

## Chatterbox #237 – The ultimate guide to high school

### Episode description

In this interesting Chatterbox episode, Andrew and Kassy answer a Culips listener's questions about high school life in Canada and the United States. How was high school different for you? Listen and find out!

### Fun fact

Boston Latin, in Boston, Massachusetts, is the oldest high school in the United States. It was founded in 1635! Over the years, it has had five different sites. The school moved to its current site in 1922.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- Mandatory
- Bright
- A tradesperson
- Demanding
- A meet
- No comment



## Transcript

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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.

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Andrew: Hey, guys, what's up? My name is Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And you're tuned into Culips.

Hello, everyone, you are listening to Chatterbox, and that is the Culips series where we share completely natural English conversations with you all. And today I'm joined by my cohost, Kassy.

Hey, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew.

Andrew: And we are going to talk about, well, a topic that was suggested to us by one of our listeners who goes by the name Mike. And Mike is from China and he's a high school student in China. So, hey, Mike, thanks for the email. And Mike had some really great questions that he sent to us about, yeah, high school experiences in North America. And, Mike, these are the types of emails that we really love because it makes our job so easy, doesn't it, Kassy? We have to do no planning.

Kassy: Yeah, the lesson's just right there.

Andrew: Yeah, so thanks for doing our work for us here, Mike. We really appreciate it. And so, yeah, Kassy, today we'll talk about high school, OK?

Kassy: OK.

Andrew: And I hope you didn't have a traumatic high school experience.

Kassy: Oh no, pretty typical.

Andrew: Pretty typical, OK, good. But just before we get into it, I would like to let you know, guys, that there is a study guide available for this episode on our website, Culips.com. It's got a transcript, it's got detailed vocabulary explanations and real-world examples, also has a quiz and some prompts that you could use for writing practice or for speaking practice. We think it is the best way to study with us and we would like you to check it out. So just visit our website, Culips.com, to give it a download.

- Andrew: OK, Kassy, so Mike's first question here is, "What subjects do you have and are you able to choose them?" So when you were a high school student, what subjects did you study and how many of them were **mandatory** courses and how many could you choose, like electives?
- Kassy: OK, good question. In my high school, we had seven classes a day and one period for lunch.
- Andrew: OK.
- Kassy: And at least four of those classes were for the core lessons, you know? Math, science, reading, and social studies.
- Andrew: OK.
- Kassy: And then after that, the classes left over, we either had to take **mandatory** electives, like 2 years of language or one semester of art, but usually we had two or three classes a year where we could take anything. One year I took a jewelry-making class.
- Andrew: Jewelry-making?
- Kassy: Yeah.
- Andrew: Wow.
- Kassy: I hated it, my friend wanted to take a class together and then she bailed out at the last minute.
- Andrew: Oh my god.
- Kassy: I was stuck in there.
- Andrew: Wow, that's an interesting high school that has a jewelry-making class.
- Kassy: Yeah.
- Andrew: I guess my experience is much the same. The core classes in Canada, we had to take social studies, English, math, and I guess science, as well. Yeah, science, but we had options within those, right? So I actually took a general English class and an English literature class. For math, math was divided into three levels: foundations, principles, and honours and I took the medium one, I guess it was called principles.
- Kassy: Did you have a choice in your school which level to take or did they place you there?

Andrew: I had a choice, yeah, because they're slightly different depending on what your goals were. But I think if you're, like, a **bright** student, you would have to take honours and you just wouldn't have a choice about that. And also if you weren't a **bright** student and you wanted to take honours, maybe they would say no.

But I remember being able to choose between principles and the foundations because they had a slightly different focus depending on what you wanted to do with math in the future. If you wanted to be a **tradesperson**, foundations was more practical math that, like, construction workers and these types of people use all the time. You know, geometry and stuff. And principles was more abstract, algebra and calculus and these types of things, I think. It's been a while since I've been a high school student, it's hard to remember.

Kassy: Showing your age, Andrew.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So because of that, let's move on to Mike's second question which is, "What is the schedule of school time?" So, Kassy, you mentioned you had eight periods and one of them was a lunch period, but when did you start in the morning and when did you finish in the afternoon?

