

## Chatterbox #298 – Christmas in Canada and the UK

AD-FREE

### Episode description

It's the most wonderful time of the year – it's Christmas! There are many different traditions and ways to celebrate this holiday around the world. In this episode, Andrew and Anna talk about the way they used to celebrate Christmas in their home countries and how they do it now that they live abroad.

Chatterbox is the Culips series designed for intermediate and advanced English learners. This series features native English speakers having natural conversations about fascinating topics. Learning with our Chatterbox series is a great way to improve your English listening and speaking skills.

### Fun fact

Have you ever seen an upside-down Christmas tree? Hanging Christmas trees from the ceiling is a trend that has been growing in popularity over the last few years. And while the tradition has religious origins, nowadays people do it for a more practical reason: this way a tree takes up less space.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- Lead-up
- To resign [oneself] to [something]
- For starters
- To spoil [someone]
- At the crack of dawn
- To seep into



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## 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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

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**Andrew:** Chatterbox #298. Christmas in Canada and the UK. Featuring Andrew and Anna. Hi, Anna.

**Anna:** Hi, Andrew. And hello, listeners. Now I've got a question for you, Andrew.

**Andrew:** Yes, right off the bat. I love it. What's up?

**Anna:** Well, there's a famous seasonal song that often gets played around the holidays. And one of the lyrics is, "It's the most wonderful time of the year." I was gonna sing that but then I decided not to. You know what song I'm talking about, right?

**Andrew:** Yeah, it's the most wonderful time of the year, a very famous song that's sung around this time of the year. And Anna I think, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think the song title is actually, *It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*. Is that right?

**Anna:** Yeah, I think you're right, actually. Anyway, I was wondering, do you agree with the message of the song? Do you think the holiday season is the most wonderful time of the year?

**Andrew:** Hmm. It's an interesting time of the year. It's a unique time of the year. I think it has a different feeling than other parts of the year. And it can be wonderful. There can be some happiness and joy in the holiday season, absolutely. But at the same time, it's a super hectic, very busy, and sometimes stressful time of the year. But yeah, there's some wonderful moments, absolutely. Anna, how about you? Do you think it's the most wonderful time of the year right now?

**Anna:** Yeah, completely agree. It's like a double-edged sword, right? You've got the positive thing with all your friends and your family, and then also the, the busyness of getting everything together, presents, etc. So, it's got both sides, I think.

**Andrew:** Well, since the holiday season is here, and also the New Year is right around the corner, it's hard to believe but it's true. And because of this, I thought it would be excellent if we talked about the holiday season. And specifically, I thought it could be interesting to compare, and contrast how we celebrate Christmas in our home countries. Of course, I'm from Canada, you're from the UK, but also in the countries that we live in right now because we're both living abroad. I'm in South Korea, and you're in Spain. So, we have a lot to compare and contrast in this episode, and I think it will make for a fascinating conversation.

**Anna:** That does sound really interesting. And it's true that there definitely are some differences to my home country and where I live now. And I'm really curious to find out if we celebrate anything differently. Also, somewhere really far away like South Korea as well, for me anyway, so should be really interesting to talk about.

**Andrew:** Let's get started with our main topic of conversation for today, which is comparing and contrasting how Christmas is celebrated in Canada and the UK. And my gut feeling here, Anna, I don't know, because I've never celebrated Christmas in the UK. But my gut feeling is that the way that Christmas is celebrated in my country and your country is really, really similar, and probably almost exactly the same. But there are probably some slight, small differences. And I think those differences are going to be really fascinating if we can find them. So, let's begin our search. Maybe I will start by asking you just about **the lead up to** Christmas. You know, we're recording this episode right now on December 16th and we're going to hustle and hurry to get it ready so that we can launch it before Christmas. Right now, it's December 16th so around what, nine days away from Christmas? So, it's **the lead up to** Christmas right now, what do people in the UK do leading up to Christmas?

**Anna:** Well, it's an excellent question. And for me, personally, Christmas is all about **the lead up**. So, guys, **the lead up** is the noun version of leading up to. So, it's all about the time before. And honestly, it's a mixture. I mean, a lot of people work just before Christmas. So, a lot of people will work right up to Christmas Eve, that's very common. But also, we have different types of events. Maybe we have a work Christmas party, that's always a sign that Christmas is coming. Maybe we will do a candlelight walk, or there's lots of different Christmas events that people like to do in **the lead up**. But I mean, very individual, lots of different things. But I think the most common thing is just spending time with family and friends, having parties, seeing people that you haven't seen in ages. Before Christmas, because then Christmas really for us is about family, not so much about friends. Like I've rarely seen my friends at Christmas, I see them at New Year. But Christmas really for us is about family. And I imagine that's the same in, in Canada, right?

