

Chatterbox #216 – Forest fires

Episode description

Forest fires have been ravaging the western coast of the United States and Canada for several months now, with devastating consequences. In this Chatterbox episode, Jeremy and Andrew discuss the terrifying results of these natural disasters and how the fires affect those who live within the burn zones.

Fun fact

On average, more than 100,000 wildfires clear 4 to 5 million acres of land in the United States each year. However, in recent years, that number has increased to as much as 9 million acres a year due to climate change. A wildfire can move at speeds up to 23 kilometres per hour, destroying everything in its path, such as plants and animals—even entire towns have succumbed to the wrath of these beastly fires.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Thick blanket of [something]
- Hazy
- To fill someone in
[on someone or something]
- Shocked
- To make sense
- To rely on





Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: You're listening to the Culips English podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hello, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Jeremy: And I'm Jeremy.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips. Hey, everybody.

And, hey, Jeremy, how are you?

Jeremy: I'm doing great. How are you, Andrew?

Andrew: I am doing well, as well. It's Saturday morning here, Jeremy, I'm so happy to start my weekend with you. It's off to a great start so far.

Jeremy: So sweet, so sweet. Unfortunately, we have a sort of negative topic to discuss here today.

Andrew: Yeah. You know, I didn't visit Canada this summer and in retrospect I'm very happy that I didn't go back home to my hometown and visit Kelowna. That's the name of my hometown. And the reason why I'm happy that I didn't visit is that it's been a terrible year for forest fires and wild fires all along the west coast of North America, from Alaska to California. Although there haven't been any major fires in Kelowna, there are tons surrounding the city, and this has caused the whole city to be smoked out. It's covered in a **thick blanket of smoke**. So this is why I'm happy that I didn't actually visit Kelowna this summer, because I wouldn't have been able to go outside and really do too much. And, yeah, so this is what we'll talk about in this Chatterbox episode, Jeremy. The 2018 forest fire situation in North America.

Jeremy: Yeah, and I live right in the middle of it, actually.

Andrew: So, yeah, you're located in California, correct?

Jeremy: In Los Angeles, so Southern California.



Andrew: Southern California. I really wanna hear what you have to say about this, because, yeah, you're right in the epicenter of the forest fires.

But just before you tell me about your experience, I wanna remind everyone that there is a study guide for this episode. So, listeners, if you want to dig a little deeper into your studies, we recommend studying along with the study guide. And that can be downloaded from our website, Culips.com. So if you're interested in getting that study guide, just visit Culips.com to download it.

All right, Jeremy, **fill me in**. How is the situation in California?

Jeremy: Well, it's been going on for quite a while now and, honestly, it hasn't affected my life very much at all. Maybe about 6, 7, 8 months ago or so there was one night where we got some fire warnings. You know, these days they send a message to everyone on their cell phone.

Andrew: Right.

Jeremy: And it said wild fire warnings near you, pack some water, get ready to evacuate. You know, if necessary, but in the end nothing happened.

Andrew: OK.

Jeremy: And since then, nothing really big has come up, except maybe last week there was a day where the sky was very **hazy**, very smoky. And it wasn't clouds, but it looked a little **hazy**, a little almost overcast.

Andrew: OK.

Jeremy: And there was little bits of ash on my car, so like a layer of dust, sort of.

Andrew: Right. So that's good news. That really means you haven't been too affected by the fires at all.

Jeremy: Yeah.

Andrew: And, actually, I'm a little surprised to hear this, because when I was reading about the situation with the forest fires and the wild fires happening in the United States this year, I was **shocked** by some of things I read. And I'll just run some of these stats and facts by you, Jeremy, to see if it matches with what you know to be true. So the first thing that I learned is that now in California, the term fire season has been replaced by fire year.

Jeremy: Oh, my gosh.



