

Curious Question #10 – “Let’s” and “Why don’t”

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone, this is Harp...

Maura: And Maura...

Harp: At Culips.com, with the **Curious Questions** podcast.

Maura: This is the podcast where we answer your questions. So please send us your questions. The email address is questions@culips.com.

Harp: That’s C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Maura: You can also check out our website where we have **Lipservice**. That includes the transcript to this episode and all our episodes.

Harp: There are also **Detailed Explanations** where we go more in depth with the subject and also some quizzes to test your knowledge.

Maura: Check it out!

Harp: The question in this episode is from Ming in China:

Maura: *What is the difference between “**Let’s do...**” and “**Why don’t we do...**”?*

Harp: The answer is simple. There is really no difference in meaning or intention. They are essentially the same. In your standard ESL textbook these expressions are often taught together because they are used in the same way: to suggest something.

Maura: **Let’s** go see a movie. **Why don’t we** see a movie? In both cases I’m suggesting we see a movie.

Harp: With “**Let’s...**” it’s actually “Let us,” but we always say it as a contraction, “**Let’s.**” I have never heard anyone use this expression without the contraction. Someone might say “Let us” to sound really proper and formal.

Maura: “Let us go to tea.” I was trying to sound really proper and formal there. Maybe you noticed. With “**Why don’t ...?**” we’re suggesting that there is no reason to not do that. In other words, there are no reasons to prevent us from doing that. That is the technical meaning.

Harp: “**Why don’t...?**” is written as a question; whereas the expression with “**Let’s...**” is written as a sentence. Even though “**Why don’t...?**” is written as a question, we don’t answer it directly.

Maura: Here’s an example of how you might answer a suggestion with “**Why don’t we...?**” Go ahead Harp...

Harp: **Why don’t we** go for a walk?

Maura: OK, sure.

Harp: **Why don’t we** watch a movie tonight?

Maura: I just watched one last night, so I don’t really want to.

Harp: We can also say, “**Why doesn’t he...?**” or “**Why don’t I...?**” In this way it is more flexible. When we say “**Let’s...**” it is always referring to “us.” But with “**Why don’t...?**” we can use it to talk about different individuals and groups of people.

Maura: Here are a couple more examples using “**Why don’t...?**” with different people:

Harp: **Why don’t you** make dinner while I make dessert?

Maura: Sounds good.

Harp: **Why doesn’t he** go for a walk now?

Maura: That’s a good idea. I’ll suggest it to him.

Harp: One more thing about “**Why don’t...?**” —even though we use it to make suggestions, it can also be used as a real question.

Maura: Here is an example:

Harp: **Why doesn’t he** work?

Maura: He doesn’t work because he doesn’t have a working visa.

The difference between using “**Why don’t...?**” to make a suggestion and using it to ask a real question is determined by the context in which it is used. If you are trying to figure out what to do, it’s probably being used to make a

suggestion. If you are not, and maybe talking about someone else's actions, then maybe it is a real question.

Harp: Now back to the original question and the simplest answer: “**Let’s...**” and “**Why don’t...?**” are both ways to make suggestions. They are both casual and friendly.

Maura: **Let’s** finish up this episode now.

Harp: Yeah and **why don’t** we go grab a coffee, Maura?

Maura: All right, sounds good. So that’s all we have for you today, hopefully you see how to use “**Why don’t we...?**” and “**Let’s...**” to make suggestions. If you have any questions you can always send them to us.

Harp: Thanks for listening everyone.

Maura: **Let’s** go grab that coffee now.

Harp: Good idea!

Maura: Bye!

Harp: Bye!

Detailed Explanation

This will be a short Detailed Explanation because “**Let’s**” and “**Why don’t...?**” are not complicated.

“**Let’s**” and “**Why don’t...?**” are two ways to make a suggestion.

Let’s take a nap.

Why don’t we stay awake all night?

“**Let’s**” and “**Why don’t...?**” are used most often with activities.

Making Suggestions

Here are a few other ways that we can make suggestions:

- A) **How about** we go for a walk?
- B) **How about** going for a walk?
- C) **What about** just hanging out here?

In example A, we follow “**How about...**” with a pronoun: “we.”

In example B, we follow “**How about...**” with a gerund: “going.” We can skip the pronoun and just use the gerund if the subjects are already established. If the subject is you and your friend because you are talking about what to do, then it is established.

In example C, with “**What about...**” we use only the gerund, for example: “hanging.” A pronoun doesn’t sound right with the expression “**What about...?**”

A gerund is the “- ing” form of the verb when used as a noun. In example B, “going” is the gerund. In example C, “hanging” is the gerund.

