

Catch Word # 51 – Wannabe

Transcript

Maura: Hello everybody, this is Maura.

Jessie: And Jessie.

Maura: And we're here at Culips with your Catch Word Podcast.

Jessie: And our Catch Word podcast is when we take a word or phrase, we break it down, we talk about what it means and we give you some synonyms.

Maura: Exactly, so if you want to know more information about this episode, you can go to our website, Culips.com, and sign up to receive our Lipservice.

Jessie: And at our website you can also join, become a member of Culips and you can sign up for our newsletter.

Maura: Good. Lots of stuff going on at the website.

Jessie: Yeah, a lot of things.

Maura: But first let's look at our Catch Word episode. What is the expression today?

Jessie: Today's Catch Word expression is **wannabe**.

Maura: Yes, a **wannabe**.

Jessie: So **wannabe** is a noun and it describes a person.

Maura: Yes so, we would say that person is a **wannabe**.

Jessie: Right, so a person who is a **wannabe** is a person who wants to be something.

Maura: Right, they want to be something that they are not right now and maybe they pretend or try to be that thing.

Jessie: Right, they're acting like they are that thing, when really they're not.

Maura: Exactly.

- Jessie: So to call someone a **wannabe** is a negative thing because you're saying that they pretend to be something that they aren't.
- Maura: For sure, it's never a good thing to call someone a **wannabe**.
- Jessie: Right. And of course there is nothing wrong with wanting to be something, if you want to be a doctor and you're working to be a doctor that's great.
- Maura: Yeah, in that case, probably no one would call you a **wannabe**.
- Jessie: Right. A **wannabe** is someone who is just pretending that they're something they're not.
- Maura: Exactly, that's a very important distinction. So what about the word itself, **wannabe**, it's kind of funny.
- Jessie: Yeah, I think this slang term is actually pretty new.
- Maura: Yeah, it originated sometime in the 1980s which wasn't that long ago.
- Jessie: No, not at all.
- Maura: So right, **wannabe** comes from the words *want to be*, like, what do you want to be?
- Jessie: Exactly, so it's just shortened and pronounced differently to **wannabe**.
- Maura: Right, so *want to* becomes *wanna* in slang when native English speakers talk very quickly. And then eventually we had **wannabe** all together.
- Jessie: Exactly, so what kind of people were described as **wannabes** when that word first **came out**?
- Maura: Yeah, well, when the word **wannabe** first started being used it was often used to talk about surfers.
- Jessie: Ah, surfers.
- Maura: Yeah, because the surf culture started to become very popular but there were many people who bought clothing and spoke like surfers but they actually didn't know how to surf.
- Jessie: OK, so those people were **wannabes** because they acted like they were surfers but really they didn't surf. They weren't actually surfers.

- Maura: Yeah, they probably didn't even live near a beach.
- Jessie: So, you could call those people just **wannabes** or **wannabe** surfers
- Maura: Exactly yeah. And nowadays sometimes you might see skateboarders who are **wannabes**.
- Jessie: Right, people who skateboard tend to wear certain kind of shoes, certain kind of clothes, but if you wear those clothes and those shoes, and you don't actually skateboard you might be a **wannabe**.
- Maura: Exactly, right so you talk like them, you wear the clothes but you don't actually skateboard.
- Jessie: Yeah, it's almost like you're trying to pretend that you're a skateboarder without actually knowing how to skateboard.
- Maura: Right, because if you met someone who was wearing skateboarding clothes and spoke like a skateboarder you would probably think that person is a skateboarder, so they're pretending to be something.
- Jessie: Right.
- Maura: You could also use **wannabe** to talk about a specific person.
- Jessie: OK, so if someone was trying to dress like, or act like one single person?
- Maura: Exactly, so a very modern example could be **Lady Gaga**.
- Jessie: Oh, a **Lady Gaga wannabe**! Just in case you don't know, Lady Gaga is a really popular pop singer right now. And she dresses in crazy outfits and her hair and make up is always really, really strange. So we'll post one of her videos on our blog, so check that out if you want to know more about her. So, a **Lady Gaga wannabe**. I guess they would dress up in really outrageous clothes and crazy makeup.
- Maura: Yeah, and say really **provocative** things.
- Jessie: OK, what about a **Madonna wannabe**?
- Maura: Yeah, so a **Madonna wannabe** would wear clothes like Madonna has worn over the years and do things like Madonna does.