Kassy: Well, after living in Asia for a few years, I know that students who live in Asia are going to hate me for this answer. But I had such a great school day, we started just before 8 a.m. and we finished by 2:30 p.m. every day.

Andrew: Wow, 2:30?

Kassy: Yes.

Andrew: That's even earlier than mine, and I thought mine was early. We finished at 3:24 p.m. and we'd start around 8 a.m. So, yeah, it's not a very long day. And I think it was in grade 12—we say grade 12 in Canada and I think in the States you say 12th grade?

Kassy: Yes.

Andrew: Yeah, so in grade 12 for me, I had two spares. So a spare is when you have no class for one of the study blocks, it's just a free study period.

Kassy: Yeah, we call it free period.

- Andrew: Free period, so we called it a spare. And the way that my school worked is that each period lined up to a letter. So we had like A block, B block, C block, D block, and that was one day and then the next day it would be like EDFG and those would switch every day. One day, A would be first, B would be second. The next day it would be B first, A second. I don't know why they would always just rotate every day. You had to, like, carry a little schedule in your pocket for the first 2 months of school until you memorized the block rotation. But what this meant is some days I would get two free periods in the morning, so I wouldn't have to go to school until after lunch.
- Kassy: You could go in late?
- Andrew: Yeah, because I had no class.
- Kassy: So lucky.
- Andrew: We wouldn't have to be on the campus when there was no class, or in the afternoons sometimes I could go home at lunch time. So grade 12 was awesome because I had lots of free time, a lot of half days.
- Kassy: Wow. Seriously, again, students who live in Asia, we are so sorry for you to be hearing this. For our listeners who don't know a lot of student from China or Korea, Japan, they have to go to school until 10 p.m. in high school.
- Andrew: Yeah, and at least in Korea here, the Korean equivalent of grade 12 is the most intense, nightmare-ish year, right? Where I was just saying I had a lot of half days in my grade 12.
- Kassy: Yeah, we coasted through the last year of high school.
- Andrew: Yeah. Let's move on to Mike's third question here, Kassy, and he is curious about scores. He says, "Do you regard scores as an important thing or are you hardworking to get high grades?" So, were grades important to you?
- Kassy: Really, I think it depends on your parents a lot. My parents were quite strict, so I did work quite hard for high grades. But my stepfather was not strict about grades, so my stepsister had different criteria for what she thought was a desirable grade point average.
- Andrew: OK.
- Kassy: Yeah, so while my mother demanded As for me and sister, my stepsister could very happily get a C+ or a B.
- Andrew: Now, were you all in the same high school at the same time?

- Kassy: Yes, we were, so our teachers knew we were sisters. My stepsister's the youngest, so they're like, "Wow, you're Kassy and Karly's sister, you're probably, you know, gonna be best in the class." She's like, "Uh, don't be disappointed when that doesn't happen."
- Andrew: That's funny. Yeah, for me, you know, I do have to agree with you. I think parents really demand grades from students. My parents weren't too **demanding**, of course they didn't want me to slack off, but I don't think they were too disappointed if I brought home, you know, a quiz with a poor grade on it or something.
- But, personally, I always tried to get high-ish grades. I didn't do poorly in high school. But I don't remember working too hard, either. Maybe in my final year I started to care a little bit as it got closer to university when I decided that I did want to go to university. I think our teachers started pushing us and preparing us for what we were going to expect in university, and at that time then I started to work a little harder.
- Kassy: Is college tuition as expensive in Canada as it is in America?
- Andrew: No, it's much cheaper.
- Kassy: In America, it's really expensive, so we had AP high school classes.
- Andrew: Advanced placement.
- Kassy: Yeah, if you took those classes, they cost \$80 to take the class.
- Andrew: OK.
- Kassy: But if you pass the test, you got college credit.
- Andrew: OK.
- Kassy: So, you know, you work really hard in high school to get this college credit. But it costs \$80 instead of \$3000.
- Andrew: OK.
- Kassy: So I took a bunch of those in high school.
- Andrew: Wow, I didn't actually know that's what the system was. I've heard AP, you know, all the time on movies and TV and such. I always just figured it was an honours class for smarter students. I didn't realize that you could earn college credit through it.



