

Chatterbox #293 – The history and culture of tea in the UK

Episode description

Who doesn't love a hot cup of tea? Most countries have some kind of tea culture. However, the British think of tea as especially important to their culture. In fact, many people think of tea when they think of elements of British culture. In this Chatterbox episode, Anna talks with Andrew about her country's relationship with tea and how important it is. So put the kettle on and sit back for an interesting conversation!

Chatterbox is a Culips series for high and intermediate English learners in which native English speakers have a conversation on an interesting topic. Listening to this series will help to improve your listening skills and to expand your vocabulary.

Fun fact

In this episode, Anna mentions that Turkey is the country with the highest consumption of tea in the world. The average Turkish person drinks 3.16 kg of tea per year, whereas people in the #2 country, Ireland, drink 2.19 kg of tea per year. Every other country surveyed consumes, on average, under 2 kg of tea per year. There must be some amazing tea in Turkey!

Expressions included in the study guide

- To come on the scene
- Fabric of social culture
- [Something] tea
- Criminal
- Just a splash
- To dress up



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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone, my name is Andrew.

Anna: And my name is Anna.

Andrew: And you're listening to the Culips English Podcast.

Hey there, everyone, welcome back to Culips. This is Chatterbox, the Culips series for intermediate and advanced English learners that features natural, unedited conversations between native speakers about compelling topics or trending current events or a hot issue. And today, I'm joined by my cohost, Anna. Hey there, Anna.

Anna: Hey, Andrew, and hello, all the listeners. So, Andrew, I'm super excited for this episode, because today we're going to be talking about tea and the culture and history of tea drinking in the UK. So, as you can imagine, this is definitely my cup of tea. I had to, I'm sorry, I had to.

Andrew: Anna, could you quickly explain that joke for our listeners? What does it mean if something is your cup of tea?

Anna: Yeah, I'm not sure if it was a joke, but we'll say it was a joke. If something is your cup of tea, it means that you like it. You enjoy it, it is your thing.

Andrew: So, it's an idiomatic expression that means that you enjoy or like something, exactly. And, Anna, I'm really excited for this episode, too, because I think this is a huge cultural difference, in fact, between the UK and North America, because we don't really have a sophisticated tea-drinking culture in North America. Of course, people drink tea, it's common to drink tea, but it's not as central to the culture of North America as I think it is in the UK. So I'm really excited to chat with you and to hear and learn all about it.

Anna: Well, I will do my best to tell you all about it. But before I do, let's remind everyone about the study guide that's available for this episode for all members. So, everyone, the study guide contains a transcript and practice exercises that are designed by us to help you improve your English fluency. We recommend following along with the guide as you listen to this episode, so you can have them side by side and follow along. And to get the guide you need to be a Culips member. So, for all the details and how to sign up, just visit our website, [Culips.com](https://www.culips.com).

Andrew: And at the start of each episode, we like to give a shout out to one of our listeners who has supported us by leaving us a review on their favourite podcast app. And today, we'd like to shout out Anastasia, one of our listeners from Russia, who left us a very heartwarming review on Apple Podcasts. Now, Anastasia wrote, "Thank you guys, you really help all people around the world improve their English skills. I listen to each episode and try to repeat it. Sometimes I even catch myself thinking that I copy your intonation." So that's a good way to go deeper into the language. So, thank you very much for that wonderful review, Anastasia.

Anna: Yeah, thanks, Anastasia. And you're absolutely right, copying intonation is a great way to try and practice sounding natural in English. And thanks to everybody out there who has been leaving us reviews and subscribing to Culips on your favourite podcast app, or even telling your friends to check out Culips. This helps lots of other English learners around the world connect and learn with us. So, keep it up, we love to read all your comments.

Andrew: Anna, we'll get into the main content here for this episode in just a moment. But Anastasia's comment here about copying our intonation as she listens to Culips brought up a memory that I had from last year. I had a couple of Culips listeners, different people from different parts of the world doing a lot of shadowing practice with Culips and they sent me their audio files of them shadowing with my voice. And it was really freaky because they were doing such a good job at copying the way that I speak and using the same expressions that I do, and it was almost like hearing a mirrored version of my own voice when they sent me the video clips. Have you ever had one of your podcast listeners do this with your voice, Anna?

