

Simplified Speech #061 – Is Canada the best place to go to elementary school?

Episode description

Every country has its own unique school system. In this Simplified Speech episode, our hosts Andrew and Morag discuss what it's like to go to elementary school in Canada. You will hear about children's daily lives, extracurricular activities, and the differences between private and public schools. There'd so much to talk about!

Fun fact

Unlike in many Western countries, it is not uncommon in Japan to see elementary schoolchildren riding trains and subways alone. That's something that would scare a lot of parents in Canada and the United States!

Expressions included in the study guide

- Suburb
- To hallucinate
- A buck
- Single parent
- Extracurricular activities
- To brush up on [something]



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: You're listening to the Culips English Podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Morag: And my name is Morag.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hey, Morag.

Morag: Hey, Andrew. How are you doing today?

Andrew: I'm doing OK, Morag, how about you?

Morag: I'm pretty good.

Andrew: Good. Well, Morag, today, we are going to do a Simplified Speech episode. And for all of our listeners that don't know, Simplified Speech is our series where we have completely natural English conversations. There's no script, we're not reading anything, we're talking completely naturally. But we speak a little bit slower than we do in our everyday lives. And this series is really aimed at intermediate learners and maybe high-beginner level English learners.

And, today, our topic is actually a request from one of our listeners. Her name is Youngha, I think is the pronunciation, and she is living in the USA right now. And Youngha asked us to talk about the daily lives of schoolchildren in Canada. So, I imagine what she's really interested to know about is what everyday life looks like for elementary school aged kids in Canada. Morag, you and I, we were both elementary school kids in Canada at one time.

Morag: Once.

Andrew: So I think we are experts in this topic. So let's talk about that.

Andrew: But before we do, I would like to let all of listeners know that there is a study guide available for this episode on our website, Culips.com. And we custom design these study guides so that they're very helpful and very educational for our listeners. And inside you'll find things like a transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations of the key and important vocabulary that you'll hear today, as well as examples about how to use this vocabulary, and there's also a quiz and some prompts that you could use for writing practice or speaking practice. There's a lot of good stuff in the study guide, and we highly recommend it. And if you wanna give it a download, you just have to visit our website, Culips.com, and you can do that.

All right, Morag, the everyday lives of Canadian schoolchildren. Wow. Where to start?

Morag: The beginning of the day?

Andrew: Yeah, I was thinking that might be a good point, too. So in the morning, what was your typical morning like when you were an elementary school student?

Morag: For a while in elementary school, I went to a school that was quite far away from my house.

Andrew: OK.

Morag: So, my regular morning would be get up, eat breakfast, put on the terrible uniform, and get driven to school.

Andrew: You went to a private school, right?

Morag: Yeah.

Andrew: So that's why you had to wear the terrible uniform?

Morag: Exactly. I would say that most kids in Canadian cities go to public schools that are close-ish to their homes. So later, when I stopped going to that private school, I went to a school that was close enough that I walked to school.

Andrew: OK.

Morag: But if it's a private school, you always have to get driven and get picked up. School buses I don't think are actually that common.

Andrew: That's interesting, because I always took the school bus to school.

Morag: What? But were you in a more rural area?

Andrew: Well, OK, so when I was a young student, like a primary school student, I lived in Langley, British Columbia.

Morag: OK, not rural.

Andrew: Which is a **suburb** of Vancouver. And, at that time, I walked to school. So, actually, I think probably the culture on this has changed a lot, because I don't imagine that kids that are like in grade 1, 2, 3, so like, 6, 7, 8 years old, walk to school by themselves anymore. I just have a gut feeling that most parents don't let their kids do that. But when I was that age, my brother and I would always walk to school together. And this involved walking through a forest, we had to take this path through a forest and crossing over a creek, and I remember that quite vividly. I'm not sure if we did that every day, I'm sure some days our parents drove us to school, too. But, yeah, I definitely remember walking to school as quite a young elementary school student.

And then later, when I was a little bit older, my family moved to Kelowna. And at that time, I did take the school bus every day. I remember walking to the bus stop. There's a certain area in the neighbourhood where the bus would stop and pick up the students, and this was one of the few times that I got to interact with older students. I remember this, like, even though I was, like, maybe in grade 4 or something, I would get to interact with the grade 6 and grade 7 students who were also waiting for the bus at the same time. And, yeah, that's how the day would start, waiting for the bus. So a little bit different, our stories here.