- Kassy: Yeah, it depends on the school, but my school really focused on that. So because of that my sister and I were able to graduate college in three years instead of four.
- Andrew: OK, this is explaining so much. I was wondering how you were so young and over here in Korea for so long already.
- Kassy: That's why.
- Andrew: OK, OK. Cool. Let's move on to Mike's next question, number four. "What after school activities did you have on both weekdays and weekends?"
- Kassy: How about you go first.
- Andrew: Sure, after school activities. When I was in high school, I didn't really do too much that was related to my high school. I wasn't super involved in, like, any clubs or sports, anything like that. I was part of the school band, but that was all during school hours.
- Kassy: Did you do the marching band?
- Andrew: No, we didn't have a marching band. We just had a concert band, I was a percussionist because I played the drums.
- Kassy: I could imagine that about you, a drum player.
- Andrew: Yeah, so, I mean, for a concert band with, like, trumpets and violins, it's like an orchestra, right? So there's not actually too much to do when you're a percussionist. You just sort of wait for most of the song and then you hit the cymbals once. It was quite easy. And on the weekends, I guess at the time I spent a lot of my weekend time and after-school time playing music with my friends. It wasn't really organized by the school, it was more organized by me and my friends, really. That's what I was busy with.
- Kassy: I am not a great sports player, but I was very heavily involved in sports all year round. I did track and field, cross country, swimming, yeah. So that took up a big chunk of my time after school.
- Andrew: Yeah, so you're part of the school team, then? And would you do track **meets** and races and participate?
- Kassy: Yeah. So it's funny, actually, sometimes I would spend more time practicing for sports and going to sports events than I actually did in school.
- Andrew: Right.
- Kassy: Not always, but occasionally.

- Andrew: Sometime, I see. So we have pretty different experiences there, then.
- Oh, I did—one time there was a battle of the bands at my high school.
- Kassy: Oh, that's so cool.
- Andrew: And my band played in the battle of the bands.
- Kassy: How'd you do?
- Andrew: I don't think we won, no, we definitely didn't win. But I do remember that, I think that was in grade 11 or, yeah, maybe grade 11. So that was one time where both of those worlds kind of met, where just a social activity kind of crossed paths with an official school event.
- Kassy: What was your band's name?
- Andrew: At that time, I think the name of our band was Lioness, a really bad name.
- Kassy: **No comment.**
- Andrew: Sounds like a high school student came up with it. All right, Mike's next question here: "Do you have any clubs or communities that are based out of your high school and, if so, what are they like?" I guess he's curious here about school clubs and, yeah, you mentioned sports clubs. There's lots of clubs, there's debate club, there's chess club, there's drama club, at least at my high school.
- Kassy: Model UN, volunteer groups, LGBTQ for gay, lesbian, queer rights, anime club.
- Andrew: Anime club, yeah, so there's lots. I'm sure even now there's, like, tech clubs, like, programming clubs and stuff.
- Kassy: Robotics.
- Andrew: My school had an automotive program, so you could learn how to fix cars.
- Kassy: That's pretty cool.
- Andrew: And we had, like, a stock car and students would go and race it and the students would maintain it. I never took any of those classes, I'm not very mechanically inclined. But, yeah, there was an automotive club. There's a lot of students at my school that would come to school and work on cars and stuff.
- Kassy: That's pretty sweet.



Andrew: Yeah. OK, so Mike's final question, Kassy, is actually really interesting and that's about the communities and the cliques that develop in high schools. And he was wondering if kids hang out based on their skin colour and ethnicity or if it's interest based? So how do cliques develop? Or how did they develop when you were a student?

Kassy: Before I was in high school, our community was predominately white, but when I was in high school, we started to have a lot more students from Puerto Rico and Egypt during the political turmoil there. So there were a couple cliques for Puerto Rican students, but that was mostly because they are just fresh off the boat, that's the expression, fresh off the airplane into America, so language barriers were issues.

And besides that, though, in terms of cliques, like, you know, we had the band geek cliques and sports, but it wasn't as stereotypical as you see in TV shows. But, yeah, it was definitely there. How about in Canada?