Anna: Oh, God, no. But now I'm thinking about it. Maybe somebody's going to do it now that they're listening to it. But that would be really freaky. I challenge anybody out there that listens to my podcast, Anna with 2Ns, I challenge you to copy my intonation. There you go. It's out there, send it to me.

Andrew: All right, listeners. So, do a little bit of shadowing with Anna to practice your native pronunciation and intonation and then send it to us so we can give Anna that experience of having to listen to someone shadow her own voice. I love it.

Anyways, why don't we get into our tea talk now, Anna, and I have so many questions to ask you about this. But maybe before we get into my questions, you could just give us a little bit of background about the history of drinking tea in the UK, because I do know that it has a history that goes back hundreds of years.

Anna: Sure, I would be more than happy to, Andrew. So, let's start off with the fact that tea first arrived in England via Dutch traders, who actually started importing it in really large quantities from China in around the early 1600s. So, there is a very important woman in this story called Catherine of Braganza or Braganza. Me and Andrew are not quite sure how to pronounce this because she was from Portugal. So, please, if anybody out there wants to correct us, feel free.

She was originally from Portugal but then she married King Charles in 1662 and became Queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Not bad, I have to say. And she's actually credited with starting this whole trend and as the person who played a huge role in spreading the popularity of tea drinking in the UK, which I think is something that a lot of people wouldn't know. So, tea was a really popular drink in Portugal and then when she arrived in England for the wedding, she requested some, but none was available. So, her love for tea kind of started this trend. And the first kind of teas available in the UK were actually **loose leaf green and oolong tea**.

Andrew: Isn't that interesting, Anna, because I know these days, most people in the UK drink **black tea** that comes in a tea bag. But back in the day when tea was first available, it was like **green tea** and **oolong tea**, which I guess is because it was coming from China. And that's the kind of tea that's grown in China. And that makes a lot of sense, too, that it would be loose leaf because, obviously, tea bags weren't invented until, I found this out through Google, until 1908. So it wasn't until hundreds of years later that tea bags **came on the scene**. But for whatever reason, when I think about people way back when drinking tea in England, I always just imagined tea bags and **black tea**, but that wasn't the case at all.

Anna: I guess we do drink **black tea** now. And sometimes we have these kind of **leafy teas**, but they're kind of posh, you know, they're kind of upper-end items. Originally, tea was actually a luxury item and enjoyed really only by the elite classes and super expensive and it had a really high import tax. However, in 1783, the prime minister, remember the prime minister is another way to say president, just depends on the country, the head of the government, who was named William Younger, slashed the high taxes from 119% to only 12.5%. And this is the key thing that made tea affordable for everybody, for the masses. So, this again is another important figure in this tea story, which I think is really fascinating.

Andrew: And, Anna, at around the same time when this tax was slashed from 119% to 12.5%, which is amazing, the government must have just been cleaning up with all the tax revenue from tea. Around the same time when they slashed the taxes is when the source of tea shifted, as well. So instead of coming from China, tea was imported from India through the East India Company. And British people started to drink **black tea** as opposed to **green tea** or **oolong tea**.

Anna: And interestingly, as well, if we're talking about Europe, I thought the UK would be the largest consumer of tea or the biggest market, but it's actually the third largest tea-drinking nation behind Turkey and Ireland, which is interesting. I know when I think about Turkey, I think of **mint tea**, like fresh, amazing **mint tea**. But I'm surprised that Ireland, I didn't know that. So, we're only the third, we're third place. We're not first place at the moment, but it does still play a really, really huge role in our culture.