**Andrew:** Absolutely. **The lead up to** Christmas, of course, like you just mentioned, is full of social events, lots of parties, parties with your friends. Usually there are office parties, there might be different, like Christmas gatherings. If you, you know, are maybe a part of a running club or something, they might have a Christmas banquet, or some kind of event like this. So, there's lots of social events. But when it comes to actually Christmas day itself, it's all about the family. And I would never see my friends on Christmas Day. I used to see my friends on Boxing Day, which is the day following Christmas, that would be a day where I could spend time with friends. But on Christmas Day itself, I would always just spend it with my family, never with friends, which is, I think, a shock for people to learn about who are from South Korea where I live now because here in South Korea, Christmas is often, especially for young people, a time where you spend it with your friends. It's a day to like hang out with your friends and socialize, not so much a family day. So yeah, that's one really big difference that I've noticed between how Christmas is celebrated in Korea and in Canada.

**Anna:** Yeah, and of course, it's not a blanket thing, right? Of course, there are some people that spend time with friends. There's some people that spend time with their family.

I'm talking about in general here, guys. So of course, there's some variations always. And for me, one thing that some people do is they go away, and especially people in the UK, right? Because we have terrible weather. Last year when I went home for Christmas, the two weeks that I was back, I didn't see the sun once. You can imagine. So, a lot of people like to get some winter sun over Christmas. So, some people might go on holiday to, for example, the Canary Islands in Spain. So, some people might do that. Or I've seen some people go to Australia for Christmas because of course Australia at the moment is in the middle of their summer. So, there are some people that like to do other plans or maybe they go traveling. You know, there's no general rule, but traditionally, I would say that the days leading up to Christmas are with your job, you're you know, you're at work, you're going out with people from there and friends. And then Christmas day itself it's a family day. So interesting to learn that about Korea. I had no idea.

**Andrew:** It's interesting. Christmas Eve is a day for couples, especially for young couples. I'm not talking necessarily about like the couples that have been married for 30 years, right? But like, if you're young in your 20s, and you're dating, and you've got a girlfriend or boyfriend or whatever, then that's a time when it's like a date day. It's almost like a romantic day. And my wife and I have been trying to find a restaurant to get a reservation for a Christmas Eve dinner, and it's been impossible. Christmas Eve this year is on Saturday and because it's this like romantic day here, all of the restaurants are reserved. So, we've just **resigned ourselves** to the fact that we're probably just gonna have to eat at home on Christmas Eve.

**Anna:** I like that though. It's kind of sweet. And we, we do have another kind of service that people go to on Christmas Eve, if people are religious, because of course, the UK is a Christian country. So, we do have the tradition of some people go to a service on the 24th, which is called midnight mass. Some of you guys may be familiar with that service and it's at midnight on the 24th of December. So, some people do that as **a lead up to** Christmas. And some people really enjoy going to that, go into that service. It's very relaxed, it's very calm, and it has a very different kind of vibe. So, some people really like going to that

service if, if they go to church. So, I think those are some of the, the common things that we do. What about decorations, Andrew? How do you, how do you decorate your house?

**Andrew:** So, Canada is a big country, right? And because it's such a big country, a lot of people live in houses, and they decorate their houses. So, Christmas lights are a big thing. So probably some of our listeners have watched Christmas movies before and have probably seen Christmas decorations in North American-style suburbs. And I grew up in one of these North American suburbs. And it was the tradition, and I guess it still is the tradition in my family, to decorate the house. I don't know if my parents these days put up lights outside. But definitely when I was living back in Canada with my family, that was something that my dad and my brother and I would do every year. We would get out these strings of Christmas lights and get out the ladder and go on the roof and staple the lights down to the roof to, to decorate the house. And we would put Christmas lights in the trees around our house as well. And my mom would do a lot of decorating the inside of the house. Of course, there's the Christmas tree, but also Christmas wreaths. And she had like this nativity scene. Of course, Christmas is a religious holiday, and has to do with the birth of Christ. And so, she had this like nativity scene, showing baby Jesus in a manger. And she used to display that and all sorts of decorations. And I remember all of my friends as well, their parents would go nuts. It's like they have so many decorations. And that is something that you don't see as much over here in South Korea. Of course, different businesses, cafes, and department stores will do some decorations, but I don't see anybody putting up Christmas lights outside of their house or anything like that at all. What about you, Anna? How would you decorate in the UK? Would you put up Christmas lights outside on your home?

