

Simplified Speech #123 – Independence Day in the USA

Episode description

Everyone loves a good party! Every July 4th in the United States, Americans celebrate their Independence Day national holiday with fireworks, family gatherings, and good food. Hear what hosts Andrew and Kassy have to say about Canadian and American national holiday festivities in this episode of Simplified Speech.

Simplified Speech is a series in which native English speakers discuss topics using easy English for everyone to follow along. In this episode, you will hear interesting expressions like shenanigans, foreign concept, and to kick up a fuss.

Fun fact

There is a very popular action movie called National Treasure starring Nicolas Cage, in which a secret map is written on the back of the American Declaration of Independence. While the movie is not historically accurate, you might enjoy the action scenes!

Expressions included in the study guide

- New on the block
- Shenanigans
- Foreign concept
- Inclusive
- To kick up a fuss
- To face [one's] history



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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello there, everyone, my name's Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello, friends, welcome back to Culips. This is Simplified Speech, which is the Culips series that features clear and easy to understand English conversations between two native speakers. And we hope that by listening to the series, you can improve your English listening and speaking skills and level up your English abilities. Today I'm joined by my cohost, Kassy, who is in the USA right now. Hey there, Kassy, how's it going?

Kassy: Hey, Andrew, I'm doing awesome and I'm looking forward to our conversation today because it's about America. We're going to talk about the Fourth of July.

Andrew: Which, for listeners who don't know, is essentially America's birthday. Is that the simple way to put it?

Kassy: Yes, that's right, the day of our independence from England.

Andrew: All right, great. Well, we'll get into that conversation in just a moment, but before we do, listeners, I want to let you know that there is a study guide and transcript available for this episode for all Culips members. And following along with the study guide while you listen to our conversation here today is the best way to study with us. And, also, when you become a Culips member, you'll be able to support the work that we do at Culips and keep allowing us to make English lessons for people all over the world. Additionally, you'll also get a bunch of other extras when you become a member, like an invitation to the monthly livestreams that Kassy and I do every month. You can come online and join Kassy and I for a live video hangout, it's really fun. You'll also get exclusive access to our Fluency Files series, which is only for Culips members, plus so much more. So to become a member and to get all of these awesome things, just visit Culips.com.

Kassy: We also wanted to give a shout-out to our listener Maryam from Iran, who left us a nice comment on Castbox. Maryam wrote, "I really enjoy listening to your podcasts. They are so helpful and I can use it in my daily speaking with others."

Andrew: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for that great review, Maryam and a shout-out to all of our listeners from Iran. I know we have a lot of passionate English learning listeners in Iran and we do appreciate you guys so much because, Kassy, a lot of our listeners in Iran actually have problems listening to Culips because of some of the internet restrictions there.

Kassy: Ah, really?

Andrew: Yeah, and they have to jump through a lot of hoops to find us. It's not as easy as some other places. So we really appreciate all of our listeners from there. And we especially appreciate the people who give us kind reviews on their favourite podcast platform. And, everyone, leaving a positive review and a five-star rating, you know, on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to your podcasts really helps us out a lot because it allows more English learners from around the world find Culips and study with us.

All right, with that being said, it's time to talk about the Fourth of July. So let's get started, Kassy. Hmm, where should we begin? The Fourth of July. We said it was America's birthday and the mark of independence from England. When did this go down? When did this happen? The independence from the former English colony?

Kassy: Well, of course it happened on July 4th, but it was in 1776.

Andrew: 1776. All right, well, I'm from Canada, and Canada became a country in 1867. Officially, that is when the country of Canada started. So our cousin to the south, the USA, is a little bit older than Canada but, relatively speaking, we're both kind of new countries, right? Compared to, like, you know, China or Japan or Korea, these countries that have been around for thousands of years. Both the USA and Canada, we're kind of **newcomers on the block**.

Kassy: I can't believe how young Canada is. It's like almost 100 years younger than the US.

Andrew: Yeah, it's pretty wild, right? Like, of course, there were the First Nations people who have been living on the North American continent for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. So it's not like it was just an empty place and then, boom, it was a country in 1867. But the formation of the government and the start of the, you know, formal, independent country, that began in 1867. So, yeah, relatively recently.