Andrew: I used to have an Irish coworker and working with her, I realized just how important a part of tea is in the lives of just regular Irish people. Because she was living here in Korea, we worked at the same school, and she loved living in Korea except for the fact that she couldn't get her favourite brand of tea bag here and so her mom would have to send her tea bags from Ireland, which I thought was hilarious because the tea came from India anyways, it wasn't like grown in Ireland but anyways, she had a brand that she connected with, and had to have that brand. So she'd get, like, big boxes of tea from her mom. And she had to prepare it a certain way every lunch and every afternoon. She couldn't go without having her cup of tea. So, yeah, I was surprised to see that Turkey is #1, but I wasn't surprised to learn that Ireland was the second largest consumer in the world, that kind of made sense to me.

Anna: Well, Ireland was a surprise for me, but I think tea just plays such a big role in our culture. And I'll explain a little bit, Andrew, now, because you said you were interested to know about what it's like in the UK. And you have to kind of see tea as like one of the **fabrics of our social culture**, you know. Like, a lot of the things that we do are focused around eating and drinking throughout the day. We have breakfast, lunch, dinner, and tea is like something that you have in the morning with a break, you have a tea break. In the afternoon, you have a break, you have a cup of tea. If you've got a problem and you know, you're feeling sad, maybe one of your family members is going to say, "Let's have a cup of tea and we can chat about it." Or your boss will tell you, "Should we grab a cup of tea and let's talk it through?"

So, it's kind of a little bit of a, maybe a safety net or like a comfort blanket. And it's kind of that thing that gets people together, gets people talking. And I think people just really enjoy it as a way to relax and to have something to drink, to enjoy. And we always have tea in the house. I mean, I would say that—I say "we," I'm referring to everybody in the UK, but I think a lot of people would have tea in the house.

And we always have a kettle. A kettle is a really important part of a British kitchen. A kettle, if you don't know, is a device which boils water. So, it's perfect for drinking tea because we want to make the cup of tea quickly otherwise we'd have to be there with a pot over the stove, trying to heat the water. So, a kettle is a staple for any British kitchen and that kettle is there to make tea. For example, in Spain they don't have kettles in their kitchens. It's not something that everybody has. What about in Korea? Do you guys have kettles?

Andrew: Yeah, I think most households will have a kettle in Korea. Korea is also a pretty big tea-drinking country. I don't think they drink tea in the same way as in the UK, but many people do drink tea here. And in fact, tea is grown here. There are beautiful green tea farms in South Korea. So, yeah, a kettle is common here, but I didn't know that about Spain. That's interesting that it's not a staple in a Spanish kitchen to have a kettle. But I guess, yeah, makes sense being a hot country that maybe they wouldn't drink as much hot tea there.

Anna: Yeah, 'cause you get a bit of a shock because when you go to the hotels here, hotels in the UK will always have, you know, a kettle, usually they'll have a kettle and a tray of teas. So, you just kind of assume when you go to other places that everywhere else is going to have it. But if you go to a really Spanish hotel, not one that's made for tourists coming from abroad, they don't have kettles. So I remember being a little bit shocked a couple of times, like, well where's the kettle? I mean, it must be here, kind of looking in all the drawers, above the bed, you know, there must be a kettle in here somewhere. So we do drink a lot of tea and. I drink, for example now I don't actually drink a British **black tea** with milk as you mentioned before, Andrew, I drink kind of a **fruit tea**, lemon and ginger. So, I do drink tea but a different type of tea. I don't even know if I can buy tea in Spain. I haven't even checked.

Andrew: When I visited London and the UK a few years back, I was shocked at just how much tea is available in the grocery stores. When you go into like Marks & Spencer for example, there was just a whole aisle of tea, which was shocking to me. Of course, there are big tea sections here in Korean grocery stores and Canadian grocery stores, as well. There's lots of tea available, but it seemed like there were just more varieties of tea than I was used to seeing when I visited London. So, I was pretty shocked about that.

Anna, I have some questions for you about the other kinds of things you use to make tea. You mentioned the kettle being a staple in the kitchen in England, but what about some of the other paraphernalia or equipment that you use to make tea? Like, for example, when you brew a cup, do you just make like one individual cup of tea and put the tea bag in it, or do you always use a teapot and make several cups of tea?

