

## Shmanners 146: Bows and Curtsies

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**Travis:** Teresa, I think it's time to record a podcast.

**Teresa:** I'm gonna bow out of this one.

**Travis:** But—it's *Shmanners*!

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

**Teresa:** And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy!

**Travis:** And you're listening to *Shmanners*!

**Teresa:** It's extraordinary etiquette...

**Travis:** For ordinary occasions! Hello, my dove.

**Teresa:** Hello, dear.

**Travis:** That joke... was my wife's, and it was good.

**Teresa:** Yeahhh!

**Travis:** Ugh! My wife is so funny. [Borat voice] My wife.

Have you guys seen *Borat*?

**Teresa:** [cough-laugh]

**Travis:** It's hard to tell if it's real or not, 'cause it seems like a documentary but it's just so wacky!

Welcome back to another episode of *Shmanners*. So, we were talking—well, I pitched out a couple ideas, and Teresa pointed out that it had been a long time since we did, like, a really specific episode.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And so we wanted to pick something that was, like—not like party etiquette, where it encompasses a big, huge thing. We wanted to do, like, specifically, bowing and curtsying, and I also—because I see it as, like, a form of bowing—added, like, head nod to the question list.

**Teresa:** Well, I mean, it definitely is. It's kind of the way in the West that bowing has evolved, and we'll get to it. We'll get to it.

**Travis:** So... I mean—listen. We usually kind of fiddly fart around, as my Dad once said, and we made fun of him forever—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —in the beginning. But do we just wanna get, like, right to talking about the thing?

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** I mean, I could fiddle and/or fart a little bit more.

**Teresa:** [laughs] No thanks.

**Travis:** How have you been? How was your lunch?

**Teresa:** I mean, my lunch was great. Thank you for asking.

**Travis:** Cool! Okay, great. So, bowing and/or curtsying.

**Teresa:** Okay. Um, so, the act—

**Travis:** It began in 1965.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Way, way, way... way back.

**Travis:** 1964?

**Teresa:** Nope. Way back.

**Travis:** [high pitched] '62?

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Further back. So, uh, probably with ancient man, before really civilizations got started, those—that specific human species was probably closer to animal, in my way of thinking. I believe in evolution.

**Travis:** Well, because it's... true. Go on.

**Teresa:** Um, and a lot of our physical tendencies probably took cues from animals as well. So, like, have you ever heard, maybe when you encounter a bear or, like, a lion or something—

**Travis:** I have not done that yet, but go on.

**Teresa:** —you're supposed to—

**Travis:** Make yourself big!

**Teresa:** Uh—

**Travis:** Or make yourself small?

**Teresa:** —make yourself *small* is what I'm leading to.

**Travis:** I know that there are *some* animals where you're supposed to make yourself big to scare them away, and some where you're supposed to make yourself small.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** That's why the fetal position exists, right?

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Like, "I'm little and nonthreatening and maybe already dead."

**Teresa:** Kind of like backing away slowly, making yourself look smaller. This is the idea... of bowing, almost.

**Travis:** Yep. Well—

**Teresa:** Where you're saying, "You're bigger than me. I submit, and, uh, you know, you're the head honcho, so... don't kill me."

**Travis:** A great everyday example of this that I would say a lot our listeners have probably already witnessed is dogs. There is an instigation of play behavior where you will see a dog kind of, like—almost like they're doing yoga, stick their front paws out and, like, lower down their front half while keeping their butts up in the air.

**Teresa:** Downward dog!

**Travis:** Right. And that is a play behavior that is, like, a form of submission. It says, like, "Hey, let's play." But that is like a dog bow. That's, like, an inherent, natural thing that dogs do.

**Teresa:** Right. Um, so then this behavior has developed to mean, maybe not in a physical sense, "You are bigger than me and stronger than me," but more in a kind of status. Like, a social way, or even—

**Travis:** I mean, if you've ever heard the phrase "I bow to your wisdom."

**Teresa:** Right?

**Travis:** I mean, literally that's what it means, yeah.

**Teresa:** Literally. Um, and—so the thing is, like... traditionally, now, people have bowed to things like monarchs, right? And then bowed to things like gods.

**Travis:** And also, I would say, even beyond that, like, teachers. Uh—

**Teresa:** Okay. Well, I mean, that comes later.

**Travis:** Oh, okay. Okay.

**Teresa:** So what I'm—

**Travis:** You're saying at this point when we're talking about. Got it.

**Teresa:** I'm still talking about antiquity.

**Travis:** Gotcha.

**Teresa:** So, there comes a point where the separation occurs between monarch and God, whereas it hadn't been separated before this.