However, Kassy, I think we should avoid going too much into the historical detail of the Fourth of July, maybe that's not the most fascinating part. The most fascinating part is the modern traditions and how you guys celebrate the Fourth of July.

In Canada, growing up, I watched a lot of American TV. It was a lot more interesting and funny and engaging than Canadian TV. So I spent a lot of my younger years watching American TV every day when I'd come home from school and turn on the TV and watch the TV channels from Washington state, which is the state that is closest to my hometown. So I feel like I have a kind of good feeling for what Americans do on the Fourth of July. But I've never actually celebrated in the States on the Fourth of July. So could you break it down and explain to me and our listeners what American people do to celebrate this holiday?

Kassy: Yeah, sure. So I think the number one thing Americans do on Fourth of July is eat and wear or use something that has the American flag on it. It is the icon of the Fourth of July. People wear swimming suits with the American flag on it. They have towels, they have tablecloths, they have miniature flags they wave around. It's just everywhere.

Andrew: So it's quite a patriotic day, then. It sounds like you guys celebrate by displaying your flag almost everywhere and being proud of your country.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. Actually, you know, it's Fourth of July weekend coming up. And I already see a giant flag hung, like, five doors down for me at this hotel I'm staying at.

Andrew: Yeah, listeners, we should say that we are recording this episode on July 2nd. So we are a few days here before the Fourth of July. However, I think by the time we release this episode, unfortunately, the July 4th holiday will have passed. But, Kassy, you're in a good position here, just a couple of days before the Fourth of July, to tell us about what the situation is like to the lead-up of this day.

Kassy: Yeah, I think another big lead-up for this day would be food prep. You know, I told you that, you know, families and friends usually love to get together on this day and have barbecue parties. So we'll buy hotdogs, hamburgers, chicken, vegetables, chips, fruit, anything you can imagine, to have a smorgasbord of different foods on July 4th.

Andrew: OK, wow. So it sounds like a real big party. And, you know, Canada Day, which is Canada's birthday, is actually on July 1st. So that's another thing that Canada and the USA have in common is that our national holidays, which celebrate the creation of our countries, come very close to each other, Canada on July 1st, USA on July 4th. And in Canada on July 1st, it's usually a pretty crazy party. There are lots of people drinking and hanging out on the streets, and there's house parties on Canada Day, and there are fireworks at night. So I'm wondering if there are any of these kinds of **shenanigans** that happen in America, too? Lots of drinking and partying and lighting things on fire and exploding fireworks?

Kassy: Yes, definitely, all of the above. Lots of drinking and fireworks are a must in my family. My mom loves them.

Andrew: Interesting. So, Kassy, what about you this upcoming Fourth? What are you going to do?

Kassy: A little unfortunate for me, actually, my first time celebrating Fourth of July in the US in 5 years, but my beach vacation ends on the Fourth this year. So, I will be driving back to Pennsylvania.

Andrew: Oh no. That's terrible. So you won't really get to celebrate then this year.

Kassy: Yes, but we're stopping for the night in a small town along the way. And I'm hoping that nearby there will be somebody setting off fireworks that I can see, because that's my favourite part about the Fourth of July holiday.

Andrew: OK, Kassy, I have one final question here for you that's kind of related to the Fourth of July, kind of not, but it is about the USA. So I'm curious about this. When I watch American movies, I often see scenes that happen at school where the students have to sing the national anthem or recite the Pledge of Allegiance every day before class starts. Is this just something that producers put in movies? Or does this really happen? When you were a student, did you have to sing the national anthem every day before class?

Kassy: Not the national anthem, but we do have to do the Pledge of Allegiance every single day.

Andrew: Wow!

Kassy: They've actually been changing it a little recently, I think. There's some parts that people don't agree with politically. So it has changed, like a couple of words, since I've been in school, I think. But, yeah, they still do it.

Andrew: Wow! And for our listeners that don't know what the Pledge of Allegiance is, could you kind of break it down? You don't have to recite it, but could you just tell us what it is?