Andrew: Yeah, Kassy, yeah. I also grew up in a city that's predominately white, although it is changing and becoming more multicultural now, but I think, yeah, everybody got along. There's no problems, I remember most people interacting with everybody. But, like you mentioned, there's these cliques that develop based on interest more so than race, I think. So, yeah, we had drama geeks, jocks, car guys. Yeah, popular kids.

Kassy: Did you have any stoners?

Andrew: Oh, yeah, of course. There's tons of stoners and burnouts.

Kassy: The druggies.

Andrew: Yeah, I think probably half of my class was high most of the time.

Kassy, it was fun to take a little walk down memory lane here.

Kassy: Yeah, it was interesting.

Andrew: Definitely. And, Mike, thanks again. It was really great to get your email.

And, listeners, if any of you have a suggestion that you would like to hear us talk about in a future Culips episode, then, yeah, just send us some questions and we'd be happy to talk about them and discuss them. Our website is [Culips.com](http://Culips.com) and we are all over the place on social media, on Facebook, on Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. So if you use one of those services, please just follow us so you can stay up to date on all the comings and goings over here at Culips.

Andrew:       Guys, thanks for listening and we'll be back soon with another new episode.  
                  We'll talk to you then. Bye.

Kassy:         Catch you later.

## Detailed Explanations

### Mandatory Adjective

**Mandatory** means that something is essential. It is something you need to do. For example, it is **mandatory** to have a driver's licence to legally drive a car. In this episode, our hosts talk about **mandatory** classes, meaning the classes every student needs to take. Obligatory and compulsory are synonyms for **mandatory**.

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

Britney:	Did you hear about the meeting at 3:00?
Hanson:	No. When did they schedule it?
Britney:	About 20 minutes ago.
Hanson:	Oh, I really don't want to go. I think I'll skip this one.
Britney:	Um, you should read the email. The meeting is 100% <b>mandatory</b> .
Hanson:	Darn. I guess I'm going to the meeting after all.

Jimin:	Do you want to go for a bike ride this afternoon? Do you have a bike and a helmet?
Carl:	I have a bicycle, of course, but I don't have a helmet. Why?
Jimin:	They changed the law on the first of this month. Helmets are <b>mandatory</b> now.
Carl:	I guess that's a good idea. It looks like I'll have to buy a helmet, then.

## Bright Adjective

If you call someone **bright**, you are saying that person is smart. You can also say a **bright** idea, which means it is a good and intelligent idea.

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

Alejandro:	I met your friend Jack at a party last night.
Sharon:	Oh, cool! What did you think of him?
Alejandro:	He's really <b>bright</b> . He talked about politics, sports, and arts, all with such ease.
Sharon:	That's Jack, all right. He knows a lot about many subjects.

Sammy:	I hear you're moving into a new apartment.
Anika:	Yeah, on the weekend. But I've got a bit of a problem.
Sammy:	What's that?
Anika:	I couldn't book a moving company. And no one I know can lend me a car or anything. Do you have any <b>bright</b> ideas that could help me out?
Sammy:	I could call my parents. They have a trailer. Maybe they can help.

## A tradesperson

Noun

In this episode, Andrew talks about the classes you need to take in order to become a **tradesperson**. A **tradesperson** is someone whose occupation requires specific manual skills. A bricklayer, a mechanic, a plumber, a nurse, and a therapist are all examples of jobs that require specific training. You can go to a trade school to get certified.

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

Andy:	Did you study to become an electrician right after high school?
Marko:	No. Actually, I graduated with a degree in French literature at my university, but I couldn't find a job.
Andy:	So what did you do?
Marko:	My father suggested I become a <b>tradesperson</b> since it was really easy to find a job at the time. So I picked the one that interested me the most.

Wei:	You work as a receptionist, right?
Danny:	Yeah.
Wei:	What do your parents do?
Danny:	My father is a plumber and my mother is a nurse.
Wei:	Wow, they're both <b>tradespeople</b> . Did they ever encourage you to find a trade?
Danny:	They did, but I couldn't find anything I liked. And, anyways, I like my job.

