

Catch Word #117 – This episode's a nail-biter

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: And we're here with your Culips English Learning Podcast.

Maura: And don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Because there, you can get access to all of our past episodes and they're still good.

Harp: They're fantastic.

Maura: You can also become a member. And when you're a member, you have access to all of our transcripts, more detailed explanations, and quizzes for every episode.

Harp: Yes. And today we're going to be doing a Catch Word episode. That's where we take some expressions, we explain them, and we give you some examples so you know what they're all about.

Maura: Right. The expressions in today's episode are used to describe books, movies, and other events that make us feel excited and that we anticipate what is going to happen next.

Harp: Yeah. When we're tense, we're anxious, and we're excited to know what happens, these are what these expressions are used for.

Maura: Right. We're waiting to see what's going to happen because we're so interested.

Harp: Exactly. I think we should get started with our first expression.

Maura: The first expression today is **a nail-biter**.

Harp: **A nail-biter**.

Maura: Right. **A nail-biter**. Now, if something, like a movie or a book, is called **a nail-biter**, this is because when you're reading or watching it, you're very interested and nervous and anxious about what is going to happen next.

Harp: Yeah. So when something is causing you to wanna know what the end is and what the resolution is and if the people make it out OK and what happens, then it's **a nail-biter**.

- Maura: And of course there are also people who are nail-biters, but that's not what we're talking about. And people who are nail-biters actually bite their fingernails.
- Harp: Yes. And this expression comes from this, because people usually bite their nails when they're nervous or they're anxious, so that's where this expression comes from. So you don't actually need to bite your nails to use this expression.
- Maura: Right. We can call anything that makes us nervous or anxious **a nail-biter**, something that we want to see the results of.
- Harp: Yeah. So if you're reading a book and you really wanna know what the ending is, it's **a nail-biter**. Or if you're watching a competition and you wanna know who wins, it's **a nail-biter**.
- Maura: Right. Especially when it's very exciting and we can't wait to see what the resolution is going to be.
- Harp: Yeah, exactly. Should we give an example?
- Maura: All right. Let's do it.

- Maura: So how did you like the movie last night?
- Harp: Oh my goodness. It was so exciting. It was such **a nail-biter**. I didn't know what was gonna happen.
- Maura: I know. The suspense builds till, like, the last second.
- Harp: I know. I thought maybe it was going to be one thing and then in the end something changed and I just didn't know. It was such **a nail-biter**.
- Maura: It's such a good movie, isn't it?
- Harp: Very good. Thanks for recommending it.

- Maura: And there's an example where we use **a nail-biter** to talk about a movie. And as you can hear, that movie was very suspenseful. And if you were watching it, you were probably nervous about how it was going to end.
- Harp: Yeah. And so for this example, it was the movie that was **a nail-biter**. We didn't know what was gonna happen in the movie. It wasn't the people watching the movie, it was the actual movie.
- Maura: Right. The people weren't probably biting their nails. They were just very anxious and nervous about how the movie was going to end.

Harp: Let's give one more example.

Maura: All right.

Harp: Here are the nachos. What did I miss?

Maura: Oh my gosh. It's such **a nail-biter**. Look at the score. **It's tied!**

Harp: Oh my! Who scored?

Maura: Edmonton.

Harp: OK, wonderful. Now we have a chance.

Maura: Oh my gosh. There's only a minute left. I wonder what's gonna happen.

Harp: I hope Edmonton wins. They scored.

Maura: Woo hoo!

Harp: So in this example, the hockey game is **a nail-biter**. The two friends are watching and they're really excited and they wanna know what happens, they wanna know who wins, so the hockey game is **a nail-biter**.

Maura: Right. And a lot of sporting events are **nail-biters** when the game **is tied** and the score is the same and you don't really know who's gonna win in the end. That's when it's very exciting.

Harp: Yes, definitely. That's when it's fun.

Maura: That is when it's fun. OK, so, let's look at another expression that is used to talk about something that makes us excited and anticipate what the resolution will be.

Harp: OK. So the next expression is **a cliff-hanger**.

Maura: Yes. **A cliff-hanger**. And this expression is used specifically to talk about a book or a TV episode.

