



A TOPICS

Movies – Pulp Fiction; the Outer Banks; lot versus batch; business ethics; to eat humble pie

GLOSSARY

dark comedy – a form of entertainment that laughs at serious subjects, such as death

* Why is there so much violence in many dark comedies?

to credit (someone) with (something) – to give someone credit for something; to say that someone is the reason why something happened

* Our boss always gives her employees credit for their good ideas.

to follow – to understand something; to know how something happened and why

* I can't follow these complicated instructions on how to put this bookcase together.

hitman – a person paid to kill another person; a professional whose job is to kill

* I read a news story about a man who hired a hitman to kill his wife.

disturbing – upsetting; causing one to feel uncomfortable

* Lorenzo is a talented artist whose paintings are often disturbing, but interesting.

formula – a standard way of doing something; a generally accepted method of doing something

* All of these romance novels follow a formula: the hero meets a girl, he loses her, but wins her in the end.

barrier islands – a long group of islands that run alongside and in the same direction as the mainland and provide protection to it from wind and waves

* Small boats can sail in these waters because of those barrier islands.

to stretch – to expand; to reach

* With the Internet, ideas can stretch across oceans and to the other side of the world.



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colony – an area of land that is governed by a country far away, sometimes with people living there from the faraway country

* Many Caribbean island nations are former European colonies.

shipwreck – for a ship or large boat to be destroyed while on the water, often because of storms

* This story is about a family shipwreck on a deserted island for two years.

to sink – for a ship or boat to fall to bottom of the ocean because it cannot float anymore; for an object to fall to the bottom of a container of liquid

* Quentin can't swim and is afraid he'll sink to the bottom of the pool.

adventurous – liking exciting and unusual experiences; looking for or ready for excitement

* Kyung is very adventurous, traveling all over the world on her own.

lot – a portion of anything; one of a set of objects from which one is chosen randomly; a share of something; one's destiny (fate); a piece of land

* I'm donating this lot of clothes to charity because none of the clothes don't fit me anymore.

batch – a certain number of items taken together; the amount of material required for a single action; the amount of cookies, bread or other dough products baked at one time

* We received a batch of calls about the new product when our store ad first appeared in the magazine.

business ethics – the study of moral (considered good or bad) and social (community; related to others) responsibility in business practices and decision-making

* Many people have criticized stockbrokers and money managers for not having good business ethics.

to eat humble pie – to be forced to apologize when one has been proved wrong; to admit one's faults in embarrassing circumstances

* Liam boasted that he could fix his own car, but after three days, he had to eat humble pie and take his car to a mechanic.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

B movies

B movies are films that were produced with a “low budget” (little money). Originally, B movies were intended as the second half part of a “double feature” shown as entertainment at a movie theater.

The “main attraction” (focus of a performance) was the “feature” (main) film, the “A” part of the double feature, which was shown first. The B movies had a shorter “running time” (length of a video or sound recording), “averaging” (approximately, with some longer and some shorter) 70 minutes. This led to the idea that they were “inferior” (not as good) as the feature. During the days of the Golden Age of Hollywood between the late 1920’s and early 1960’s, however, B movies were given as much importance as the feature film.

Early B movies were made in a different “genres” (categories). During the Golden Age, the most popular films were “westerns,” films about cowboys and the American West, usually before the 1900’s. In the 1950’s, “science fiction” (stories about the future) and “horror” (stories intended to frighten people) B movies became very common and popular.

B movies were often thought of as having very low “artistic ambitions” (intentions of making it high quality art). However, some B movies have received positive reviews and attention. Famous B movies include Pulp Fiction, and classics such as Night of the Living Dead and Psycho.

Many famous actors started their careers in B movies, including Jack Nicholson and John Wayne. Famous directors Peter Jackson, Anthony Mann and Jonathan Demme also started their careers with B movies.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast English Café number 414.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 414. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

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On this Café, we're going to continue our series on famous American movies, focusing on a film called Pulp Fiction. We'll also talk about an interesting area on the East Coast of the United States called the Outer Banks. And, as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

We begin this Café with a discussion of the famous American movie called Pulp Fiction. This is a movie that I guess we would call a “dark comedy,” or might be called a “black comedy.” A “dark comedy” is a movie that is funny, but it's funny about a very serious topic, usually about death. The movie Pulp Fiction is full of a lot of violent crime where people are injured and killed, but somehow it is done in sort of a funny way. I know that sounds strange, but if you've seen the movie, you probably know what I mean.

