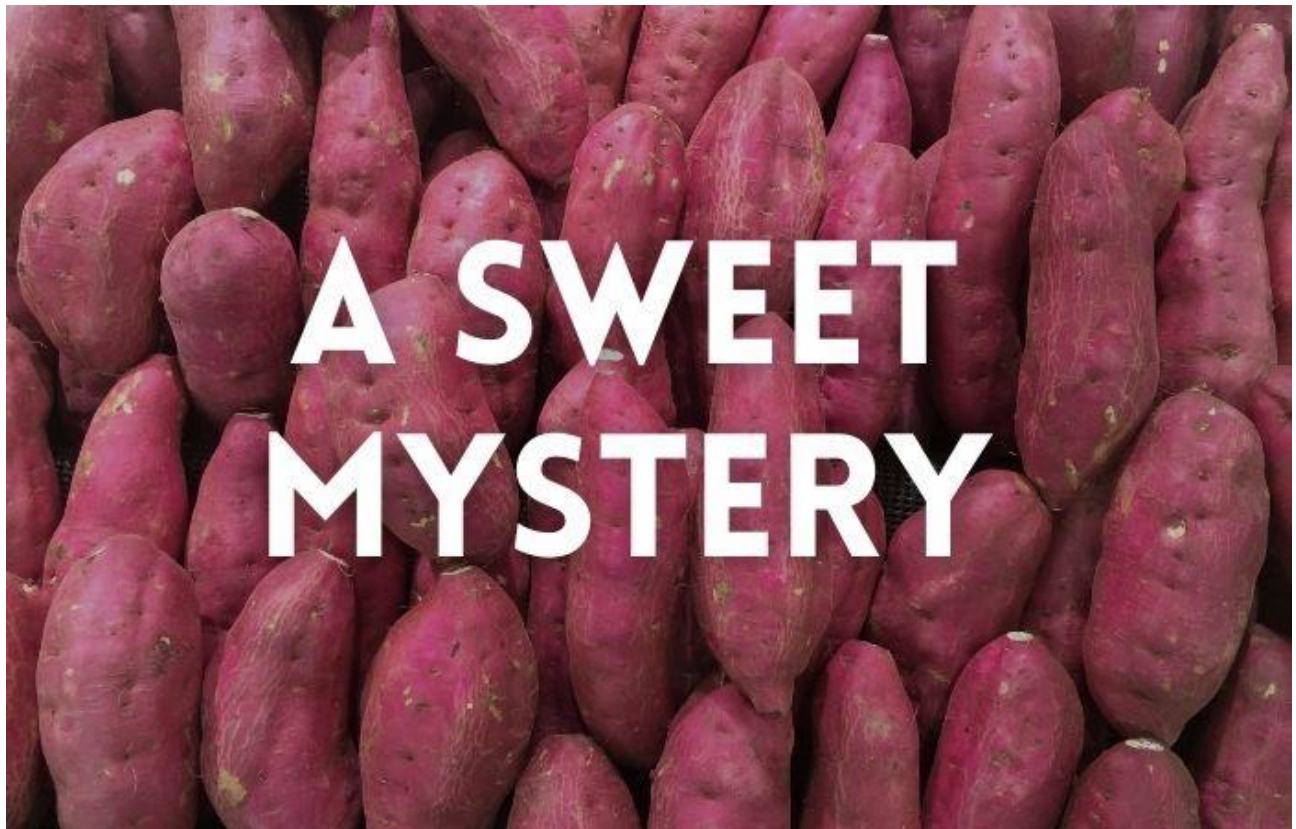


## A sweet mystery

### Episode description

In this bonus episode, Andrew talks about a mystery he has discovered in his neighborhood and about visiting a Christmas market in Seoul. Plus in the vocabulary lesson, he teaches you the expression **to not hold water**.

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Note: The transcript has been edited for clarity.