**Anna:** Yeah, you are making me laugh there, because I was kind of imagining you on the roof with the staple like you know, get with the program, get the lights up. And it's funny because we say, I don't know if you say this in Canada, Andrew, but we say, to go all out, which is like to go all out is all the lights, all the lights on the trees, on the house, red, blue, white like to go all out.

**Andrew:** To do it like 100%, right? So put in all the effort to go all out. Yeah, we use that expression as well.

**Anna:** Cool. So, some people in the UK do go all out. And actually, there's some specific people I'm thinking within my town that are kind of famous for putting up Christmas lights. So, I kind of feel bad for them because I feel like they're kind of trapped because everybody expects them to do these amazing lights every year. So, they kind of don't really have any choice. Otherwise, people are gonna be missing the, the Christmas lights. So yeah, there are some people that go all out. I think my family is somewhere in the middle. My mom really likes to have the Christmas tree and then we have like lots of things on the Christmas tree like little baubles and tinsel and things like that. And around the house we have different lights. And I mean, to be honest in my house right now, I don't have a Christmas tree because I'm just like, it's just me. I feel a bit silly having a Christmas tree in the corner when it's just me here. I feel a little bit strange and honestly can't really be bothered. I will be waiting for the Christmas decorations at home. So, it depends, I think people do like to have the Christmas decorations and I, I like the lights that you have in the cities. I don't know if you have them in Korea, South Korea as well. The lights in the cities I think that's nice. I think it brings a different atmosphere and I think it makes everybody feel excited. So, I love seeing the lights in cities that they have for Christmas. I think that's really special.

**Andrew:** Yeah, to be honest, we do not have a Christmas tree in our place either.

**Anna:** I knew it.

**Andrew:** We put up some lights yesterday evening because my wife is having some friends over this evening. We're having a little Christmas gathering here at our place. So, we needed to make it look festive and Christmassy. So, we did put up some Christmas lights. And I borrowed some Christmas garland. You know, garland is like, the string of shiny, it's almost like tin foil, but it's coloured like red and green and gold to look



Christmassy and you just kind of hang that around the apartment. So, we've decorated with some garland and some lights. And yeah, we've got a nice Christmas vibe in our apartment right now. But no tree, no tree.

**Anna:** Yeah, I, I kind of guessed that you wouldn't have a tree as well, I was thinking, I bet Andrew doesn't have a tree either, not because we're not festive. But I just thought I bet he doesn't have a tree either. I don't know about you guys. But for me, it's a lot of effort and I don't have a lot of space in my living room. So, I think, OK, I'm going to have a tiny tree. And for me, it's like, it's kind of pointless to have a tiny tree. Sorry, guys, if you have a tiny tree in your house on your desk or something. But for me, it's kind of pointless, I prefer to just wait until I get home. And actually, that's one thing maybe I wanted to pick up from before is that for me Christmas is also about traveling. So, for the last nearly, I don't know, 13 years, every Christmas I travel to go home. I traveled from Liverpool to go back to Oxfordshire. I traveled from Spain to go back to the UK. So, for me that trip, that's when I start to go into Christmas mode. Like that's what I'm like, oh, I get really excited, I'm like "Christmas is coming!" As soon as I get on that flight or that train, that is the start of Christmas for me.

**Andrew:** Nice. And are you going back home for Christmas this year?

**Anna:** Yes, I'm actually going back on the 18th which is in a couple of days. And I'm really looking forward to it. And I can't wait, just fingers crossed that my flight is not delayed, or my bags don't get lost.

**Andrew:** Yeah, absolutely, that would be terrible. Hopefully you have a nice, happy, and wonderful Christmas back home with your family. What does Christmas morning look like in your house, Anna? How do you celebrate Christmas morning?