## Demanding Adjective

In this episode, Kassy says her parents were very **demanding** regarding her high school grades. Andrew says his parents weren't as **demanding**. They're talking about how well their parents expected them to do academically. **Demanding** is about expectations. This is different from a demand, which is a request.

A job or a task can also be **demanding**. That means the job is difficult. Running in a marathon is very physically **demanding**.

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

Jessica:	Are you coming out with us tonight?
Victor:	I really shouldn't. I'm working tomorrow morning.
Jessica:	But tomorrow's Saturday!
Victor:	I know, but my boss is really <b>demanding</b> . He expects everyone to put in extra time on weekends.
Jessica:	That's rough.

Keiko:	I tried calling you yesterday. Where were you?
Nancy:	Oh, I've been trekking in the mountains for the past few days.
Keiko:	Really? For days? That sounds horrible!
Nancy:	No, no, I love it! It's really <b>demanding</b> on the body, but it's amazing. Plus, I don't get cellphone reception, which is great. That's why I didn't answer your call.

## A meet

Noun

**A meet** is an athletic competition. The most common ways of using **a meet** are in the phrases **a track meet** or **a swim meet**. In this sense, **a meet** is not short for a business meeting or a family meeting.

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

Drake: You looked stressed. Is anything OK?

Andrea: I am stressed. I've got a race on the weekend.

Drake: Oh, yeah. You run track, right?

Andrea: Yes, and it's the last **meet** of the season before the championship.

Drake: Cool. Good luck!

Santiago: Fei, I was wondering if you can do me a huge favour.

Fei: What is it?

Santiago: I'm working on Saturday and I can't change my shift. My son has **a swim meet** that same afternoon. I can drive him there in the morning, but I can't pick him up. Do you think you could?

Fei: Sure! Around what time?

Santiago: It usually finishes at 4:00.

Fei: OK. No problem.

## No comment

### Idiom

In this episode, Andrew says that the name of his high school band was Lioness and that he thinks it was a terrible name. To this, Kassy says **no comment**. That means she is not offering any kind of answer. Kassy is choosing not to offer her opinion because maybe she too thinks it's a bad name but she wants to be polite. **No comment** is usually a humorous statement.

**No comment** can also be used seriously. Reporters often ask politicians difficult or embarrassing questions. If the politician answers **no comment**, he or she is not trying to be funny or polite. The person simply does not want to answer the question one way or another.

Here are a couple more examples with **no comment**:

Alfredo:	There's something different about your look. What is it?
Kevin:	Guess.
Alfredo:	I don't know!
Kevin:	I got green contact lenses. Some people say it looks weird on me. What do you think?
Alfredo:	Um, <b>no comment</b> .

Alisha:	I was reading about the criminal allegations against the governor in the paper this morning. Have you heard anything about them?
Lynn:	Is it something to do with campaign finances?
Alisha:	That's right.
Lynn:	I don't know much about that. What has the governor said?
Alisha:	So far, he has said <b>no comment</b> every time someone asks him a question.
Lynn:	Sounds like there might be an investigation.



## Quiz

**1. Which of the following sentences is a good example of something that is mandatory?**

- a) You don't need to pay for parking.
- b) You can do it when you want.
- c) If you don't do this, you're fired.
- d) Take any class you want.

**2. What does no comment usually mean?**

- a) you don't know the answer
- b) you don't want to answer
- c) you can't answer
- d) there is no answer

**3. Which of the following is NOT an expression meaning smart?**

- a) a bright colour
- b) a bright idea
- c) a bright athlete
- d) a bright student

**4. According to our hosts, who had more demanding parents in terms of high school grades?**

- a) Andrew
- b) Kassy

**5. Which of the following is NOT a common expression?**

- a) a track meet
- b) a track and field meet
- c) a swim meet
- d) a business meet

## Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What were some of the more unusual classes you had to take in high school?
2. Were there many cliques in your high school? If so, which one were you part of?
3. How demanding were your parents regarding your academic scores?
4. What would you do differently if you could relive your high school days?
5. At what time did a normal high school day finish for you?
6. What is tuition like in your home country? How expensive is it compared to other countries?

## Quiz Answers

1.c    2.b    3.a    4.b    5.d

### Episode credits

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