



ESL Podcast 703 – Attending an Auction

GLOSSARY

auction – an event or place where things are sold to the person who is willing to pay the most for them

* A lot of fine art is sold at auctions because it would be difficult to put a price tag on the pieces.

auctioneer – a person whose job is to lead an auction, announcing what is for sale and identifying who is willing to pay the most money

* If you want to buy something, make sure the auctioneer can see and hear you.

podium – a small raised area that is a little higher than the surrounding floor, where a speaker stands so that he or she can be seen by the audience, and/or a wooden stand the speaker stands behind and places books or notes on so that he or she can read the notes while facing and speaking to the audience

* Whenever he approaches the podium, he gets really nervous, his heart rate speeds up, and his hands begin to sweat.

gavel – a wooden hammer held in one's hand and hit against a table to get everyone's attention, especially in a courtroom

* The judge hit her gavel on the table to get everyone's attention.

bidding – the process of many people taking turns announcing how much they are willing to pay for something until only one person is willing to pay the final price

* Some people get too excited during the bidding and they end up spending more money than they had planned.

lot – a group of objects that are sold together

* They saved a lot of money by buying baby clothes in lots on eBay.

reserve – the minimum price at which something will be sold

* The car didn't sell because nobody was willing to pay more than \$5,000 and the reserve was \$7,500.

opening bid – the amount proposed by the auctioneer to begin bidding on a particular item, so that the first bid is equal to that amount and all other bids must be higher

* If the opening bid is too low, the bidding process can take a long time.



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auction block – the raised surface where objects are displayed as they are sold at an auction

* Are bidders allowed to go up to the auction block and take a closer look at what they're bidding on?

on behalf of – doing something for another person, especially someone who is not able to do something at a particular place and time

* I am honored to accept this award on behalf of all our team members.

absentee – someone who cannot be present; someone who is not able to be at a particular place and time to participate in some meeting or activity

* Our state allows absentee voters to vote by mail.

paddle – a flat round or square piece of wood or plastic with a handle, held in the air with one's hand, usually marked with a large number so that one can place a bid at an auction

* If the auctioneer sees your paddle in the air, she'll assume you're bidding on the item she's talking about.

going, going, gone – a phrase used by an auctioneer when he or she thinks only one person is still bidding, indicating that the opportunity to bid will end and nobody else will be able to buy something

* I hear \$235. Is that the final bid? Going, going, gone to the lady in the blue hat.

commission – the percentage of a sales price that one receives for helping to sell something

* The clerks at this store work on commission, so they're always eager to help shoppers make a purchase.

or else – a threat; a phrase used to show another person that he or she must do what one is asking, or there will be negative, unspecified consequences

* Jennifer said to her little brother: "Give me back my diary, or else!"

on the chopping block – at risk of losing one's job or life, referring to the piece of wood that used to be used when cutting someone's neck to separate the head from the body

* If this presentation doesn't go well, I'll be on the chopping block!



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What is in the auctioneer's hand?
 - a) The podium.
 - b) The gavel.
 - c) The paddle.

 2. Why doesn't Martin want to bid on the first lot?
 - a) Because he thinks the auctioneer is asking for too much money.
 - b) Because he isn't interested in that lot.
 - c) Because he doesn't have enough money.
-

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

lot

The word "lot," in this podcast, means a group of objects that are sold together: "This auction catalog describes all the lots in great detail." The phrase "(one's) lot in life" refers to one's situation, especially when it is not a good or happy one and when one does not have much or any control over it: "Do you really think poverty is your lot in life?" The phrase "to draw lots" or "to cast lots" means to decide who will do or receive something by having each person take one of several pieces of paper or an object from a container, where one is different from all the others: "Nobody wanted to give the first presentation, so they decided to draw lots." Finally, a "lot" can refer to a piece of land: "Do you know if anyone's planning to build a house on that empty lot?"

paddle

In this podcast, the word "paddle" means a flat round or square piece of wood or plastic with a handle, held in the air with one's hand, usually marked with a large number so that one can place a bid at an auction: "Who was bidding with paddle number 146?" A "paddle" is also a piece of wood with a wide end and a long handle, placed in the water and used to move a boat forward or backwards: "Rowing the canoe paddles all afternoon made his arms very sore." Finally, a "paddle" can be a special attachment for an electric mixer, used for stirring dough: "Don't forget to scrape the paddle attachment every few minutes while you're making the cookie dough."



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CULTURE NOTE

Common Types of Auctions

The most common types of auctions in the United States are “English auctions,” where bidders can see who the other bidders are, and they start with a low price, “working up” (increasing the amount of the bids) until only one person is willing to pay the highest price for the item.

The opposite of an English auction is a “Dutch auction,” where the auctioneer begins with a very high price and “gradually” (slowly) lowers it until someone is willing to buy the item.