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**Andrew:** There's a mystery in my neighborhood that I'm trying to solve. It's not a murder case or a kidnapping. In fact, it's nothing gruesome or horrible like that. But on the contrary, it's rather sweet. A sweet mystery. My name is Andrew, and this is bonus episode number 31 of the Culips English Podcast. In this episode, I'll tell you all about the sweet mystery and some other stories from my week. Plus, I'll teach you a useful English expression and update you about what's new here at Culips. There's a free interactive transcript that accompanies this episode, and you can study with it by following the link in the description, or by visiting our website [Culips.com](http://Culips.com).

So, let's get back to the mystery. If you're a regular listener of Culips, you'll know that I have a little dog named Pinky. Every day, my wife and I take Pinky for a walk. And we usually do this not just once, but four times each day, in the morning, at lunch, in the evening, and at night. And to be honest, it's not so easy to walk him so often. And he always wants to seem to go outside, when I'm right in the middle of doing something like cooking dinner or working on Culips. And, in fact, he just came into my office a moment ago, and gave me those, "Let's go out for a walk" eyes. So, I think I'm gonna have to pause the recording here in a second and take him out for a walk.

But anyways, despite the fact that it is sometimes hard to walk him so often, I think it's good, it's good for both my wife and for me as well. Since we both work from home a lot, it's a good excuse for us to get outside to get some fresh air and to stretch our legs a little bit too. If you've ever had a dog before, then you'll know that they love to sniff and smell everything when they go outside. What looks like just a plain telephone pole to me is an absolutely fascinating place for Pinky. He loves to walk from telephone pole to telephone pole and give them all a good smell. Instead of houses, most people in my neighborhood live in what Korean people call *billa*, which I guess is a play on the English word villa. But really, that's not a good word to use in English to describe them. I think the best thing to call them in English is just a small apartment building.

So, each *billa* or each building is around four to five-stories tall and has maybe 10 to 15 condo-like units inside. And most of these buildings don't have any green space. There's not a front yard or a backyard. And so, because of this, some people like to plant trees or flowers in these big plastic containers, these big planters and they leave them on the road in front of their *billa* or their small apartment building. And it's great, it's a way to make both the road and the area in front of the building look more attractive. These planters and flowerpots that are on the road are also very popular with the dogs that live in the area. Every dog that walks by them likes to have a pee and to sniff there. So, when I walk Pinky, our route usually consists of going from telephone to telephone pole and planter to planter. If we go outside for a 20-minute walk, for example, at least 10 minutes of that time is spent at the poles and at the containers. And this is where the sweet mystery starts.

You see over the last week, I've started to find sweet potatoes randomly placed in various planters around the neighborhood. Now someone has definitely gone around from pot to pot and placed exactly one sweet potato in each one. How weird right? It's not like sweet potatoes were growing in these planters before and these are just leftovers from the sweet potato crop. It's nothing like that. There were never sweet potatoes growing in these planters before. So, without a doubt someone has deliberately done it. The questions that I'm trying to answer are who did it and why did they do it? I have no leads for either question. I have no idea what the answers to these questions are. If I had to guess, I'd say it's probably an older person. I work at a university, and I interact a lot with kids in their early 20s. And this doesn't seem like the kind of thing that they would be interested in doing. They're just too busy studying, or working part time



jobs, playing computer games, or dating to do something like this. So, I've ruled out younger people. To rule out. Woah, that's a great phrasal verb, and it just means to eliminate. So, I've ruled out young people. That means I've eliminated them from my bank of people who I think may be responsible for putting the sweet potatoes in the planters.

On the other hand, this does seem like the kind of thing a retired person would possibly do. So, my hunch, my feeling, my guess, is that it's an older person, but I really have no idea. Anyway, no matter who did it, the more interesting question is why. Why would someone go around placing exactly one sweet potato in each planter? And I have to mention, it's not like these planters are close. Some of them are at least 500 meters away from each other. And it's also not like the sweet potatoes are rotten, or that someone's trying to compost them. The sweet potatoes look pretty good. Like you could cook them and eat them if you wanted to.

