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COMPELLING CONVERSATIONS

Questions and Quotations on Timeless Topics

AN ENGAGING ESL TEXTBOOK FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS

Written, Compiled, and Edited by
Eric H. Roth and Toni Aberson

Compelling Conversations:
Questions and Quotations on Timeless Topics
An Engaging ESL Textbook for Advanced Students
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ISBN: 1-4196-5828-X
Library of Congress Reg. # TX 6-377-924

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Chimayo Press

“English saved my life.”

Joseph Conrad (1857–1924),
English novelist born in Poland

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STUDYING ENGLISH

SHARING EXPERIENCES

English has emerged as the global tongue in the early 21st century. Yet, English remains a crazy, confusing, and misspelled language. Interview a classmate and share your joys and frustrations in learning this important language.

1. Where did you first hear English spoken?
2. Which English words have been adopted into your native language?
3. Where is English most commonly used in your native country?
Why?
4. Do advertisements sometimes use English words? Why?
5. When did you first study English? Were you excited, bored, or indifferent?
6. How long have you studied English? What inspired you to study it?
Where have you studied English?
7. Have you had any negative experiences learning English?
8. Are there English classes for adults in your country?
Are they expensive?
9. What was the best English class you ever had? Why?
10. What method of learning seems to work best for you? Why?
11. Have you found an excellent tool for learning English? What?
12. Do you have a good bilingual dictionary? Can you bring it to class?
13. What’s your favorite English word or expression?
14. Do you listen, speak, read, and write English every day?
15. Where do you usually speak English? Why?
16. What materials do you read in English? Why?
17. Do you speak English with American neighbors? Co-workers?
Friends? Classmates?

VOCABULARY

Please circle the words that you know, and find out the meaning of the other words. Use several vocabulary words to write three questions.

- adopt.....
- inspire.....
- bilingual.....
- audiobook.....
- monolingual.....
- eavesdrop.....
- subtitle.....
- examiner.....
- closed-caption.....
- exclusive.....
- inclusive.....
- offer.....

THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES...

1. Have you ever called a 1-800-number just to practice your English? What happened?
2. Have you ever listened to an audio book? Which one? Was it enjoyable? Did you learn many new words?
3. Do you ever eavesdrop, or just listen intently, to conversations around you?
4. Do you listen to the radio? Do you have some favorite shows? Why?
5. Do you watch American movies with subtitles? Why?
6. Do you use the closed-captioning feature on many TV programs? Why?
7. Is it easier to spell in English than in your best language? Why?
8. What are some positive aspects of the English language?
9. What are some characteristics that make learning English difficult?
10. Do you have a driver's license? Did you take the exam in English? Why?
11. Should all government agencies exclusively use English? Why or why not?
12. Are you a U.S. citizen? What questions did the examiner ask you?
13. If you were designing the citizenship test, would you change anything? What?
14. What would you not feel comfortable doing in English now?
15. Where would you like to feel more comfortable speaking English?
16. In your opinion, why has English become more popular in the last 20 years?
17. What tips can you offer friends who want to improve their English?

NOTES & QUESTIONS

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QUOTATIONS

Read aloud all the quotations. Pick your favorites and discuss.

1. "I speak two languages, Body and English."
—Mae West (1892–1980), actress
2. "'I am' is reportedly the shortest sentence in the English language. Could it be that 'I do' is the longest sentence?"
—George Carlin (1937–), American comedian
3. "Every immigrant who comes here should be required within five years to learn English or leave the country."
—Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), 26th U.S. President
4. "Even if you do learn to speak correct English, whom are you going to speak it to?"
—Clarence Darrow (1857–1938), American lawyer
5. "England and America are two countries divided by a common language."
—George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), Irish playwright, Nobel Prize winner
6. "Next to money, English is the leading international language."
—Evan Esar (1899–1995), American humorist
7. "'Check enclosed' are the most beautiful words in English."
—Dorothy Parker (1893–1967), American writer
8. "The most beautiful words in the English language are 'not guilty.'"
—Maxim Gorky (1868–1936), Russian novelist
9. "The most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help you.'"
—Ronald Reagan (1911–2004), 40th U.S. President
10. "There is no such thing as 'The Queen's English.' The property has gone into the hands of a joint stock company and we own the bulk of the stock."—Mark Twain (1835–1910), writer
11. "Slang is a language that rolls up its sleeves, spits on the its hands, and goes to work."—Carl Sandburg (1878–1967), American poet, Folklorist, and historian
12. "Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."
—Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), British author and Nobel laureate
13. "In this country, it doesn't make any difference where you were born. It doesn't make any difference who your parents were. It doesn't make any difference if, like me, you couldn't even speak English until you were in your twenties."—Arnold Schwarzenegger (1947–), California Governor and American actor
14. "Apparently Arnold was inspired by President Bush, who proved you can be a successful politician in this country even if English is your second language."
—Conan O'Brien (1963–), American talk show host
15. "Fatherhood is helping your children learn English as a foreign language."
—Bill Cosby (1937–), American comedian and actor



ON YOUR OWN

Using only English words, write a favorite food or dish next to each letter. For example: E, Eggs.

E.....

N.....

G.....

L.....

I.....

S.....

H.....