**Travis:** Gotcha.

**Teresa:** Right? So, like, for example, the pharaohs.

**Travis:** God-king.

**Teresa:** God-king. So you probably behaved very similarly when you were worshiping as to when you were, uhh... groveling?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** I guess? [laughs]

**Travis:** Pro—aw, man. I can never remember if is prostrating or prostating—it's prostrating. Now I've said it out loud—okay.

**Teresa:** Yes, yes-yes-yes. So—

**Travis:** Do you think that there was ever a time when a pharaoh farted and everyone was like, "God just farted!"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** That's probably weird, right? That's not important. Go on.

**Teresa:** Um, and so this is where things start to divulge, right? Or diverge.

**Travis:** Diver—diverge?

**Teresa:** Diverge.

**Travis:** Yeah. Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** There it is. Um, and so different societies began to make different, uh, positions, basically, for religious bowing and social bowing. That's where prostrating comes. That's where one would lower themselves completely to the floor, uh, put their—even *face* on the floor.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Um, and that became closer to what someone would do when bowing before a God, and worshiping, and not as much what people would do when bowing for a, uh—for a ruler.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Um—

**Travis:** It's what I picture when I picture Islamic prayer.

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** I had to look it up to make sure I was thinking—but, like, that—that is—when I think of—whenever I heard the word "prostrating" now, that is kind of the body language, the body position that I associate with it. That, like, all-the-way down on the ground—you know, like, head down, touching the ground—

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** And like I said, at one point there was God-king, so you were still doing this lying down for the same thing. But then, like I said, it starts to divulge, and more of kneel became appropriate for the monarch. Um, and that's where a courtesy...

**Travis:** [gasps]

**Teresa:** ... comes from. See?

**Travis:** Ohhh.

**Teresa:** That's also where the word "curtsy" comes from. You are doing your courtesies by curtsying.

**Travis:** [makes explosion noise]

**Teresa:** [makes "mind blown" noise]

**Travis:** That was my head. My head just exploded.

**Teresa:** But this—this kind of half-kneel curtsy move was done by, at the time, both—

**Travis:** Everyone.

**Teresa:** —was done by everyone, right?

**Travis:** Yeah. 'Cause that the thing is, like, I learned this doing a lot of, like, classical Shakespeare. But, like—whatever, classical theater—is, like, when you are curtsying, right? If you catch yourself kind of halfway through kneeling down, it's a very similar position with your feet. Like, I'm doing it right now with my feet, but, like, you're kind of putting—

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** —and then you would just keep going down with one knee, and then you're on the ground kneeling, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Like, it's—a curtsy is kind of halfway between standing and kneeling.

**Teresa:** Exactly. So then we come to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where, uh... gender roles began to be more important and segregated within society. Um, so then men took on the posture of the bowing from the hips with bowed head, and women retained the curtsy, kneeling-ish status.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um... do—

**Travis:** I've also always wondered if that had to do somewhat with clothing?

**Teresa:** I—in my research, I did find that perhaps it had something to do with the length of skirts. Um, but it doesn't—

**Travis:** See, I was thinking more of, like, curse—c—uh, corsets and, like, the boning making it hard to bend at the waist?

**Teresa:** Well—okay. This is a tangent, but the waist isn't a real thing. it's—it's... it is a point on the body that doesn't actually bend, so when you bend, you bend from the hip, and most corsets stop before the hip, so if you bend correctly from the hip, you can still bend over in a corset.

**Travis:** And I guess for a long time, especially if we're talking about, like, aristocracy and, like, royal courts and stuff, dudes were probably in—in corsets as well, or at least something similar. More restrictive clothing.

**Teresa:** Something similar, yeah. Some kinda girdle.

**Travis:** Even without the boning, it probably still—

**Teresa:** Right. And again, the waist is not a place where you bend.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** It's just a measuring point on the body. Anyway, like I said—I digress.

So, here is how we come to a crossroads between the East and the West, especially the United States.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Once the United States broke off from England—

**Travis:** Can I guess?

**Teresa:** What?

**Travis:** I think it's a pride issue. We—we don't have monarchs—



**Teresa:** That's right.

**Travis:** —we do not bow.

**Teresa:** That's it. We don't bow. So, the only retaining of any kind of bowing or kneeling was more of a social, like, graces.

