



ESL Podcast 430 – Talking About Books

GLOSSARY

well enough – somewhat; satisfactory, but not great; so-so; not horrible, but not wonderful

* I like math well enough, but I wouldn't want to solve math problems all day.

glowing recommendation – an enthusiastic statement that one should definitely do, use, see, or have something because a person likes it very much

* We had the best meal ever at that restaurant, and now we give it glowing recommendations whenever we talk to other people about food.

to start off with a bang – to begin in an exciting way; to begin well

* The conference started off with a bang with some great speakers, but then it became less interesting over the following few days.

suspense – the feeling of being excited and wanting to know what is going to happen, or looking forward to something that will happen in the future

* Everyone waited in suspense to hear whom the presidential candidate would choose as his vice president.

to not be able to put (something) down – to not be able to stop reading something because it is very interesting or exciting

* Her book was so interesting that she couldn't put it down until she had finished it.

pace – the speed or rate of something, especially of a race or of a book that one is reading

* For exercise, he walks at a very fast pace.

effort – something that is difficult and/or requires concentration to do

* For me, learning to ski took a lot of time and effort.

characterization – the way that fictional (not real) people are made to seem real in a book, story, or movie

* Sosumi's characterization is so good that her readers feel like the people in her books are good friends.



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to relate to (someone or something) – to understand someone or something; to be able to find something in one’s experience that is similar to something in another person’s experience

* Jim asked his grandmother why it is so hard for some older people to relate to teenagers.

plot – storyline; the things that happen in a book or movie

* The plot in this book is very similar to the plot in the author’s last book.

to drag – to do something very slowly; to be very slow, boring, and uninteresting

* The chemistry professor’s lectures always drag, making the students fall asleep.

author – writer; the person who writes something, especially a book or story

* Her favorite author is Mark Twain, who wrote The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.

to pull (something) off – to be able to do something successfully, especially if it is difficult and people don’t believe that it can be done

* Nobody thought that a hair salon would be successful on that street, but Paco opened the business and was able to pull it off.

ending – conclusion; the way that a book, story, or something else ends

* Please don’t talk about the movie’s ending! I haven’t seen it yet, and I want to be surprised.

laughable – something that is so bad that it is funny, because one cannot do anything other than laugh about it, not believing that it can be as bad as it actually is

* The government’s attempt to improve education by raising taxes by \$0.03 per person is laughable. That isn’t enough money to make a difference.

sequel – the second part of something; the continuation of a book or movie in a second book or movie

* Have you seen the sequel to this movie?

that makes one of us – an informal phrase used to show that one does not agree with another person

* I don’t like shopping at this store, so when Chaffey said that it was his favorite store, I said, “Well, that makes one of us.”



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why didn't Kurt like the book?
 - a) It was too suspenseful.
 - b) It didn't have good characters.
 - c) It was too slow.

 2. What does Kurt say about the book's ending?
 - a) It was very silly and unlikely.
 - b) It was very funny and humorous.
 - c) It was pulled off by the author.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

pace

The word “pace,” in this podcast, means the speed or rate of something, especially of a race or of a book that one is reading: “I don't like running with Mitch because he runs at such a slow pace.” A “pace” is also a step or the distance that is covered by one step: “Please move one pace to the left.” The phrase “to set the pace” means to decide how quickly a group of people will move by beginning to move at that speed: “Whenever they go hiking, her father sets the pace by walking in front.” Finally, the phrase “to keep pace with (someone or something)” means to increase or change as quickly as someone or something else is doing: “The company's production can't keep pace with sales, so there aren't enough products for all the people who want to buy them.”

to drag

In this podcast, the verb “to drag” means to do something very slowly, or for something to feel very slow, boring, and uninteresting: “This TV show is dragging. Let's watch something more interesting.” The verb “to drag” also means to carry something so that part of it is touching the ground, usually because it is too big or heavy to lift into the air: “Please stop dragging your jacket on the ground. It's getting dirty.” The phrase “to drag (one's) feet” or “to drag (one's) heels” means to do something very slowly because one doesn't want to do it: “I know you don't want to fire him, but stop dragging your feet and do it now so that you can stop worrying about it so much.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Many people who love to read have “book lists,” or lists of books that they want to read in the future when they have time. Many of the books on those lists are “best sellers,” or books that are very popular, with many people buying copies of those books.

