

Simplified Speech #020 – The curious case of the UVic bunnies

Episode description

If you walked onto a university campus and saw hundreds of rabbits, you might think you were dreaming, but this was the reality at the University of Victoria for more than 20 years! Still can't believe it? Join Andrew and Morag in this episode as they talk all about the UVic bunnies and their mysterious disappearance.

Fun fact

At the height of their population, it's estimated that there were between 1,400 and 2,000 rabbits living on the University of Victoria campus! However, UVic isn't the only place in Canada to have a problem with large populations of wild bunnies. Canmore and Banff in Alberta, Sudbury in Ontario, and three other locations on Vancouver Island (other than UVic) were once, or are still, populated by large numbers of wild rabbits.

Expressions included in the learning materials

- To pat [somebody] on the back
- In the first place
- The flip side
- Laid back
- A hippie



Transcript

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

Andrew: Hello, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Morag: And my name is Morag.

Andrew: And we are back with another Culips episode.

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Andrew: Hey, Morag. How are you?

Morag: I'm doing pretty well, Andrew. I actually just recently discovered a new hobby that is kinda taking over.

Andrew: Hmm. It's becoming an obsession?

Morag: Just a little, yeah.

Andrew: You have to share. What is it?

Morag: Well, modular origami.

Andrew: Wait, what? Modular origami.

Morag: Yeah. It's where you fold lots and lots of the same shape, and you can put them together into crazy, beautiful, big, or complicated shapes. It's like where math and paper folding and just gorgeous colours meet.

Andrew: This sounds really cool, but I'm having a difficult time picturing it.

Morag: Mmhmm.

Andrew: So you take many different pieces of paper or just one piece of paper?

Morag: Many different pieces.

- Andrew: Can you make things other than geometric shapes? Like could you make an animal, for example? Or is it all math based?
- Morag: It's all math based. But you can do things like M.C. Escher where they're impossible shapes. So you can have things that look like they're passing through one another in impossible ways, but it's just from paper.
- Andrew: Wow. Optical illusions made of paper.
- Morag: Mmhmm, optical illusion origami. Pretty amazing.
- Andrew: Morag, would it be possible for you to take a picture of one of your creations so we could all see it?
- Morag: I have no problem with that. I would love to share.
- Andrew: Awesome. Well, everybody, check out our Facebook page for a picture of Morag's modular origami.
- Morag: Yeah, that's it.
- Andrew: OK. Today, Morag, we are going to do a Simplified Speech episode. And in Simplified Speech episodes, we have a natural conversation, but we speak at just a little bit of a slower speed than we would in our everyday lives.
- And, today, I think we have a really intriguing episode topic. It is The Curious Case of the UVic Bunnies. It's a good title, right?
- Morag: It's a very good title.
- Andrew: I thought of it myself, so I will **pat myself on the back**. I think we should start with ... Well, you can answer this question, what is UVic and where is UVic?
- Morag: Well, Andrew, UVic is the colloquial way to refer to the University of Victoria. And that is in Victoria, British Columbia, which happens to be where I'm from and where you went to university?
- Andrew: Yes. I went to the University of Victoria, as did you. And I went to UVic between the years 2004 to 2008. What years were you there?
- Morag: I was there 2007 to 2012.
- Andrew: OK. So we had a little overlap. And what stands out in your mind when you think of the UVic campus at that time? Is there something special or unique about the campus?

- Morag: Well, I actually remember I went to high school quite close to the UVic campus, and probably around the time that you first went there.
- Andrew: Mmhmm.
- Morag: And I just remember ... Well, it was the bunnies. There were so many rabbits. Like fluffy, adorable bunny rabbits everywhere.
- Andrew: Now we should mention that UVic has a very beautiful campus. It's much like a park. There's a lot of green spaces. There's areas with open fields and there's forested areas. There's also a really nice garden on the campus. So it kind of feels like a park. It's got that atmosphere. But, like you said, there were ... I'm probably not exaggerating here, over 1,000 rabbits on the campus.
- Morag: You're not exaggerating, Andrew, at all.
- Andrew: It may be even more. Maybe multiple thousands.
- Morag: I think that there may well have been. There were at least enough that they were starting to damage school property. Their burrows, because you know how rabbits make holes underground, there were so many of them that they were starting to become a health hazard just from having their homes underneath buildings where people were sleeping.
- Andrew: All you listeners out there are going to think that we're nuts, and that we're exaggerating. But it's true. There were so many bunnies on the campus. So how did the rabbits get there **in the first place**? Do you know?
- Morag: Well, like I said, I grew up in Victoria, so I've seen the bunnies there my whole life. It was really normal to take little kids to go play with the bunnies.
- Andrew: Mmhmm.
- Morag: But the story was always that in the '80s sometime, there were a couple of people who got rid of their pets. And then ... Well, they bred like rabbits.
- Andrew: Yeah, we have this expression in English, right? Multiply like rabbits, which means to have a lot of babies or have a lot of offspring, and—
- Morag: Really fast.
- Andrew: And the reason we have this expression is because, well, rabbits do that exactly. They multiply very quickly.