**Anna:** Oh, my goodness, I was gonna say how does it look? Well, we all look awful, that's **for starters**. We are definitely not one of these families where you see the pictures and



they're like, all done up like with makeup and everybody's dressed like no, that's definitely not how it goes in our house. So, we're in our pajamas for a significant portion of the day, I'll put it that way. What about you?

**Andrew:** When I was younger, you know, Christmas was by far the most exciting holiday because, of course, a central part of Christmas is gift giving and exchanging gifts, right? And it's all about the kids. So, when you are a family and you have young kids, it's a time **to spoil the kids**, I think, and I was definitely spoiled growing up. So, I always loved Christmas because it was a time to get a wonderful, amazing present. And so, I could never sleep on Christmas Eve, I would always just be so excited for Christmas morning. And as soon as the sun would come up **at the crack of dawn**, you know, like, I don't know what time it is Christmas morning, I guess it's, you know, the sunrise is pretty late. So, let's say maybe like 7:30 in the morning, as soon as the sun would rise, and there's a little bit of sunlight, then I would get up and we would run to see what Santa Claus, aka mom and dad, had left for us. So, when I was younger, it was a day that always started really early. You know, and it always felt like a long day as well because you don't go anywhere. You're kind of just hanging around the home all day. We usually have a nice breakfast, and then just kind of hang out and there's nothing on TV to watch. There's no stores open or anything. So yeah, just a day to like, relax and really not do much, except eat, right? You eat a big breakfast, and then eat a Christmas dinner as well. But now that I'm older, and I just celebrate Christmas with my wife, it's more like a day of rest. Like there's no way I'm waking up **at the crack of dawn** anymore. I'm going to sleep as long as I can, get a nice rest in, and then yeah, maybe wake up and eat some brunch and just relax. And here in Korea, everything is open. So, if we want to go and do an activity, go shopping, go watch a movie or something like that, everything's open, so.

**Anna:** That's great.

**Andrew:** Yeah, we just use it as kind of like an extra weekend day, right? It's like, just a nice day where you could do whatever you want, essentially.

**Anna:** Yeah, and it's funny because when you asked me that question, how's Christmas morning? I totally forgot about the presents.

**Andrew:** Oh, yeah.

**Anna:** Yeah. I just totally skipped that part. But I think it's because you know what? When I was younger, you're right, it's all about the kids and the kids get the presents. But as I've got older, so it used to be the kids that got the presents, and my mom and dad got a couple of little things, or my mom got a couple of little things. Now it's the opposite. So now we go back, my mom's got this huge pile of presents. And me, my brother and sister have got like one present. So, I think that's why I didn't remember the presents, because I don't really get any anymore, which is fine, which is fine. I come from a Scottish background. And actually, in Scotland, I don't know if this is, well, my family in Scotland don't really give presents after 18. So, once you grow up, I mean, my mom and dad, whatever gives me presents, but when you get a bit older, the presents get a bit smaller. They've already invested in you a lot when you were younger, so no complaints here. But I remember the stocking, so my mom always does a stocking as well as the presents. And guys, if you don't know what a stocking is, it's like a big sock, and you hang it outside your door. And basically, that's where you get the small, good presents. The small expensive presents, in my family anyway, that's where you get the nice little bits and bobs, a little perfume, a little packet of socks, a box of nice chocolates. And for me the stocking is the icing on the cake on Christmas morning. That's, the thing, you open— I get up, I go to the stocking, I open my stocking on my bed, and then I go through to the living room. And you're right **at the crack of dawn** really, really, really early. My brother and sister used to wake up at like, well, I don't know, half past five in the morning. It was horrendous.

**Andrew:** Too early, too early.

**Anna:** Too early. Yeah, god.

**Andrew:** Anna, I think we may have found a difference here, we also have a stocking that we, we get in Canada. And I always love it too, because there's lots of candy inside the stocking, at least the ones that I would get. But we hang our stocking not on our door, but near our mantel of the fireplace, because Santa Claus has to come down the chimney of the fireplace and put the presents in the stocking. So, we leave it right in a very convenient location for him. So, we would always hang our stockings on the mantel of the fireplace.

**Anna:** I see. OK, yeah, that, that makes sense because I remember watching a lot of movies and things like that where they are on the fireplace. And I think another thing to mention here, guys, is a lot of families have slightly different traditions. So, within the kind of normal things, or general things that people do, a lot of families have their own traditions with things. So sometimes they might do the stockings first and then go to the presents or maybe they have a special thing that they do with the stockings. Like a lot of families, I don't know if you found this with your friends, Andrew, they have like little traditions that they do within their families. So, there's also lots of little quirks and different things that people do outside of the general things that, that we're talking about as well.