In a “sealed-bid” auction, each bid is “presented” (submitted) in a “sealed” (closed with glue so that other bidders cannot see it) envelope and the item is sold to the highest bidder. In a sealed-bid auction, each bidder can present only one bid.

“Silent auctions” are very common for “charity events” or “fundraisers,” which are auctions that are designed to “raise” (gather) money for important “causes” (efforts to change society in some way), such as feeding the poor or saving “endangered species” (types of animals of which few are still living). In a charitable silent auction, people or businesses “donate” (give something without receiving money) goods and services and those items (or descriptions of them) are placed on a table with “sheets” (pieces) of paper where bidders can write down their bidding number and the price they are willing to pay. Bidders can return to that table and “revise” (change; edit) their bid if they see that other people are bidding “higher” (in a larger amount) than they are. At a specified time, the bidding is closed and the highest bid on each piece of paper is the winner.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 703: Attending an Auction.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 703. 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. Download a Learning Guide for this episode, and help support this episode by becoming a member of ESL Podcast.

This episode is called "Attending an Auction." An "auction" is where you try to buy things by offering or saying that you will pay more money than the other people. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Diane: This is so exciting! I've never been to an auction before.

Martin: Sit down. It's about to start. The auctioneer is on the podium with her gavel and she's ready to start the bidding.

Diane: Are you bidding on the first lot?

Martin: No, the reserve is too high. See? The opening bid is over 10,000 dollars. I'm not surprised. Items of that quality don't appear on the auction block very often.

Diane: What are those people doing on the phone?

Martin: They are bidding on behalf of people who can't be here, the absentee bidders. Hey, stop waving that paddle around! The auctioneer is going to think that you're placing a bid.

Diane: Oh, sorry. Listen, the price is up to 30,500 dollars. Going, going, gone! The auction house is going to make a nice commission on that one. This is so much fun!

Martin: Shhh! I'm going to bid on the next lot. Where is the paddle?

Diane: The paddle?



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Martin: Yeah, the paddle. Where did you put it?

Diane: I had it just a minute ago.

Martin: Find it, or else I'm putting your head on the block.

Diane: The auction block?

Martin: No, the chopping block!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Diane saying to Martin, "This is so exciting! I've never been to an auction before." An "auction" (auction) is a place where things are sold to people who will pay more than the other people who are there. You can go to an auction for art, for cars, for land, for really anything that can legally be sold. That's an auction. I say, "I'm going to pay 10 dollars," you say, "I'll pay 11 dollars," I say, "Okay, I am going to pay 12 dollars," and so forth.

Martin says to Diane, "Sit down. It's about to start." An auction – many auctions, anyway, are held in a room and there are people sitting there, and each person is given a number on something called a "paddle," which we'll talk about in a second, and they hold that number up if they want to buy the item. Martin says to Diane, "Sit down. It's about to start. The auctioneer" – the person whose job it is to lead the auction, to announce what's being sold, and to ask people how much they want to pay – "The auctioneer is on the podium with her gavel." A "podium" (podium) is an area that is higher up than the surrounding floor, where a speaker will stand so that people can hear him or her. Professors in college or teachers in high school often have podiums; they put their paper on the podium and they stand behind it facing or looking out toward the class. The auctioneer has something called a "gavel" (gavel). A "gavel" is like a small hammer – wooden hammer that you hit against the table to get people's attention. In a courtroom, where there is a judge, the judge typically has a gavel. At an auction, a gavel's purpose is to indicate that the thing that they are selling has been sold, that you cannot try to buy it after that point. Martin says the auctioneer is ready to start the bidding. "Bidding" comes from the verb "to bid" (bid). "To bid" is to say that you are going to pay a certain amount of money for something at an auction. "Bidding" is the process of many people taking turns announcing how much they're willing to pay for something. Here in the United States, the most popular online auction is eBay (eBay).com. People say, "I'll give you 10 dollars," "Oh, I'll give you 10.50," "Okay, I'll give you 11 dollars." Those are two different



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people; you wouldn't, you know, want to bid against yourself. That is, offer prices higher than your own price. That would be crazy!

Speaking of crazy, Diane says, "Are you bidding on the first lot?" Here, the word "lot" (lot) means a group of objects – a group of things that are sold together at an auction. "Lot" has a lot of different meanings; take a look at our Learning Guide for more explanations.