The name of the movie, “Pulp (pulp) Fiction,” refers actually to a type of literature that was popular in the 1930s called “pulp magazines.” I talked about this back on English Café number 387. Pulp fiction consisted of magazine stories and novels that had a lot of violence, a lot of crime, a lot of what we might call “fast-paced dialogues” where people would speak back and forth in short sentences – things happen very quickly in the novel itself. Pulp Fiction had many things in common with these early pulp fiction novels and pulp fiction stories. A lot of the pulp fiction was originally published in magazines.

The film, which was made in 1994, was directed by a young (at that time) director by the name of Quentin Tarantino. It was Quentin Tarantino's first popular and successful movie. He had a movie before that, or two, but he really became a star after directing Pulp Fiction. The movie itself starred John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson, and Uma Thurman.



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Many people credit the film with giving new life to John Travolta's acting career. John Travolta was a popular actor in the 1970s, but he went through a long period where he was no longer very popular. Then Pulp Fiction was made. John Travolta was the star of the movie, or at least one of the stars of the movie, and suddenly he was popular again as an actor. Many people credit this film. "To credit" someone means to give someone the credit for, or to say, "This is why this happened." "To credit someone" is usually a positive thing. It means to say, "This person did something good."

The plot of the movie is sometimes a little difficult to follow, meaning it's a little difficult to understand what is happening in the story and why. The plot has a lot of different . . . what we would call "story lines" – different parts of the story. It seems like each major or important character or group of characters has their own story, but these stories all mix together at the end. Another reason why the plot is difficult to understand is that it was not filmed – or I should say, it wasn't put together – in order. In other words, you start in the middle or the end of the story and then you go to the beginning of the story. Pulp Fiction jumps back and forth in terms of the plot so that it's a lot more difficult to understand where you are in the story. Are you in the early part of the story or the late part of the story?

In fact, I won't even try to explain the story in Pulp Fiction, but I can tell you that it involves organized crime – what we often call, in the United States, "the mob" (mob). A "mob" can be a large group of people who are perhaps violent or doing something that could be dangerous. Here, however, "mob" refers to organized crime, often organized by different crime families. Pulp Fiction also has a lot of "hit men" in it. A "hit man" (hit man) is someone who is paid to kill another person. The plot involves drugs. It involves a mysterious "briefcase" – a small box that businessmen and women use to carry important papers.

In the film, we never get to see what's inside of this box, what's inside of this briefcase, but it seems to be very important to the criminals of the movie. There was a lot of guessing – when the movie came out, when the movie was released – about what was really inside this box, but if you see the movie, it really isn't important what's inside the box. It's just the fact that there is something important inside the box. Some people thought the film was too violent. They thought some of the violence in the movie was what we might describe as "disturbing." Something that is "disturbing" (disturbing) is something that makes you uncomfortable. We might also use the word "unsettling" or "upsetting."

Overall, though, the film was very favorably received. It was very popular and it became very quickly a film that people considered a classic – a great movie.



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Movie critics loved Pulp Fiction because it had seemingly broken the traditional formula for successful movies. A “formula” (formula) is a word we usually associate with math or science, but here it simply means a way of doing things, a way of putting the movie together. Pulp Fiction broke the formula. It used a different approach to moviemaking. And that's something that a lot of the film critics – the people who write opinions about movies in newspapers, magazines, on blogs nowadays, and so forth – loved about this film.

The film was named “Best Picture” by many different organizations. It didn't actually win the Academy Award – the Oscar – for best movie that year, but Quentin Tarantino was recognized in this film as being one of the great new directors. The film itself did receive seven nominations for Oscars. A “nomination” is when you are one of the finalists, one of the last four or five that are being looked at to determine the winner. If you haven't seen Pulp Fiction, I have to warn you there is a lot of violence there. It's certainly not something you would want to take a child or a young adult to. But if you are interested in finding out a little bit more about American film, especially the work of Quentin Tarantino, then this is definitely a good place for you to start.

