TOPICS

American Musicals and Movies: Grease; Workers’ Compensation Laws; whirl versus swirl versus eddy; to be curious versus to wonder; beloved

GLOSSARY

senior year – final year of high school or university studies; the forth and final year of high school or university studies
* When Yentzu finishes her senior year, she plans to take a year off to travel before attending college.

reputation – what other people think about you and how you behave
* Jaime had a reputation for being an honest businessman, which is why people liked to work with him.

rebel – a person who fights against authority and tries to do things their own way
* James Dean was an actor who played rebels in films, riding motorcycles, smoking cigarettes, and drinking alcohol.

good girl – a girl who follows the rules and behaves in a way that is expected of her
* Most parents want their daughters to be good girls who listen to them, do well in school, and have well-behaved friends.

to exaggerate – to represent something as bigger, better, greater, or worse than it really is
* Simone said that she caught a fish that was eight feet long, but I think she was exaggerating.

workers compensation – something, usually money, that is given to workers after they are injured to help pay medical bills and/or to replace the money they would normally be earning if they had not been hurt
* When Milo hurt his hand at work, he collected over $100,000 in compensation to help pay doctors’ bills.

to sue – to take to court and ask for money or something else
* The landlord sued his former tenants because he said that they didn’t pay him rent for three months.

federal – related to the national government
* Federal offices, such as the Post Office, are closed on national holidays.

**to put a limit on** – to create a maximum amount that is allowed  
* In order to keep the restaurant safe, the fire department put a limit on the number of people who are allowed in the restaurant at any one time.

**disability** – a physical or mental condition that limits the amount of activity a person is able to do  
* Even though she suffered from a physical disability, Arti was able to move around quite well, thanks to her wheelchair.

**industry** – field of work or employment; type of business  
* Many college graduates with degrees in business go to New York City to work in the financial industry.

**miner** – a person who works in a mine (a large hole very deep in the ground), digging for materials such as coal or gold  
* When gold was found in San Francisco, miners from all over the country traveled there to try to find gold of their own.

**whirl** – a fast movement around and around; moving in a circle, again and again  
* The little girl whirled around and around in her new dress.

**swirl** – a movement in a twisting or spiraling pattern (moving around and around without stopping, making bigger or smaller circles)  
* How do you create a swirl of cream in your coffee in that heart-shaped pattern?

**eddy** – a movement in water or air in the opposite direction of the main current or movement, especially moving in a circle  
* Jim isn’t a strong swimmer and was scared when he was caught in the eddy.

**to be curious** – to be eager to know or learn something  
* I’m curious to know how long it took you to build this wood deck.

**to wonder** – to want to know something; to want to have an answer to something  
* I wonder how many people will attend today’s concert.

**beloved** – dearly loved; a much-loved person  
* Their dog is very cute and beloved by all of their neighbors.
WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Greasers

There are many “subculture” (smaller cultural or social) groups in every country and many of them are formed by young people. These subcultures each have their own “distinct” (unique; special in some way) style, behaviors, and interests. These subcultures are often “inspired by” (started based on the idea of) a “genre” (classification; type) of music.

One subculture that has appeared in many American movies, like Grease, is the greaser. The greaser subculture began in the 1950s and many films and TV shows “set” (located in the time period of) the 1950s included greaser characters.

Being a greaser was a way for young Americans in the 1950s to show “rebellion” (acting against authority and rules). Rock and roll – the music genre popularized by singers like Elvis Presley and Little Richard – was a big part of this subculture. The term “greaser” came from the way the members of this subculture styled their hair, which involved combing the hair back and applying hair products such as “wax” (a stiff material used in candles) or “pomade” (a scented thick liquid applied to the hair), to make it appear “greasy” or covered with an oily substance.

Greasers were most often found in the “working class” (a social class where people most often worked in jobs that used their hands and body, such as in factories or as plumbers) neighborhoods. These neighborhoods tended to have higher “crime rates” (more crimes occurring), so greasers were also called “hoods” or “ punks,” both negative terms for young people, especially young men involved in activities that break the law or the rules.