The New York Times is a popular newspaper in the United States. Every Sunday, it publishes The New York Times Best Seller List, which lists all the books that have had the highest sales in the past week. The list, which was first published in 1942, is divided into different “sections” (parts), each with 10-20 books. There is a “fiction” (written about things that are not true) and “non-fiction” (written about things that are true) section.

The sections of the list have changed over time. In 1984, the list began to include a section for “advice” books (books about how people should live their life), because some of those books were becoming so popular that there wasn’t enough room on the list for “general-interest” (interesting to most people) non-fiction books.

In 2000, The New York Times Best Seller List began to include a special section for children’s books. This was because the Harry Potter “series” (a group of books with the same characters) had become such a famous best seller that it was always on the top of the list and there wasn’t room for other books.

Authors want to have their books listed on The New York Times Best Seller List, because many people look at the list to decide which books they will read. Being named a best seller helps even more copies of a book be sold, because many people become interested in it when they see it on the list.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – a



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 430: Talking About Books.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 430. 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. Go there to download the Learning Guide for this episode, which will help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "Talking About Books." It's a dialogue between Maggie and Kurt using some common vocabulary we might use in talking about and recommending books. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Maggie: What did you think of the book you started last week?

Kurt: Oh, I liked it well enough.

Maggie: Wow, that's a glowing recommendation.

Kurt: Well, it started off with a bang and the suspense in the first half was great. I couldn't put it down. Then, the pace changed in the second half and it was an effort to finish it.

Maggie: Really? I read it a few months ago and I loved it. I thought the characterization was really good. I could really relate to the two main characters.

Kurt: Yeah, that's true enough, but the plot dragged, don't you think? The author just couldn't pull it off and the ending was laughable.

Maggie: I really liked the ending! I can't wait for the sequel.

Kurt: Well, that makes one of us.

[end of dialogue]



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Our dialogue begins with Maggie asking Kurt, “What did you think of the book you started last week?” meaning the book you started to read last week. Kurt said, “Oh, I liked it well enough.” When someone says they like something “well enough,” it means they didn’t think it was great; it was okay; it wasn’t bad, but it wasn’t great either. Maggie said, somewhat sarcastically, trying to be funny, “Wow, that’s a glowing recommendation.” A “glowing recommendation” is an enthusiastic statement that you should definitely do something or see something or hear something. A “recommendation” is a suggestion to someone else; a “glowing recommendation” is a very positive, very enthusiastic recommendation. Of course, Kurt is not giving a glowing recommendation; Maggie’s just being funny.

Kurt says, “Well, (the book) started off with a bang.” To “start off with a bang” (bang) means to begin in an exciting way, to begin well: “The meeting started off with a bang when the president said everyone would be getting two weeks extra vacation this year.” Kurt says the book “started off with a bang (it was exciting at the beginning) and the suspense in the first half was great.” The “suspense” is the feeling of being excited and wanting to know what is going to happen next, when you’re looking forward to something that will happen next. There are lots of movies that that are suspenseful. The movies of Alfred Hitchcock, the great British director in the 1950s and 60s, those are suspense movies; you are waiting for something to happen.

Kurt says about the book, “I couldn’t put it down.” To not be able to put a book (or something) down means you can’t stop reading it because it’s so exciting. When you’re reading a really good book, you really want to continue reading it; you can’t put it down. To “put (something) down” means literally to take it and put it on the table, or stop reading it in this case. Kurt says, “Then, the pace changed in the second half (of the book) and it was an effort to finish it.” The “pace,” here, just means the speed or rate of something. This is a word we use about, for example, runners in a race: they are going at a fast pace or a slow pace. We can also use it to describe a book that you are reading. “It’s going at a very fast pace” means it’s going very quickly, the story is changing and moving forward very quickly. The word “pace” has a couple of different meanings in English; look at the Learning Guide today for some additional explanations.