**Travis:** Uh-huh. "[goofy posh voice] Oh, hello!"

**Teresa:** Exactly. It was more for people of your own social status, to acknowledge each other. So we get to the idea of nodding your head, tipping your hat, bowing slightly to whoever you might know or meet on the street. Um, and then also several different types of curtsies and bows were concocted as kind of like performance respect?

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Um... different from bowing on the theater, which we'll talk about probably after the break. Um, but, like, when debutantes were being debuted, things like that. Especially—

**Travis:** I really like the way you just said "debuted."

**Teresa:** Debuted.

**Travis:** But you said it like—with, like, all the emphasis on the "bu" part. You're like, "debuted."

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** And it was like, "Ooh!" I got chills a little bit?

**Teresa:** Well, you're welcome!

**Travis:** Yes, okay.

**Teresa:** And so curtsying in that way became, like I said, more of a performance.

**Travis:** Right. That was less of, like, a, uh... you know, a deference thing and much more of like—just what you do.

**Teresa:** Whereas in the East, bowing is still more about respect and deference and social status between social groups.

**Travis:** I feel like—and I'm saying this as very, uh, light knowledge of this, but I feel like we could do a whole episode just about the structure of, like, bowing in Japan, and, like, what—how much you bow to who and who bows first and—I know that there's a lot of stuff about, like, greetings and who speaks first and—but I don't know enough about it to speak on it.

**Teresa:** I—I do have—I do have a summary that I can give after the break.

**Travis:** Okay.

[pauses]

**Teresa:** So let's take a break!

**Travis:** Oh, I see.

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[theme music plays]

**Teresa:** This week, we're sending out our thank you notes to... Zola. So, *Shmanners* is supported in part by Zola, and we've talked about Zola before. They take the stress out of wedding planning with free wedding websites that include dream registries, affordable save-the-dates and invitations—

**Travis:** Not—not dream registries like "Last night I dreamed of—"

**Teresa:** No—[laughs]

**Travis:** But more like "Here's the registry of my dreams." But even *that* could be, like...

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** The registry. Of my dreams!

**Teresa:** Um, and easy-to-use planning tools, because planning the wedding is the hardest part. [laughs] Um, and they have over 100 beautiful wedding designs that can complement any couple's style, and their store has the widest selection of gifts at so many different price points. There's something for every guest to feel comfortable giving.

Um, we took a look at their website, and one of our favorite parts is the fact that you can split a single purchase between guests, so if someone wants to contribute to a larger gift but can't, maybe, purchase the entire one, it's so easy to just give a partial gift.

**Travis:** Imagine, like, how many people in the past have said, like, "Okay. Well, I'm gonna call cousin Sue and cousin Jim to see if they'll go in on this thing with me, and then I gotta remember to collect that \$50 for them and for—" Right?

This takes all that out of it, and you just say, like, "Hey, log on and do it," right? So you don't have to worry about asking for money.

**Teresa:** And they deliver it wherever you tell them to, so you could deliver it right to the couple's address. Um, so you, our listeners, can start your free wedding websites, and also get \$50 off your registry on Zola!

All you have to do is go to [zola.com/shmanners](http://zola.com/shmanners)!

**Travis:** Teresa, I have an idea for a website, and it's really good—

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm?

**Travis:** —and in fact it's *so* good that I'm kind of afraid to say it out loud here, but here goes. I call it "Zoola."

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** Z-O-O-L-A.com, and basically you set up wedding websites for your animals, or for other animals. Say you wanna marry, like, the two deer in your backyard, right? You go to Zoola and you set up their wedding registry, right? And I think that maybe, if I set up this website and it's a big hit, we can *finally* retire from this podcasting rat race—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —and just settle down! And here's the thing: I don't have to know anything about coding or even, like, how to make a website, because I can just go to squarespace.com and do it all there! Um, say I wanna, like, publish content, photos from the—the animal weddings I've set up—

**Teresa:** Lil deer in a—in a tuxedo?

**Travis:** Yeah! Or—or, like, maybe I can do, like, their engagement photos, you know? Where it's, like, one of them looking this way and the other one looking—anyway, it'll be cute.