Harp: Yes. It wouldn't be used for an event or for sports.

Maura: Right. So, **a cliff-hanger** is when at the end of a chapter in a book, or maybe at the end of a TV episode, something very exciting and dramatic happens but there's no resolution. You don't know what's going to happen. And so of course you want to keep reading the book or you can't wait to watch the next television episode.

- Harp: Yes. This is when, if you finish the chapter, or sometimes if it's **a trilogy** of books, at the end of the book, you wanna read the next one to know what happens and what happens with the characters. And that's **a cliff-hanger**.
- Maura: And this expression actually comes from the idea of somebody hanging on the edge of a cliff, because, for example, imagine you're reading a book and you're really involved with what's happening to the main character and then at the end of one of the chapters, the character is actually hanging on a cliff. You don't know whether the person is going to live or die. It's very exciting, so you wanna keep reading to find out if they live or die.
- Harp: So exciting.
- Maura: Yeah. **Cliff-hangers** get me every time.
- Harp: Me too. Sometimes I can't go to sleep because I'm reading or I'm watching 'cause I wanna know what happens next.
- Maura: Especially nowadays, we can watch a TV series all at once by renting the DVD.
- Harp: Yeah. That reminds me of when I was watching the TV show *24*, the first season. I had rented it, and I just kept watching episode after episode because it's **a cliff-hanger** at the end of each episode.
- Maura: So really, the point of **a cliff-hanger** is get you to keep being interested. And it usually works.
- Harp: Yeah, definitely.
- Maura: OK. Let's give an example with **a cliff-hanger**.

- Harp: Did you watch the show last night?
- Maura: Of course. I'm addicted.
- Harp: It was crazy. It was such **a cliff-hanger**. Jimmy got in the car accident. I don't know if he's dead. I don't know if he's alive.
- Maura: I know. I can't wait to watch the next episode.
- Harp: I'm sure because it's **a soap opera** he's still alive, but we'll see tomorrow.
- Maura: I don't know. Maybe he's in a coma or something.
- Harp: We'll see. It's **a cliff-hanger**.

Maura: So, there is an example where **a cliff-hanger** was used in a television show. And at the end of the show, something very dramatic happened with one of the characters and we didn't know what was gonna happen next, so we felt very interested to find out.

Harp: Definitely. And that means we would watch the next episode.

Maura: And **a soap opera** is a kind of TV show that has tons of **cliff-hangers**. Because it's such a dramatic show, something exciting is always happening.

Harp: Yeah. Often in these shows, people die and then come back to life because they really weren't dead they were just hiding. Something always. There are lots of **cliff-hangers**.

Maura: For sure. OK, let's give one more example with **a cliff-hanger**. This time we'll talk about a book.

Harp: Let's do it.

Harp: Ugh. I'm so tired.

Maura: Why?

Harp: I went to sleep really late yesterday.

Maura: What, were you out partying or something?

Harp: No, not at all. I was at home reading. But there was such **a cliff-hanger**. I didn't know what happened, I don't know if her lover was moving or if he was staying, so I had to just keep reading and I went to bed at 4am.

Maura: But was it a good book?

Harp: It was really good.

Maura: Maybe I can borrow it from you.

Harp: Definitely. I'm almost done.

Maura: All right. Let me know.

Maura: And so there's an example using **a cliff-hanger**, this time talking about a book.

Harp: Yeah. And with this book there was a dramatic **cliff-hanger** and the person in the example didn't wanna go to sleep because they wanted to find out what happened.