Morag: Yeah, I think that this shows my city bias.

Andrew: OK.

Morag: Because when you have more people in a smaller area, the schools become closer.

Andrew: Right, yeah, of course.

Morag: Not **suburbs**, but, like, urban, which is where I went to school, was like right next to the downtown.

Andrew: So let's go now, let's fast forward to the middle of the day. School lunch time and, if I recall correctly, we've actually recorded an episode about school lunches before.

Morag: We have.

Andrew: Unless I'm **hallucinating**, but I think we have, haven't we?

- Morag: We definitely have.
- Andrew: OK, good. So if you want to know more details about school lunches, everyone, visit Culips.com and search for that episode. But I always took a packed lunch to school, a lunchbox. Did you eat in a cafeteria, Morag? I can't remember.
- Morag: There was no cafeteria, but we could get a note to go the corner store or the fish and chip shop across the street.
- Andrew: Awesome. The fish and chip shop.
- Morag: Yup.
- Andrew: That's fantastic.
- Morag: So quite often I would have 5 **bucks** and a note.
- Andrew: OK, that's great.
- So, Morag, I think one of the biggest differences between Canadian school kids' lives and the lives of other schoolchildren from around the world, particularly in Asia where I'm living now, is their after-school lives. Because here in Korea, when students finish school, they usually go to another type of cram school, a private school where they'll study math or English or piano. And this is really quite different than what we do in Canada, isn't it?
- Morag: Wait, you have school after school? That sounds terrible.
- Andrew: I know, right? And, believe me, some of my friends that teach English at these institutes, they say that the kids are pretty bummed out to have to go to school after they finish school.
- Morag: My experience, because I have a **single parent**, I always went to after-school care.
- Andrew: Ah, OK. So what kinds of things would you do there?
- Morag: We would play games, do activities. There would usually be an area close to the school or a part of the school where it would have, like, a bunch of fun stuff in it for younger kids.
- Andrew: OK.
- Morag: So there'd be like, you know, craft supplies and, like, maybe a gym access or that kind of thing, and you'd do whatever. You'd play, you'd run around outside, you know, that kinda thing.



- Andrew: So it sounds quite fun. It's not like you were studying or doing other school-type activities.
- Morag: No, absolutely not. It was all, like, recreation and the point was to have us have fun while we waited for our parents to come pick us up.
- Andrew: Ah, OK. That sounds pretty cool, actually.
- Morag: It was all right. Usually, though, they're the weird kids. Maybe not now, because you either have to have both of your parents working, which wasn't as common, I think, when we were kids ...
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Morag: Or only one parent.
- Andrew: Right.
- Morag: So it's quite a small number of students, usually, and a bunch of different grades.
- Andrew: Oh, cool.
- Morag: Yeah, so it's just a bunch of kids who can't go home yet, and you play.
- Andrew: I see.
- Morag: But no school, no real school.
- Andrew: Right. So I guess that's a big difference, because I know that these kind of cram schools exist in other Asian countries, too, like in China and Japan, and probably other places around the world, as well. But Canadian kids, we still do what we call **extracurricular activities**. For example, I took piano lessons and drum lessons and I played all sorts of sports, like baseball and soccer and ice hockey. What about you? Were you into any **extracurricular activities** when you were younger?
- Morag: I did strings.
- Andrew: Strings?
- Morag: So I played the violin.
- Andrew: Oh, string instruments.
- Morag: Yeah.
- Andrew: OK. I gotcha.

- Morag: So, I was part of a thing called strings.
- Andrew: OK.
- Morag: Stringed instruments.
- Andrew: I see.
- Morag: I started that when I was 8. But that happened during school time.
- Andrew: Oh, OK. That definitely counts. In my case, a lot of these things were done after school, like in the early evening, like, I would finish school, go home, chill out for a bit, play with my friends and eat dinner, and then my mom would take me back to school and we'd have a soccer practice at, maybe, like, 6:30 until 7:30 in the evening. Or I would play a soccer game on the weekend, like on a Saturday morning or something. I think we'd usually practiced like once or twice a week and then played a game on the weekend. But, yeah, outside of school hours, I didn't do anything academic at all.
- Morag: Neither did I.
- Andrew: Except I guess there was homework, we do have homework in Canada. But I honestly, when I was young, like an elementary school student, I don't remember doing that much homework.
- Morag: I think it very much depends, it's not a very heavy load, at least not for all kids. I don't think I really ever did homework at home. I'm pretty sure I finished it at school 90% of the time. That's of course not true for every person, it depends on how quickly people learn. But it's not the case that there's so much work that everyone is working from home. It's a lot lighter on kids, I think, than a lot of other places in the world.
- Andrew: Thankfully, that means there was more time to play.
- Morag: Play, play video games, watch TV.
- Andrew: Eat snacks, yeah, it was great.
- Morag: Eat snacks. I got to really **brush up on my cartoons**, you know?
- Andrew: Absolutely, very important stuff.
- Morag: Oh, yeah.
- Andrew: Morag, I'm really curious now to hear from our listeners, and if some of our listeners can send us an email and let us know what are the similarities and what are the differences between our experiences and their experiences.