Um, and I can sell products and services of all kinds, promote my physical or my online business, and beautiful customizable templates to choose from, everything optimized for mobile right out of the box, and a new way to buy domains and choose from over 200 extensions, and it's free and secure hosting with 24/7 award-winning customer support, so if you wanna stand out with a beautiful website—and please don't steal my amazing idea—you can do it with Squarespace! Go to [squarespace.com/shmanners](https://squarespace.com/shmanners) for a free trial, and when you're ready to launch use the offer code "shmanners" to save 10% off your first purchase of a website or domain.

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[gavel banging]

**Jesse:** I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn, and justice is within your reach!

**Speaker One:** My mom refuses to take my phone calls!

**Speaker Two:** My boyfriend says I should take our cats with me to graduate school, but I think he should keep them.

[cat meowing]

**Jesse:** In the court of Judge John Hodgman, justice rules!

**Speaker Three:** My partner's board game collection is out of control!

[gunshot?]

**Speaker Four:** My sister won't stop stealing my clothes!

**John:** I'm Judge John Hodgman. I'm tough, but fair.

**Speaker Five:** [stamping noise] Tough but fair!

**John:** I'll bring you justice, and I'm only a click away!

**Jesse:** Tipping. [gavel banging] Automotive etiquette. [gavel banging] Siblings. [gavel banging] Roommates. [gavel banging] If you've got a case, go to [Maximumfun.org/jjho](http://Maximumfun.org/jjho). Judge John Hodgman is tough, but fair.

**Speaker Five:** [stamping noise] Tough but fair!

**Jesse:** Subscribe to the podcast today.

[gunshot?]

**John:** Judge John Hodgman rules.

[gavel banging]

**John:** That is all.

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**Biz:** Hi. I'm Biz.

**Theresa:** And I'm Theresa.

**Biz:** And we host *One Bad Mother*, a comedy podcast about parenting.

**Theresa:** Whether you are a parent, or just know kids exist in the world, join us each week as we honestly share what it's like to be a parent.

I... don't know how to fix mornings for myself.

**Biz:** [laughs]

**Theresa:** I do not know how to make mornings okay for myself.

**Biz:** So the t-shirt "I don't do mornings—"

**Theresa:** Yes.

**Biz:** —isn't even a funny shirt.

**Theresa:** No.

**Biz:** I shouldn't get it for you.

**Theresa:** It's sad.

**Biz:** It's a sad shirt.

**Theresa:** Yeah. It's a sad shirt with tears flowing.

**Biz:** So join us each week, as we judge less, laugh more, and remind you that you are doing a great job.

**Theresa:** Find us on [maximumfun.org](http://maximumfun.org), on Apple podcasts, or wherever you get your podcasts!

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**Travis:** Okay. Now, Teresa.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm?

**Travis:** You teased that you were going to give us a little summary of bowing in Japan. Please, take it away.

**Teresa:** Not only are there different bows for different situations, there are different bows for different genders. Um, so as far as—let's talk about... body posture. Okay?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So, if you are bowing from a standing position...

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** ... um, is it *too* specific if I go into, like, inclines?

**Travis:** Well, maybe a little bit. Give us a taste.

**Teresa:** Okay. Um, like I said, bow from the hip at approximately 45 degrees, with the neck straight.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and this is when, like I said, bowing from a standing position, and you wanna try and keep the space between your collar and your neck even, so don't, like, elongate that space, right?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, this is kind of like a formal occasion thing, right?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and if you are sitting, you will—most often, when you're sitting, in a lot of these Eastern cultures, you'll be sitting on the floor, right? With your shins flat against the floor, underneath your body, and your toes pointed behind you.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Does that make sense if I—how I explained—

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Okay. And the way that you would bow for that is you would put your hands on your—toward the outside of your knees. You would place your fingertips lightly touching the ground, and keep your gaze down, moving at a 15 degree angle.

**Travis:** Okay. And that's from sitting, for a formal?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** That's from sitting. Okay. Um, and the longer that you hold the bow, the more respect you are offering.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** So, um... 30, like—so, this 30 degree kind of bend, polite bow is for, as I understand it, peers.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, and 45 degree is more deference, and longer.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, there is a kind of trend I read about where women, instead of keeping their hands on their legs, are keeping their hands closer together, like, touching. Kind of making more—making themselves, like, smaller? But according to my research, that's not traditional, but as we know, cultural things evolve all the time.

**Travis:** Yes, but I will also say, you don't have to make yourself smaller. Take up space.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** You deserve it.

**Teresa:** So if you are interested in learning more about this, might I suggest [tofugu.com](http://tofugu.com), and we—

**Travis:** Can you spell?

**Teresa:** T-O-F-U-G-U. Um, and we will post a link in our description box talking about, uh, this wonderful article that was written by Mami Suzuki, um, about bowing in Japan.