- Maura: And you know what I was just thinking, Harp? We said that we use **a cliff-hanger** to talk about TV shows and books, and that's true, but nowadays we have so many movies that are **trilogies** or that have **sequels**. And in these cases, they often have **cliff-hangers** at the end too, because people want you to go watch the next movie.
- Harp: Yup.
- Maura: I hate movies with **cliff-hangers**. I want a nice resolution with **closure**.
- Harp: Especially if the next movie is not coming for a year or two, because then you're left waiting to know what happened.
- Maura: Yeah. I'm not patient.
- Harp: No, me neither.
- Maura: OK. So, we looked at **a nail-biter** and **a cliff-hanger**. We have one more expression for you.
- Harp: Our last expression is **a page-turner**.
- Maura: Right. **A page-turner**. And if you're paying attention and hear the word *page*, you could probably guess that this expression is used to talk about books.
- Harp: Yes. **A page-turner** is used only for books. And it's basically a book that's very dramatic and you wanna keep reading it and you don't want **to put it down**. It's really exciting and you wanna know what the end is.
- Maura: Right. A book that's **a page-turner** often has **cliff-hangers** in it. Because you're so excited that you wanna find out what happens, you keep turning the page and you keep reading.
- Harp: Definitely.
- Maura: OK. Let's give an example with **a page-turner**.

- Maura: Happy birthday! Here. **I got you a little something**.
- Harp: Oh! **You shouldn't have**.
- Maura: No, no. I wanted to get you something. Go ahead. Open it.
- Harp: Oh, a book. Thanks!
- Maura: It's *The Hunger Games*. I hope you haven't read it.
- Harp: I haven't read it, but I've heard about it.

Maura: It's **a page-turner**. I just read it yesterday in one day.

Harp: Oh, really? It's that good?

Maura: It's really good. I hope you'll like it.

Harp: I hope so.

Maura: So, there is an example where we were talking about a book and this book was **a page-turner**, which means it was very exciting.

Harp: I think all of you can probably tell that we're really big **bookworms**, 'cause we're super excited about this expression.

Maura: Yeah. It's funny, because when I think of **a page-turner**, I always think of the book *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown. That was a few years ago that it was popular but I found that book such **a page-turner** because it had so many **cliff-hangers**.

Harp: Yeah, I had a really hard time **putting that book down**. I had to keep reading it.

Maura: Yup. Very exciting.

Harp: OK, let's do a quick recap of what we talked about today.

Maura: The first expression was **a nail-biter**.

Harp: And then we talked **about a cliff-hanger**.

Maura: Which is mostly used to talk about books and TV episodes, and rarely, movies.

Harp: And then the last expression was **a page-turner**, which is used only for books.

Maura: All right. So, don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And if you're on Facebook, say hi to us over there.

Harp: Yeah. There's lots of fun stuff on Facebook, so check us out.

Maura: We'll talk to you soon. Bye.

Harp: Bye everyone.

Detailed Explanation

A nail-biter

When somebody calls something **a nail-biter**, they're usually talking about a situation that involves a lot of suspense or tension because you don't know what will happen next.

Things like movies, books, stories, and sports events can all be **nail-biters**.

When a story or a situation has a lot of suspense, you feel anxious to find out what will happen next. The term **nail-biter** comes from this anxiety, because some people bite their nails when they feel nervous or anxious.

People only use the term **nail-biter** when they're talking about something that's exciting and entertaining, like movies. If something is seriously dangerous or threatening, or may actually cause harm, the term **nail-biter** is not usually used.

In this episode, Maura and Harp discuss things that can be considered **nail-biters**, such as books or movies. They also talk about how a game or competition can be **a nail-biter**, especially if the scores are very close and it's hard to tell who's going to win. Basically, any sort of situation where you're anxious and excited to know what will happen next can be called **a nail-biter**.

To be tied

A game or a competition is **tied** when both teams or players have the same number of points. When a game is **tied**, it creates suspense and tension because either team could win.

In this episode, Maura and Harp use the example of a hockey game to show how suspenseful and exciting it can be when a game is **tied**. In the dialogue example, there's only one minute left in the hockey game, which makes it even more exciting that the game is **tied**, because if either team scores before the game ends, they will win.

A cliff-hanger

A cliff-hanger is sort of like a nail-biter because they're both suspenseful and create a lot of anticipation, because you don't know what will come next. This expression comes from the idea of a character in a book or movie hanging from a cliff. The situation is dangerous and suspenseful, but it could work out either way—the character could get rescued or could fall.