- Morag: Yeah. Oh, but it was so cute every time in the spring. All of the baby bunnies? If you were having a bad time in your classes or you were stressed out for some reason, you could just go outside and see just baby bunnies.
- Andrew: Yeah. And one of the things that I clearly remember is always meeting my friends after class and sitting outside of the library, and just hanging out with the bunnies.
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: A lot of students would bring carrots and fruit and vegetables, and you could feed the bunnies. I wouldn't say they were tame, but they weren't afraid of people.
- Morag: No, they weren't scared. But they did end up ... Well, they're not there anymore.
- Andrew: Yeah. So let's get to that part of the story. And I actually didn't know this, because I graduated in 2008. I still assumed that the rabbits were there, but I recently found out that's not the case. And, actually, in 2009, the university said, "Enough is enough, we can't have the rabbits on campus anymore. It's just too big of a problem." They were destroying everything. They were eating all the plants.
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: They were causing damaged buildings. I believe even some people were injured because they tripped over a bunny.
- Morag: Oh, I feel very bad for those people. But it's the cutest injury.
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Morag: Yes.
- Andrew: The cutest way to break your wrist, tripping over a bunny. So the university decided to cull the rabbits. This is a word that probably most of our listeners are not familiar with, cull. C-U-L-L. What does this mean, Morag, to cull? It's not an everyday word, is it?
- Morag: No, it's not. I only hear it in terms of culling a population of something, which means to destroy—
- Andrew: Yes.
- Morag: Or get rid of a large portion of that population.

- Andrew: Yes. I usually hear this word used when talking about a farm.
- Morag: Yes, yes.
- Andrew: Maybe you have a group of animals that are sick or diseased and they need to be destroyed. They need to be put down, so the population of animals is culled. And this is what happened at UVic; the rabbits were culled or ... Actually they weren't culled. The school decided to cull them, but what happened?
- Morag: Well, I was there during this whole debacle, and the students and the student newspapers and student societies and everything were really up in arms about the possibility of the bunnies getting killed or taken away. Everyone loved them, even though they were doing a lot of damage.
- So there was a lot of discussion and a lot of protests, and everyone was very upset. But a certain point—I think it was over a summer because UVicsers got back and ... But I don't remember them rounding up rabbits or seeing any of that.
- Andrew: Mmhmm.
- Morag: I'm pretty sure it was just one year they were there, and then the next they weren't. One of the stories was that 500 or something, or 600 rabbits were sent down to a rabbit refuge in Texas. It felt so much like, you know, your parents telling you that your hamster, he didn't die, he just went to the hamster farm.
- It felt like it was, "No, no, no, don't worry. They went to a rabbit farm in Texas." And I was like, "What?"
- Andrew: Well, when I was doing some research for this episode, I read that over 900 of the rabbits were saved, and they were sent to animal shelters or they were adopted. And out of those 900 rabbits, 150 were sent to a rabbit refuge in Alberta.
- Morag: Oh!
- Andrew: But I read this online, and you can't trust everything that you read online. So probably the truth is somewhere in the middle.
- Morag: Yeah, yeah.
- Andrew: Maybe some people are listening to this and thinking that we're crazy. We're spending all this time and money to save some rabbits.

- Morag: Oh, because there's the **flip side**. Not all of those rabbits were healthy. Do you remember that?
- Andrew: Mmhmm, there was a lot of diseased rabbits, weren't there?
- Morag: Yeah. It was kind of sad. They ... There was the ... The goiters were strong with that population.
- Andrew: Hmm. Well, I have to say that Victoria has a little bit of a different feeling to it than some other parts of Canada. It's more of ... Well, we say because Victoria is located on an island, it's got a kind of **laid-back** island vibe, right? There's a lot of **hippies** and a lot of very, hmm, left-leaning political people that live in Victoria, and especially at the University of Victoria.
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: So there's a lot of people that are animal rights activists that really fought for the protection of the rabbits.
- Morag: Yeah, yeah.
- Andrew: And, yeah, this was a major news story.
- Morag: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: It actually was covered in the *New York Times*, if you can believe it.
- Morag: What?
- Andrew: Yeah. So that is the story of the UVic rabbits. And if you have a chance to visit the campus these days, you might see a deer and you might see some very pretty birds and some pretty flowers. But it's unlikely that you will see a rabbit.
- Morag: Aw, so sad.
- Andrew: So sad. Anyways, Morag, that brings us to the end of today's episode. And thank you to everybody who listened today. We hope you enjoyed our story. And if your goal is to improve your English, we would love to help you out.
- The best way to study with us is to become a Culips member. And when you are a member, you will be able to access all of our learning materials, which include transcripts, detailed vocabulary explanations, and quizzes for all of our episodes. And we have over 400 episodes.
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Morag: And if you have any questions or comments for us, please send us a message. And a great way to do that is through our Facebook page, which is [Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast](https://www.facebook.com/CulipsPodcast). Or you can email us directly as contact@culips.com. Thanks for listening, everyone. We will be back soon with another Culips episode.