Although the greaser subculture was “largely” (mainly) a North American youth subculture “phenomenon” (occurrence), similar youth groups appeared in Australia, Japan, Italy, Sweden, South Africa, and in the United Kingdom.
We’re going to talk about a favorite (for some people) movie musical called Grease. We’re also going to talk about something called “workers’ compensation laws,” or the laws that are supposed to protect employees who get hurt while working. And, as always, we’ll answer a few of your questions. Let’s get started.

The first topic is the movie musical Grease. A “musical” (musical) is a play that has singing and usually dancing in it. The story is told through regular dialogue, or speaking, but also through songs and music. A movie musical, then, is a movie that has singing and dancing in it, basically. The musical Grease was first performed as a play in 1971, and later, in 1978, it was made into the movie Grease.

The word “grease” (grease) usually refers to a type of oil that is used in an engine to keep the motor or engine running smoothly, but we also call the stuff some men put in their hair to keep it straight “grease.” Putting grease in your hair was particularly popular in the 1950s among certain teenagers. In fact, these teenagers were called “greasers,” and that’s whom the musical and the movie are about – a group of teenagers in the 1950s.

Grease begins in the summer of 1958, when a beautiful young teenage girl (of course), Sandy Olson, and a handsome, or good-looking, young man, Jeff McQuillan – I mean, sorry, Danny Zuko – meet on a summer vacation with their families. Sandy Olson was played by Olivia Newton-John, the Australian singer and actress. Danny Zuko was played by someone who looks just like me: John Travolta. They were both about to begin their senior year (that is, Sandy and Danny), or their final year of high school.

Now, Sandy is from Australia, which is convenient because so was Olivia Newton-John – although in the original play, Sandy was not from Australia. But because Olivia Newton-John is from Australia, Sandy – her character, who speaks like an Australian – is also from Australia. Anyway, Sandy is planning on returning to Australia after the summer vacation.
Now, here’s my problem with the movie. The months that we call “summer” in the U.S. are of course actually winter in Australia. So technically, Sandy should be in school during this time, not vacationing in America. So basically, the movie is a little illogical, but this is a movie and so we don’t worry too much about things like what season is it in the northern hemisphere.

Back to the story, the handsome American teenager, Danny, will return to his high school as normal, and Sandy, we think, is going to go back to her high school somewhere in Australia. But Sandy and Danny, after they meet each other, have a summer romance, and the audience watching the film sees them saying goodbye at the end of the summer, and it’s so sad because they’ll never see each other again. Aww.

But wait! In the fall, school begins at Rydell high school, where Danny is a student. Danny is reunited with his friends – he meets all of his friends again – a group of boys called the T-Birds. The T-Birds are the cool kids, right? They wear black leather jackets and have a reputation as being rebels at the school, just like the greasers in real life 1950s. A “reputation” is what other people think about you and about how you behave. A “rebel” (rebel) is a person who fights against authority and tries to do things his or her own way.

Now, the members of the T-Birds often do not go to class and like to play jokes on the teachers and administrators at the school. During the movie, the audience learns that some of the T-Birds may not even graduate, or finish high school, because their grades are not good enough. The term “T-Birds” actually comes from a fast car that was popular in the 1950s in the U.S., the Ford Thunderbird. “T-Bird” is short for “Thunderbird” (thunderbird).

There was a song, later, by the Beach Boys called “Fun, Fun, Fun.” And in that song, there was a line, “And she’ll have fun, fun, fun till her daddy takes her T-Bird away.” It’s a song about a rich young girl whose father (“daddy”) has let her use his “T-Bird” car to drive around in. The song, however, is not in the movie. The movie has a lot of other popular songs, however.

Now as it turns out, Sandy’s family has changed their plans, and they are not going back to Australia. And where will Sandy be going to high school here in America? Well, if you said Rydell High School, give yourself ten points. Who would’ve guessed it? But you see, Sandy doesn’t know that Danny is a student at Rydell High School, and of course, Danny doesn’t know that Sandy is now a student there either, because he thought she was returning to Australia. Well,
you can imagine what happens. The two of them are going to meet, and everything is going to be happy, right?

Well, not exactly. Here's what happens. One of the girls at the school, named Frenchy, invites Sandy into her group of friends, but it is clear from the beginning that Sandy doesn’t belong. She’s not like the other girls. She is not a rebel like the other girls in Frenchy’s group. The group is actually called the “Pink Ladies.” Now, the Pink Ladies make fun of poor Sandy, especially one character named Rizzo, who was played by the actress Stockard Channing.