A **cliff-hanger** is a little bit different than a nail-biter, because it specifically means that the situation or event that is suspenseful gets interrupted or ends without anything having been solved or explained. This happens a lot in TV shows that are series, like soap operas. They build up a story with a lot of mystery and then end the show until the next episode. With a **cliff-hanger**, you have to wait a while for an end to the suspense instead of it happening right away. This wait doesn't have to be long. A **cliff-hanger** could just be the end of a chapter in a book, or it could be a commercial break in a movie shown on TV. But a **cliff-hanger** means that there is some sort of break or gap to a really suspenseful event, and that the situation won't be resolved until the story starts back up again.

A soap opera

A **soap opera** is a type of television show that has dramatic storylines and lots of different characters and stories. **Soap operas** usually play daily, and are in a serial format, meaning that each show is a continuation of the last. Sometimes the story lines are very suspenseful, and since they only play for one show and then you have to wait until the next show to see what happened, they have many good examples of cliff-hangers, since you often have to wait until the next day's show before you see the result of something happening in an episode.

What makes a **soap opera** different than other shows that have a lot of stories and episodes, like comedies, is that they always end with the promise that the story will be continued in the next episode. There is never any closure to a storyline, like there usually is in sitcoms or other shows. Because of this continuation, each episode always ends with a cliff-hanger.

Soap operas got their name from the commercials that played during the commercial breaks. Since **soap operas** aired during the day, the commercials were targeted for homemakers. Most of the products that were advertised were for cleaning products, like soap. And since the shows were so dramatic, they compared them to operas that you can see at a theatre. And so, the nickname **soap operas** was given to them, and that nickname stuck.

A trilogy/a sequel

Trilogy, *prequel*, and **sequel** are all words for sequences or versions of books or movies.

A **trilogy** is a series of three separate books (or movies) that when combined tell one whole story. A good example of a popular **trilogy** is *The Hunger Games*.

A *prequel* is a book or movie that was made after another book or movie, but is supposed to tell the story of what happened *before* the story depicted in the original movie or book took place.

A **sequel** is also a book or movie that was made after another book or movie, but it tells the story of what happened *after* the story told in the original movie or book took place.

Here's an example with the words *prequel* and *sequel*:

Mandy: Did you ever see the movie *Alien*?

Jeff: Yeah, that's a pretty old movie.

Mandy: Yeah, it is. But I saw *Prometheus* yesterday. It just came out in theatres, and it's the prequel to *Alien*.

Jeff: Really? So it tells the story of what happened before *Alien*?

Mandy: Yeah, it's awesome

Jeff: Wow. I saw the **sequels**, *Aliens* and *Alien II*, but seeing the prequel would be amazing. I'll check it out!

Closure

Closure is a word used when a person feels that something has adequately or definitely ended.

In this episode, Maura says that she hates movies with cliff-hangers, and that she wants a nice resolution with **closure**. What Maura is saying is that she doesn't like it when movies don't really end or resolve a storyline, but leave the ending vague or open so that the audience is left wondering what happened. Sometimes this is done because another movie or book (a sequel) will come after it. Sometimes movies or books don't include **closure** because they want the audience to guess what happened, or they're trying to make some sort of point or statement.

Soap operas usually don't have any **closure** because they're meant to be serials, with each show continuing the story from the last show. Books and movies, however, generally have **closure** if they're not supposed to be part of a trilogy or series.

A page-turner

A page-turner is a book that's so good that people don't want to stop reading it. People want to keep reading page after page, turning the page as they read.

It's hard to stop reading a **page-turner** because you want to find out what happens next. A lot of times, this expression refers to a book that has a lot of suspense in it. You keep turning the page because you want to find out what the ending of the mystery is, or how everything turns out.

Here's an example with the expression **a page-turner**:

Jane: Have you read *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*?

Mark: Yeah! I read it in one night.

Jane: One night? It's a pretty long novel!

Mark: I know, but it was such **a page-turner**. There was so much suspense! I read it all day on Saturday and even stayed up late on Saturday night!

I got you a little something

I got you a little something is something you can say to somebody when you get them a present. It usually refers to a present that's a surprise, or a gift that's not a large present, but just something small. For example, if you go on vacation and find something in a shop that your mom would really like, you could give it to her when you get back and say that you **got her a little something**, meaning that you have a present for her.