Anna: That is a fabulous question. So I think in the past people were more likely to use a teapot and then they would put the tea bag in the teapot and then there would be a few cups from the teapot. But nowadays, I think it's more common just to get a mug, which, by the way, is also a staple of tea and you need a mug, it's a special type of cup and you can't have a glass, that's not going to work. I'm sorry, we need a mug, a nice mug with a nice pattern or whatever you want, but a mug is very important in this equation. And you put the individual tea bag inside and you fill it up with your boiling water. And then comes a question about how much milk, because this is a very delicate topic, especially in the office because everybody likes their tea a slightly different way.

Andrew: And so milk is a common additive in tea, right? You're drinking a **black tea** and you add milk. And from what I've heard from my friends is that there's a lot of debate, like you said, about how much milk to put in and should you put the tea in the cup first and then the milk? Or the milk in the cup first and then the tea?

Anna: This is very clear. The tea first and then the milk. OK? All right? Let's not start with milk and then tea. I know some people, like, if they like a very **milky tea**, which is what we call it in the UK, they'll say, or weak, a **weak tea** or a **milky tea**, maybe they will put the milk in first and the majority of their drink will be milk. They'll put in the tea bag and then they'll just add a **splash** of water, that's horrendous. I mean, I don't know who does that, but **criminal**, absolutely **criminal**.

So the way that I like it is, I think most people, you put in the tea bag first with the hot water and then you add in the milk that you'd like. And some people will say just a **splash**, just a drop, which is a tiny bit of milk. And some people say something like this, it's the drink is so stiff, that you could stand a spoon in it, you could stand up a spoon in it, which is basically like, it's so thick, the tea so thick that you could stand up your spoon in the middle of the drink. I'm not quite hitting the spot with the expression but it's a northern one. I learned that when I lived in Liverpool.

Andrew: Almost like your cup of tea is mud. Anna, I've mentioned this on the podcast before, but my mom is actually from Scotland, originally. So she has some roots back to the UK and she's a big tea drinker herself. And she'll make a pot of tea in the teapot and then to keep the tea warm, she puts this very interesting device over the teapot, which she calls a tea cozy, which just sounds like the most grandmother type of thing in the world. It's like knitted, like usually a grandma knits them. It's made out of wool and it's really just like a hat for the teapot that is supposed to keep the warmth in the teapot and keep the tea warm. Have you ever used a tea cozy?

Anna: No, I haven't. Well, I'm sure I have at some point in my life, but you couldn't have described it better, Andrew, it's a hat for the teapot. Literally, it's like a little hat, a little blanket to keep the tea nice and warm so that you can keep popping back and filling up your mug with your cup of tea. But, yes, I would say if you had a teapot, that would be an essential complement to that is a tea cozy. It's very cute, it's like seeing a little dog, you know, when dogs were little jackets and you're like, oh, so cute. It's kind of like that.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah, indeed. Anna, I was wondering if there are any other expressions. You mentioned a few earlier that are related to drinking tea, like **weak tea** or having just a drop or a **splash** of milk in your tea. Are there any other slang expressions related to tea drinking? I know one that I've heard before is cuppa, cuppa. What does that mean, cuppa, a cuppa?

Anna: A cuppa just means a cup of tea. It's like a short way to say a cup of tea. One thing to know as well, if you are travelling to the UK and you're with people, they're going to ask you a question, they're gonna say, "How do you take it?" "How do you take it?" Which is basically how do you want your tea? Do you want it with milk? Do you want a lot of milk? Do you not want a lot of milk? So, they're going to ask you something like that, probably. They might not, in which case you're gonna get the standard, you're gonna get whatever they like. OK, so normally people would ask you, it's kind of courtesy to ask if you're making a cup of tea for somebody and you maybe ask them for sugar, would you like sugar? Some people take sugar in their tea.

So, you might hear a cuppa, you might also hear a brew, brew, B-R-E-W, because to brew is the process of releasing the ingredients into the water. To brew. I think that's, well, I'm not actually sure, but that's kind of what I thought the meaning was. But, yeah, if you brew something, it stands for a while, and you let the ingredients or you let the flavour be absorbed by the water. So, a cuppa, a cup of tea, a brew. And I think there are some more regional variations. But those are the ones that I'm familiar with, but I'm sure there's more.