Martin says, "No," he's not bidding on the first lot, "the reserve is too high." The "reserve" at an auction is the minimum price at which something will be sold. So, I give my computer to the auctioneer, I say to him, "Sell this computer, but I will not accept anything less than 400 dollars." That's the reserve, the 400 dollars, the minimum I will accept. The auctioneers typically keep a percentage for themselves, of course, usually around 30 percent I think. Anyway, Martin says, "The opening bid is over 10,000 dollars." The "opening bid" is the bid that the auctioneer proposes or suggests as the first price. After the auctioneer suggests a price and someone says, "Okay, I'll pay that," the auctioneer doesn't suggest any other prices. They will, instead, ask people if they're willing to pay more. So if you say, "I'm going to pay 10,000 dollars," I'll say, "Okay, 10,000 dollars. Do I hear 11,000?" "Do I hear" means is there anyone who will say they will pay 11,000, and someone may say yes. You say, "Okay, 11,000, 11,000, 11,000. Do I hear 12,000? 12,000, 12,000, 12,000..." For some reason, auctioneers like to talk and repeat things very fast.

So in our story, the opening bid is over 10,000 dollars for the first lot. Martin says, "I'm not surprised. Items of that quality don't appear on the auction block very often." The expression an "auction block" refers to a raised area where you can see the thing being displayed – the thing that is being sold. In general, the expression means available at an auction or to be auctioned.

Diane says, "What are those people doing on the phone?" Martin says, "They are bidding on behalf of people who can't be here." "On behalf of" means to do something for someone else. So if there's an auction in Paris, and I can't be there, I send a friend of mine, and the friend will bid on something and talk to me on the phone and say, "Do you want to pay 11,000?" and I say, "no," or "yes," and then that's how I can participate in the auction. He says – Martin – the absentee bidders are talking on the phone. The "absentee" is the person who isn't there; they are absent. "To be absent" is the opposite of "to be present." If you're "present," you're here; if you're "absent," you're not here. At school, we talk about people being present in class or absent from class. Notice, present "in" class, absent "from" class; the prepositions are different. So, these are "absentee bidders," people who are not physically there.



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Martin says, “Hey, stop waving that paddle around!” “To wave” is to move back and forth in the air. A “paddle” is a flat, round or square piece of wood that has a number on it. If you are familiar with the game of ping-pong, or table tennis, the ball is hit with a small paddle. It looks little like that kind of paddle. It has a handle on it where you can pick it up with your hand, and if you hold it up in the air that tells the auctioneer that you’re willing to pay that higher price. So, the auctioneer doesn’t know your name, but he can see your number, and he writes that number down saying, “Okay, that person will pay 11,000.” Well Diane, the dummy, she starts waving the paddle around. Martin says, “The auctioneer is going to think that you’re placing a bid.” “To place a bid” means the same as “to bid,” to say that you will pay a certain price for something.

Diane says, “Oh, sorry. Listen, the price is up to 30,500 dollars. Going, going, gone!” After the auctioneer decides that no one else will pay a higher price, he or she will say that phrase, “going, going, gone,” and when they say “gone,” they take the gavel, the little hammer, and they hit the table to indicate that that item is sold. Diane says, “The auction house (the company that runs the auction) is going to make a nice commission on that one.” A “commission” is a percentage of the sales price that you receive for selling a certain thing. We talk about people at stores “working on commission,” meaning they will get a percentage of the price. Many salesmen and saleswomen are working on commission.

Diane says, “This is so much fun!” Martin indicates for her to stop talking, to be quiet. He says, “Shhh! I’m going to bid on the next lot,” the next group of things. “Where is the paddle?” he asks. Diane says, “The paddle?” Martin says, “Yeah, the paddle. Where did you put it?” Where did you place it? Diane says, “I had it just a minute ago.” She had the paddle just 60 seconds ago. Martin says, “Find it, or else I’m putting your head on the block.” “Or else” is a phrase used to show another person that you have to do what I am telling you to do or there will be negative consequences. You don’t even have to say what those negative actions will be. You might say, “Give me my pen back, or else,” meaning if you do not give me my pen back bad things will happen to you. Of course, some people will say, “Or else what?” asking specifically. “Or else, I will punch you in the nose,” I will hit you in the face.

In this case, Martin says if Diane can’t find the paddle, he’s going to put her head on the block. The “block” is also a term we can use to talk about when they used to kill people by cutting, or “chopping” we would say, off their head. We would call the place where you put your head down the “chopping block.” It would be a large piece of wood that would hold your head until the person chopped it or cut it off. Well, that’s what Martin is saying he’s going to do to Diane, which of course



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would be illegal in most countries. You can't just go killing people! Diane says, "The auction block?" She's confused; she's not sure where her head will be. Martin says, "No, the chopping block!" which is what we just explained. In general, the expression "on the chopping block" means that you are risking something valuable; you may lose something valuable. Or a company might say, "The employees are on the chopping block," they are in risk of losing their jobs.

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

[start of dialogue]

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Martin: No, the chopping block!

[end of dialogue]

On behalf of everyone here at ESL Podcast, I want to thank Dr. Lucy Tse for another great script.

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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