Andrew: Talk to you then. Bye.

Morag: Bye.

Detailed Explanations

To pat [somebody] on the back

To pat [somebody] on the back is an expression that means to praise someone for doing something well. **A pat on the back** can be any expression of approval. For example, if your boss told you that you did a good job on a project, you could say that she gave you **a pat on the back**. Or, if your roommate thanks you for doing the dishes, that could also be called **patting you on the back**.

You can also talk about **patting yourself on the back**. For example, Andrew says that he “will **pat himself on the back**” for coming up with an amusing title for this episode. By using this expression, Andrew is saying that he is proud of his work. People usually talk about **patting themselves on the back** in a humorous or casual way. So, Andrew is drawing attention to the fact that he did something well, but not in a bragging or annoying way.

So, when you have or someone else has done something well, you can use the expression **to pat [somebody] on the back** to show that they deserve praise.

Here are a couple more examples with **to pat [somebody] on the back**:

Johan:	Do you want to go to a movie with me tonight?
Erica:	No, sorry. I'm way too exhausted.
Johan:	Why are you so tired? Have you been working a lot lately?
Erica:	Yeah, I've been putting in overtime at work to get a project finished. I finally got it done today, though. And I did it ahead of schedule!
Johan:	Good for you! I hope your boss pats you on the back for all your hard work.

Samuel:	Wow, the house looks so clean! Did you hire someone to come in and clean the place while I was away?
Diana:	Nope! I'm going to pat myself on the back for this one—I did it all myself!
Samuel:	No kidding? Good work!

In the first place

In the first place is a phrase that means “to begin with” or “in the beginning.” It has two different main uses, but the two can be a bit difficult to tell apart because, in both cases, **in the first place** is added to the end of a sentence.

The first use of **in the first place** is to place emphasis on the beginning of a situation or series of events. For example, in this episode Andrew asks how the bunnies got to UVic **in the first place**. In other words, Andrew is asking how the bunnies arrived at the university.

The second use of **in the first place** is to indicate an opinion about what should have been done at the beginning of a situation or to identify the root of a problem. For example, imagine that you’re having trouble with your new pet cat. If someone says, “You never should have bought a cat **in the first place**,” they are saying that your mistake came at the beginning of the situation, when you purchased the cat.

So, while the two uses are similar, it’s easy to tell them apart by their context. When **in the first place** is used to talk about something positive or neutral, it’s emphasizing what happened at the beginning of a situation. When talking about a problem or negative situation, **in the first place** is used to indicate an opinion about the root or beginning of that problem.

Here are a couple more examples with both uses of **in the first place**:

Kristen:	Can you believe that there’s only 2 more days until we move into the new apartment?
Kevin:	I know, I’m so excited! The whole thing doesn’t seem real yet. I still can’t believe that we got the apartment in the first place .
Kristen:	We got lucky, that’s for sure!

Jane:	This hotel is terrible! They don’t even serve breakfast!
Ian:	I know, but it’s all we could find out here, remember?
Jane:	Then why did we decide this was the place to take our vacation? I didn’t even want to come here in the first place .
Ian:	Well, we’re here now, so we should make the best of it.
Jane:	I guess you’re right. There’s no use dwelling on the past.

The flip side

The flip side is a noun that comes from the time when people mostly listened to music on records. **The flip side** of a record was the one that was less liked or did not have the hit or popular song on it. So, when you talk about **the flip side** of something, you're talking about the opposite or less popular aspects of something.

For example, while our hosts spend a lot of time talking about how cute the rabbits were, at one point Morag mentions **the flip side** of the bunnies at UVic; many of them were sick and did not live long or healthy lives. This information is **the flip side**, because it is a negative aspect of the situation.