**Andrew:** Yeah, absolutely. I remember growing up in my hometown, a lot of my friends come from like a northern European or eastern European background. And I'm not sure exactly which countries do this. But I think a lot of countries in both maybe northern Europe, like in Scandinavia, and also in eastern Europe as well. And listeners, correct me if I'm wrong about this, but I believe in most of those countries, they do the gift exchange on Christmas Eve because a lot of my friends come from that kind of cultural background, they would also open their gifts on Christmas Eve. And I remember being very jealous as a youngster, like my friends are all opening their presents, and they would call me and talk about the wonderful gifts they received. And I still had to wait until Christmas morning. It was like torture to have to wait one more extra sleep longer than them. But yeah, you're absolutely right that it's hard to say like, this is how we celebrate Christmas because every family is different. Every tradition is different. Probably everybody's menu at their Christmas dinner is, is different as well. So yeah, it's hard to summarize it and say this is

exactly how we celebrate it. But I think Anna, it sounds like we actually celebrate it in a very similar fashion, you and I.

**Anna:** Yeah, absolutely. And I'd like to mention Spain as well, because if you think opening presents on the 24th is strange, try this. When I moved to Spain, I didn't know this, but not just in Spain, but other countries around the world, especially Catholic countries, they open their presents on the 6th of January. And not only that, but that Christmas Day is called Three Kings Day. So those are the three wise men out of the story. And basically, what they do is they have a big parade on the 5th of January, and they have these big kind of floats of people and there's like a big parade in the middle of the, in the middle of the city, in the middle of towns and they throw sweets at all the children. And all children, they're like, oh my god, they've got these umbrellas. And what they do is they turn the umbrellas inside out so they can catch all the sweets. And you can see these little kids with all the ladders trying to reach the sweets. Yeah, and the cutest thing is that they think that these wise men are like the real wise men, right? So, they go crazy, they're like, "Balthasar!" like shouting all the names of the three wise men. It's the cutest thing. It's so sweet. But for me, the 6th of January is like I'm done, like Christmas is over. Like we're in the new year now. So, for me, it was really strange to have this to kind of take part in, it just felt really strange for me, but it is wonderful. I mean, it's like an extra Christmas, you've got Christmas Day. I've got my Christmas in England, I've got New Year, and then I've got Christmas in Spain. So, no complaints, I get a double Christmas, I'm absolutely fine with that.

**Andrew:** Nice. So, on the 25th in Spain, nothing happens?

**Anna:** They do still celebrate Christmas Day, that's still an important day, but they don't have the tradition of opening presents on that day, it's very much a family day, much more relaxed, a nice meal with the family. And that's how most people celebrate Christmas Day in Spain, from as far, as far as I know. And then the 6th is when it goes crazy. This is when the kids get all the presents. But also just from a practical standpoint, they then have to go back to school the next day on the 7th. So, it's like, I think some families here have started

giving presents on the 24th or on the 25th, just so they can spend a little bit more time with their presents before they have to go back to school.

**Andrew:** Sure, yeah, some playtime before you have to go back to your studies. So, Anna, we're going to wrap things up here quickly. But before we do, I have one final question for you. And I'm very curious about this because I know in the USA, there is no Boxing Day. But as far as I know, in the UK, and in Canada, we have a holiday called Boxing Day, which falls on December 26th, it's the day after Christmas. And in Canada traditionally, that was a big shopping day, there were massive sales, the biggest sales of the year were on December 26th. And people would go to the malls and go shopping and it would be crazy. And I think now, some of that has changed slightly because of the American Black Friday holiday. And of course, American culture **seeps into** Canada very, very easily. And so also now we have Black Friday in Canada, and I think maybe that is a more popular shopping day. Which makes sense because it was always horrible to go shopping right after Christmas. I never liked it. I don't really like shopping like that in general, but especially the day after Christmas. I never liked it. But that was what Boxing Day was and I guess to an extent is. What's Boxing Day like in the UK?