The Pink Ladies tease Sandy about being such a good girl. “To tease” (tease) someone means to make fun of someone, fun of the way he or she talks or acts or dresses. The term “good girl” refers to a girl who follows the rules, who does what other people tell her to do. In the first part of the movie, Danny and Sandy tell their friends about their summer adventure, their summer romance. They in fact sing about their romance in one of the first songs of the movie, “Summer Nights.” The movie switches back and forth between Danny singing and Sandy singing, so that the audience hears both versions of the story.

Now, Danny is singing to his friends, and Sandy is singing to her friends. So of course, what a boy will say or a man will say about his relationship with a girl or a woman may be different than what the woman would emphasize about that relationship. And that’s exactly what happens. Sandy talks about how Danny and her have this loving, innocent relationship, and Danny talking to his male friends suggests that the relationship was perhaps more sexual than that.

Well, it’s clear, however, that Danny is exaggerating. “To exaggerate” (exaggerate) means to make a story sound better than it really is. A classic example of this is someone who goes fishing and tells you how big the fish was that he caught – that he was able to take out of the water. Usually the size of the fish is much bigger than the actual fish – the size in the story that the person tells. Well, that’s what happens with Danny.

At the end of the song, Sandy tells the girls the name of her summer boyfriend, and the girls are all surprised to hear the name of one of their classmates, Danny Zuko. So, the girls decide to surprise Sandy and Danny and get them back together again. They don’t tell Sandy that they know this Danny Zuko. When Sandy and Danny see each other again, they are both very happy.

Danny, however, wants to keep his reputation with his friends as the tough guy, the rebel. So, he’s not very nice to Sandy. Men do this sometimes, right? They
don’t treat women very well because they want to have this tough reputation. Well, that’s what Danny does to Sandy. Sandy is confused. She doesn’t understand why Danny is being such a jerk, such a bad person, and rightfully she gets upset. She gets mad and she leaves.

Frenchy later invites Sandy over to her house for what’s called a sleepover. A “sleepover” (sleepover) is when children or teenagers go to the house of one of their friends and spend the night there. Sometimes just one night, sometimes for the weekend. The tradition with a sleepover, which can be for either boys or girls – not together, of course – is that you stay up all night talking to your friends. It’s probably much more common among girls than it is among boys, but that’s the idea of a sleepover.

Well, the sleepover doesn’t help Sandy feel any better. It also becomes clear that Sandy does not fit in with, or does not seem to be the same as, the other girls who are at this sleepover, and the girls make fun of Sandy when she is out of the room. They tease her about how perfect she is and what a good girl she is. Sandy, meanwhile, leaves and goes outside to think about – who else? – Danny. She sings about how she still really loves Danny even though he was mean to her when they met last.

This is expressed in one of the most famous songs of the movie, “Hopelessly Devoted to You.” “To be devoted (devoted to)” someone is to love them, to be loyal to them. The word “hopelessly” means without hope, and it’s often used in a situation where things are bad and cannot get better. Sandy is saying in a way that she loves Danny and can’t stop being devoted to him, even if it hurts. That’s why she uses this adverb, “hopelessly.” “I’m hopelessly in love with you” – even if it hurts me, I’m still in love with you.

We later learn that Danny isn’t such a terrible person after all. He also misses Sandy and wants to be back in a relationship with her. He tries to get her to be his girlfriend again by being the good boy, and he does this by joining some athletic teams to try to impress her and get her attention. This is something boys like to do. Men also like to get a woman’s attention by doing something that he thinks the woman will admire, something that will impress her. “To impress” (impress) someone means to make them think you are a good person or that you are good at some task or activity.

Danny’s plan to get Sandy to be his girlfriend works. It is successful and they do in fact get back together. But there are some more problems in the story. The relationship has what we would call its “ups and downs” – its good times and bad
times – as they try to figure out how a good girl and a rebel can go out with each other, can date each other romantically.

What happens at the end? Well, have you ever seen the Shakespeare play, *Romeo and Juliet*, where they both kill each other at the end of the play? That doesn’t happen in *Grease*. I won’t tell you what happens. You just have to go and watch the movie yourself if you haven’t seen it already.