Kassy: Yeah, sure. I'm pretty sure other countries have this. I know Korea has it. It's a pledge where you put your right hand above your heart. And you, you know, say a few words in honour of your country showing that you're a patriotic, good, supportive citizen.

Andrew: Interesting. Yeah, we don't have a pledge of allegiance in Canada. So it's a little bit of a **foreign concept** for me. Of course, we have a national anthem and we would sing the national anthem sometimes at school when I was a student. And, actually, the reason I am asking you this question is because it came up when I was surfing Wikipedia the other day. I learned about the Canadian government's laws surrounding mandating students singing the national anthem at school. And where I grew up, the law is that we have to sing it three times a year, every year at school. So I think three times a year is not bad, but every day would be pretty intense, I think.

Kassy: It is! And I don't know about Canada, Andrew, but in the second grade, I remember this very clearly, we had to learn every song imaginable that has some sort of lyric about the USA. For example, *God Bless America*, *I Love the USA*, *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*.

Andrew: *America the Beautiful*.

Kassy: Yes, all of them. I can remember almost every word.

Andrew: Well, that's funny that you say that because I was watching an ice hockey game the other day. And before the ice hockey game starts, they always sing the national anthems of Canada and the USA, if it's a Canadian and American team playing, which that game was. And about 3 or 4 years ago-ish, maybe a little bit longer than that, the lyrics to the national anthem of Canada changed so that they would be more **inclusive** to everybody. There were some lyrics that were kind of gendered only towards males, but in the modern era, that doesn't really reflect all Canadians. So the government changed the lyrics to be more **inclusive** of all citizens. However, I was living abroad when that change happened, so I wasn't really too tuned in to that news. I knew it happened, but I kind of forgot about it.

So when the national anthems were playing at the start of the hockey game the other day, I was kind of singing along to the Canadian national anthem in my head. And when it came to the part of the lyric change, I sang the part that was familiar to me, the lyrics that I knew from when I was a kid, when I first learned the song. And then I was a little shocked, like, oh, yeah, they changed it. I need to learn these new lyrics so if I'm ever back in Canada, watching a hockey game with all of the other fans, I don't look like an idiot who doesn't know my own national anthem, in public.

Kassy: That's funny. Ah, wow, I wonder what it'd be like if we ever changed our national anthem. I can't even imagine.

Andrew: It was a big debate and a lot of conservative people who are fond of tradition and hate change, they really **kicked up a fuss** and, you know, in my opinion, it was such a minor lyric change that it doesn't really matter. And I guess that's more of my mindset as a younger person, I was totally for the lyric change.

And I think we could even make more changes to some of these things in the future. I think a lot of that is on the horizon, personally, Kassy, in both of our countries as we kind of **face our history** and we look forward and think about how we can make our countries better places for all people. Maybe historically, some people were treated poorly in the past. So we want to do things right now. And part of that is changing some of these traditions. But there is a lot of opposition from, like I said, conservative people or older people, and it's just a debate that we have to have in our countries.

But, Kassy, I think for today's conversation, we won't get into that topic, because it's very complicated and long. Instead, we'll just keep it light today. So maybe we'll just finish up here. Kassy, happy Fourth of July! Have a great time celebrating.

Kassy: Thank you, Andrew. I will

Andrew: And listeners all around the world, happy Fourth of July to you, as well.

So that's it for this episode, everyone. Thank you for listening. We hope you learned a lot with us today and enjoyed this conversation. Our website is Culips.com and if you want to get the study guide, including the transcript and practice exercises for this episode, all you have to do is check out Culips.com to sign up, become a member, and download it.

Kassy: Remember becoming a Culips member is a great way to support us, but it's not the only way. You can support us by leaving us five-star ratings and a nice review on your podcast app, telling your friends about Culips, and following us on social media.

Andrew: That's right. You can stay up to date with us by following us on Instagram or YouTube. Our email address is contact@Culips.com and if you'd like to send us a message, maybe suggest a topic for an upcoming episode or ask us a question, feel free to do that. We love hearing from you. We'll be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. See ya!