Andrew: That's very interesting because in Canada, at least where I'm from in Canada, on the west coast, we use a brew to talk about a beer. So, like, a bottle of beer would be a brew. So, yeah, very different drinks, but the same word. But both are made through that process of brewing, right? You brew a beer to make the beer and you brew a cup of tea. We use that same verb for that action of making the beverage.

Anna, another thing that I'd like you to clarify is about eating biscuits while drinking tea.

Anna: Oh, goodness.

Andrew: Do most people drink a cuppa and have a biscuit at the same time?

Anna: There's huge debate about tea, OK? So you could have this debate with any British person. If you want to have a conversation starter with somebody, you can talk about this type of thing, **strong or weak teas** or biscuits. Now, I'm going to be very clear again, biscuits are not to be eaten with tea. And from my perspective, this is me. A lot of people what they do is they, they dip their biscuit in their tea, and then they eat the biscuit. That for me is, like, the most disgusting thing. Why would anybody want to eat a soggy biscuit? Soggy means, soggy is something solid that has become wet and it's, like, soggy and it's just the most disgusting thing. I don't know. But some people like it, some people don't. So, there's the debate out there, biscuits or no biscuits? It's like Marmite, love it or you hate it. Biscuit or no biscuit. For me, no biscuit.

Andrew: Interesting. And biscuit is what people in the UK call what we'd call in North America a kind of cookie, I think. Not very many people use the word biscuit in Canada, we would say cookie, but it does sound strange to use the word cookie when talking about drinking tea.

Anna: Let me be clear. I mean, the thing that's disgusting for me is dipping the biscuit in the tea. But I'm more than happy to eat a biscuit alongside drinking the tea, just not putting the biscuit in the tea. I'm going to be clear about that because I wasn't sure if I stressed that. I'll have a biscuit, no probs, I'm just not dippin' it, I'm not dippin' it in my tea. That's the key thing.

Andrew: Do you have a favourite brand of biscuit? Because I know this is also a hot issue for debate.

Anna: Oh, you can't go wrong with a good digestive.

Andrew: Chocolate or no chocolate?

Anna: I didn't know. Let's keep it simple. Let's keep it no chocolate. But if I'm having a good day, we'll throw on a chocolate digestive, why not? Or chocolate orange, I think that's a new range that they've got as well. But we'll keep it nice and simple.

Andrew: OK, I think we'll end this episode with this last question, Anna. And that is from watching different movies and TV shows produced in England, it seems to me that I've noticed that sometimes people use the word tea to talk about a meal. So instead of saying the word lunch or an afternoon meal, they'll actually say, "Let's have tea" or, "Let's go to tea." And then I see them eating lunch. I was a little bit confused about that. Do you sometimes use the word tea to talk about eating a meal?

Anna: Not lunch. For me tea can mean dinner, but not lunch.

Andrew: Dinner? OK.

Anna: So, for example, that's quite regional as well. So different people will say it from different places, but will be like, "Oh, when are we having tea?" which means when are we having dinner? So, yes, we do use it to describe a meal, but that's depends on where you're from. I know for example, my friend was from Liverpool, and she used to say tea. So, I know that it can be associated with some places in the north of England, but it really depends. It really depends on where you're from, but, yes, it can be used to describe dinner.

Andrew: OK, interesting. And I'm a liar because I do have one more question for you. That is about high tea. What is high tea?

Anna: OK, so this is kind of coming back to the thing at the beginning of tea started off as something with the elite classes and it was something that was very much, you know, very posh, very fancy. So, high tea or afternoon tea, people might have heard of this, is where you go to a nice restaurant or a tearoom, a tearoom and you have high tea. So high tea is some very, very nice tea, and they serve you food, small cakes, small sandwiches, we actually call it finger food because it's like the size of your finger, so tiny. If you're hungry, not a good idea.