**Travis:** There you go! So, is there anything else you wanna talk about in history, or should we get to questions?



**Teresa:** Um... let me think. Let's talk about... different royal bows.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, monarchs, most monarchs have a preference of who should bow and how.

**Travis:** Is it a personal preference? Or is it, like, by country? So, like—it's not like Queen Elizabeth the second said, like, "When people bow to me, here's what I want." Or is it just like—

**Teresa:** Well, I mean—

**Travis:** —this is how you bow to the royal family?

**Teresa:** Bas—I mean, basically the monarch sets it.

**Travis:** Okay!

**Teresa:** So they decide how they would like to have, uh—have a bow.

**Travis:** I would like people to do the hokey pokey when they bow to me.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Can I do that?

**Teresa:** So the King and Queen of Spain seem to receive bows and curtsies on a very regular basis. Even their children, uh, greet their majesties with a bow or a curtsy.

**Travis:** Could we train Bebe to do that for us?

**Teresa:** Hm...

**Travis:** I said "train." Like she was an ani—I'm the worst Dad. [laughs]  
"[pompously] I'll train my daught—" oh, God. Forgive me, Bebe. I'm sorry when you listen to this in the future.

**Teresa:** Um... the United Kingdom has slowly evolved into less and less of bowing of, um, the commoners, as they're called? Where only really the royal family bows to each other.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, famously, Mrs. Tony Blair did not curtsy upon meeting Queen Elizabeth. Um, but Mrs. Gordon Brown and Lady Thatcher *did* both curtsy, and there was a—a whole to-do about the idea of—because, um, Mrs. Tony Blair was—obviously married to Tony Blair. Um, there was kind of, like... political statement made of it? Um, it was very, very interesting.

**Travis:** I just wanted to say, Cherie Blair. [stammering]

**Teresa:** Oh, okay.

**Travis:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just to get—okay.

**Teresa:** Okay. In general, when you're a diplomat to another country, you are expected to bow. Except, the United States forbids its foreign service personnel to observe such acts, as representatives of the President.

**Travis:** I see. Uh, I'll say this. Hey, I don't like that.

**Teresa:** You don't?

**Travis:** No. I don't care for it. There's something about saying, "Don't observe someone else's, like, thing, when you're in their country, 'cause *we* don't *do* that," that I think is—is not great! But that's—but you know what? It's personal. That's my personal feelings about it. If I were President I'd say, like, "Yeah, you know, literally, when in Rome. Literally."

**Teresa:** [laughs] I think that the handshake has slowly, uh, given way. Um, no, I have to say that the other way. The bow has given way to the handshake, is what I mean. Uh, as a kind of more formal greeting.

**Travis:** I could—I just forgot that I wasn't on *Trends Like These* for a second. Okay. Go on.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Yes, please. We're not on *Trends Like These*, thank you!

**Travis:** No.

**Teresa:** Alright, I think I'm ready for some questions!

**Travis:** Okay! So, the first comes from Fiona.

"Are curtsies on their way out as gender becomes more and more fluid? If not, when is it appropriate to curtsy instead of bow?"

**Teresa:** Okay. Well, as we—as we explained earlier, curtsy is really just kind of kneeling—almost kneeling.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Um, this whole thing that you see, like in the movies and on TV where people grab their skirt and kind of, like, flare it out and bow their head and all this stuff, that's not—that's just demonstrative. That's not really what a curtsy is about.

**Travis:** That's not part of the, like, form?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, you're supposed to keep yourself straight up, and not, you know, play with your dress. So, I think that it really is just kind of—it should be personal preference. I know people when they design their theatrical bows, some people kind of, you know, bend the knee and nod the head.

**Travis:** I know that I personally, frankly, don't have great balance? So I much more—I'm trying to think, now, when I do theater bows—but I think I much more kind of, like, lower my whole body, uh, curtsy-ish, without, like, bending over full at the waist, 'cause I also have a *huge* head—

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** —and if I bend over full at the waist, it'll just keep going and pull me right off the front of the stage like Kelsey Grammer.

**Teresa:** Oh boy.

**Travis:** Yeah. Did you see that one clip where he fell off the stage? It's not important.

**Teresa:** I—I did see it.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, so I don't know if it's so much on it's way out, but in Western society, neither pose really has much to do with the kind of reference and deference that it used to have. Does that make sense?