- Andrew: Because in the past, the fires were seasonal, right? Every year it's kind of a natural thing, you'd have forest fires in the summer. This is just something that happens in North America. It's a fact that it happens.
- Jeremy: It's a natural part of nature.
- Andrew: Exactly. There's a lightning storm, the forest is dry or there's some grasslands that are very dry, a fire starts, and it's actually part of the life cycle of a forest, and of these natural areas. Things die and then they regenerate. That's cool. But these days, the scientists are using the expression fire year because, due to climate change, fires can happen at any time. Especially more in your area, in California.
- Jeremy: Yeah.
- Andrew: It could be the winter and there could be a huge fire.
- Jeremy: So, I live in Los Angeles, right now, and to drive to my hometown in northern California, San Jose, near San Francisco, it's about a 7-hour drive by car.
- Andrew: OK.
- Jeremy: And almost the whole drive, all you see is dry grasslands. Hills and hills and hills of tan-coloured, dry grass.
- Andrew: Wow.
- Jeremy: Only in the rainy seasons is it even a little bit green, but most of the year it's dry. So it **makes sense** that this kind of thing could happen a lot or would happen a lot more in California.
- Andrew: Another thing that I often hear on the news about California is the water shortage.
- Jeremy: Yes.
- Andrew: And so this might also have something to do with it. I would imagine that they're connected. Lack of water means dry, right?
- Jeremy: I've heard that most of the water in California or at least southern California is imported from the Colorado River.
- Andrew: Oh, no way.

- Jeremy: A lot of the water that we use here is not from this area. So it's a naturally very dry place. Mostly desert, mostly dry grasslands. So when people live there and operate heavy machinery and smoke cigarettes and have camp fires, it **makes sense** that this kind of thing would happen in California.
- Andrew: Now, it's interesting that you bring that up, because the next stat that I wanna run by you is that, in California, since the start of 2018 there's been 5000 fires recorded.
- Jeremy: Wow, I did not know that.
- Andrew: And 84% of them were started by human activity. So things like you just mentioned, camp fires, smoking cigarettes, but also more industrial activities like oil and gas pipelines, utilities. And something that has made people in my home province of British Columbia outraged is that there's been several arsons reported. So people actually taking advantage of the tinder dry conditions to start a fire, and somebody was caught last week lighting a fire in my hometown. And it was big news and everybody was just going crazy on the message boards online.
- Jeremy: I'm sure.
- Andrew: Because it's terrible. It can cause a huge amount of damage and people are just lighting fires. It's crazy.
- Jeremy: I have heard about that happening around here, too. Can't really comment on that, but it seems like it's getting more common.
- Andrew: Well, to bring it back to my hometown, Kelowna, for a second. As I mentioned, the smoke situation has been really, really bad this year, and this is one of the side effects of having all this forest fires is that the air quality is terrible. My parents and my brother who still live in my hometown say that it's really uncomfortable to go outside. The visibility is really bad, you can't see, you know, more than maybe a 100 metres in front of you. It's like walking in a thick fog all the time, except that it hurts your eyes and makes your clothes smell bad and makes it difficult to breathe. This has had a really negative effect on the economy of my home province, British Columbia, because we **rely so much on** tourism in the summer. People coming to visit, you know, if you visit Canada you don't wanna visit in the winter, right? It's cold, it's snowy, so we encourage everybody to come in the summer. But people have been cancelling their vacations because who wants to go to a place where it's just, you get smoked out, right?
- Jeremy: Wow.
- Andrew: I wouldn't wanna do that.