Andrew: And, guys, the best way to get in touch with us is just to message us. Our email address is contact@Culips.com, and we will be eagerly awaiting your emails. Also, I want to thank Youngha for the suggestion for this episode. And if you have any topics that you would like to suggest for a future Culips episode, just send us an email to that same address, contact@Culips.com. Don't forget to follow us on social media. We are all over the place on social media, on YouTube, on Facebook, on Twitter, on Instagram. If you search for the Culips English Podcast, you will be sure to find us. And, finally, guys, if you want the study guide for this episode, it is available on Culips.com. Just go there to check out how you can download it.

All right, we'll be back soon with another Culips episode, and we'll talk to you then. Bye everyone.

Morag: Goodbye.

Detailed Explanations

Suburb Noun

A **suburb** is an area located outside of the city's core. Unlike inside the city, **suburbs** often have single family houses, green grass lawns, and not many tall apartment buildings. Most large cities in North America are surrounded by **suburbs**. The adjective form is suburban.

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

Nathan:	I heard you were house shopping. In what areas are you looking?
Gregory:	I like the city, but my wife really wants to live in the suburbs .
Nathan:	Oh, but the suburbs are so boring!
Gregory:	That could be. But we're planning on having children, so we're thinking it might be good for them.
Nathan:	OK, I see your point.

Paul:	Hey, aren't you from Montreal?
Angeline:	Yes, I am.
Paul:	I love Montreal. What part are you from?
Angeline:	Well, actually, I'm from just outside the city. It's a suburb called Roxboro. Have you heard of it?
Paul:	No, I haven't. I'm only familiar with the downtown area.
Angeline:	Yeah. Roxboro is a smaller suburb . Not many people have heard of it—even people from Montreal!

To hallucinate

Verb

To hallucinate is to see or imagine things that aren't really there. In this episode, Andrew says, "Unless I'm **hallucinating**" because he's not sure about whether his memory is good or if he is imagining something that isn't true. You can **hallucinate** because of hard drugs or other physical problems, but we usually use the verb as a joke.

Here are a couple more examples with **to hallucinate**:

Pat:	Earlier, I was thinking of that time we went camping in Colorado. That was fun.
Eva:	What? We've never been to Colorado.
Pat:	Of course we have. About 6 years ago.
Eva:	Either you're hallucinating or you're thinking of someone else, because I know for a fact that I have never been to Colorado.
Pat:	Really? That's strange. Then who am I thinking about?

Hyeonji:	I was reading about some ultra-marathon runners this morning. Those people are crazy!
Farouk:	How so?
Hyeonji:	They run for hundreds and hundreds of kilometres.
Farouk:	That doesn't sound like fun at all.
Hyeonji:	I know! And after a while, some of them start hallucinating .
Farouk:	What do you mean?
Hyeonji:	Some people have their minds play tricks on them. While running, they start seeing things that aren't there. They have conversations while people who aren't there. It's really intense.
Farouk:	You won't ever find me running one of those!

A buck

Noun, informal

A buck is a common term for a dollar in Canada and in the United States. Morag mentions that she would sometimes be given 5 **bucks** and a note for lunch. That means she received \$5 and a note.

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

Sherry:	Do you know anyone who's selling a bicycle?
Yoon:	I thought you bought one last week.
Sherry:	I was going to, but the seller wanted 400 bucks . That's a lot more than I'm willing to pay.
Yoon:	I see. How much are you willing to spend?
Sherry:	Somewhere in the \$100 to \$200 range.
Yoon:	I know a shop nearby. Give me a second and I'll send you the address.

