



ESL Podcast 743 – Writing a Story

GLOSSARY

novel – a book-length story; a long story created by a writer and not based on real people or events

* Joan likes to read novels in her free time, while her sister prefers reading newspapers and newsmagazines.

to abandon – to give up completely; to not continue doing something before it is completed

* After working several weeks on repairing his old car, Jamil decided to abandon it and to buy another car.

to bite off more than (one) can chew – to try to do something that one is not capable of doing; to try to do too much

* Candace felt that she had bit off more than she can chew when she volunteered to organize a dinner for 50 people.

character – a person in a novel, play, or movie

* My favorite character in the movie Star Wars is Hans Solo.

character development – the way that a person in a novel, play, or movie changes over time or throughout the course of a story

* The character development of the hero in this series of films shows that he is a complex person.

plot – the main events in a novel, play, or movie; the main storyline in a novel, play, or movie

* Are you able to follow the plot of this novel? I find it very confusing.

adventure – a novel or movie with exciting and dangerous activities or experiences

* Kalih's favorite childhood adventure stories are about a ship captain who travels around the world.

romance – a novel or a movie dealing with themes related to love

* In romance stories, the hero always gets the girl in the end.

horror – a novel or movie with frightening events or stories

* Some of the scariest horror films don't show too much blood and killing, but relies on the audience's imagination.



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setting – the time period or environment in which a situation occurs; the location and/or time period that a story takes place

* The setting for this story is present-day Chicago.

up in the air – undecided; not yet determined; with the ending, conclusion, or decision not yet clear

* Whether the childcare program will continue next year is up in the air because of a lack of money.

period – belonging to a past time period; being from a historical time period

* Why do so many period films set in England win major film awards?

point of view – the view or perspective from which a story is told or events are explained

* From the customer's point of view, this website is very difficult to use.

first person – for a story to be told from one of the people in the story

* The police wanted a first person account of what happened in the accident.

third person – for a story to be told from the storyteller's perspective

* A complicated story can more easily be told in the third person.

to have (one's) work cut out for (one) – to be required to complete a task that is difficult; to be faced with a task that is at or above one's level of ability

* Daisuke has his work cut out of him, raising three young children by himself.

inspiration – something that stimulates one's mind to do or to feel something; something that gives one ideas for a creative task

* The recent snowstorm was the inspiration for Lyle's new painting.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Sara writing?
 - a) A novel.
 - b) A play.
 - c) A short story.

 2. Why does Xavier say to Sarah: “You’ve definitely got your work cut out for you?”
 - a) He believes she has a difficult task to do.
 - b) He wants her to stop what she is doing.
 - c) He thinks she should write a novel.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

character

The phrase “character,” in this podcast, means a person in a novel, play, or movie: “There are too many characters in the movie for me to follow.” The word “character” can also refer to the qualities of a person or a place: “This city is very big, but it has the character of a small town.” When talking about computers or other electronics, a “character” is used to refer to a symbol representing a letter or a number: “Move your cursor to the character that looks like a house and it will take you to the company’s homepage.” To be “in or out of one’s character” refers to whether behavior is consistent with one’s usual behavior: “It isn’t out of character for Michael to leave his home for weeks without telling anyone.”

period

In this podcast, the term “period” refers to something belonging to a past historical time: “This store has a lot of period furniture from the 1700s and 1800s.” A “period” is more often used to mean a length of time: “The economy in the southern United States was very poor in the period after the Civil War.” A “period” is also the name of the punctuation mark at the end of a sentence or an abbreviation: “Instead of a period, let’s put an exclamation point at the end of this line in the dialogue.” Or, “There should be periods after the initials in his name, like this: J.R.” Finally, people often use the word “period” for emphasis at the end of a statement, usually indicating that one’s opinion will not change: “Dad said there was no way he would allow us to go to the dance. Period.”



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CULTURE NOTE

The Use of the Second-Person Point of View in Writing

Whether you read novels or newspapers, most of the written materials we read “on a daily basis” (every day) is written in the first person or third person. In American schools, students are usually taught to write “expository” (something that explains or describes something) reports and “narratives” (stories). Seldom are students required to learn to write in the second person, although it has several important uses.

