

CELEBRATE THE AMERICAN WAY

A Fun ESL Guide
to English Language and Culture in the U.S.



Sheila MacKechnie Murtha, M.A.
Jane Airey O'Connor, M.Ed.



- Get to know U.S. holidays, social customs & special events
- Learn tons of idioms and new vocabulary
- Have fun while you learn with quizzes and activities
- *Plus* audio to help you practice until you're perfect



Audio available
on CD + Mp3

WINTER



♪ LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW! ♪

Sure, we're singing it now . . . but just wait until the first snowstorm **dumps** 12 inches of **the white stuff**. Let's see who's singing that happy **tune** then. Ha! Yes, just as you finish raking the golden leaves of autumn, here comes Old Man Winter with another job for you to do: **shovel** the snow. It may mean some work, but there's something exciting about the first **snowfall** of the season. It's even better if it means a **snow day!** When kids hear the **snowplows** in the **middle of the night**, they **cross their fingers**, hoping that schools will be closed.



"Hello, Old Man Winter and Jack Frost. Good morning, Mother Nature."

Ha, these aren't our neighbors—they're weather words!

Mother Nature rules *all* weather in *all* seasons. Old Man Winter is the **cranky** guy blowing icy winter winds. And Jack Frost? He painted those ice **designs** on your window!

We call *personification* when we give human qualities to something not human . . . like the weather.

Guess what, kids. Your teachers are crossing their fingers, too. **No kidding!** Everybody loves a snow day! YAY! No school! No work! This is not a day to waste—kids **bundle up** and **head out** for **snowball fights**, building **snowmen** (hmm . . . or *snowwomen*, ha!) and making **snow angels**. Even

the **grown-ups** go **sledding** and **ice skating**. Friends make **weekend plans** to **hit the slopes**—fresh snow is perfect for **skiing** and **snowboarding**. And when everyone is **freezing** and tired, there's no better way to end the day than with a **steaming mug** of **hot chocolate**! Enjoy it while you can, **folks**. Tomorrow the roads will be **clear**, and it's back to work for you!



We cold weather people have one word of advice about dressing for the cold: **LAYERS**!

This means to wear a light shirt, then another warmer shirt over it. Put a sweater over that, and then put on a warm coat. Layers!

Moms sometimes put so many warm layers on little kids that they look like little colorful **snowballs**, ready to roll down a hill! (Which is exactly what they want to do on a snowy day!)

Of course, not all parts of the United States are cold in winter (and our friends in Florida, in Arizona, and on the **West Coast** love to remind us of that!), but wherever you are, winter is a season that has **a lot going on**. It's the busiest holiday season of the year, with parties

everywhere. There are family parties, office parties, class parties, neighborhood parties . . . you get the idea. That's a lot of party **refreshments**! Ha! Too many of those snacks and you'll be shopping for a bigger New Year's Eve **outfit**.

Yes, **chances are** you've decided on something extra-special to wear for New Year's Eve. It's an exciting night when lots of people get very **dressed up** for special parties. On this night it seems that everything sparkles: moonlight glistens on fresh snow; fancy clothes glitter in soft house lights; candles flicker in holiday windows; and, of course, champagne bubbles sparkle in crystal **flutes**. Cheers! Let the party begin!



And what a party it is! Everyone is happy to be with friends to “**ring in** the new year.” As **midnight** gets close, champagne glasses are filled with **bubbly**, and people **gather** around a TV to watch the **ball drop**. (Ha! Or maybe they just want to watch the crazy **adventure-lovers** who are freezing in Times Square in New York City! *Brrr!*)

The countdown begins at 60 seconds before midnight . . . until finally . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . 1 **HAPPY NEW YEAR!** Friends share kisses and drink a **toast** to a great new year. But let’s see how many of them remember to write the new year date the next day. HA!

Of course, not everyone celebrates by going out to a party. Lots of people stay home and let the kids **stay up** late. At midnight, they may go outside to make lots of noise by hitting pots. Some people like to **set off fireworks** . . . BOOM! Some throw **streamers** and **pop party poppers!** Then, good-night, kids! Don’t get up too early—we may need some extra sleep! Tomorrow will be Day One of trying to keep our New Year’s **resolutions**. Typical resolutions are to **quit** smoking, or exercise more, or stop eating **junk food** and lose weight. And everybody *always* keeps *every* resolution! . . . um . . . okay, for at least . . . a day . . . Hey! **It’s the thought that counts!**

And good thoughts are what people share on the third Monday in January. This is a **federal holiday** to observe the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. We honor Dr. King for his work in using peaceful ways to get civil rights for all people. Civil rights make it against the law to treat people differently because of their color, religion, sex, or nationality. Many cities have a “Day of Service” in honor of MLK. People do **charity** projects or volunteer to help others in the community.