- Jessie: Yeah, so calling someone a **wannabe** is definitely not a good thing because it's like saying that they don't have their own identity, they don't have a lot of self confidence, they just wanna be like someone else.
- Maura: Right, sometimes people are not sure about who they are or how they want to dress so they just choose someone to **look up to**.
- Jessie: Right.
- Maura: So, a lot of people who are **wannabes** are often younger teenagers, you know they're still discovering themselves.
- Jessie: Yeah but it doesn't have to be a young person; you could be a **wannabe** at any age.
- Maura: Yeah, but it is more common amongst younger people.
- Jessie: You know, there's a couple that lives near my house that has the nicest car, huge house, all the nicest clothes but actually they don't make a lot of money.
- Maura: Oh really?
- Jessie: Yeah, they're actually in **debt**. So they're **wannabes** because they're trying to act like they are really rich when in reality they don't have that much money.
- Maura: Yup, those sound like **wannabes** for sure. In addition to the word **wannabe**, another similar word is a **poseur**.
- Jessie: A **poseur**.
- Maura: Right just like a **wannabe**, a **poseur** is pretending to be something that they are not.
- Jessie: Yeah, so to pose as something is to act like you are that thing. So, I have a friend, when he goes to restaurants he always poses as a restaurant critic because then he gets really good service because they think he's going to write a newspaper article about them
- Maura: Yeah, that's a good idea.
- Jessie: Yeah it is.
- Maura: Right, because he's just pretending to be a critic, he's not really a critic.

- Jessie: Right. But the word **poseur** can also be used the same way as **wannabe**, somebody who's acting like something they're not, dressing or talking like somebody else.
- Maura: Exactly, so that person could be called a **poseur**.
- Jessie: Right, so with the surfer example we used earlier, we could call people who dress like a surfer, talk like a surfer, we could call them **poseurs** if they're not really surfers.
- Maura: Yeah, exactly the same way. If there was someone who was imitating **Lady Gaga**, we could say that person is a **poseur**.
- Jessie: Exactly.
- Maura: So right, these two expressions, **wannabe** and **poseur**, are really exactly the same.
- Jessie: Yeah, I think you could use them in all the same ways. OK, so remember there's nothing wrong with wanting to be something and working towards that goal, but to be a **wannabe** or to be a **poseur** is never a good thing.
- Maura: Right, and it's also important to remember that to call someone a **wannabe** or a **poseur** is an insult. It's not a nice thing to say so **shhh!**
- Jessie: Yeah, you could definitely hurt someone's feelings that way.
- Maura: Yes that's a good point. OK, that's about it for today's episode. So don't forget to go to our website Culips.com.
- Jessie: And we'll talk to you next time.
- Maura: See you later, bye.
- Jessie: Bye.

Detailed Explanation

Wannabe

A **wannabe** is someone who is pretending to be something they are not in their everyday life. **Wannabe** comes from the words *want to be*. *Want to* often becomes **wanna** when native English speakers talk.

Here are some important notes about **wannabe**:

- It is NEVER a positive thing to call someone. But it can be used as a joke with close friends.
- It is not used if someone honestly wants to be something, like an actor, and is working towards it.

Wanna be (verb)

Wannabe is a noun, but you could also hear it like a verb and in this case it is two words.

Here are some examples where you might hear **wanna be**.

They **wanna be** famous one day.

You **wanna be** at the restaurant for dinner at 7pm.

* **Wanna** can be used with the subjects I/you/they/we because the verb *want* is conjugated as *want*. **Wanna** CANNOT be used with she/he/it because *want* is conjugated as *wants* with an S. The slang way to pronounce want with she/he/it is *wantsta*. For example, she wantsta go to dinner tonight.

Wannabe surfers

Surfers are associated with the origin of the slang term **wannabe**. This is because many people acted as surfers, but were not.

Wannabes act like they belong to a subculture, but do not. Here is a list of things that wannabes do.

- speak like a particular group that they are not a part of
- wear clothes like a particular group does that they are not a part of
- go to places where a particular group might but they are not a part of this group
- claim to have skills of a particular group but do not actually possess those skills
- own items associated with a particular group that they are not a part of



Come out

To come out as a phrasal verb can have many different meanings. In this case, we talked about when the expression **wannabe came out**. **To come out** in the example we use is to become known. Jessie was asking when people first began to know and use this expression.

Here is a short list of other meanings of **to come out**.

- To be released, To make a debut

Example

The new Johnny Depp movie just **came out**.

- To tell family and friends that you are gay

Example

Jamie only **came out** last spring.

- The end result

Example

How did your painting **come out**?