Kurt says that it was an effort to finish the book. An “effort,” here, means something that is difficult, something that requires extra work, extra concentration. Maggie says, “Really? I read it a few months ago and I loved it.” So, Maggie read the same book and she loved it. “I thought the characterization was really good,” she says. In a story – in a fictional or imaginary story,



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“characterization” is the way that people are made to seem real, usually in a book, story, or movie. So someone may say, “Boy, this book has good characterization.” That means that the people in the books seemed real; they seemed interesting, perhaps, or complex. Maggie says, “I could really relate to the two main characters.” To “relate to someone,” or to “relate to something,” means to understand someone, to be able to find something similar in your own experiences. Sometimes we simply say, “I can relate.” For example, you are in an airport and the person next to you is worried because they are going to miss their flight (they will not leave at the correct time), and you may say, “I can relate to that. I missed my flight yesterday.” Or, we may just say informally, “I can relate,” meaning I understand. So, Maggie can relate to the characters (the people in the story), that means she can understand them; she has some sort of common experience that they share.

Kurt says, “Yeah, that’s true enough (meaning that’s true), but the plot dragged, don’t you think?” The “plot” is sometimes called the storyline. It’s the things that happen in a movie or a book or a story. It’s the events that happen: the person goes to the party, he talks to a pretty girl, the girl is not interested, so he talks to another pretty girl, and so on. That would be a “plot.” That would also be the story of my life! Now, when the “plot drags,” we mean it moves very slowly; it moves at a slow and boring pace; it doesn’t seem to move forward very quickly. “Drag” actually has a couple of meanings in English in addition to this one, so you know what to do: take a look at the Learning Guide for some more explanations.

Kurt says, “The author just couldn’t pull it off.” The “author” is the man or woman who writes the book or story; we may also call them the “writer,” especially if we are talking about a movie. The technical term for someone who writes a movie would be a “scriptwriter.” Here on ESL Podcast our scriptwriter, the person who writes these stories that we talk about – these wonderful stories, is Dr. Lucy Tse. She’s the author of these dialogues. “The author just couldn’t pull it off.” This is an expression, a phrasal verb, “to pull (something) off” or “to pull off (something)” means to be able to do something successfully; to be able to complete something that is difficult, especially when other people don’t think you will be able to do it. Kurt says the author could not pull it off, “and the ending was laughable.” The “ending” is, you may guess, the final part of the story, the conclusion. If you say something is “laughable, you mean it is so bad that it is funny because you can’t do anything other than laugh about it. You, in some ways, can’t believe how bad it is. So, “laughable” means funny, but it means funny because it’s so bad.



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Maggie says, “I really liked the ending! I can’t wait for the sequel.” A “sequel” (sequel) is the second part or continuation of a book or a movie. So, it’s the second book. I read a book a long time ago, a suspense spy book called Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy by the British author John le Carré. After he wrote that book it was very successful, so then he wrote another book – a sequel. There are a series of popular movies based on a book; the first one was called The Bourne Identity. And then, that was successful so the author wrote another book, and they also made movies about these three books. So, each one is a sequel; the second and third books are sequels to the first.

Kurt doesn’t agree with Maggie, so he says, “Well, that makes one of us.” Actually, Kurt is making a joke here: the normal expression is “that makes two of us” when, for example, someone says something and you are in the same situation. Somebody says, “Oh, I missed my airplane (I missed my flight at the airport),” you may say, “Well, that makes two of us. I missed my flight, too.” Here, Kurt is making a joke, he says “that makes one of us,” which is just a funny way to say you are the only person that thinks that.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal pace.

[start of dialogue]

Maggie: What did you think of the book you started last week?

Kurt: Oh, I liked it well enough.

Maggie: Wow, that’s a glowing recommendation.

Kurt: Well, it started off with a bang and the suspense in the first half was great. I couldn’t put it down. Then, the pace changed in the second half and it was an effort to finish.

Maggie: Really? I read it a few months ago and I loved it. I thought the characterization was really good. I could really relate to the two main characters.

Kurt: Yeah, that’s true enough, but the plot dragged, don’t you think? The author just couldn’t pull it off and the ending was laughable.

Maggie: I really liked the ending! I can’t wait for the sequel.

Kurt: Well, that makes one of us.



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[end of dialogue]

The author of this fast-paced script today was Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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