



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

GLOSSARY

What are you looking at? – a phrase used when one feels defensive and thinks another person is looking at oneself strangely, being critical or judgmental

* What are you looking at? Every time I look up, you're staring at me.

You want a piece of me? – an informal question that asks whether another person wants to fight; a challenge for a fight

* You want a piece of me? Go ahead and hit me! I can beat you, for sure.

You and what army? – an informal phrase showing that one doesn't believe another person is capable of doing what he or she just said, unless he or she has help from many other people

* Do you really think you'll be able to make this company profitable again? You and what army? You have no idea how much debt we have.

to take (something) outside – to leave a bar or another room so that two or more people can fight and/or have a loud disagreement outdoors, away from other people

* Boys, if you can't keep the noise down, you'll need to take your disagreement outside. Nobody wants to hear the two of you fighting with each other.

to pick a fight – to try to get another person to fight with oneself, usually by saying or doing something to cause the other person to become angry

* Christopher tried to pick a fight with the rich man by saying horrible things about his wife.

to make peace – to make a situation calmer and more controlled or more manageable; to find a way to end an argument or a tense situation without fighting; to forgive another person and be forgiven by that person

* Shane and his girlfriend have been fighting for a few days, but tonight he's going to try to make peace with her by cooking dinner and giving her flowers.

to hold (someone) off – to delay someone; to prevent someone from doing something for a period of time, usually at least until something else can happen

* Somehow John was able to hold off the attackers until the police arrived.



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

to mind (one's) own business – to stay focused on oneself, without interfering with another person or becoming involved in another person's conversation or actions; to not pay attention to anyone else

* Why are you asking me all these personal questions? Please just mind your own business.

to get in (one's) face – to bother, annoy, or upset another person, often by standing too close, asking personal questions, or doing something that is offensive

* Homeless people often ask us for money when we walk downtown, but this time it was different, because the guy was really getting in our face.

to chill out – to calm down and relax; to stop shouting or being agitated or upset

* After a stressful week at work, Iris chose to chill out by taking a bubble bath and watching an old movie.

fighting words – language that is aggressive and makes another person angry enough to want to fight; spoken statements that encourage another person to become angry, aggressive, and violent

* Anyone who heard those fighting words would have become angry. It's amazing you had enough self-control not to hit him.

tail between (one's) legs – cowardly; scared and frightened; not brave

* He always pretends to be brave, but whenever anything really happens, he runs away with his tail between his legs.

to stop in (one's) tracks – to immediately stop what one is doing and change one's behavior, often because one is very surprised, startled, shocked, or scared

* Whenever Raj's cell phone rings, he stops in his tracks to take the call.

to weigh (one's) odds – to evaluate and assess one's likelihood of success; to try to determine whether one will be successful in what one wants to do

* I know you enjoy playing the lottery, but if you really sit down and weigh your odds, you'll see that you're better off investing that money in stocks.

narrow escape – getting away from a dangerous or difficult situation without being harmed, but just barely

* The firefighter made a narrow escape from the burning building, which collapsed just seconds after she walked out.



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

needless to say – without the need to say something because it is so obvious, clear, and easy to understand

* Needless to say, I'd be very happy if I won a million dollars.

round – alcoholic drinks purchased for and drunken by a group of people at the same time, usually paid for by one individual

* If I win, you'll buy a round of drinks, but if you win, I'll buy a round.

on (one/someone) – paid for one or by a particular person; the financial responsibility of one or a certain person

* Thanks for buying me lunch today. The next time we go out together, it's on me.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does he mean by saying he was hoping to “hold him off”?

- a) He wanted to delay him until his friends could come.
- b) He wanted to try to hold him down so he couldn't move.
- c) He wanted to call the police to ask for protection.

2. Why does he say, “That was a narrow escape”?

- a) Because he had to run away through a very narrow door.
- b) Because he almost had to fight the other man.
- c) Because he would have been embarrassed if his friends had seen him fighting.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to take (something) outside

The phrase “to take (someone) outside,” in this podcast, means to leave a bar or another room so that two or more people can fight and/or have a loud disagreement outdoors, away from other people: “If your discussion doesn't involve any of the other meeting participants, please take it outside.” The phrase “outside of” means apart from, or excluding: “Outside of my parents, you're the person who knows me best.” The phrase “outside perspective” is used to



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

describe the viewpoint of someone who isn't directly involved in something and can provide a fair, unbiased opinion: "They realized they would never solve the problem on their own, so they got a mediator who could give them an outside perspective." Finally, the phrase "outside interests" refers to the things one likes that are not related to one's job: "He's a software engineer, but his outside interests include painting and snowboarding."

on (one/someone)

In this podcast, the phrase "on (one/someone)" means paid for by one or a particular person, or the financial responsibility of one or a certain person: "Let's go get some ice cream. It's on me." The phrase "on (one's) watch" means while someone was responsible or in charge: "I can't believe Ileana fell off the slide on my watch. Her mother will never forgive me." The phrase "on (one's) honor" is used to emphasize the seriousness of one's promise or truthfulness: "On my honor, I would never do such a thing." Finally, the phrase "on (one's) own" is used to show that someone has done something independently, without help from anyone else: "Did you solve the math problems on your own, or did someone help you?"