Here are some examples of making suggestions in conversation:

Speaker 1: I don’t know what I feel like doing tonight.
Speaker 2: Me neither. **Let’s** just hang out here.
Speaker 1: All right. That sounds good. Hey, **how about** watching a bit of TV?
Speaker 2: OK.

Speaker 1: I need to paint my walls. But I am not sure which colour I want.
Speaker 2: **What about** painting it two colours?
Speaker 1: That could work.

Hanging out

I used this expression twice in the section above. Do you already know this expression?

“**To hang out**” is a way of talking about doing nothing special. I could say, “Last night I went to my friend’s place and we just **hung* out**.” For more examples, check out how I used “**hang out**” in the examples above.

If you are **hanging out**, you are probably just watching TV, talking with friends, or reading a book. Often teenagers like to **hang out** in public places, for example, malls or schoolyards and parks (I did this when I was younger). They simply talk and do random activities, maybe even sports. “**To hang out**” is very general, activities may happen but nothing was planned.

* “To hang out” is an irregular verb: the past tense is “hung out.”

Examples:

I hung out at the mall when I was a teenager.

My friends and I hung out at the coffee shop last night.

“Let’s” and “Why don’t?”

As we mentioned in this episode, “**Why don’t...?**” is more flexible than “**Let’s...**” It is more versatile because we can change the subject to “**Why don’t you...?**” or “**Why doesn’t she...?**” With “**Let’s...**” the subject is always “**us**.”

“**Let’s...**” is always about “us” and it is always based on an activity to do soon. When “**Why don’t...?**” is not followed by “we,” the sentence is more flexible.

Look at the difference between these two sentences:

Let’s move the table to the other side of the room.

(This is an activity to do together, probably at that moment.)

Why don’t you move the table to the side of the room?

(This is a suggestion to someone who is moving furniture in her apartment. The speaker may not help move the table.)

More examples:

Let’s add more colours.

(This is an activity to do together, probably at that moment.)

Why doesn’t she add more colours?

(This is a suggestion to someone. The speaker is probably not involved in adding more colours.)

“Why don’t” as suggestion and “Why don’t” as a real question

Sometimes the difference between “**Why don’t...?**” as a suggestion and “**Why don’t...?**” as a question is very clear. At other times it is not. Let’s look at some examples:

Julian: **Why don’t we** go for a walk? (SUGGESTION)

Erin: OK, sure. (Or) No, I’m tired.

Julian: **Why don’t we** go for a walk? (REAL QUESTION)

Erin: Because it’s raining.

In the first example Julian wants to go for a walk, and he wants Erin to go with him. We know this is a suggestion (and not a real question) by the way that Erin answers. She is either agreeing to go for a walk, or disagreeing.

In the second example Julian is asking for the real reason why they aren’t going for a walk. The real reason is because it is raining outside.

Sometimes it doesn’t matter if it is a question or a suggestion because the answers are the same. If there is a reason why we don’t do something then we say “no.” If there is no reason to say “no,” then usually the person agrees.

Let’s look again at the example for real questions from this episode.

Speaker 1: **Why doesn’t he** work?

Speaker 2: He doesn’t work because he doesn’t have a working visa.

This is a real question but it could also be a suggestion.

Speaker 1: **Why doesn’t he** work?

Speaker 2: That’s a good idea. I will suggest it to him.

If we use a thing then it is a real question.

Matt: **Why doesn’t** your stove work?

Catherine: I don’t know why. It just stopped.

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

1. Which are the two words that make up “Let’s”?

- a) Let is
- b) Let us
- c) Let has
- d) Let we

2. Which other expression is similar to “Let’s stay home and take it easy”?

- a) Why don’t we stay home and take it easy?
- b) Why do we stay home and take it easy?
- c) Why don’t they stay home and take it easy?
- d) Why aren’t we staying home and taking it easy?

3. Complete the conversation:

Catherine: What do you want to do tonight?

Robert: _____.

- a) Why let’s watch a movie don’t we?
- b) Why do we watch a movie?
- c) Why don’t we watch a movie?
- d) Let them watch a movie.

4. Which of the following is not correct?

- a) Let go to the park.
- b) Let’s go to the park.
- c) Why don’t we go to the park?
- d) Why don’t they go to the park?

5. Complete the conversation:

Jack: Paul wants to know what he can bring for dinner.

Nicole: _____ make a salad?

Jack: And then we can make dessert!

- a) Why doesn't he
- b) Why don't we
- c) Why don't they
- d) Why does he

Answers: 1.b 2.a 3.c 4.a 5.a