Speaking of charity projects . . . Here’s one that will make you **shiver!**

Does snowy, cold weather make you want to go swimming? OF COURSE NOT! IT’S FREEZING! But that’s exactly how some people **raise money** to help others. It’s the Polar Bear **Plunge!** People in swimsuits run into icy water, while we watch—nice and warm, in our heavy winter coats.

It’s all for fun to help the community. Get those polar bear people some hot chocolate!



We celebrate another **civic** holiday on the third Monday in February. It's Presidents' Day. "Which presidents?" you ask. Take out your **wallet**. Do you have a **single**? No, no, no, don't send it to us! Take a look at the **bill** . . . That's George Washington, our first president. (Hey, the number ONE president is on the ONE dollar bill!) Okay, do you have a **five**? Hello, Abraham Lincoln! (Well, he was the sixteenth president, but we don't have a sixteen dollar bill.) Both of these important presidents are honored on

Presidents' Day. Happy February birthday, Washington and Lincoln!

Are you a sports fan? The beginning of February means only one thing to American football fans: Super Bowl Sunday! The Super Bowl is the National Football League **championship** game, and it's *hugely* popular! **Advertisers** pay millions of dollars for just a 30-second TV **commercial** during the game. And the commercials themselves are famously funny. Raise your hand if you like the commercials better than the game . . . (US! Yes, that's us! We watch the commercials, then take a **nap** when the game comes back on. Yes, we admit it: Sheila + Jane + football = zzzzzzzzzzzzz. Let the husbands watch the crazy game!) If you're not taking a nap, you may be at a Super Bowl party. These loud parties begin in the afternoon, and football fans have all the snacks ready to go: nachos and chips, chicken wings and chili, pretzels and pizza. It's the biggest game of the season, and there's lots of **yelling** and **cheering** as the teams score . . . or miss. At half-time, when the teams **take a break**, so do the fans as they watch the **half-time show**. Crazy Super Bowl Sunday . . . before Back-to-Work Monday, ha!

SUPER BOWL



Okay, we admit it: We're not football fans. So we figured out a little **secret**: If everybody is at a Super Bowl party watching the game, no one will be shopping! The stores will be empty! No crowds!

But here's the **catch**: If you go early, lots of people will be getting snacks to prepare in the afternoon. If you go later, people will be shopping for things they forgot. If you wait until game time, you'll be too tired to move! So, yeah, when the game starts no one will be shopping. Including you!

(And if the weather people say a snowstorm is coming, there won't be any milk or bread left anyway! We don't know why everyone buys milk and bread before a snowstorm . . . it's just one of those crazy American winter facts.)



Then, before you know it, all the holidays and exciting events are over, and the winter white and fun of snow start to get not-so-magical and not-so-fun! People are tired of cold, and slush, and icy roads, and shoveling snow, and more cold, and . . . well, you get the idea. Just in time! We have a **silly** day called **Groundhog Day** on February 2. The scientists can't always get weather **predictions** right, but on this day we let some big **rodents** tell us when winter will end! Places all over have special Groundhog Day ceremonies with their "official" groundhogs.

Tradition says that if the groundhog comes out of his **burrow** and sees his shadow, spring will be late, and we'll have six more weeks of winter. NOOOOOO!!!!

GROUNDHOGS



Cities name their "official" weather-predicting groundhogs!

Punxsutawney Phil is the star in Pennsylvania, and he's probably the most famous weather-predicting groundhog of all. (We think if you can spell *Punxsutawney* you should be able to figure out the weather without asking a rodent . . . ha!)

New York City (NYC) has Staten Island Chuck (though we don't want to think about what happened one year when the **mayor** dropped him), and Atlanta, Georgia, has General Beau Lee.

But our very favorite of all is Jimmy the Groundhog. In 2015, Jimmy the Groundhog BIT THE MAYOR'S EAR in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin!! HE BIT THE MAYOR'S EAR!!

Which is a good lesson: If mayors want to know the weather, they should ask a **meteorologist** instead of a groundhog. (That story makes us laugh every time we remember it.) Anyway, it's just for fun (unless you're the mayor of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin!).

TAKE A LOOK: Words that SHINE!

There's no brighter, shinier season than winter, so this is a perfect time to take a look at *light* words! These bright words can make any writing, um, shine. Put on your sunglasses and take a look at these **brilliant** words. And—BONUS!—they can be used as nouns OR verbs, so they'll . . . um . . . *brighten* twice as many sentences.