The flip side is commonly used in the phrase “on **the flip side**.” If you want to introduce an opposite, less welcome, or more difficult aspect of a topic into conversation, you can start your sentence with “on **the flip side**.”

So, **the flip side** of something is the opposite, less popular, or more difficult side of that topic, idea, or situation.

Here are a couple more examples with **the flip side**:

Dave:	Oh, my gosh, I love how cool your apartment is in the summer. It has to be 10 degrees colder in here than it is outside. It's paradise!
Jessica:	I know, it's so great. Main floor apartments are amazing for keeping cool.
Dave:	And here I am, living on the third floor like a sucker!
Jessica:	Well, I know it's nice right now, but you have to remember the flip side : it's way colder in the winter too! It's only nice to have a cold apartment for half the year.
Dave:	Good point!

Lucas:	I really want to get a pet! I'm thinking about adopting a puppy. They're so cute and energetic. I would love to have a running partner, too.
Dina:	Yes, if you got a puppy you'd have a cute running partner, but on the flip side you wouldn't be able to leave it alone for any length of time. You'd never be able to stay out late after work or go on spontaneous trips anymore.
Lucas:	You're right. I should probably give the whole puppy idea more thought.

Laid back

When someone has a relaxed and calm personality, you can refer to them as **laid back**. **Laid back** is an adjective used to describe people who are not easily bothered or worried about things. People with a **laid-back** attitude are neither quick to get angry or overly excited; they are defined by being calm and peaceful.

You can also use **laid back** to describe the feeling of a place or a group of people. For example, in this episode Andrew mentions that Victoria, British Columbia, has a **laid-back** vibe. In other words, it is not a busy or hectic city. It's a place that has a relaxed feeling to it.

So, if you want to describe a person or place that has a calm and relaxed character, you can use the term **laid back**.

Here are a couple more examples with **laid back**:

Noel:	You look so relaxed. Don't you know that we have a big exam tomorrow?
George:	Yeah, I haven't forgotten about the exam. I'm just not worried about it.
Noel:	How? I'm totally losing my mind with anxiety right now.
George:	I guess I'm just more laid back than you are. I don't get stressed easily.
Noel:	Lucky!

Alexandra:	Your sister is such a cool chick. I can't believe that she's a mom, has a full-time job, and still manages to make such amazing art in her spare time.
Steve:	I know, she's the coolest.
Alexandra:	Do you know what her secret is? Most people wouldn't be able to take on so much in their lives.
Steve:	She's always been a really laid-back person. She's never been someone who gets anxious and stressed out about things. I think she can do so much because she spends more time getting things done and less time worrying!
Alexandra:	That makes sense!

A hippie

Hippie is a term that comes from the 1960s and early 1970s when there was a movement of young people who focused on the values of non-violence, peace, and love. They rejected the mainstream ideas of how people should live and were typically identified by having long hair and wearing unconventional clothing.

Today the term **hippie** has a broader but related definition. It's often used to describe people who are against capitalist ideals and instead value nature and the environment, and who often have non-traditional or non-Western spiritual practices. They are still, however, typically identified by having long hair and wearing flowing and unconventional clothing.

In this episode, Andrew mentioned **hippies** because the **hippie** culture has a strong presence in Victoria, British Columbia.

If you're still confused about what **hippies** are, do an image search on the internet. You'll probably recognise the **hippie** look!

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

Kat:	Would you like a hamburger?
James:	No, thank you, I've never eaten meat.
Kat:	Wait, you've never tried meat at all?
James:	No, I haven't. My parents are hippies and don't believe in harming animals, so they raised us vegetarian. I'm happy not eating meat, so I've never tried.
Kat:	That's good to know. Thank goodness I made veggie burgers too!

Leah:	Wow, it smells great in here!
Joe:	Thanks. I just burned some cedar incense before you got here.
Leah:	That's weird, I wouldn't have guessed you would be the type to burn incense.
Joe:	Well, my roommate is a real hippie , and I've picked up some habits from living with her. Now I burn incense, wear clothing made from all-natural fabrics, and eat organic food!

Quiz

1. The opposite and/or less popular side of an idea or a situation is called:

- a) the dark side
- b) the wrong side
- c) the flip side
- d) the good side

2. If someone has a calm and relaxed personality, you could call them:

- a) laid down
- b) laid back
- c) downtrodden
- d) set back

3. A hippie is a term for a type of:

- a) landmark
- b) person
- c) object
- d) idea

4. In the first place is another way of saying:

- a) to begin with
- b) to end up
- c) to land on
- d) to back off

5. Patting someone on the back is another way to:

- a) show them respect
- b) lead them on
- c) give them praise
- d) give them a gift

Quiz Answers

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

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