- Jeremy: I didn't know that.
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Jeremy: Some listeners may not quite understand this, but California and southern California, at least, is quite far from British Columbia, and yet the winds are still carrying the smoke all the way up there. So that just kinda shows how much fire there is in California, how much ash is being created. This is unprecedented.
- Andrew: We should mention, too, that the fires are not just located in California. They're located all in the west side of North America. Alaska, Alberta, Colorado, Washington, Oregon. There's fires everywhere, so I think it's a combination of all of these fires and, you know, wind patterns blowing smoke everywhere.
- Jeremy: Yeah.
- Andrew: I don't know exactly how it works, but it's made for really unpleasant conditions all along the west coast of North America.
- Jeremy: That time I mentioned where I got a fire warning, there were a lot of houses on the other side of Los Angeles, not too far from here, maybe 30 to 45 minutes driving by car. There were a lot of people who evacuated and lost their house, lost their homes, and in Northern California near where I'm from there were thousands of homes that burned in one fire. And it was, my friend was there, his house wasn't burned but he was there and he said it was like the apocalypse. It was very scary, just a whole neighbourhood burned to the ground, black, char. Just nothing left. So my experience isn't the most representative and, to some people, this is a very big deal. So if you know anyone who lives in these areas, maybe check in with them?
- Andrew: Say we're thinking of you.
- Jeremy: You know, ask them, are you OK? We're thinking of you.
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Jeremy: Something like that, might be good.
- Andrew: Well, Jeremy, just before we finish, I thought it would be interesting to take a listen to a news report from a local news organization called OK Kelowna, which is from my hometown, Kelowna. This news report is of a reporter walking downtown in Kelowna asking residents if they have been affected by the smoke and the fires this year. So let's take a listen to a little clip from that news report right now.



Jeremy: All right.

Reporter: Over the weekend, Kelowna Now conducted a Facebook poll asking the question is all this smoke affecting your health, your work, or your active lifestyle?

Lady 1: Nobody wants to be outside in this. I hike and I golf and I do lots of things.

Reporter: But you normally would?

Lady 1: Yeah, not anymore. No, not in the last couple of weeks.

Reporter: Just staying inside?

Lady 1: Yup, trying too. Trying to limit, I mean you can't stay inside all the time, but definitely trying to limit my time outside.

Andrew: OK, so, Jeremy, in that clip the reporter was just asking a lady that he met on the street if her lifestyle has been affected by the smoke in Kelowna, and it seems like she has been affected by it. She says that she's trying to stay inside, right? Trying to limit the time that she spends outside.

Jeremy: Oh, wow, that is terrible. It's so sad that this is affecting peoples' daily lives. Let's listen to some more of the interview.

Lady 2: Yesterday, I couldn't go outside.

Reporter: You pretty much had to stay inside?

Lady 2: Yeah.

Reporter: What would you have done?

Lady 2: Hiking.

Reporter: Hiking?

Lady 2: We were gonna go take photos, but we couldn't.

Andrew: OK, so in that clip another woman that the reporter was talking to mentioned that she, as well, has been affected by the smoke. You know, she was planning to go hiking but cancelled the hiking trip because it's too smoky.

Jeremy: So unfortunate.

Andrew: No photos for her. Bad conditions for photos.



Jeremy: True, actually, it really does ruin photos, smoke.

Andrew: All right, let's listen to one last part of this news report.

Lady 3: Breathing is a little harder and your eyes are burning.

Reporter: So are you avoiding activities?

Lady 3: Not a lot of exercise outside. Just walking around and being casual.

Andrew: And, again, this lady that the reporter talked to said that, you know, she has been affected by the smoke as well. Breathing is hard for her, her eyes are burning. So it seems like everybody is affected by the smoke and the fires this year. And to bring it back to where I started, I'm really glad that I didn't go home this summer.

Jeremy: I hope your friends back home are not listening to this.

Andrew: Yeah, I'm sorry to everybody that's been affected. I'm kind of joking about it, but it is a very serious issue and I hope that, you know, we have the expression **pray for rain** and I think a lot of people in North America, especially on the west coast right now are **praying for rain**, are **praying for damp conditions**, so that Mother Nature can put out these fires and things can return back to normal.

Jeremy: I sure hope so, too.

Andrew: Well, Jeremy, I think we can leave it at there for today. I want to thank all of our listeners for tuning in and, you know, we'd be really curious to find out if there's forest fires or anything like this where you live. We have listeners from all over the world, and I don't really know if forest fires happen in other areas other than North America. So please send us a message through our Facebook page or leave us a comment on our Facebook page or even send us an email to contact@Culips.com. And **fill us in**, let us know if forest fires are affecting where you live. I'd be really curious to find that out.

Jeremy: And if you'd like to listen to more episodes of Culips, you can go to Culips.com or go where you get your podcasts.