Ha! Make that *three times* as many sentences . . .

These light words sure are hard workers. You can make them adjectives, too! Just add the suffix *-ing*.

That's a beautiful sparkling ring!

beam (verb): to shine in a ray of light

*What a beautiful day! The sun **beamed** down through the window, and the cat slept happily in the sunbeam.*

beam (noun): the ray of light

*The cat slept in the warm **beam** of light.*

dazzle (verb): to shine so brightly your eyes hurt!

*Hoo boy! When you leave the dark movie theater, the sun outside will **dazzle** you.*

dazzle (noun): the bright light that hurts your eyes

*The **dazzle** of daylight surprised her when she left the theater.*

flash (verb): to shine in a quick and sudden way

*WOW! The lightning **flashed** across the sky. A storm is coming!*

flash (noun): the quick light

*A **flash** of lightning often means a storm is coming.*

flicker (verb): to shine quickly on and off

*The lamp **flickered**, and then went out. Time for a new light bulb.*

flicker (noun): the light that shines

*The **flicker** of the bulb reminded him to buy a new one.*

gleam (verb): to shine, as a reflection

*The beautiful silver bowl **gleamed** on the table.*

gleam (noun): the reflected light

*The **gleam** of the polished bowl was bright on the table.*

glimmer (verb): to shine in a weak way, on and off

*It was a foggy night, and the Statue of Liberty's light **glimmered** in the harbor.*

glimmer (noun): the weakly shining light

*In the harbor, a **glimmer** of light showed where to look for the Statue of Liberty.*

glisten (verb): to shine off something wet

*As he worked in the hot sun, his face **glistened** with sweat.*

glisten (noun): the shine that comes from something wet

*There was a **glisten** of sweat on his lip.*

glitter (verb): to shine in tiny lights that flash

*The ocean **glittered** in the bright sun.*

glitter (noun): the flash caused by tiny bits of light

*She sat on the beach, watching the **glitter** of sunlight on the waves.*

glow (verb): to shine like light caused by heat

*The fire **glowed**, and everyone sat around it with hot chocolate and cold hands.*

glow (noun): a shine or brightness caused by warmth

*Their faces had a warm **glow** as they sipped the hot chocolate.*

sparkle (verb): to shine in lots of small flashes of light

*The diamond **sparkled** in the light. . . . She was dazzled!*

sparkle (noun): the look of small light flashes

*The **sparkle** of the diamond made her smile.*

twinkle (verb): to shine in a strong, then weak way, then strong again!

*The moon is out and the stars are **twinkling** . . . It's a perfect night!*

twinkle (noun): a light that shines on and off

*The **twinkle** of winter lights reminded her of stars.*



Here's a "glitter" that you really DO NOT want. Maybe you've seen it. (If you have, you may still have some in your hair, ha!) Glitter is a pretty, shiny **decoration**, but it will drive you crazy.

We're talking about those teeny tiny pieces of shiny metal... or plastic... or whatever it is! You see it on some greeting cards in the store. (Don't touch the glitter! It will come home to live with you forever!)

Kids like to use glitter to decorate their projects. (Haha! Be careful on Mother's Day, Mom!) You can buy little **jars** of glitter at a crafts store. (But don't say we didn't warn you . . .)

YOUR TURN!

This is your chance to . . . come on—you know what’s coming—it’s your chance to . . . SHINE! We’ve made it a little easier for you—the shiny missing words are used as verbs. Can you find which word from the list below works best in these sentences? There may be more than one that fits. (You may need to change the form of the verbs, as we did in the example sentences above.) Answers are on page 173.

beam	glisten
dazzle	glitter
flash	glow
flicker	sparkle
gleam	twinkle
glimmer	

1. The jewels in the little girl’s princess crown _____.
2. The sailors were happy to see the light _____ from the lighthouse to guide them safely to shore.
3. It’s tricky driving in the country at night. The car’s headlights will _____ a deer near the road.
4. We lost power in the snowstorm, so we ate dinner as candles _____ on the table.
5. I’ve polished the car until it _____!
6. A storm’s coming! Lightning is _____ across the sky.
7. The flashlight is _____ weakly; I think it needs new batteries.
8. The newlyweds were happy just watching the stars _____ in the sky!
9. New Year’s Eve? I want my dress to _____ like gold!
10. The fire is _____, and so are the kids’ faces!
11. The snowman is _____ in the early morning sun. Don’t melt, Frosty!