

Catch Word #65 – A chip off the old block

Transcript

Maura: Hi everyone, its Maura.

Harp: And Harp.

Maura: And I'm here to deliver a special message. Right now I'm offering private English lessons via Skype and webcam. So if you're interested in having private lessons with me, which will always be fun and personalized to whatever you're interested in and to your level, contact me and we'll schedule some lessons. I really look forward to meeting you and chatting with you on Skype. Right, so let's get started on today's episode and we're here at Culips to bring you the Catch Word podcast and that's where we look at one expression or slang term, we explain it, we give you lots of examples and similar expressions.

Harp: Exactly, and make sure you go to the website, that's Culips.com, CULIPS.com, where you can sign up for the Lipservice, because in the Lipservice, you can get the complete transcript, a detailed explanation, and even a quiz. OK, well Maura, the expressions today...what are we going to be looking at?

Maura: Well, we're going to look at some fun expressions that talk about two people who resemble each other.

Harp: OK, so two people who look alike or two people who act alike.

Maura: Right. Two people who are similar to each other, so two people that are related, so they're family, and they're almost the same or they have some things in common.

Harp: OK.

Maura: Right, so we can say that they resemble each other or that one person takes after another person. OK, so the first expression that talks about two people who are alike is **to be a chip off the old block**. Phew, it's long!

Harp: OK, so **to be a chip off the old block**.

Maura: Right, I'll say it one more time slowly and then Harp, you can say it at regular native speaker level.

- Harp: OK.
- Maura: OK. The expression is ***to be a chip off the old block***.
- Harp: Yeah, ***to be a chip off the old block***.
- Maura: Right, we say it a lot faster when we're talking, don't we?
- Harp: Yeah, that was really fast.
- Maura: Yeah, so the expression is ***to be a chip off the old block***.
- Harp: Yeah, so now, this expression means that two family members look or act alike.
- Maura: Exactly. So it means that the younger family member looks or acts like an older family member. It's usually between parents and their children, but it could also be with grandparents or aunts and uncles.
- Harp: Yeah. When I visited my grandma the last time, she **kept saying** that I looked so similar to my aunt; she **kept saying** that I was **a chip off the old block**.
- Maura: Yeah, OK good. So really the meaning is that someone, like you in that example Harp, is made of the same thing as another person, in that case your aunt. So if you think about the old block as your aunt and the chip being you, you're **a chip off the old block**; you're made of the same stuff; you act alike; you look alike.
- Harp: Yup, that makes sense to me.
- Maura: Yeah, it's actually a really old expression; it's been around for a long time. I think since the 1600s.
- Harp: Yeah, but we still use this expression.
- Maura: Yeah, it's been around for a long time but you still hear it today.
- Harp: Oh yeah, of course, we use this often.
- Maura: OK, let's give an example with ***a chip off the old block***. Hey, did you see Charlie play hockey?

- Harp: Yeah, I watched him last night actually. He is great!
- Maura: Oh really?
- Harp: Yeah, he's so good at hockey. He's **a chip off the old block**.
- Maura: Oh wow, so he's as good as his father was, then?
- Harp: Yeah, for sure. He has a similar style to his dad.
- Maura: So in that example we talked about Charlie, who plays hockey, and his father, who plays hockey too, and you said that Charlie was **a chip off the old block**.
- Harp: Yeah, so Charlie's a really good hockey player, but his dad was a really good hockey player, so they're similar. They're alike.
- Maura: Exactly, they have that talent in common.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: OK great, now let's do one more example, since our first example was about a quality or an action, let's do an example with looks.
- Harp: OK, sounds good. Maura look at little Sally over there!
- Maura: Oh wow, she's really growing up. She looks so much like her mother. She's really **a chip off the old block**.
- Harp: Yeah, she looks so similar to her mom.
- Maura: Yeah, the hair and the eyes. Wow, she's really going to look like her when she grows up.
- Harp: Yup, for sure.
- Maura: OK great. So in that example we used the expression again.
- Harp: Yeah, we used the expression **a chip off the old block**.
- Maura: And we used it to describe Sally, who physically looks like her mother.
- Harp: Yeah exactly, similar hair, similar eyes. They look alike.