Eddie:	Hey, I found this super cool bar with really cheap drinks last night.
Dave:	How much were they?
Eddie:	Only a buck fifty.
Dave:	\$1.50 for a drink? That's a great price.
Eddie:	I know. That's why I'm telling you!

Single parent

Noun

At one point in this episode, Morag mentions she had a **single parent**. That means she lived either with her mother or her father. Having a **single parent** might be because the parents divorced, they never were together, or one of them died. **Single parent** can also be an adjective, as in a **single parent** household or a **single parent** family.

Here are a couple more examples with **single parent**:

Heidi:	Wow, you're buying a lot of groceries. Do you always buy that much?
Irene:	Actually, I'm buying food for my sister.
Heidi:	Your sister? How come?
Irene:	She's a single parent . It's been difficult for her these past few years, so I try to help her as much as I can.
Heidi:	Oh, I didn't about that. You're a very kind sister.

Dean:	When you think of your childhood, were you happy?
Kamal:	I thought so. My parents got divorced when I was 7 years old.
Dean:	That doesn't sound like fun. Did you split your time between your parents?
Kamal:	I went to live with my mother. My father moved out of the country soon after.
Dean:	Was it difficult living with a single parent ?
Kamal:	For me, I was just a kid. It wasn't so bad. But, thinking back, it must have been really hard on my mother.

Extracurricular activities

Idiom

Extracurricular activities are activities outside of regular class hours. As mentioned in the episode, popular **extracurricular activities** are math or language classes, music lessons, or sports activities. Although you can say an **extracurricular activity**, the plural form is more common.

Here are a couple more examples with **extracurricular activities**:

Keith:	Did you do a lot of homework when you were at school?
Yann:	I should have done a lot of homework, but I rarely did. I was too busy.
Keith:	Too busy? What do you mean?
Yann:	When I was in primary school, I had so many extracurricular activities . I played with the band. I was on the track team. I was also a Boy Scout. So when I didn't always do my homework, my teachers understood why.

William:	I'm thinking of signing up my son for some extracurricular activities . What do your children do?
Valery:	Normal stuff. One takes piano lessons. The other likes karate.
William:	Is it very expensive?
Valery:	Through the school, it hardly costs anything—just a small administrative fee.

To brush up on [something]

Idiom

To brush up on [something] is to refresh your knowledge on something. Towards the end of this episode, Morag says that she got **to brush up on her cartoons**. She means she got to know cartoons better. For example, if you took French classes a long time ago but can't remember much now, you can **brush up on your French** by studying it again.

Here are a couple more examples with **to brush up on [something]**:

Jill:	Do you have any plans for the winter vacation?
George:	I was thinking of going to Peru and Argentina.
Jill:	Cool. That sounds interesting. Can you speak Spanish?
George:	I took a few years of Spanish in high school, but I'm pretty rusty nowadays. I definitely should brush up on my Spanish before my trip.

Yolanda:	Next question: what is the capital of New Zealand?
John:	Um, is it Auckland?
Yolanda:	No. It's Wellington. What's the capital of Australia?
John:	I know this. It's Sydney.
Yolanda:	No! It's Canberra.
John:	Geez, I really need to brush up on my world capitals before our trivia competition.

Quiz

1. What does it means to hallucinate?

- a) to see beautiful things
- b) to see strange things
- c) to see things that aren't in front of you
- d) to see hallows

2. What does Andrew think Canadian parents won't let their children do these days?

- a) participate in extracurricular activities
- b) walk to school alone
- c) play with friends before doing their homework
- d) take the bus in the city

3. What does it means to brush up on something?

- a) to brush your hair
- b) to learn something
- c) to search for something on the internet
- d) to relearn something

4. Which of the following is a good example of a suburb?

- a) a community outside of a larger city
- b) a neighbourhood downtown
- c) a remote island
- d) a countryside town

5. In this episode, Morag says she played the strings. Which of the following is a stringed instrument?

- a) an oboe
- b) a drum
- c) a triangle
- d) a bass guitar

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What are your memories of going to elementary school?
2. What kind of extracurricular activities did you do?
3. What kind of extracurricular activities did you want to do?
4. If money wasn't an issue, would you want to send your children to a private or public school? Why?
5. Did you have packed lunches or did you buy your own lunches when you were at school? Which would you have preferred?
6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of allowing children to walk to school on their own?

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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