So, I spent a little bit of mental energy this week thinking about the mystery. My first idea was that maybe there's some Korean superstition that I'm unaware of, you know, something like, if you leave sweet potatoes outside your door, then you will have good luck, or some evil spirits will be warded off or something like that. So, I asked my wife about that. And she said, there's no superstition like that. So, I ruled out that possibility. Another idea I thought of was that maybe someone may be leaving the sweet potatoes outside for the cats that live in the neighborhood.



There are street cats that live all over the place in Seoul, just on my block alone, there are at least five different cats that I know of, and they live outside. They're kind of semi-wild cats. I guess they're the descendants of pet cats, but these cats are not pets and they



aren't really friendly or tame. But at the same time, they're not afraid of humans. And you see them walking around all the time in the neighborhood. We see the same cats so often, in fact, that we've given them nicknames. The cat issue here in Seoul is a divisive issue. A divisive issue. Have you heard that phrase before? It means an issue that divides people into different groups. And this street cat issue is a classic example of a divisive issue, because it's divided people into three groups. There are the people who want to take care of the cats, that's one group. The other group is people who want to get rid of the cats, that's the other group. And there are the people who don't really care either way. So, there's these three groups. Now, this isn't true for all areas of the city, but the cats that live in my neighborhood at least, are pretty plump, and chubby, and they look clean, and also pretty healthy. And I think the reason for that is that there are people in my neighborhood that leave them food, and there are even some people who have built shelters for the cats so that they have a warm and dry place to sleep. Now, I don't know if this is the best way to deal with the street cat issue, but without going into all of the details about that. I can say that it is true that there are many people in my neighborhood who care for the street cats.

And I've also seen some people in my neighborhood who put out food for the pigeons that live in the neighborhood too. So, maybe they'll put some rice or some seed outside on the street. And when I'm outside walking Pinky, I can see a flock of pigeons gathered around that rice or seed to eat it in the morning. So, I thought, "Hmm, could it be that someone put the sweet potatoes out for the local cats or the local birds to eat?" That was my other theory. But if you are going to feed a cat or feed a pigeon, would you feed it a sweet potato? Is that the first food that you think a cat, or a pigeon would like to eat? I'm not an expert, but I don't think that's the kind of dish that a cat or a pigeon would enjoy.

My wife has another theory, and she thinks that maybe what happened is that someone went to the vegetable market. And while they were coming home, they accidentally dropped some of the sweet potatoes they bought on the street. And then later when someone else saw the random sweet potatoes, just lying on the road, they picked them up

and put them into the planters, so that the sweet potatoes could decompose, and they just didn't get smushed by a car on the street. I could see this idea being true if it were just one sweet potato. But since there are multiple sweet potatoes, and they're scattered in various spaces hundreds of meters apart, I don't think this idea holds water.

Have you ever heard anything like this before? Do you have a theory about who could be leaving the sweet potatoes in the planters? Do you know why in the world, they would do such a thing? If you have any ideas, leave a comment for me. At the moment, this is an unsolved mystery and I need your help to crack the case. By the way, to crack the case means to solve a mystery. So, I need your help to crack the case, to solve this mystery. And of course, if any new information arises or I discover any more clues about the scattered sweet potatoes, I'll be sure to give you an update in the future.

We're less than two weeks away from Christmas now and that means the festive season is in full swing. Here in Seoul, it feels pretty Christmassy. Although I think there are a lot of differences between the way Christmas is celebrated in most English-speaking countries and here in South Korea, it is a holiday here and it is celebrated by a lot of people. And all around the city you can see shops, cafes, and restaurants decorated for Christmas. There are even big Christmas trees lit up with glowing lights in a few places right in my neighborhood, like the closest subway station. In one of the Culips bonus episodes from the summer, I told you about going to an international festival that was organized by some of the foreign embassies that are located close to where I live. And at that festival, I ate a French-style hot dog. Did you hear that story, and do you remember that episode? Well, anyways, the same group of foreign embassies organizes a Christmas festival each year too and it's modeled after a European Christmas market.