- Maura: Good. So we have another expression that also is talking about family members looking the same.
- Harp: Yeah, the next expression is ***to be the spitting image of someone***.
- Maura: Right. It's another long one: ***to be the spitting image of a person***.
- Harp: Yeah, ***to be the spitting image of someone***.
- Maura: Yeah and when we say it as native speakers it gets faster, ***to be the spitting image of someone***.
- Harp: Yeah, ***to be the spitting image of someone***.
- Maura: So this one is a little bit different, because we use it to talk about family members who look alike. We're not really talking about qualities or abilities and attributes, it's just looks.
- Harp: Yeah, it's not about acting the same, it's about looking the same.
- Maura: So, we can say that the younger person **is the spitting image of** the older person. So that's something important to remember: in that we cannot say that the older person **is the spitting image of** the younger person.
- Harp: No, the older person is older; they came first, so the younger person **is the spitting image**.
- Maura: Right. And that's true for the first expression to, ***to be a chip off the old block***. It has to be the younger person who's the chip off the block. OK, so ***the spitting image***. It's such a strange expression and I did some research about how it started, but no one is really sure exactly how it started.
- Harp: Oh, OK.
- Maura: So I looked around at where this expression came from and no one really knows for sure, but there are a lot of ideas, I'll include those in the Lipservice.
- Harp: OK, good idea. Should we do an example?
- Maura: Yeah, sure. Harp, have you ever seen John's son? He is really **the spitting image of** his father.
- Harp: I've never seen him. They really look alike?

- Maura: They look almost identical. It's really funny.
- Harp: Wow, really?
- Maura: Yup. So right, just like we said, the expression ***to be the spitting image of someone*** means that they look alike.
- Harp: Exactly, it's pretty easy.
- Maura: Yeah, and we even have one more expression, right Harp?
- Harp: We do! This is a fun expression. Yes, this expression is ***the apple doesn't fall far from the tree***.
- Maura: Yeah, I'll repeat it: ***the apple doesn't fall far from the tree***.
- Harp: When we say it slow it's hard, I **find**.
- Maura: Yeah, all the expressions today are quite long, so I'll say it one more time: ***the apple doesn't fall far from the tree***.
- Harp: Yeah, ***the apple doesn't fall far from the tree***.
- Maura: So, this means that two family members look alike or act alike.
- Harp: Yes, this one can mean to look or to act alike.
- Maura: Right, and this is also a fixed expression; you can't really change it around. It's always ***the apple doesn't fall far from the tree*** or you could say ***the apple never falls far from the tree***, but it's really such a small change.
- Harp: Yup.
- Maura: So, in this case, this expression is also a proverb, and a proverb is very old expression that tells some truth. And the truth in this expression is that, often children resemble their older relatives.
- Harp: Yeah, so in this expression, the parent or older relative is the tree and the apple is the younger relative. The younger person is connected to the older person, and so the **symbolism** is the apple coming from the tree.
- Maura: Right, so it's showing the connection...the family connection.

- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: And some people consider this a kind of negative expression, that you're saying the family members resemble each other about a negative quality, but nowadays you could use it for something positive too.
- Harp: Yeah, it can be positive or negative...a good quality or a bad quality.
- Maura: OK, so let's give a couple examples with ***the apple doesn't fall far from the tree***.
- Harp: OK, sounds good.
- Maura: Did you hear that our friend Sarah is going into medical school?
- Harp: Oh, is she? She wants to be a doctor?
- Maura: Yeah, it's really funny, because her dad is a doctor and when she was younger, she said she didn't want to be a doctor, but now she decided that she's going to medical school.
- Harp: Yeah, ***the apple doesn't fall far from the tree***.
- Maura: Exactly.
- Harp: Yeah, in this example, Sarah is similar to her father. Her father is a doctor and now she wants to study to be a doctor.
- Maura: Right, so in that case we could just say the proverb, ***the apple doesn't fall far from the tree***, and we know that we're making a connection with a similarity between the two people.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: OK, let's give another example but this time let's give a maybe negative example.
- Harp: OK. So did you have a fun time last weekend when your family came to visit?
- Maura: Yeah, yeah, it was good. My nephew is really growing up.
- Harp: Really? How old is he now?
- Maura: He's four. But the one thing is really funny: that he **bites his nails**.