Lady Gaga

If you like American pop culture you probably already know who **Lady Gaga** is. She is a singer who wears outrageous clothes and says shocking things. She has been compared to Madonna (who we also talk about in this episode). Her first album **came out** in 2008 and she had many hits.

At the time that we uploaded this episode we included one of her videos in our blog.

What is **gaga**? *To be gaga* or *to go gaga* means that someone became very excited about something or that you love the person. Here is an example: She went **gaga** over the new boy in school.

Provocative

If someone or something is **provocative** this means that he or she or it gets attention, gets people curious and gets people reacting. When something is provocative it can be used in a positive or negative way. The adjective **provocative** comes from the verb to provoke. To provoke is to try to get a reaction from others. Often the things that Lady Gaga says are **provocative**.

Look up to

One person **looks up to** another person. In this episode we spoke about wannabes **looking up to** other people. When one person admires another person, we can say that they **look up to** the person.

We can also say look up to when we are talking about physically **looking up to** something. For example, Sheila **looked up to** the sky. In this example, Sheila might be admiring the sky, but **to look up to** meaning admire is only used to talk about people. **To look up to** is then being used in the physical, literal sense in this sentence.

Here are some examples.

Valerie: Who is your idol?

Robbie: I don't have anyone that I really **look up to**.

Ron: I have always **looked up to** my Dad.

Ned: He sounds so nice.

Debt

Maybe the economic crisis that has affected many countries around the world, you have heard of this word, **debt**, a lot more. *To have debt* or *to be in debt* means that the person is obligated to pay money to someone that they have borrowed. You can be in **debt** with the bank or with another person. **Debt** is not always about money, but still means that one person owes another something.

But the reason that **debt** is included in the Detailed Explanation of this Lipservice is not because of this explanation of the meaning. It has been included because of the pronunciation. The *b* at the end of **debt** is not pronounced. It sounds like 'det' when we say this word.

We do not say the *b* in all words that have *bt* at the end. Luckily there are not many! Here is a short list.

Debt

Doubt (and all variations of it)

That's it! We told you it was a short list.

Poseur

Another word used in much the same way as **wannabe** is **poseur**.

To *pose* is the verb that can mean to maintain a physical position, like posing for a photo. It can also mean to act, or pretend to be something you are not. But when we change the word from a verb to a noun to talk about a person, it is spelled **poseur** in most online dictionaries, and not *poser*.

There is also the word *poser*, without the u, that is pronounced exactly the same way. In most dictionaries we looked at, *poser* did not have the same definition as **wannabe**.

In reality, you could probably write **poseur** or **poser** to mean the same as **wannabe**.

We mentioned above that we can say, for example, “**Lady Gaga wannabe**.” You cannot combine another noun with **poseur**. It is NOT correct to say *Lady Gaga poseur*.

Shhh

At the end of this episode, Maura says “**shhh**.” **Shhh** is the sound we make when we want others to be quiet. There can be only one *h*, like **Sh**, but we add *h*’s to make the sound longer.

Maura says **shhh** because to say **wannabe** and **poseur** are not nice things to say about someone or to someone. She is reminding you to be careful how you use these words. These words can be used as a joke with good friends or about people that are not there.

Quiz (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)

1. Which words make up the slang term *wannabe*?

- a) want to
- b) want to be
- c) wants to be
- d) want to belong

2. Who were some of the first wannabes?

- a) surfer wannabes
- b) Lady Gaga wannabes
- c) Madonna wannabes
- d) wanna wannabes

3. What does *gaga* mean?

- a) to go to a fun party
- b) to strongly dislike something
- c) to become very excited about something
- d) to love dancing

4. Which are examples of provocative topics?

- a) sex, money, religion
- b) music, movies, pop culture
- c) food, cooking
- d) surfing, skateboarding, extreme sports

5. Patrick: Is there anyone that you really admire?

Alex: I _____ my boss because he is a really fair person.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) look down
- b) look up
- c) look up at
- d) look up to

6. What is special about the way we pronounce the words *debt* and *doubt*?

- a) do not pronounce the *d*
- b) do not pronounce the *b*
- c) do not pronounce the *t*
- d) there is nothing special about this pronunciation

7. Which word is similar to *wannabe*?

- a) poseur
- b) poser
- c) poseur or poser
- d) poster

8. Annie: "Be quiet. The baby is sleeping. _____."

Please fill in the blank.

- a) Bla
- b) Ohhh
- c) Eww
- d) Shhh

Answers: 1.b 2.a 3.c 4.a 5.d 6.b 7.c 8. d