**Anna:** Yeah, well, I think the tradition of Boxing Day actually comes from in the past, Boxing Day was when you gave presents to people who were less fortunate. But I mean, that tradition has been completely lost. I think a lot of people think it has to do with the sport boxing, but it's actually not to do with that at all. But yeah, I mean, people love to go shopping on Boxing Day, there are some really good sales. I couldn't think of anything worse than going shopping on Boxing Day, literally nothing worse. Maybe on the 27th, maybe on the 28th, at a push the 29th. But you're not going to find me in a shop on the 26th. Like no way, absolutely not. The 26th is the day to recover, to eat the leftovers, to relax. It is not a day to go shopping.

**Andrew:** Turkey sandwiches, yeah. No, I'm totally on the same page as you. Shopping on Boxing Day? No, sounds terrible. And I have done it in the past. But never again. I think that point of my life is finished.

**Anna:** Going back to the question though people do do it. There are sales on Boxing Day. And it is a, is a big, is a big tradition. So, people do like to do that, a lot of people like to watch sports as well. There's a lot of sports things on Boxing Day as well. So that tends to be a day when people go out with friends, like you mentioned before. So, Christmas Day tends to be with family. And then Boxing Day sometimes people like to do different events and go and see different things.

**Andrew:** Yeah, I always loved Boxing Day as a university student because, you know, I come from a small town and there's not much to do once you graduate high school. So, all of my friends would leave, and they'd go study at different universities across the country. But Christmas time was like the one time of the year you could guarantee that almost everybody would come back. And so, I could see all of my friends on Boxing Day, and we'd have a get together or a party or something on Boxing Day and we could all get together again. So yeah, definitely Boxing Day was always a fun day for me in— especially when I was in university. But now it's just a day to hang out and relax. And actually, here in Korea, it's not a holiday. Boxing Day will be on a Monday, so it's just a regular workday this year for me.

**Anna:** Yeah, that's tough at least in the UK and, and here in Spain as well, it's a public holiday, it's a bank holiday, so great. Yeah, the way Christmas falls this year is really bad for bank holidays. So, we actually kind of lose days. Yeah, it's terrible this year for Christmas and New Year. But what can we do? We shan't complain.

**Andrew:** Well, Anna, I hope you have a wonderful holiday season and a Merry Christmas. And I think that will bring us to the end of this episode, everyone. So, thank you for listening. And congratulations on making it all the way to the end. Great job. And now of

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course, you know about how Anna and I spend the holiday season. But we are curious about you. Do you celebrate Christmas in your country? Or maybe you have a different way to spend the holidays? Or maybe you come from a culture or a place where there is no end of year holiday celebration yet because it's not even the end of the year, according to the calendar in your country. No matter what you do around this time of the year, we would love to hear about it. So please get in touch and let us know.

**Anna:** Absolutely. This is your opportunity to be active with your English and join the discussion. Please let us know what you have to say by leaving a comment or posting on the discussion forum on our website. We'll be back for another episode very soon and we'll talk to you all again then. Have a happy Christmas, Andrew and to listeners as well. Have a wonderful time if you are celebrating Christmas and we'll see you soon. Bye, bye.

**Andrew:** Bye, everybody. Happy Holidays.



## Detailed Explanations

### Lead-up

Noun

**Lead-up** is a word we use when talking about something that happens before something else. A **lead-up** usually indicates a period of time before an important event, or a series of preparatory activities that are directly connected to that event.

In this episode, Andrew and Anna talk about things people do in the **lead-up** to Christmas. The **lead-up** to Christmas means the period of time before Christmas, things people do to prepare for Christmas, and the events and activities that take place before Christmas Day.

This word is usually used with the preposition *to*, as in **a lead-up to** something. For example, **the lead-up to** an international sports competition, which is the period of time before the competition. Or, **the lead-up to** a big product launch, which is the series of preparatory events for the launch.

Here are a couple more examples with **lead-up**:

**Nicole:** How was your day at work?

**Marshall:** Busy! We're launching a new product at the end of the month, and we have so many things to do in the **lead-up** to it.

**Nicole:** So, you won't be able to go to the concert with me next Friday?

**Marshall:** Yeah, I'm afraid not. I'm responsible for the marketing campaign and for the test runs. I'll probably have to work late all week.

**Stanley:** Hey! So happy you made it to my birthday party! Did you bring Greg with you?

**Meghan:** No, it's just me. He couldn't come.

**Stanley:** Is everything OK?

**Meghan:** Sure, he's just training hard in the **lead-up** to his big game. It's always a stressful time for him, preparing for his games. He sends his love though!