Kassy: Bye!

Detailed Explanations

New on the block Phrase

In this episode, Andrew and Kassy talk about the relatively young age of their respective home countries. Both Canada and the United States have been countries for less than 250 years, which makes them a lot younger than many other countries. Andrew says the two countries are **new on the block**.

To understand this expression, you need to think of all the countries in the world as a neighbourhood. If there is a new country that is formed, they are **new to the block**, new to the community of countries. Block in this expression refers to how sections of a city are separated into blocks.

Here are a couple more examples with **new on the block**:

Pete: The boss is going to give away two tickets to the hockey game tonight. What do you think of your chances of winning them?

Shelby: Probably not good.

Pete: Why do you say that? I thought he liked you.

Shelby: He does. But I'm still kind of **new on the block**. I've only been here a couple of months. He'll probably give the tickets to a more senior employee.

Mary: Oh, wow. This garlic bread is amazing.

Vance: I know, right?

Mary: How much did it cost?

Vance: It was free. It was a freebie that came with the pizza.

Mary: Seriously?

Vance: Yeah. This pizza place is **new on the block**, so I think they're offering free stuff to get the word out.

Shenanigans

Noun

After talking about the various Canada Day parties and festivities, Andrew asks Kassy if the United States have the same kind of **shenanigans** for their Independence Day. In this sense, Andrew uses the word **shenanigans** to mean wild, unruly, and possibly illegal behaviour, like drinking in the streets, having a big house party, and setting off fireworks.

Shenanigans is also often used when talking about youths who get into trouble. If your son or daughter is always doing something mischievous, you can say they are always up to their **shenanigans**.

Shenanigans is almost always pluralized. Saying a **shenanigan** sounds strange and is awkward English.

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

Jill: How come you're driving your parents' car? You told me they would never let you drive it again.

Patrick: Yes, but they are currently out of town.

Jill: Oh, you! You're always up to crazy **shenanigans**.

Patrick: Want to get in and go for a ride?

Jill: No way. You're going to get in trouble, and I want no part of that.

Monica: Do you want to go downtown and watch the hockey game at a bar?

Carl: I'd rather not.

Monica: Why not?

Carl: If we win, it's going to get way too crazy. There are so many **shenanigans** downtown every time we win a big game.

Monica: But that's why it's fun!

Foreign concept

Phrase

In this episode, Andrew tells Kassy that it is a **foreign concept** to him that American students have to pledge their allegiance to their national flag every day. He says this because Canadian students do not have this ritual.

A **foreign concept** is an idea or thing that you are not very familiar with. If you had never heard of Christmas, for example, Christmas celebrations would be a **foreign concept** to you because you have no experience with them.

You can also use this expression ironically. You can say that giving a friend a birthday gift is a **foreign concept** to you because you don't want to do it, even though you know that friends do often give each other birthday gifts.

Here are a couple more examples with **foreign concept**:

Mark: What were some of the differences you noticed during your trip to Canada?

Hyun: The main one is tipping.

Mark: What's weird about that?

Hyun: It's weird how you have to tip at some restaurants but not at fast food restaurants. I don't really understand the rules. Tipping is a completely **foreign concept** to me.

Mark: There's no tipping in Korea?

Hyun: Nope.

Vera: One of my fondest memories is waking up on Saturday morning and watching cartoons. Did you do that too when you were a kid?

Mary: That's a **foreign concept** to me.

Vera: What? You never watched cartoons on Saturday morning?

Mary: No way. I had to go to school on Saturdays.

Inclusive Adjective

In this episode, Andrew mentions the changes that were recently made to the Canadian national anthem. The lyrics “in all thy sons command” were changed to “in all of us command.” The older lyrics mention only males, whereas the newer lyrics are more **inclusive** because they refer to everyone.

Inclusive means to include more people or things. When using the word **inclusive** in a social context, it usually means that you are trying to include some minority or marginalized groups in the larger group. You are trying to make the minority group feel more welcome or included.

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

Harry: Here, take a look at the new program we have for our community centre.