*Grease* was released in, or first shown in, movie theaters in the summer of 1978, when I was a freshman in high school. It was an immediate success – at least, it was an immediate success with a lot of teenage girls. I did not go see the movie in 1978, nor did any of my male friends. In fact, I don’t think I saw it until at least the 1990s. John Travolta, who played Danny Zuko in the movie, was at this time already a major star, a well-known celebrity, especially after starring in the movie *Saturday Night Fever* the previous year, in 1977.

Olivia Newton-John at this time was not that popular. She was popular in her native Australia, but she hadn’t had much success in the United States. *Grease* really changed her career dramatically. She became a very popular singer both in the U.S. and internationally. She was never great actress, however, and one of her following films was maybe one of the worst films ever made, a film called *Xanadu*. If you have a chance to see it, don’t.

Some of the songs in the movie *Grease* also became hits, or successes. The title song, “Grease,” was written by Barry Gibb. You may know Barry Gibb from the popular group the Bee Gees. “Hopelessly Devoted to You,” “Summer Nights,” and “The One That I Want” all became hits on the radio.

The movie itself was nominated, or chosen, to possibly win a lot of awards, including best picture, best actor, best actress, and best original song. Not for the Oscars, but for another awards ceremony, called the Golden Globes. The Golden Globes are awards given by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. Unfortunately, it didn’t win any of those awards.

However, it has remained an extremely popular movie, especially with teenage girls. In fact, I’ve been in other countries and talked to people, and many of the girls and women have seen this movie, dubbed or subtitled. The movie was in fact re-released for its twentieth anniversary in 1998, and when it was released, it was the second-most-popular movie in the theaters at that time, even though it was 20 years old.
Let’s change topics now and talk about the fascinating world of workers’ compensation laws. If you don’t think they’re fascinating, if you don’t think they’re interesting – well, you just listen. Worker’s compensation laws are laws that protect people, protect employees, who are hurt while working at their jobs. The word “compensation” (compensation) refers to something, usually money, that is given to people after they are injured or hurt to help pay for their medical bills – their doctor’s bills. It also helps them make up for the money they lose because they cannot work.

Worker’s compensation laws in the United States usually say that a worker who was hurt while working at his or her job must be paid a certain amount of money. The laws were established both to help make sure that the employee would get his or her money and to avoid having the employee sue or take the employer to court. Each state in the U.S. has its own workers’ compensation laws, though the differences are not that great. The overall idea of the laws is the same in every state: that is, to protect the employees and to make sure that they have money to live on if they get hurt doing their job.

The government also has its own workers’ compensation programs, but these federal or national government laws are just for people who work for the government. People who work for what we would call “private companies” must follow the laws of the state they live in. Companies usually buy insurance or give money to the state as part of an insurance plan in case one of their employees gets hurt – at least, that’s the way it works here in California.

Workers’ compensation laws not only protect the employee, but also the employer – the company or person who hires the employee. Workers’ compensation laws typically require that the employer carry – that is, have or buy – insurance that helps the employer pay for workers’ compensation, as I just mentioned. These laws also put limits on the amount of money that an employee is allowed to receive. “To put limits on” something means that the law says there is a maximum amount of money that, in this case, the employer has to pay the employee.

So, if the employee is hurt at work, he or she can’t ask the company to give him or her a million dollars and a free trip to Hawaii. The laws limit the amount that the company has to pay this person. This helps make sure that the employer is not put out of business – does not have to close their business because they have to pay huge amounts of money to their employees. We’re assuming, of course, that the employer has safe working conditions for the employees. If the
employer doesn’t follow the safety laws in his or her particular business or industry, then it’s a different story.

Workers’ compensation laws actually began in the U.S. in the early 1900s, but it took a long time before the laws existed in every state. The first laws were passed in 1911 in the state of Wisconsin, which is just next to my home state of Minnesota in the north-central part of the U.S., what we call the “Upper Midwest.” Mississippi was the last state to pass such laws, in 1948. So it took about, oh, 10, 20 . . . 37 years for all of the states to have workers’ compensation laws. (I’m a little slow at my math today.)