## To resign [oneself] to [something]

Phrasal verb

**To resign yourself to something** means to accept an unpleasant situation because you can't change or escape it. When you **resign yourself to something**, you surrender to it, and learn to deal with it after unsuccessfully trying to change it.

In this episode, Andrew says that all the restaurants are reserved for Christmas Eve in Seoul, so he and his wife have **resigned themselves to** the fact that they'll have to eat at home on Christmas Eve. It means that after trying to get a reservation, they've accepted the fact that they won't be able to go to a restaurant on Christmas Eve.

A variation of this expression is to be resigned to something. It means the same thing, to accept something you don't like but aren't able to change or avoid.

Here are a couple more examples with **to resign [oneself] to [something]**:

**Lea:** How are you doing?

**Daniel:** Not so great, to be honest. Ever since I lost my job, I haven't been able to find a new one. And I don't have a lot of savings to pay my rent.

**Lea:** Does it mean you'll move back in with your parents?

**Daniel:** It's the last thing I want to do, but I guess I'll have to **resign myself to living with them**. At least for a while, until I find a job and get back on my feet.

**Gloria:** I heard you wrote a new book. Congratulations!

**Tim:** Thanks. I've been getting some terrible reviews from critics, though.

**Gloria:** Oh no! That's too bad.

**Tim:** Well, at first it was quite upsetting, but by the time I wrote my third book I'd **resigned myself to the fact that** there will always be people that don't like my work. It's just a part of being a writer.

## For starters

Phrase, informal

**For starters** is an expression we use to introduce the first thing in a series of things. **For starters** means *to begin with* or *first of all*. When you want to explain something, you can start giving your reasons and arguments by using this expression.

In this episode, Andrew asks Anna about Christmas morning in her house. She replies by saying “We all look awful, that’s **for starters**.” She uses the expression **for starters** to introduce the first thing that she wants to mention when answering Andrew’s question.

**For starters** is an informal expression, so it’s best to avoid it in formal writing, such as academic essays and business emails.

Here are a couple more examples with **for starters**:

**Mom:** I just talked to your teacher. She says you stole someone’s bike. Would you care to explain?

**Tate:** Well, **for starters**, I didn’t steal it, I borrowed it. And I put it back where it was afterwards. I just wanted to buy some snacks at the store during the break, I didn’t think anyone would notice.

**Mom:** You do realize you did the wrong thing, right?

**Tate:** I do. I promise I won’t do it again.

**Victoria:** So, did you watch the movie I told you about?

**Jerry:** I did actually. And I don’t see why you’re such a big fan of it, to be honest.

**Victoria:** You didn’t like it? But why? It’s one of my favorite movies!

**Jerry:** The plot was so predictable, **that’s for starters**. I knew who the killer was right away. Also, it was way too long. I almost fell asleep while watching it.

**Victoria:** I don’t know what you’re talking about, I absolutely loved it!

## To spoil [someone]

Verb

**To spoil [someone]** can have two meanings depending on the context. The first one is to treat someone, especially a child, too well and give them all they ask for and let them do anything that they want. In this context **to spoil [someone]** is used in a negative way, it's disapproving, because treating children this way has a bad effect on their behavior.

However, **to spoil** can have a positive meaning as well. In this episode, Andrew says that Christmas is a time **to spoil** the kids. In this example, spoiling means making kids happy by giving them presents. Spoiling means treating yourself or someone else kindly, doing something special for a person, or being nice or generous to them.

Here are a couple more examples with **to spoil [someone]**:

**Marcus:** Is your little sister going to be at the party tonight?

**Martha:** Yes, and that's something I'm a little nervous about.

**Marcus:** Why? I'm glad I'm finally going to meet her.

**Martha:** You don't know her. She's not like me. She can be kind of rude and selfish. Our parents really **spoiled her**. They never said no to her, she was always getting what she wanted.

**Marcus:** Oh. Well, you haven't seen her in a while, maybe she's changed.

**Martha:** We'll see.

**Max:** Any plans for the weekend?

**Stacey:** I was thinking of doing something nice and relaxing. I've been working 24/7 these last few weeks! I feel like I need to treat myself to a whole day at the spa. Have some me time, you know.