I'm lucky enough to have traveled to Europe a few times, but I've never visited Europe in December. And I've never been to a Christmas market in Europe. From what I've heard, the Christmas markets in Germany are the best. And I would love to check one out someday. But for now, the Christmas market here in Seoul that is organized by the

European embassies, well, it will have to do. So, my wife and I decided to check out the Christmas market on Saturday. And like I said, I've never been to a Christmas market before. But I seem to remember seeing pictures of people going to the Christmas markets in Europe during the nighttime. I'm not sure if going to a Christmas market is a nighttime activity or not, but I have the feeling that it's something that people mostly do during the night. You know, so that you can see the Christmas lights and maybe there are some bonfires you could stand around and you could enjoy some delicious food and drinks, that kind of thing. It seems like a nighttime activity to me. If you're European and your country has Christmas markets, then please chime in and leave a comment and let me know if I'm correct or not.

But anyways, we went to the Seoul Christmas market on Saturday afternoon last week. And when we got there, we were extremely underwhelmed. Extremely underwhelmed. Disappointed is how we felt. There were tons of people, long lines for all the food, and the atmosphere didn't seem very Christmassy at all. There were some concerts scheduled for the day and when we arrived, there was a trio of mini skirt wearing women performing on the stage. One played an electric violin, the other played a keytar, and finally the other one played an electric cello. They actually seemed like a pretty cool group, but the volume was too loud. And it didn't fit the atmosphere of a Christmas market in my opinion. We walked around to the different booths to check out what was for sale, but we didn't buy anything because like I said the lines were too long, and it was too loud and too crowded. And after about 20 minutes of checking out the market, we had had enough, and we left. Instead of going home right away, we decided to visit a cafe that we like that's in that neighborhood. So, we walked there, we had a coffee, we hung out for a bit. But back on our way home, we had to pass by the Christmas market one more time. And by this time, it was now seven in the evening, which seemed like the time that you should visit a Christmas market in my mind.

So, I asked my wife if we could stop by again, and we went again. And this time, we had just a much better experience. The loud concerts had ended, and now there was just

some gentle jazz playing in the background through the speakers. The crowds had died down, and there weren't as many people and all of the lines had also died down, so we could actually walk around freely and enjoy the market a bit more. It was a little chilly out, so we bought a couple of glasses of mulled wine to warm us up.



Do you know what mulled wine is? Actually, it's kind of new to me. Although I had heard of mulled wine before this was, I think, my first time drinking it. So, mulled wine is a traditional European beverage that is usually consumed around the Christmas season. And essentially, it's just a wine that has been heated up. So, it's served warm and there's some citrus and some spices inside as well. And it was nice, I thought it was quite delicious. At the Christmas market, it was called *Glühwein*, which I'm probably butchering the pronunciation of. So, I'm sorry to all of the German listeners out there. But that is the

German word for mulled wine. And interestingly, I learned that the *Glüh* part of the word is related to the English word for glow. So, you could think of *Glühwein* as meaning a kind of glowing or smoldering hot wine. So yeah, I thought that was cool. And I did enjoy the glass that I had. I'm sure that the kind that my wife and I had wasn't exactly the same as the kind that served in Europe, but it did the trick and it made us feel warm and glowing.

Now I'm the kind of person that when I try something new, I like to learn lots of information about it. So, after the Christmas market, when I came back home, I had to search for mulled wine on Wikipedia. And according to Wikipedia, at Christmas markets in Poland, mulled wine is spiked with vodka to make it even a more potent drink. So, I thought that was pretty intense. And if you're a listener from Poland, please chime in and let me know if that information is correct or not. I think if I were to have that Polish mulled wine, instead of



glowing, I'd be breathing fire. I also learned that mulled beer, which is beer that's been heated and then flavored with spices and honey and citrus can be found at Polish Christmas markets. I've never tried anything like that before either, but I'm going to add it to my bucket list. A Polish Christmas market sounds like a pretty fun time.