Now let's turn to our next topic, which is an area of the United States called the “Outer Banks.” The Outer Banks are a line of islands off the coast of North Carolina and part of Virginia. When I say “off the coast,” I mean they are in the ocean but near the main area of the states of North Carolina and Virginia. These are two states in the southeastern part of the U.S.

The Outer Banks are what we call “barrier islands.” A “barrier” (barrier) is normally something that protects you against something else – like a wall, for example. These aren't walls, but they're islands that in some ways protect the land – the mainland, we might refer to it as – of North Carolina and Virginia. These islands protect it from the wind and from the water in some ways. The islands of the Outer Banks stretch for about 200 miles. “To stretch” here means “to go the distance of.” They cover an area of about 200 miles.

The area itself is quite interesting in terms of its history. When Europeans came to the United States – when they first arrived – the British established a “colony,” an area of land governed by a country that is far away, on these islands. It was called the “Roanoke Colony.” The Roanoke colony is very famous in American history as being the first place where someone of English descent – someone from Great Britain – was born. The first British baby, we might say, was born in Roanoke Colony.



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Roanoke Colony is also famous because the colonists apparently mysteriously disappeared. We don't know what happened to the colonists on Roanoke Island. We know that they were there – and then, a few years later, they weren't there. It's one of the great mysteries of early American history about what happened to the people on Roanoke Island. Everyone has a different theory. My theory is that the island had hundreds – maybe even thousands – of cats, and that the cats ate the colonists and that's why they disappeared. You have to be careful with cats, people. I've been trying to tell you this.

Anyway, the Outer Banks also have been the site or the location of many shipwrecks. A “shipwreck” (shipwreck) is when you have a boat or a ship that has a problem; maybe they have a problem in the ship itself, and the water starts to come into the ship. Maybe it hits something that causes the ship to have a problem. Whatever the reason, a shipwreck is when a ship sinks. “To sink” (sink) means to go to the bottom of, in this case, the ocean.

There are a lot of shipwrecks around the Outer Banks. In fact, it's sometimes called “the graveyard of the Atlantic.” It's in the Atlantic Ocean, of course, off the East Coast of the U.S. A “graveyard” is normally a place where you bury dead people – bury their bodies. A “cemetery” is another word for “graveyard.” In this case, it's a graveyard of ships and, of course, of some of the men who are on those ships.

More recently – that is, more currently in American history – the Outer Banks were where the Wright brothers made the first flight in their airplane. I talked about that on English Café 185. So, the Outer Banks are quite famous for a lot of different things. If you ever go to this part of the country and visit them, you'll discover that the Outer Banks islands are very windy. There are often hurricanes that go through this area. Nevertheless, some crazy people like going there, and it has become a popular place for visitors. Some people who go there like to fish. Some like to swim. Some like to play golf.

If you're feeling a little bit more adventurous when you visit the area, you can climb up on top of the lighthouse and do what's called “hang gliding.” “To hang glide” is to get in this machine, basically, that doesn't have a motor, but it has big wings, and you jump off the top of something very high, and you are able to go down slowly in the air. You “glide” (glide) down. That's why they're called “hang gliders.” “To be adventurous” means to be ready for something different, to be ready for something exciting. I'm not very adventurous when I go on vacation. I just want to sit and relax. I don't really want any excitement. No adventure for me, thank you.



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Other people who go to visit the Outer Banks are more interested in learning about the history of the area, and we've already talked about some of that history. There's a play that is performed there called The Lost Colony, about the Roanoke Colony, and you can go and see that and learn more about that part of American history. So, if you're in the area of North Carolina, you might want to visit the Outer Banks. Just be very careful about the cats.

Now let's answer some of the questions you have sent to us.

Our first question comes from Richard (Richard) in China. Richard wants to know the difference between "lot" (lot) and "batch" (batch). Let's start with "batch." A "batch" of something can be a number of individual items or examples of that something taken together. For example, you may go on a trip and take a lot of photographs. You could say, "Well, I have a whole batch of photographs to look at," or "This is a batch of photographs from my trip last year, and here's another batch from this year" – "Here's another group from this year."

