. “I’d rather,” which is actually “I would rather,” means that you prefer to do this thing versus that thing. “I’d rather go to the movie instead of reading my book.” That’s my preference, that’s what I want to do. But if I said “I’d better go to the movie,” that means that there’s something about going to the movie that is going to be good for me, that’s going to improve something, which of course isn’t always the case. You could say “I’d better go to the doctor when I’m sick, but I’d rather stay home.” “I had better” refers to what is good for you; “I would rather” refers to what you would actually prefer or want to do.

Sometimes we use “had better” as almost a threat to someone. “You’d better pay me my money before Friday.” You’re saying if you don’t, something bad will happen to you. The famous Christmas song about Santa Claus begins by saying “You better watch out,” really it should be “You had better watch out.” Santa Claus is warning you that you will need to be good or you will not get any presents for Christmas.

I’d rather not threaten you; instead, I invite you to send your questions and comments to us at eslpod@eslpod.com. We don’t have an opportunity to answer all of them, but we’ll do the best 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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