- Harp: Really?
- Maura: It's really funny as well, because my brother always **bites his nails**, even today.
- Harp: Oh really?
- Maura: Yeah, **the apple doesn't fall far from the tree**.
- Harp: Nope.
- Maura: OK, great. So there's another example, not really a positive quality, but there was still a similarity between my nephew and his father.
- Harp: Exactly.
- Maura: OK, great, so let's say these long expressions one more time for everyone.
- Harp: OK, so we started with ***to be a chip off the old block***.
- Maura: Right. And the next expression was ***to be the spitting image of someone***.
- Harp: And what was the last one?
- Maura: The last one was ***the apple doesn't fall far from the tree***.
- Harp: Exactly. So these three expressions are all related to resembling family members.
- Maura: Good. So, remember to always go to our website and see what's going on there, because there's always something new.
- Harp: Exactly, something fun and exciting.
- Maura: Right, and don't forget to become a member at Culips.com.
- Harp: C-U-L-I-P-S.com.
- Maura: OK, this has been Maura.
- Harp: And Harp.
- Maura: And we'll see you later.

Harp: Bye everyone.

Maura: Bye.

Detailed Explanation

To be a chip off the old block

To be a chip off the old block means that a younger person is very similar to their older relative. Remember that the younger person must come first. For example, if we say that Tim is **a chip off the old block** in comparison to Bob, then Tim must be the younger relative.

When using this expression, we only include the younger relative, so we must establish who the other relative is that we are comparing. For example, if we say that Brittney is **a chip off the old block**, we must first make clear who she is being compared to. See the following example:

Nora: Brittney loves cooking, I see.

Joan (Brittney's mom): Yeah, she loves to help me out in the kitchen.

Nora: She's **a chip off the old block**!

There was no need to say who was directly being compared. In this case, Nora and Joan know that Joan loves to cook so the comparison is obvious. In other cases, the comparison needs to be established, like in the example below:

Mike: Jon is such a funny guy.

Pete: I know! And have you met his dad? Jon's **a chip off the old block**.

There are many words to explain that people are similar. Here are some of the words we use in this episode to describe people that look or act alike. These words are not only for relatives, but could be used for anyone:

to resemble

to be alike

to look like/to act like

to take after

to have something in common

to be similar to

to be almost identical

Phew

Near the beginning of this episode, Maura says, “**Phew**.” This word represents a sound that a person makes when they feel tired, or glad that something is finished. Maura uses the word **phew** to exaggerate that she was tired because the expression *to be a chip off the old block* is long.

Here are some other examples with **phew**: (The “ph” is pronounced like an f, as in *phone*.)

Matt: Wow! That was a good workout today.

Danny: **Phew**! I’m so tired now.

Ben: **Phew**. I’m glad that test is over with.

Penelope: Do you think you passed?

Old sounds like ol’ sometimes

The word **old** is sometimes not pronounced clearly when speaking. This is true for the expression *to be a chip off the old block*. Sometimes when people are speaking they pronounce the word **old** like **ol’**. This often happens when there is a hard sound following the word **old**.

There is no need for you to pronounce **old** like **ol’**, but it may help you to understand when you hear native English speakers say it.

To keep doing

In this episode, Harp tells us that her grandmother recently **kept telling** her that she was a chip off the old block. **To keep doing** something means *to continue doing* it, so in this way, **to keep** can mean *to continue*.

Here are a couple more examples where **to keep** is used like *to continue*:

Nathan: I **keep telling** him that I can’t come to his party, but he **keeps forgetting**.

Jackie: Yeah, Pat has a bad memory.

Brad: No matter what I do, I can’t seem to find a job.

Lucy: **Keep applying** and something will happen.

To be the spitting image of someone

Here is the next expression that means that two family members look alike. This expression should not be used to say that two relatives act alike. **To be the spitting image of someone** is different from *to be a chip off the old block*, because we can

specifically mention both people. For example, we can say, “Veronica **is the spitting image** of her grandmother.”