Kyla: OK. Cool, we’re offering wheelchair basketball classes.

Harry: Well, it’s a community centre. I think we should be more **inclusive** towards members of the community who don’t always have the opportunity to play these sports.

Kyla: That’s good. Actually, I have a cousin who will definitely sign up for something like this.

Nancy: Next, we should talk about our company’s outlook for next year. Does anyone have any good ideas?

John: I think we should focus on being more **inclusive**.

Nancy: What do you mean by that?

John: We should recruit more foreign workers. Our company lacks diversity. Hiring more foreign workers will help us with creative new ideas.

To kick up a fuss

Idiom

When talking about the lyric change to the Canadian national anthem, Andrew says that there were many conservative people in the country who were opposed to the idea. At the time, they really **kicked up a fuss**. **To kick up a fuss** is to be loudly opposed to something.

Think of what happens when you kick a bunch of dirt that's on the ground. The dirt flies into the air and it can be uncomfortable. It would be an aggressive act to kick up dirt or dust towards someone. Likewise, **to kick up a fuss** has a similar sense, where you are making it very clear that you are opposed to something.

You can also say **to kick up a row**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to kick up a fuss**:

Ahmed: I need to talk to you about something. It's Jack again. He keeps complaining about the coffee machine in the break room. It's really annoying.

David: Oh, don't mind him. He's always **kicking up a fuss** about nothing important.

Ahmed: What should I do?

David: You don't need to do anything. Just don't listen to his noise.

George: What did you think about the manager's speech?

Felicia: I can't say that I liked it.

George: How come?

Felicia: I think she doesn't understand the problems ordinary workers face every day.

George: Why don't you say something?

Felicia: You know me. I'm not the type of person to **kick up a fuss**. How about you tell her?

To face [one's] history

Idiom

Near the end of this episode, Andrew talks about the changes that should continue to happen in Canada, as Canadians need **to face their history**. **To face [one's] history** is to acknowledge one's own history and be responsible for the mistakes of the past. Like all countries, Canada has terrible and ugly events in its past, notably the treatment of its Indigenous peoples. In **facing their history**, Canadians will need to know what happened and how they can make things better.

To face [one's] history is often said about countries and cultures, but you can also use the idiom in relation to an individual or a family's history. You can also say **to come to terms with [one's] history**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to face [one's] history**:

Fern: We need to release an apology for the pollution our company has released into the river.

Edward: Are you really sure you want to do that?

Fern: I'm more than sure. We need **to face our company's history**. There's no running away from it.

Edward: I understand. I'll work with my team on the wording of the statement.

Nate: I can't believe Phil got a promotion.

Mariko: Why do you say that?

Nate: You don't know? There's a rumour going around that he doesn't actually have a chemistry degree, like he says.

Mariko: Really? That's pretty crazy.

Nate: I know. Eventually, he's going to have **to face his history** and it won't be good for him. The boss is going to fire him so quickly.

Quiz

1. Which of the following 2 days are NOT national holidays in Canada or in the United States?

- a) July 1st
- b) July 2nd
- c) July 3rd
- d) July 4th

2. True or false? If you are new on the block, that means you are new to a situation or group.

- a) true
- b) false

3. What are you doing if you are trying to be inclusive of people?

- a) you want to include blueberries in your diet
- b) you want to help your parents with their mortgage
- c) you want to add the colours red and black in your painting
- d) you want to make sure elderly people can access your building

4. True or false? Generally, to face [one's] history is to deal with things in one's past that are not good.

- a) true
- b) false

5. Which of the following is a good example of being up to shenanigans?

- a) you are going to bed
- b) you are riding on the bus to work
- c) you are out partying all night
- d) you are buying groceries

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a national holiday in your home country? How do you celebrate it?
2. Have you ever been to another country during one of their national holidays? How was the experience? If you have only seen one in movies or on television, what are your thoughts?
3. Do you think the country you currently live in is inclusive regarding minorities and disadvantaged people?
4. Why kind of shenanigans did you get up to when you were younger?
5. What is the history that your home country needs to face?

Quiz Answers

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

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