The second-person point of view is a way of telling a story or giving information with you, the reader, as the main character. To do this, the writer uses the second-person personal pronoun “you.” Here is an example: “You are not the type of person who likes ice cream, but here you are eating three different kinds and enjoying it.” The second-person point of view is sometimes used to make the reader more involved in the story or explanation.

For example, many “guidebooks” are written in the second person. Guidebooks give people information as they travel to a new place, giving information about “sites” (places to visit), transportation, and restaurants, and providing useful “tips” (advice). By using “you,” the guidebook puts the traveler “in the middle of the action” (where the activity is taking place). Many “do-it-yourself manuals” (books giving you information about how to do something, such as fixing something in your home) also use the second person point of view, most likely for the same reason.

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 743: Writing a Story.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 743. 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. Write it down, go there, and download a Learning Guide for this episode. You can also join us now on Facebook at facebook.com/eslpod.

This episode is a dialogue between Xavier and Sara; it's called "Writing a Story." Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Xavier: How's your novel coming along?

Sara: It's not. I abandoned it for now. I think I bit off more than I can chew. Now, I'm working on a short story.

Xavier: That sounds interesting. Who are the main characters?

Sara: I'm not sure yet. Character development is really important so I need to give the characters themselves some serious thought.

Xavier: Okay, tell me about the general plot. Is it an adventure, romance, horror story – what?

Sara: I haven't decided that either.

Xavier: All right. What about the setting? Is it going to be set in the U.S.?

Sara: Hmm, that's still up in the air, too. I'm thinking of writing a period story, but I'm not sure what time period to choose. That'll help decide the actual setting.

Xavier: I'm guessing you haven't decided the point of view of the story either, whether it'll be told in the first person or third person, am I right?

Sara: You are. I know. I have a lot to think about.



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Xavier: You've definitely got your work cut out for you.

Sara: I know. I'm just waiting for some inspiration.

Xavier: Good luck with that.

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Xavier saying to Sara, "How's your novel coming along?" A "novel" is a long, fictional story, a story that is not true. "To be coming along" means to be progressing. So, Xavier is asking Sara how her novel is progressing. Is it getting finished? Sara says, "It's not (it's not coming along). I abandoned it for now." "To abandon" (abandon) means to give up on something completely. Well, Sara has not given up on it completely, that's why she says, "I abandoned it for now," meaning maybe in the future she'll come back to it. She says, "I think I bit off more than I can chew." This is a common expression: "to bite off more than you can chew." "To bite" means to use your teeth to remove usually a piece of food. For example, if you are eating chicken and you are holding the piece of chicken by your two hands, you might bite off a piece. The difference between "to bite" and "to bite off" has to do with separating the piece with your mouth; you remove it completely from where it was. You could bite something; you could bite your finger, but you wouldn't be removing it from your hand – well, unless you bit it very strongly. The expression here in the dialogue however is "I bit (bit) off." "Bit" is the irregular past tense for "bite." So, "I bit off more than I can chew." "To chew" is to use your teeth to break down food into smaller pieces so you can swallow it. "To bite off more than you can chew," however, as an expression, means to try to do something that you are not completely able to do or even capable of doing. Sara says, "Now, I'm working on a short story," which is also a work of fiction; a story, but not a long one that you would publish as a book.

Xavier says, "That sounds interesting. Who are the main characters?" A "character" in a novel is one of the people in the novel. Sara says, "I'm not sure yet. Character development is really important so I need to give the characters themselves some serious thought." "Character development" is the way that a person in a novel, a play, a movie changes over time in the story itself. Sara says she's going to give this "some serious thought" meaning she's going to think about it seriously for a long time. Xavier says, "Okay, tell me about the general plot." A "plot" (plot) is the main events in a novel, play, or movie; we might call it the main storyline. First this happens, then this happens, then this happens.



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Boy meets girl, boy and girl fall in love, boy and girl get married. That's the basic plot for a lot of romantic movies and books.