If the older person who is being compared is already established, we don’t need to finish the sentence with “of her grandmother.” We could simply say, “Veronica **is the spitting image**.”

Here are two examples of this:

Ken: Olivia looks so much like her aunt Mona.

Shannon: Yeah, I noticed that too. She really **is the spitting image**.

Ken: Olivia **is the spitting image of** her aunt Mona.

Shannon: Yeah, I noticed that too. They really do look alike.

One possible origin of this expression is that it was originally ***the spit and image of someone***. ***Spit*** represented the insides of a person and ***image*** represented their looks, meaning that they were alike inside and out. As time passed, ***spit and*** became ***spitting***, and now we say ***the spitting image***.

The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree

The third expression that we look at today is a proverb. A proverb tells a truth, which in this case is that people who are family often look and act alike. A proverb is also a fixed expression that does not usually change, although there could be a small variation, like ***the apple never falls far from the tree***.

In this case, both people being compared should be established first, and then the expression is said in completion: ***the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree***. We did this in the dialogue example for this expression.

Here’s one more example:

Sally: Michelle is a really great musician, just like her father.

Luke: **The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree**. That’s for sure!

Some people believe that this expression should be used to talk only about negative qualities in family, but nowadays it can be used to talk about something negative or positive.

To find

To find means to locate or obtain by chance or by effort. For example, with this definition

we can say, “I **found** my wallet that I had thought I lost,” or “I **found** a dollar in my pocket.”

But we can also use **to find** to mean *to believe* or *to think*. This is how the verb **to find** is used when Harp says, “When we say it slow it’s hard, I **find**.”

Here are a couple more examples with the verb **to find** used like *to think* or *to believe*:

Ted: I went to that new pizza place last night.

Paula: How did you **find** it?

Ted: It was great!

(In this case, “How did you **find** it?” is the same as asking, “What did you think of it?”)

Blair: How can I get in touch with Amanda?

Ivan: I **find** that calling her directly is the best way.

Symbolism

Symbolism is used in two of the focus expressions in this episode. A symbol is when one thing represents another. Here’s a breakdown of the symbols used in this episode, and what they represent.

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Represents</u>
a chip	the younger relative
the old block	the older relative
the apple	the younger relative
the tree	the older relative

Nail biting

This is the bad habit used as an example when we discuss the phrase *the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree*. **Nail biting** is when someone bites their fingernails. It is often a habit of children, but can also be an adult habit, like in the example in this episode.

Here’s a list of some other common bad habits that are not very serious:

Biting your nails

Playing with your hair

Cracking your knuckles

Chewing with your mouth open

Watching too much television

Drinking too much coffee

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

1. If we want to say that Suzanne is very similar to her mother Darlene, how should we complete the following sentence?

_____ a chip off the old block.

- a) Suzanne is
- b) Darlene is
- c) They are
- d) He is

2. How is the word *old* often pronounced by Native English speakers?

- a) oldie
- b) ol'
- c) o'
- d) oldest

3. Which of the following is NOT used to talk about people who are similar?

- a) to take after
- b) to resemble
- c) to be an ensemble
- d) to be alike

4. What does the expression *to be the spitting image of someone* mean?

- a) One person acts like another
- b) One person looks like another
- c) One person acts like another but looks very different
- d) One person does not act like another

5. When comparing two family members who are alike using the phrase *a chip of the old block*, which family member is “the chip”?

- a) the father
- b) the daughter
- c) the older
- d) the younger

6. What is a slight variation of the fixed expression *the apple doesn't fall far from the tree*?

- a) The apple does fall far from the tree.
- b) The apple never falls far from the tree.
- c) The orange doesn't call car from the tree.
- d) The apple doesn't fall far from the stem.

7. Kevin is very similar to his father, Ronald.

Which statement does NOT fit this situation?

- a) The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.
- b) Kevin is a chip off the old block.
- c) Ronald is the spitting image of Kevin.
- d) Kevin takes after his father.

8. Which expression used to be associated with only **NEGATIVE** characteristics that are similar between family members? (Today all three expressions can be used for positive and negative similarities.)

- a. a chip off the old block
- b. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.
- c. the spitting image of someone

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