But this is like an experience, so it's become actually really trendy, I would say in the past few years is that people go with their friends to afternoon tea or high tea, and it's where you drink tea with a little bit better than biscuits, you know, we're talking like nice cakes, scones, creams, which is why I could spend all day talking about scones and creams. And so, it's like a, I guess that's probably what it would have been like, in the past, you know, this kind of like really nice space, really beautiful. And so, it's become very popular as an experience, a dining experience or an eating out experience. Yeah, high tea.

Andrew: It's often very formal as well, is that true? That people will wear formal clothes and **dress up** to go for tea?

Anna: People **dress up**, they look nice. I'm wearing a sweatshirt now. I wouldn't go, if I was going to high tea, I wouldn't go with my little sweatshirt and trainers, you know? People like to make an effort they put on their best clothes. And you know, it's kind of an elegant experience. I would definitely recommend if you're ever in the UK and you're thinking about what you could do, I would really recommend going for a high tea, afternoon tea experience. It's a very British experience, it could be really fun.

Andrew: How much would it cost to go for high tea? Is it expensive? I used to work at a hotel where we served high tea in the restaurant of the hotel, and it was very expensive. It was like \$100 per person, which I thought was insane because you're just eating, like you said, Anna, finger food, like very small sandwiches and drinking **black tea**, which is extremely cheap to create. But it was the atmosphere of the hotel and the ambiance and the elegance of it, that's why I think the price was high. But what about in the UK, is it expensive to go for high tea?

Anna: I mean, sure, it's a business and it can be really expensive. And, you know, there's different levels. Some places do it, they have their own version, and it's much cheaper. Some places you have to book in advance, you cannot just turn up and go for high tea, you have to book sometimes even months or weeks in advance if you want to go but yeah, I mean it can be, it can be pretty pricey.

But you can definitely go to some, you know, smaller cafes or restaurants that will do their own version. But it tends to be kind of a little bit more expensive, because it's an in-demand experience, and something kind of that they've marketed that way. But, yeah, you could do your own high tea at home, I guess. But we don't do it in our houses, that's important to say like, this is not something that we do at home. We go out to do this type of thing. You know, my mom's not gonna put on a high tea spread at home, no, we go out to do this. It's not something we do in our houses, as far as I'm aware, anyway.

Andrew: Well, Anna, all of this talking about tea has made me thirsty for a cup of tea. So I think we should wrap this episode up and I'm going to go and pull out my kettle and my teapot and brew up a cup of the finest **black tea** that I have in my pantry.

Anna: Good idea. Me, too. I'm gasping for a cup of tea now, gasping means really thirsty. It's another way to say that. But, yeah, I know I could talk about tea a lot. I'm really surprised. But, yeah, it's been really fun, Andrew, love talking about it.

Andrew: So, thank you, everyone, for listening to us today. And if you enjoyed this episode and find Culips helpful for building your English fluency, we would really love it if you could support us. Now there are many ways that you can do that. The best is by becoming a Culips member on our website, Culips.com. And for all of the details and to learn about all of the amazing tools and benefits you get when you are a member, just check out the website. But of course, there are other ways that you can support us, like telling your friends who are learning English to check us out, following us on Instagram and YouTube, and also leaving us a five-star rating and review and subscribing to us on your favourite podcast app.

That brings us to the end of this episode but don't worry, we'll be back soon, and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

Anna: See you next time, guys.

Detailed Explanations

To come on the scene

Idiom

At the beginning of this episode, Andrew talks about how tea bags are a relatively recent invention. He says that it wasn't until 1908 that they **came on the scene**. **To come on the scene** is to come into existence in a particular field. In this sense, the scene is the industry of tea making.

You can also be **new to the scene**. For example, there is a musical community or scene in your city. A new artist who is gaining popularity in your city is **new to that music scene**. If you establish your own flower arrangement shop, you are **new to the flower arrangement scene**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to come on the scene**:

Kyle: Have you ever seen pictures of those old cellphones, those that look like big bricks?

Patty: Yeah. Imagine having one of those now?

Kyle: I can't. Do you know when it all changed?