CULTURE NOTE

When people "have too much to drink" (become drunk from drinking too much alcohol), they often become aggressive and violent, causing bar "brawls" (fights). Bars have many "policies" (official descriptions of how things should be done) to avoid these situations, and communities "pass" (approve) laws, too, but of course they don't always work.

"Bartenders" (the people who serve drinks in a bar) are "instructed" (taught) to "cut off" (stop serving alcohol to) anyone who appears to be drunk. The customers might become very angry when their "order" (request for what one wants in a restaurant) is "denied" (not allowed), but the bar always has the "right to refuse service" (can decide whether to serve each customer).

Many bars also have a "bouncer," or a big, strong, usually male employee who works in the bar at night to keep everyone safe. A bouncer stands by the door and controls who can and cannot come into the bar. The bouncer will not allow anyone who is "visibly" (noticeably; able to be seen) drunk to enter the bar. Also, if the bouncer sees someone "getting out of control" (starting to lose control), he



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

might ask that person to leave. If any fights “break out” (begin), the bouncer will “intervene” (become involved) and call the police if necessary.

If a drunk person is “kicked out of” (forced to leave) a bar, it doesn’t really solve the problem, because he or she can still pick fights with other people on the street. That is why there are many laws against “public” (around other people; in shared areas) drunkenness. If police see someone who is drunk in public, they can “arrest” (put in jail) and/or “fine” (charge money as a punishment) him or her, even if the drunk person hasn’t yet picked a fight.

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



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 621: Picking a Fight.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 621. 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 a Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English – and improve your life in general!

Today's episode is a story about a man who goes to a bar, and there is another man at the bar who wants to fight him. Sounds exciting! Let's get started.

[start of story]

I was sitting at my local bar waiting for my friends to arrive to watch the game. Two guys sitting a few seats away kept giving me strange looks, and one of them said, "What are you looking at?" I looked around to make sure that he was speaking to me, and before I could respond he said, "You want a piece of me? You and what army? Let's take it outside."

By this time, I realized that this guy was trying to pick a fight with me and I wasn't sure what to do. I was hoping that I could make peace with him or at least hold him off until my friends got there.

I said to him, "I'm just sitting over here minding my own business. I'm not trying to get in your face. I don't have a problem with you. Let's just chill out and I'll buy you and your friend a drink." He didn't seem to like what I'd said.

"Chill out?" he said. "I don't need to chill out. Those are fighting words. Let's take this outside. I want to see you running with your tail between your legs." He got up and started to walk toward me.

Just then, my friends arrived. When the man saw my six friends walking toward me, he stopped in his tracks. I think he was weighing his odds and doubting his own chances. He turned around and said something to his friend, and then they both got up and walked out the door.



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

That was a narrow escape. I had never been so happy to see my friends as I was at that moment. Needless to say, the first round was on me.

[end of story]

Our story begins with me sitting at a local bar. A “local bar” would be a bar in my neighborhood, close to where I live. A “bar” is, of course, a place where you can go and get beer and other alcoholic drinks.

I’m waiting at the bar for my friends; we are going to watch the game. I don’t say which game; it could be a baseball game, a football game, and so forth. It’s popular in the United States for men, in particular, to go to what are called “sports bars,” and these are bars that have big televisions that you can watch sporting events on.

Two guys – two men – are sitting a few seats away. They kept giving me strange looks, meaning they kept looking at me, they continued to look at me for a long time with strange looks. The expression on their faces, the way they held their body, it was unusual, odd, strange. Finally, one of them said to me, “What are you looking at?” This expression – this question could be just a way of asking someone what they are looking at, but it’s the way that you pronounce it that changes the meaning. There’s a difference between “What are you looking at?” and “What are you looking at?” In the second case, “What are you looking at?” it’s meant to express a kind of anger. You think the other person is looking at you in some critical way, that the other person doesn’t like you and so you want to defend yourself. It’s the sort of thing you would say if you wanted to fight someone. So you wouldn’t want to say this to, say, someone who is bigger and stronger than you.

Well, this man at the bar doesn’t like me – in the story, that is. I say that I look around to make sure that he is speaking to me, and before I can respond he says, again another expression that you would use to start a fight, “You want a piece of me?” This is another way of saying do you want to fight me. “You want a piece of me? You and what army?” “You and what army?” is another informal phrase showing that you don’t believe that the other person can beat you in a fight, that this person would need other people – a lot of other people. It can be used for anything, not just a fight, any situation where you don’t think the person is able to do what they say they can do. Finally this man says, “Let’s take it outside.” “To take (something) outside” is another informal expression used to indicate that you want to fight – to physically fight this other person. You want to leave the bar, or leave that room and go outside and have a fight. So, all three of



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

these expressions are ones that you would find in situations where someone was trying to pick (pick) a fight. “To pick a fight” means to try to get another person to fight you, especially someone who isn’t really bothering you, someone who just wants to leave themselves alone, but you’re so angry you feel like fighting someone. This doesn’t happen to me, but apparently to some men it does.