Here's an example with this expression:

Joey: So how was your trip to Niagara Falls?

Stacy: It was really good! **I got you a little something.**

Joey: Wow, a keychain! This is so nice. Thank you.

Stacy: Oh, it's really not a big deal. I just saw it and thought of you.

You shouldn't have

You shouldn't have is an expression that people sometime say after someone has bought them a gift, especially if the gift was unexpected. In the above example, Joey could have said **you shouldn't have** when he received the keychain that Stacy bought him on her trip to Niagara Falls.

This expression may sound like you're telling someone that they shouldn't have done something, but this specific expression is one that is used casually and nicely. It doesn't mean that the person should take the gift back. **You shouldn't have** is just another way of saying that the gift is unexpected, and that you are very touched and thankful that the person thought of you and got you something.

A bookworm

A bookworm is an idiom used to describe someone who reads a lot of books. This expression comes from the name for a certain type of bug that actually eats the paper and glue of books. People who read books very quickly can be called **bookworms**. This is an affectionate nickname, meaning that it's not an insult, but a friendly nickname to describe someone.

Someone who studies a lot can also be called **a bookworm**, because they're always reading or going through books.

In this episode, Maura and Harp explain what **a page-turner** is, and Harp says "I think all of you can probably tell that we're really big **bookworms**, 'cause we're super excited about this expression." What Harp is saying is that because she and Maura are excited to explain an expression that is about books, it must be obvious that they are **bookworms**.

To not want to put a book down

When a book is really interesting and you're really enjoying it, you might **not want to put it down** and stop reading!

There are a few different variations of this expression. For example, if you love a book and don't want to stop reading, you can say any of the following:

- **I don't want to put it down.**
- **I can't put it down.**
- **I have a hard time putting it down.**

Like the expression *a page-turner*, this is an expression that only refers to books, usually books that contain suspense, like mysteries. Sometimes you **don't want to put a book down** because you want to keep reading to find out what will happen next.

But unlike the expressions *a page-turner* and *a cliff-hanger*, this expression can also be used to talk about books that aren't suspenseful. If you're really enjoying a book for any reason, you could **have a hard time putting it down**.

Here's an example with a couple of variations of this expression:

Debbie: Have you ever read *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac? Our teacher gave it to us this week. She said we'd probably **have a hard time putting it down**.

Jessica: Yeah, I have read it! It's one of my favourite books.

Debbie: Oh, really? Why?

Jessica: It's about travelling, and I love to travel. **I didn't want to put it down**. I read the whole thing in just one weekend. I think you'll like it too.

Quiz

1. What is a nail-biter?

- a) a book or movie that's very suspenseful and makes you anxious
- b) a film about bad habits
- c) a book that's given to you as a present
- d) a movie that doesn't end or resolve itself

2. What is an example of a type of TV show that doesn't usually have any closure?

- a) a page-turner
- b) a soap opera
- c) a trilogy
- d) a cliff-hanger

3. When it is appropriate to tell someone that they shouldn't have?

- a) when they finish reading a book
- b) when they are sick
- c) when they give you an unexpected gift
- d) when they ask you for directions

4. What is a bookworm?

- a) a person who reads or studies a lot
- b) someone who works in a library
- c) a person who only reads books that are part of trilogies
- d) the name of a dog that was in a famous book last year

5. What does it mean when a game is tied?

- a) one side wins without the other side getting any points
- b) someone cheats and nobody catches them
- c) there are more than four players or four teams
- d) the teams have the same score

6. What's the difference between a prequel and a sequel?

- a) A prequel is a trilogy, and a sequel is a series that has more than three parts.
- b) A *prequel* refers only to movies, and a *sequel* refers only to books.
- c) A prequel is a book or movie that has no closure, and a sequel is a book or movie that has a definite ending.
- d) A prequel is about what happened *before* an original movie or book, and a sequel is about what happens *after* the original.

7. What types of books and movies are often referred to as cliff-hangers?

- a) romances
- b) comedies
- c) mysteries
- d) documentaries

Answers:

1.a 2.b 3.c 4.a 5.d 6.d 7.c