Patty: Well, some companies like Nokia and Sony were making smaller phones by the 1990s. But it wasn't until the iPhone **came on the scene** that everything changed. That's when we started having pocket-sized smartphones.

Nick: I love this song. Who is the band?

Indira: It's an Australian band called the Koalas.

Nick: I've never heard of them. Are they **new to the scene**?

Indira: No, actually. They've been around for a while, but it's only recently that they've become really popular.

Fabric of social culture

Idiom

In this episode, Anna says that tea is one of the **fabrics of UK social culture**. To be the **fabric of social culture** is to be an integral part of that culture. It is extremely important. Likewise, Anna says that tea is one of the most important elements of UK culture.

Think of a cotton shirt. Cotton is the actual fabric of the shirt. Without the cotton as the base material, you cannot have a cotton shirt. In an exaggerated way, Anna is saying that you can't have UK culture without tea, because tea is the **fabric of its social culture**.

A related term is **staple**, which is something everyone has or does. Anna says that having a kettle is a **staple** for every British household. A **staple** also applies to food. In many Western countries, bread is a **staple**, meaning it is very important to their culinary culture. In many Asian countries, rice is a **staple**.

Here are a couple more examples with **fabric of social culture**:

Phil: What's the problem?

Sasha: My parents are setting up a bunch of dates for me. They're practically forcing me to get married.

Phil: What if you don't want to get married?

Sasha: I don't think I have a choice. My parents say that marriage is the **fabric of our social culture**. It's very important to them and our community.

James: In the past 24 hours, you served me potato chips, French fries, potato salad, and mashed potatoes. What's with you and potatoes?

Michael: It's my culture. Potatoes are a **staple** in all household around here. Do you not like potatoes?

James: Oh, it's OK. Don't worry. I'm not complaining.

Michael: Good, because I made some really good baked potatoes that I want you to try.

[Something] tea

Phrase

In this episode, Anna talks about the tea preferences British people have. She says some people like a **very milky tea**, which is also called a **weak tea**.

A **weak tea** can also be a drink where the tea leaves were not steeped for very long. In that sense, the tea does not have a strong taste, like a weak cup of coffee, for example.

A **stiff tea** is a **very dark tea** without much milk. As a joke, you can say the tea is so strong that a spoon can stand upright in the cup.

People tend to separate teas into **caffeinated teas** and **non-caffeinated teas**. In that sense, **black**, **green**, **white**, and **oolong teas** are caffeinated and can be grouped together. **Herbal teas** are not considered true teas, but since they are infused just like caffeinated teas, they still carry the name of tea.

Here are a couple more examples with **[something] tea**:

Mary: Oh, it's so nice of you to come and visit.

Frances: Don't mention it. I was in the neighbourhood and I figured I'd say hello.

Mary: That's nice. Would you like some tea?

Frances: I would love some.

Mary: How do you take it?

Frances: If you don't mind, I like rather **weak tea** with lots of milk. Thanks.

Feodor: Do you happen to have some tea in your kitchen?

Darla: Of course. What kind would you like?

Feodor: I would love some **black tea**.

Darla: Are you sure? Don't you have to go to sleep early tonight? I think you'd be better off with some **herbal tea**. Take a look at this. It's from India. Would you like a cup?

Criminal Adjective

When talking about very milky teas, Anna gets quite animated. She thinks that it is terrible to put milk in first, then the tea, then hot water (her style is in the opposite order: water, tea, milk). She thinks it is so bad that she calls it **criminal**. This is an exaggeration. Anna doesn't actually think that people who put the milk in first should go to jail, but she does feel strongly about it. It's a funny way of saying you don't like something.

To call something **criminal** is a common exaggeration for something you don't like or that you disapprove of. For example, you can say that it would be **criminal** of you to forget to send your mother a birthday card.

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

Vicky: How did your date go?

Lana: It went well. He was rather nice.

Vicky: Do you think you'll be going on a second date?

Lana: I don't think so.

Vicky: Why not?

Lana: He was wearing sandals with socks.

Vicky: So what?

Lana: That's absolutely **criminal**! You should never wear sandals with socks. I don't think that's something I can overlook. I can't date someone like that.