Anyway, these laws have not changed much since they were first created. The last major or important change to the workers’ compensation laws were in the 1990s, when the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. A “disability” (disability) is a physical or mental condition that limits the amount of activity a person can do. The Americans with Disabilities Act created new laws that allowed people with disabilities to get jobs and protected them from being fired from their jobs because of their disability.

Some industries have their own special workers’ compensation laws. An “industry,” I should explain – (industry) – is a type of work or a kind of business. The “film industry,” for example, refers to all the companies that make movies. One industry that has special workers’ compensation laws is the mining industry. “To mine” (mine) is to dig into the ground to get things like coal out of the ground. The person who mines is called a “miner” (miner). And miners have special protection under workers’ compensation laws.

So, that’s all you need to know, really, about American workers’ compensation laws, and I think you found it as exciting and as fascinating as I do.

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.

Our first question is from Timofey (Timofey) in Russia. The question has to do with three words: “whirl,” “swirl,” and “eddy.”

Let’s start with “whirl” (whirl). “Whirl” describes a fast movement around and around. You can talk about a ballet dancer or an ice skater who whirls around quickly. It basically would mean the same as spin. We could talk about the leaves of a tree whirling around in circles in the wind.
“Swirl” (swirl) is very similar in definition. It describes a movement in a twisting or what we may describe as “spiraling” pattern, moving around and around without stopping, making bigger or smaller circles. You could talk about swirling some cream into your coffee – mixing it into your coffee, making it go around and around.

“Eddy” (eddy) is a movement either in water or in the air in the opposite direction of the main movement, especially when it is moving in a circle. If the water is all flowing in one direction, but there is a small section of the river that is moving in the opposite direction, that would be an eddy.

The word “Eddie” spelled somewhat differently – (Eddie) instead of (eddy) – is a shortened form, or nickname form, of the name Edward. I had an “Uncle Eddie” – we called him “Eddie.” You may have heard of the comedian Eddie Murphy back from the 80s and 90s here in the U.S. But that has nothing to do with the topic of the question by Timofey about “whirl,” “swirl,” and “eddy.”

Our next question comes from Engin (Engin) in Turkey. The question has to do with the difference between two very common expressions in English: “I am curious” and “I wonder.” In common conversation, we often use these two expressions to mean the same thing. However, they could be used differently.

Let’s start with “I am curious.” “I am curious” can mean I am eager to know about something – I want to know about something. “I wonder” can also mean I want to know about something: I want an answer to something. Of the two, “I wonder” is probably more common, and it has a more general use than “I am curious.”

Sometimes we’ll use “I am curious” in a situation where perhaps it’s somewhat awkward or unusual for you to be asking someone a question – perhaps it is about something private. It doesn’t always have to be that way, but that would be one possible use of it. “I am curious as to why you didn’t go to the movie last night.” The suggestion there is that there’s something unusual about what happened, and you want the person to explain it to you.

When you say, “I wonder,” it doesn’t necessarily have any implication of there being a problem or a mystery about your action. “I wonder what the capital of Italy is.” Well, I know the capital of Italy – it’s Rome. But if you didn’t know, that might be one possible use of that expression.

Another small possible difference between these two expressions is that when you say, “I wonder,” you want to know the answer, but it’s okay if you don’t find
out the answer. When you say, “I’m curious,” there is perhaps a little bit more urgency, like you really do want to know. In fact, some people say, “I really am curious about . . .” (whatever it is you’re curious about, whatever it is you want to know about).

Finally, Reza (Reza) in Sweden wants to know the meaning of the word “beloved.” “Beloved” (beloved) is a word that you would normally encounter nowadays in writing. It’s not used very much in conversation. “Beloved” means someone who is much loved, especially in a romantic way. “My beloved” would describe the woman I love, my wife. Hopefully the same person.

However, it doesn’t have to have a romantic connotation. It could just mean someone who is loved very much. “My beloved grandmother,” for example. You’ll also hear this word used in the traditional opening of a wedding ceremony. The priest or minister or person who is marrying two people traditionally would say, “Dearly beloved,” (the “beloved” here would be the people who are there at the wedding) “we are gathered here today” – we are meeting here today. And then you would talk about marrying these two people.

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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