Xavier wants to know about the general plot of Sara's book, so he gives her some examples, some kinds of books, what we would call some "genres": adventure, romance, horror story. He asks which of these his friend's story is. Well, an "adventure story" is a story that is exciting; there are many usually dangerous activities or experiences in the story. You can think of a movie like Indiana Jones, the series of movies, those were adventure movies. "Romance" is boy meets girl, boy and girl fall in love, boy and girl get married; that's the general idea of a romance story usually. "Horror story" (horror) is a novel or a movie that has something scary or frightening. The Silence of the Lambs was kind of a horror movie. Usually, horror movies have a lot of blood nowadays, movies with people who get their heads cut off, and that sort of thing. I don't really like horror stories. I like adventures. Romance, eh, not so much.

Sara says, "I haven't decided that either," meaning she doesn't know what kind of story she's going to write. Xavier says, "All right. What about the setting? Is it going to be set in the U.S.?" The "setting" of a story has to do with the time and the place where the story takes place, the location and the period of time. Is it in the 1980s in England? Is it in Scotland in the 1400s? What's the setting? The question that Xavier asks is "Is it going to be set in the U.S.?" meaning is it going to take place in the United States.

Sara says, "Um, that's still up in the air, too." When we say something is "up in the air" we mean it's undecided, we're not sure yet, we haven't determined that yet. Someone may say, "Our plans are up the air, we don't know what we're going to be doing tomorrow." Perhaps we'll be in a beautiful balloon! Sara doesn't know what her setting is going to be. She says, "I'm thinking of writing a period story, but I'm not sure what time period to choose." A "period story" is a story that takes place at some time in the past; it's not a story about what's happening today. It might be about England in the 19th century or Rome at the time of Julius Caesar; those would be period stories, or period pieces they might be called.

Sara isn't sure what period she's going to write in. She says, "That will help decide the actual setting." Xavier says, "I'm guessing you haven't decided the point of view of the story either, whether it'll be told in the first person or third person, am I right?" The "point of view" is the view or perspective from which a story can be told. Usually a story is told either in the first person, meaning you read the story from someone's viewpoint; they say "I." "I walked into a room and I saw a beautiful woman and I said, 'Can I have your phone number?' and she



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said, ‘No. Get out of here. You’re ugly!’” That would be a first person story. That’s kind of what my romance story would probably be! A third person story is the story being told not by one of the characters in the book, but, if you will, by some person outside of the book. “He walked into the room, he saw a beautiful woman. He said, ‘Hey baby. How ya doing?’” That would be a third person story. That would never happen to me! So, first person is “I,” a character is telling the story from their own perspective – their own point of view. Third person is someone else’s point of view. The story that Sara is writing is still undetermined in terms of its point of view. She says, “You are,” you are right, I don’t know. “I know I have a lot to think about,” she says.

Xavier says, “You definitely got your work cut out for you.” “To have your work cut out for you” means to be required to complete something that is going to be very difficult; you have a very difficult task, a very difficult problem to solve. Sara says, “I know. I’m just waiting for some inspiration.” “Inspiration” is something that occurs to you that stimulates your mind to do or to feel something. When we talk about creative people – artists, writers, painters – sometimes they’ll talk about their inspiration. A man may paint a picture of a beautiful woman; he was inspired by some woman in his life perhaps. Sara is waiting for some inspiration. Xavier says, “Good luck with that.” That’s kind of a comical expression nowadays. When someone says, “Oh, good luck with that,” they mean you probably won’t be able to do that, or I doubt you will be able to do that.

Now let’s listen to the story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

Xavier: How’s your novel coming along?

Sara: It’s not. I abandoned it for now. I think I bit off more than I can chew. Now, I’m working on a short story.

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Xavier: All right. What about the setting? Is it going to be set in the U.S.?

Sara: Hmm, that's still up in the air, too. I'm thinking of writing a period story, but I'm not sure what time period to choose. That'll help decide the actual setting.

Xavier: I'm guessing you haven't decided the point of view of the story either, whether it'll be told in the first person or third person, am I right?

Sara: You are. I know. I have a lot to think about.

Xavier: You definitely got your work cut out for you.

Sara: I know. I'm just waiting for some inspiration.

Xavier: Good luck with that.

[end of dialogue]

Scriptwriters write stories, and our scriptwriter has written some wonderful stories with funny and interesting plots, some of them romance, some of them adventure, not a lot of them horror, thank goodness. Thank you, Dr. Lucy Tse.

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

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