Laura: Did your son call you for Mother's Day?

Shelley: No, he did not.

Laura: That's just **criminal**. Are you going to talk to him about that?

Shelley: We'll see what he thinks next week, after I don't call him on his birthday.

Just a splash

Phrase

In describing how much milk she thinks should be in a cup of tea, Anna says **just a splash**. **Just a splash** means a small amount of liquid. It is an informal unit of measure. Instead of saying you should pour in exactly 15 mL of milk, you can say **just a splash**.

Just a splash can work with any liquid. If you want a little bit of water with your whiskey, you can say **just a splash**. If you want just a little more coffee in your mug, you can ask for **just a splash**.

You can also say **just a splash** when at the beach or the pool. If you only went into the water for a few minutes, you can tell people that you didn't really go swimming, you went for **just a splash**.

Here are a couple more examples with **just a splash**:

Harry: How do you take your tea?

Erik: Tea first with **just a splash** of milk.

Harry: OK. I'm the opposite. I like a lot of milk then just a touch of tea at the end.

Erik: Then you can't say you're drinking tea! You're pretty much just drinking milk with a small amount of tea.

Harry: That's one way of looking at it.

Sofia: What are you drinking?

Manny: This is orange juice.

Sofia: It smells like alcohol. Did you put vodka in it?

Manny: **Just a splash**. Don't worry. I won't drink too much tonight.

Sofia: You better not!

To dress up

Phrasal verb

When talking about the British tradition of high tea, Anna says it is something for more posh or rich people to do. Those people usually **dress up** for high tea. **To dress up** is to dress in your nicer clothes. You would normally **dress up** for important events, such as a wedding or a graduation ceremony. They don't need to be your best clothes, but they are certainly nice and formal.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, you can also **dress down**. **To dress down** is to wear casual clothes, often in a situation when you could have worn regular clothes. For example, showing up at your office wearing shorts is considered **dressing down**. If you are someone who always **dresses up** and is suddenly wearing informal clothing, that is **dressing down**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to dress up**:

Alice: I have to visit my in-laws this weekend.

Natasha: You don't look very happy. What's the matter?

Alice: I get along with them fine, but there's one thing I don't like. Even though I've been in the family for over 5 years now, I still have to **dress up** when I visit.

Natasha: Seriously?

Alice: Yes. They treat it like a formal visit. I would much rather it be informal, since we're all family, after all.

George: Don't forget. It's Casual Friday this week at the office.

Ollie: What does that mean?

George: Casual Friday is when you can **dress down** at work. You don't have to wear your dress shirt and slacks like you normally do.

Ollie: Is that true? So I can wear shorts and a tropical shirt if I want?

George: Of course. That's what I'm wearing.

Quiz

1. **What does it mean if something is the fabric of your social culture?**
 - a) it is extremely important
 - b) it is made of fabric
 - c) your culture makes fabrics, like cotton and silk
 - d) it is not very popular

2. **True or false? If you think it's criminal to do something, you think it's a terrible thing to do.**
 - a) true
 - b) false

3. **What does it mean to dress up?**
 - a) to dress informally
 - b) to dress formally

4. **If a product first came on the scene in 2007, what did it do?**
 - a) it caused a scene
 - b) it was first available then
 - c) it was in a scene in a movie
 - d) it was obscene

5. **What does just a splash mean?**
 - a) just a little powder
 - b) a lot of liquid
 - c) just plain with nothing added
 - d) just a little liquid

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. How do you take your tea?
2. Is there a drink that you are very particular about? That is, is there a drink that you will only have if it is made a certain way?
3. How important is tea in your culture? Is there another drink that is more important to your culture?
4. What is something that you think is criminal, but that other people do?
5. Talk about some occasions when you like to dress up.

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Anna Connelly

Music: *Something Elated* by Broke For Free

Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates

Audio editor: Kevin Moorehouse

Transcriptionist: Heather Bates

Study guide writer: Matty Warnock

English editor: Stephanie MacLean

Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima

Image: Rachel Cheng (Unsplash.com)