By the way, the expression “to take (something) outside,” or words in that expression, can be used in other ways in English. Take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

I continue the story by saying, “By this time (meaning by the time this has happened), I realized that this guy was trying to pick a fight with me and I wasn’t sure what to do. I was hoping that I could make peace with him.” “To make peace” (peace) means try to calm down a difficult situation, a tense situation, to perhaps forgive the other person so that there are no longer any bad feelings between you. I tried to make peace with him, or I was hoping to make peace with him, or at least hold him off until my friends got there. “To hold (someone) off” is another two-word phrasal verb meaning to delay someone, to prevent someone from doing something for a certain length of time, usually until something else happens. This could also be used in a military situation. The famous group of Spartans in ancient Greece, the soldiers from Sparta, held off the Persians at Thermopylae to allow the Athenians to build a better defense and defend the city of Athens. “Go tell the Spartans, you passerby, that here, obedient to their word, we lie.” That is a famous line written about the Spartans who died at Thermopylae by one of the great poets of that day. A “passerby” is someone who is just walking by. And so the soldiers are saying go tell the Spartans (our people back in our city of Sparta) that here (at Thermopylae), obedient to their word (meaning we are doing what they asked us to do), we lie. In this case, their bodies are there – they lie there. “Go tell the Spartans, you passerby, that here, obedient to their word, we lie.” This has nothing to do with our episode, but it does have to do with the expression “to hold (someone) off.”

Well, I’m hoping to hold off these two men until my friends arrive, so I say to the man, “I’m just sitting over here minding my own business.” “To be minding your own business” means that you are not bothering anyone else; you are not interfering or paying attention to anyone else, you are just focusing on yourself. I say that I’m not trying to get in your face. “To get in (someone’s) face” is an informal expression meaning to bother, to annoy, to make another person angry often by asking them personal questions or perhaps standing too close to them. I say that I don’t have a problem with you. “Let’s just chill out.” “To chill out” is a phrasal verb meaning to relax, to be calm. It’s very informal.



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

I tell him that I will buy him and his friend a drink, but he's angry. He says, "Chill out? I don't need to chill out. Those are fighting words." In other words, those are things you would say when you want someone to fight you. "You want a piece of me? Let's take it outside. What are you looking at?" Those are all examples of fighting words. Well, this gentleman thinks that telling him to chill out is an invitation to fight. He says, "Let's take this outside. I want to see you running with your tail between your legs." The expression "your tail (tail) between your legs" means that you are scared and frightened, sort of like a dog who's running away. You are a coward; you are not brave.

Then, my friends arrive, and when the man sees my friends he stops in his tracks (tracks). "To stop in your tracks" means to immediately stop what you are doing, to stop moving often because you are surprised or shocked. Well, this man stops in his tracks. Then I say, "I think he was weighing his odds and doubting his chances. "To weigh (weigh) your odds" means to think about whether you are going to be successful or not, to determine whether you will be able to do what you want to do. This man is now seeing my six friends, doubting that he can beat me. He turns around and says something to his friend, and then they leave.

Finally I say, "That was a narrow escape." A "narrow escape" is when you get away from a dangerous or difficult situation without being harmed, without injury. But you almost got injured, it was very close – it was a narrow escape. I say that I had never been so happy to see my friends as I was at that moment. "Needless to say, the first round was on me." The expression "needless to say" means it is so obvious I don't have to say it. A "round," in this case, is alcoholic drinks that are purchased by someone; usually one person buys everyone in the group a beer or a drink. When everyone in your group orders a drink at approximately the same time, we would call that a "round of drinks." So you may have a first round, and then you may have a second round, and a third round, and a fourth round. Well, you should probably stop after maybe the third round!

I say that the first round is on me. When you say something is "on you," or "on me," you mean that I, or you, am going to pay for it. You say, "Oh, no. That's on me. Dinner is on me." I'm going to pay for dinner; I'm inviting you to dinner. There are actually some other ways of using the preposition "on," especially this saying "on me" or "on you." Those can be found in our Learning Guide.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.



ESL Podcast 621 – Picking a Fight

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“Chill out?” he said. “I don’t need to chill out. Those are fighting words. Let’s take this outside. I want to see you running with your tail between your legs.” He got up and started to walk toward me.

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That was a narrow escape. I had never been so happy to see my friends as I was at that moment. Needless to say, the first round was on me.

[end of story]

The script for this episode was written, needless to say, by Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again on ESL Podcast.

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