**Max:** Sure! You should definitely **spoil yourself**! You've been working so hard, you deserve it. Enjoy!

## At the crack of dawn

### Idiom

**At the crack of dawn** is an idiomatic expression that we use to emphasize that something happens extremely early in the morning. If you do something **at the crack of dawn**, you do it very early in the morning. The word *dawn* means sunrise, so **the crack of dawn** is the time when the sun begins to rise, and most people are still asleep.

In this episode Andrew talks about celebrating Christmas as a child. He said he would get up **at the crack of dawn** to open his presents. This means he would get up very early in the morning.

As an idiomatic expression, it's often used as an exaggeration, so it doesn't always mean that something happens exactly when the sun rises. It might simply mean extremely early in the morning or earlier than usual.

Here are a couple more examples with **at the crack of dawn**:

**Randall:** Hey, can you turn the volume down please? My dad just went to sleep.

**Katie:** Why's your dad going to bed so early? It's only 8 PM.

**Randall:** Well, he's a farmer, so he wakes up **at the crack of dawn** every day. He has a lot of work on the farm. He gets very tired and usually goes to sleep quite early.

**Katie:** Right, this makes sense.

**Chris:** Good morning! What's for breakfast?

**Ellie:** I've made waffles, pancakes, some French toast, and an omelette.

**Chris:** Wow. That's a lot of food. You must have been cooking **since the crack of dawn**.

**Ellie:** Yeah, I woke up early to make you breakfast, but I didn't know what you liked so I made a little bit of everything.

**Chris:** That's so sweet! Thank you. Let's eat, it looks delicious!

## To seep into

### Phrasal Verb

**To seep into** means to move or leak from one place to another slowly and in small quantities. You can use this verb literally, for example, when talking about water **seeping into** your shoes when it starts to rain. The water gets into your shoes slowly, drop by drop, and spreads inside your shoes, eventually making them wet.

In this episode, however, **seep into** is used figuratively. When talking about the American Black Friday holiday, Andrew said that American culture **seeps into** Canada very easily, so now they have Black Friday in Canada as well. This means that since America and Canada are neighboring countries, American traditions move into Canada and then become common there too.

Here are a couple more examples with **to seep into**:

**Jason:** Why didn't you call me back yesterday?

**Linda:** I totally forgot. We had a bit of a situation.

**Jason:** What happened?

**Linda:** I was watching TV when I saw smoke **seeping into** my bedroom. I panicked and went into kitchen. My roommate was baking cookies, but she left them in the oven too long and they started to burn. Luckily, I was able to put out the fire, but our oven is destroyed now. We spent the rest of the day shopping around for a new one.

**Jason:** Sounds like you had a crazy day!

**Charlie:** It's so nice to finally see you again! How have you been?

**Stella:** It's been a crazy year. Working from home hasn't been easy at all. It feels like all I think about is work stuff, I can't even relax properly.

**Charlie:** Oh, I know what you're talking about. It's been really difficult for me to stop work from **seeping into my free time** as well.

**Stella:** I hope it gets better now that we're back in the office.

## Quiz

**1. Which of the following means a period of time before an important event?**

- a) A load-up
- b) A lean-up
- c) A lead-up
- d) A lid-up

**2. If you accept an unpleasant situation that you can't change, you \_\_\_\_\_.**

- a) design yourself to it
- b) resign yourself to it
- c) redesign yourself to it
- d) sign up for it

**3. True or false? For starters and first of all are synonyms.**

- a) True
- b) False

**4. If your someone says they got up at the crack of dawn, it means that \_\_\_\_\_.**

- a) they watched the sunrise
- b) they woke up very early in the morning
- c) they spent last night outside
- d) they broke something when they got up

**5. Over the years, a lot of French words have been spreading around the world and are now used in many different languages. In other words, French \_\_\_\_\_.**

- a) sneaked into other languages
- b) steeped into other languages
- c) sipped into other languages
- d) seeped into other languages



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## Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Do people celebrate Christmas in your country? If yes, what are some Christmas traditions in your family? If not, are there any other similar holidays that you celebrate?
2. What do people in your country usually do in the lead-up to Christmas and New Year's Eve?
3. Describe a time when you resigned yourself to something. What happened?
4. When was the last time you spoiled yourself? What did you do?
5. Talk about the last time you woke up at the crack of dawn. What happened?

## Quiz Answers

1.c    2.b    3.a    4.b    5.d

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