Andrew: Yup. iTunes, Stitcher, hey, we're on YouTube. We upload our episodes to YouTube now, as well. So where you like, guys, you can find us. That's it for us today. We'll be back soon with another episode and we'll talk to you then. Bye.

Jeremy: Bye, everyone.

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Detailed Explanations

Thick blanket of [something]

Idiom

A blanket is a large piece of thick cloth that you use to cover something for warmth. Therefore, a **thick blanket of [something]** is a continuous layer of something that hides what is below it. This phrase is most often used with weather-related words such as a **thick blanket of snow**, a **thick blanket of fog**, or, like in this episode, a **thick blanket of smoke**.

Here are a couple more examples with **thick blanket of [something]**:

Jamie:	It snowed while you were asleep last night. Go and see.
Mary:	Wow, the ground is covered in a thick blanket of snow . It's magical!
Jamie:	How about we go play in it? I'm thinking sledding, snowman-making, and snow angels.
Mary:	Yes! I'll go find my snow things!

Rafael:	Be careful while driving today. The weather report said a thick blanket of fog is covering the roads from here to Carlisle.
Katerina:	OK, I'll stay alert, and I'll text you when I arrive. See you for dinner. Love ya!

Hazy

Adjective

Hazy means to be indistinct and unclear. Often people say their memories are **hazy**, which means that they can't remember the memories well. In this episode, however, **hazy** is used in the context of weather. In weather, **hazy** refers to a thin layer of haze or clouds that covers the sky. Another word similar to **hazy** is overcast. An overcast sky and a **hazy** sky both mean a sky that is covered by a thin layer of clouds or mist, or even sometimes pollution.

Here are a couple more examples with **hazy**:

Bob:	Wow, it looks very hazy out today.
Joe:	I agree with you, Bob.
Bob:	Looks like we won't be going to the water park today. It's no fun with no sun.
Joe:	Oh, man. That sucks.

Minji:	I hate when it's hazy outside.
Roosevelt:	How come?
Minji:	Because, here in South Korea, a hazy sky means the air quality is bad. It's best to wear a face mask.
Roosevelt:	Wow, that's rough. Do you have to deal with this hazy , polluted weather often?
Minji:	Not all year, but the worst of it happens in the spring.



To fill someone in [on someone or something]

Idiom

To fill someone in means to let someone know some information, fact, or detail that they are curious about. Usually people use this phrase when they want to know some new, interesting piece of gossip. This phrase refers to a gap in someone's knowledge; they need a piece of information to literally **fill in** that gap.

Here are a couple more examples with **to fill someone in [on someone or something]**:

Josh:	Hey, dude, fill me in —what happened at the party last night? Did you ask her out?
Matt:	No, she came with another guy. His name is Rob, I think.
Josh:	Aw, man, that blows. Well, maybe it wasn't serious or anything. It could have been a casual date.
Matt:	Yeah, maybe.

Mort:	Hey, Killian and I are gonna miss the team meeting this afternoon. We've got study hall with Mr. Briggs. Can you fill us in on what Coach Mac has to say ?
Brian:	Yeah, no problem. Catch you later. Don't be late for practice!
Mort:	Yup, later.

Shocked

Adjective

Shocked is an emotion that one feels when they are greatly surprised by something. It can sometimes have a good meaning, but often **shocked** is used when someone hears sad, unexpected, or perplexing news. Another definition of **shocked** is an electric **shock**, a feeling of pain from electrocution. Therefore, you can imagine a piece of news that was so surprising or distressing that it feels as if it has physically **shocked** you.

In this episode, Andrew says that he is **shocked** by how badly the forest fires have affected some areas of California. In other words, he was greatly surprised and distressed to hear how bad the fires are in that area.

Here are a couple more examples with **shocked**:

Stacy: Have you heard? Roger left his wife and ran off with his secretary!

Diane: Yeah, I did. I was so **shocked**! Can you believe such a scandal could happen? And on Christmas Eve, too!!