We use "batch" in a special way in talking about a group of something when we refer to things like cookies or other kinds of baked sweets. "I made a batch of cookies yesterday." "I'm going to make a batch of cookies tomorrow with chocolate and beer." I wonder, can you do that? Chocolate and beer cookies? Why not? Anyway, that's the meaning of "batch," to have a group of something – in this case, in this specific case, a group of cookies.

"Lot" has a couple of different meanings, one of which is sort of similar to batch. A "lot" can be a portion of something, whereas "batch" refers to a group of something. "Lot" refers to one part of a larger thing. We're selling furniture – we're selling chairs and tables – in lots of ten. We're taking a group of ten from the larger group and selling them as one group. So, you can see there's some connection – a "lot" of something can be a small group of something, but it's part of a larger group when we use it in this way.

We also use "lot" to refer to a piece of land. "My house is sitting on" (notice the verb we use – "to sit on") "a lot." It's a plot or an area of land where the house is located. You could have an empty lot. That would be land where there is nothing built on it. There are no buildings on it. "Lot," in a very different sense, can also mean your "destiny" or your "fate" – your future. This is a slightly older use, not quite as common anymore, of "lot." "I guess it's my lot in life to listen to bad music on the radio." That expression, "my lot in life," used to be quite common. The idea is that it's something you have to do, usually something that isn't very pleasant.



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Sam (Sam) from Sudan, in Africa, wants to know the meaning of the term “business ethics.” Let's start with “ethics” (ethics). “Ethics” refers to principles that guide you to make the right decision, to make a moral decision or a decision that is considered fair and just and correct. We talk about ethics for individuals. You could also talk about ethics for a group. In this case, the group would be a company or a business. “Business ethics,” then, would study, or look at, or try to apply certain principles or rules of good behavior – of ethical or moral behavior.

This term, “business ethics,” became popular in the 1970s and 80s. Most business schools now offer a course in business ethics. What did people do before the 1970s? Well, I guess they knew the right and the wrong thing to do – when they didn't need a class to tell them that you shouldn't do things like cheat or steal – but nowadays we need a class to tell people that that's not the right thing to do, I guess. I'm not sure; I've never been to business school. When you see, then, the term “business ethics,” you'll know that it's referring to principles or guidelines that tell you what you should and should not do in certain situations.

Finally, Mohammed (Mohammed) in Saudi Arabia, although originally from Yemen, wants to know the meaning of an idiom, “to eat humble pie.” This is a good idiom to know, especially if you're married, especially if you're a husband. “To be humble” (humble) means to be modest, to not have a very high opinion of yourself or how important you are. “To be humble” is the opposite of being proud. “Pride” is the opposite of “humility.” “Humble” is the adjective that describes someone who has a lot of humility, who doesn't believe that they're the best, who doesn't think they're better than other people.

“Pie” is a dessert, typically, in the United States. It's a dessert that you eat. It's sweet. Usually, it's baked in a dish – a round dish – and has fruit or some other sort of sweet ingredient inside of it. In some places, not so much in the U.S. but in some countries, the word “pie” can also be used for dishes that have meat and vegetables in them. I'm thinking especially in Great Britain.

“To eat humble pie,” however, has nothing to do really with food. “To eat humble pie” means to have to apologize when you have been proven wrong, when someone has shown that you made a mistake – to admit your fault in humiliating situations or humiliating circumstances. That's another definition of “to eat humble pie.” So, you say something or you do something, and then you have to admit that you're wrong. Usually this expression is used when you start off bragging about something. “To brag” (brag) means to say how great you are, or how great the things that you have done are. “To brag” is to have a lot of pride.



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It's the opposite of being humble. When you brag about something, and then we find out that you're wrong about it, then you have to admit you're wrong. You have to apologize. You have to “eat humble pie.”

There's another expression like this, which is “to eat crow” (crow). It means basically the same thing. Ironically, the verb “to crow” can mean to brag. “He was crowing about his victory on the golf course.” But “to eat crow” means, in some ways, the opposite – to say that you were wrong, to have to admit that you were wrong. Now you know why this is such an important phrase for husbands.

If you have a question or comment, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again right here on the English Café.

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