By the way, for any word nerds out there. The term that I've been using for these heated alcoholic beverages in English is mulled. Mulled wine or mulled beer, M-U-L-L-E-D. And here, the word mulled means heated. And it's really interesting because we only use this word to describe heated wine or heated beer. So, it's a very, very specific adjective that we rarely use, except to talk about these warm beverages that people drink around Christmas. So, I don't think you have to like memorize this word and add it to your vocabulary because you won't be using it very often. And now you know that mold means warmed up.

So, all in all, the atmosphere of the Christmas night market was much, much better than during the day. And we hung around for a while, we enjoyed the festivities and we sipped on our mulled wine. And I have to say that it helped me start to get excited for Christmas. And although this year, my wife and I don't have any special Christmas plans, and I usually don't like starting Christmas celebrations too early. You know some people start to celebrate Christmas in November, which to me is terrible. You have to wait at least until the middle of December. So, right around now is when I can start to get into the Christmas spirit. And I have to say that this Christmas market that we went to was perfect for kicking off the holiday season for me and my family.

I've been hosting the Culips English Podcast for many years now. And a question that I get asked from time to time is, why do our episodes have no background music? Some listeners have suggested that having some music in the background could be nice. And the answer that I usually give to this question is that personally, I'm very sensitive to music, and I find it can be really distracting if it's not done correctly. As a Korean learner, I spend a lot of time learning with YouTube. Unfortunately, for me, there aren't any kinds of podcasts like Culips to help me with studying Korean. So instead, I often watch YouTube

videos, and many of them have background music playing, in well, the background. And often that music is looped repeatedly, and it gets on my nerves and annoys me. Or sometimes it's mixed too loudly, and I can't hear the speakers clearly. However, at the same time, I understand this question, and I understand why the listeners asked me it. And I think music and sound design, when done correctly, can actually really improve the quality of a podcast. There's a podcast that some of you might know about, which is called Radiolab. And they do an awesome job at making the stories they tell in their episodes even more interesting, through the use of sound effects and background music that is really well done. It's not too much. It's not too little. It's just right.

Back in my younger days, I used to make a lot of music, I played in bands and also enjoyed just writing songs or making beats or tunes on my computer too. Now, I was recently doing some work on my computer and listening to Spotify. And I had just a random playlist on playing in the background. And a song came on that caught my attention, and I had never heard the artist before. So, I clicked on his name, to read his biography and learn some more information about him. The musician's name is H. Takahashi, and he's an ambient musician from Japan. And in his biography, it said that he composes all his music just by using an app called GarageBand on his iPhone. Now, this blew me away. His music is really beautiful and lovely, but it was just made on his smartphone. That's incredible! I'm also an iPhone user, and I have the GarageBand app on my phone too, but I've never used it. So, I got inspired by this guy H. Takahashi and I decided to open the app and play around with GarageBand a bit.

And I have to say it was pretty easy to come up with some very simple songs and sounds. And it got me thinking, "Hmm would it be a good idea to use some of this style of music in Culips episodes?" Here's a sample of what I'm talking about. Can you hear this music in the background? This is something that I came up with really, really quickly in the GarageBand app. Of course, I'd only want to use music in Culips if it helped to tell the story better. If music can help me communicate with you clearer, and help you make a deeper emotional connection with English. Well, maybe that perhaps could help you learn

and acquire the language better. But of course, I'm curious about what you think. Maybe you're a sound-sensitive person like me and would just prefer to have clean audio of only the speaker's voice that you can hear crystal clear. Or maybe you'd rather have some background music and sound effects. Either way, I'd love to know what your thoughts are. And you can let me know by posting a comment on our website or by emailing me at [andrew@culips.com](mailto:andrew@culips.com). Or hey, maybe you're even a musician and you'd like to donate some of your songs for us to use in our episodes. I think that would be really cool too. And if that sounds like you, then feel free to reach out and let me know.