Reporter: **Shocking** news! In the midst of this morning's thunderstorm, a 100-car pileup occurred on the Jefferson Highway. If you or your loved ones are planning to take Jefferson on their morning commute, you should think again. It's going to be a long while before all of that wreckage is cleared. Tune in later for more information on the scene.



To make sense

Idiom

To make sense means to have a clear meaning and to be easy to understand. Something that sounds reasonable just **makes sense**. For example, one might say that it **makes sense** to leave early in order to avoid traffic. In this episode, Jeremy says that it **makes sense** that a lot of fires occur in California, because the conditions are very dry and there is a drought. In other words, it is easy to understand why California has a lot of fires, because of the dry conditions.

Here are a couple more examples with **to make sense**:

Mom:	Niki! I just got a call from your teacher. You were fighting in school again?
Niki:	Yeah. But, Mom, he started it.
Mom:	Fighting doesn't make any sense ! It doesn't matter who started it. Nothing good ever comes from fighting. When will you learn?
Niki:	Sorry, Mom. I won't do it again.
Mom:	You better not!

Gigi:	Why is it that I'm always single? Am I just that ugly?
Sarah:	No, of course not! Maybe it's just because you are a little picky about the guys you wanna date.
Gigi:	Like how? I just want them to have a good job, no facial hair, dental insurance, a nice car, straight teeth, a healthy relationship with their mother, and a respect for strong, independent women. Is that too much to ask for?
Sarah:	Yeah, I guess that makes sense but—
Gigi:	No, you know what? I'm done! I'm just gonna be a cat lady for the rest of my life.

To rely on

Verb

To rely on means to put your trust or confidence in something or someone. Someone who is dependable and trustworthy is someone that you can **rely on**. In this episode, Andrew says that his hometown **relies on** tourism for its economy, but the fires have decreased the number of tourists coming to visit.

Here are a couple more examples with **to rely on**:

Sam: Hey, can you help me with the project I'm working on tomorrow?

Jenna: Of course, Sam. You can **rely on** me. I'll help you get the job done.

Sam: Jenna, you're the best! I know I can always count on you.

Ming: Our organization **relies heavily on** outside donations. You will be in charge of fundraising for us. I believe you've had experience with this before?

Zhiyi: Yes, sir. I have managed a few dozen fundraisers for my last employer, as well. I won't let you down.

Ming: I have high expectations for you, Zhiyi. Good luck!

Quiz

1. Which of these words does not fit in the phrase “thick blanket of _____”?

- a) snow
- b) smoke
- c) stench
- d) fog

2. Who is someone you cannot rely on?

- a) your close sibling
- b) your best friend
- c) your honest coworker
- d) a nice person you just met today

3. What is a synonym for shocked?

- a) surprised
- b) sad
- c) depressed
- d) timid

4. Which is NOT a synonym for hazy?

- a) overcast
- b) smoggy
- c) transparent
- d) misty

5. What does it mean to fill someone in?

- a) to substitute for them when they are sick
- b) to let them know something
- c) to feed them until they are full
- d) to ignore them completely

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Does your area get forest fires? If yes, have you experienced one firsthand? If not, are there any other common natural disasters in your area?
2. What types of natural disasters have you witnessed/experienced? Describe them.
3. How do you prepare for an emergency situation caused by weather? Do you stock up on food? Do you stay inside?
4. Have you ever moved somewhere specifically for its nice weather conditions? Have you ever wished you could move somewhere new because of your area's current weather patterns?
5. What is an obstacle in your area that most affects how you live? What do you do to combat that obstacle?

Quiz Answers

1. c 2. d 3. a 4. c 5. b

References and suggestions for further reading

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhNFB_uJ_mY
2. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/bcs-tourism-industry-taking-a-significant-hit-due-to-wildfires/article36133097/>
3. <https://www.vox.com/2018/7/20/17582890/wildfires-2018-carr-fire-california-cranston-ferguson-colorado>

Credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Jeremy Brinkerhoff
Music: *Something Elated* by Broke For Free, *Step On* by Jahzzar
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