And now it's time for this week's vocabulary lesson.

A little earlier I used a wonderful idiomatic expression when I was talking about the sweet potato mystery, and my wife's idea about why the sweet potatoes were placed in various planters across my neighborhood. She said that maybe someone had dropped the sweet potatoes on their way home from the market, and someone else had just picked them up and put them in the planters to decompose. However, I said that, in my opinion, that theory didn't hold water. It didn't hold water. That's this week's key expression: to not hold water, we always use it as a negative. Let's go back and listen to the part of the episode where I used this expression to not hold water a couple more times. Here we go.

Since there are multiple sweet potatoes, and they're scattered in various spaces hundreds of meters apart, I don't think this idea holds water.

So, can you guess what this expression means from the context? To not hold water. Well, if a theory, or an idea, or someone's argument or opinion, or even an excuse doesn't hold water, then it means that you can't believe it, or that it's impossible to be true because there are no supporting facts. I want you to imagine a cup in your mind, OK? Just a cup like you would use for drinking water out of. Now imagine that there are many cracks and holes in that cup. If you poured water into that cup with the cracks and the holes, all the

water would just spill out, right? Well, that's the imagery behind this expression. Because if someone's theory or opinion or argument doesn't hold water, then it means there are cracks and holes in the logic and reasoning behind it. So, to help us understand this expression fully and to understand also how English speakers use this expression in real-life situations, I prepared three examples for us to check out. So, let's do that right now. Here we go!

## **Example sentence number one**

Peter said he couldn't come hiking with me because he has to work. But his excuse doesn't hold water. His store's closed every Sunday.

Let's break this example down. In this example, the speaker says that his friend Peter can't come hiking with him. Why? Well, because Peter said that he had to work. But then the speaker says that this excuse doesn't hold water. OK, it doesn't hold water. It can't be true because Peter works at a store and that store is closed every Sunday. And I guess the friends wanted to go hiking on Sunday. So, if the store is closed on Sunday, but Peter says he has to work at the store on Sunday. Well, then that doesn't make sense, right? So, we obviously know that Peter is making an excuse in that situation. And the excuse can't be true. It doesn't hold water.

## **Example sentence number two**

I watched a movie last night about a guy who was falsely accused of murder. He didn't commit the crime, but the judge didn't believe him because he said his story didn't hold water. After 25 years, the truth was finally revealed, and the man was let out of prison.

Let's break this example down. In this example, we hear about a man who was falsely accused of murder. So, this means that he didn't commit a murder. However, a judge thought that he did and sent him to prison, mistakenly, OK? Why did the judge send this innocent man to prison? Well, because he didn't believe his alibi, his excuse, his story,

OK? The judge said that that man's story didn't hold water. So, I guess in the judge's opinion, he just didn't believe the facts of that man's excuse. Even though in the end, it turned out that the man was telling the truth.

### **Example sentence number three**

My friend's dad honestly believes that the earth is flat. I tried to tell him that that idea doesn't hold any water, but he's just so stubborn and refused to listen to me.

Let's break this final example down. In this example, we heard from a guy who was talking about his friend's dad, and his friend's dad believes that the earth is flat. Believe it or not, there are still some people who believe that the earth is flat. And so, the speaker of this example, tried to convince his friend's dad that the Earth is actually round, OK? And that the flat-earth idea doesn't hold any water. That there are no facts supporting the flat-earth idea. But the friend's dad was just so stubborn, and he refused to listen to the speaker.

Congratulations on making it to the end of another English study session with me. I'm proud of you. You did a great job. You made it to the end, and this wasn't a short episode, so nice work. If you're looking for more lessons to learn with, make sure to visit our website. Once again, it is Culips.com We've got hundreds of episodes and for Culips members, each one comes with a full transcript and study guide. So that's it for me for now, but of course I'll be back soon with another brand-new episode, and I will talk to you all then. Take care and goodbye.

### **Episode credits**

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