**Travis:** Though I will say—yeah, but to hearken back to what I was saying about my problems with US diplomacy and whatever, is if you find yourself in a culture or society where that is *not* the case, and there are, like, certain observed cultural rules or expectation, I think my personal—especially, I would say, if you are a visitor, is to try to follow customs as much as you can.

**Teresa:** Sure.

**Travis:** Um, while still being true to yourself, and not making yourself, you know, feel like less of who you are. Um, this is from Lauren.

"I once read that you're supposed to bow/curtsy from the head, not the waist. What's the difference?"

I assume you mean, like, lead—

**Teresa:** Yeah, lead. Um, I would say that it's probably easier to—according to my research—I feel like what's her name on *School Bus* when I say that. Um, is it Dorothy? Is that her name?

**Travis:** I don't know.

**Teresa:** I don't know what her name is. I can't remember. I—I have read that you are to initiate at the hip, because keeping the back straight, one, is the form, and two, is, like, better for you.

**Travis:** Oh, see, I was thinking the other—okay. 'Cause this is saying you're supposed to lead from the head—or you're supposed to bow from the head, not the waist, because if you lead from the waist, the last thing to go down is the face?

**Teresa:** Uh, I don't think it's supposed to be a ripple. Um—

**Travis:** But if that's why—if you're leading from the head—I keep bowing away from the microphone to do it. You're leading with the head and all going down in one plane, whereas if you start—if you lead from the waist, then—

**Teresa:** Well, you think of yourself as like a hinge, right?

**Travis:** But then—but then it feels like the exact same motion, whether you're leading from the head or the—[sighs] may—maybe this is, like, a... oh, what's the thing? Uh, Alexander Technique? Right?

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** Where this is—so that's a—it's an acting movement thing where you don't actually *do* something on purpose so much as you *think* about doing it, and that makes you do it. So, like, rather than trying to lengthen your spine, you *think* about lengthening your spine. Anyways. So, this is maybe, like, to help with your form. *Think* about leading from the head to—doesn't matter. You know what? I've gone—I'm full'a beans!

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, so this is from, uh, Hidden Valley Homie. Sure.

"Is bowing for a greeting related to bowing after a performance? Is one a result of the other?"

**Teresa:** Aha, here it is. So, bowing after a performance is a thank you, or an act of respect to the audience. Like, "Thank you for watching, thank you for clapping, thank you for—for being here," that the performers give to the audience.

Um, and so it *is* kind of related, right? So you—the performers give their respect to the people of the audience. Much like when you greet someone, bowing is a sign of respect.

**Travis:** And I *have* to think that that comes from the time where—so, right now we think especially a lot of, like, celebrities or very famous people—and where we're like, "Oh my God, I can't believe I just got to see such-and-such performing

this thing," right? But back in the day, like, the people showing up to see theater were, like, lords and ladies and, like, dukes and stuff.

**Teresa:** Absolutely.

**Travis:** And so it was very much, like, "The only reason we get to perform is 'cause they haven't decided to shut us down yet," and so it was—there was a lot more deference at that point.

Um, this question is from Hope.

"Is there a too-low bow/curtsy? Like, would it be viewed as offensive?"

**Teresa:** Um, I wouldn't think that it would be viewed as *offensive* to go too low, but it might result in embarrassment.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Not for yourself, but—I mean, maybe f—I mean, maybe for yourself, but also for the person you are bowing to.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Uh, they may become flustered or embarrassed, not feeling worthy of whatever kind of, you know, respect you've given them with that too-low. I would say it's—it's best to stick to cultural norms.

**Travis:** What it reminds me a little bit of is like when we went to Scotland and asked the bartender about tipping. And it was like, "Yeah, it's a lot more about familiar—" like, that it's not expected, so if you do it—or if you say, like, "I'll buy your drink," right? It can feel overly familiar? Or if you tip someone for just doing basic service, it could feel, like, over the top formal.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And so it really is, like, knowing that when you go into it so you don't either act—bow too familiarly with someone, or, like, come off as far too formal. Like, know—know before you go. That's what I always say.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Um, one last question. This is from Marge.

"What do you do with your hands when you bow? Every time I've been in a play, I feel really awkward when I have to bow at the end. How to remedy this?"

[holding back laughter] I'll tell you what not to do.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** 'Cause—okay. This is honestly making fun—if you do it, it's honestly fine. This is my personal preference. This is something, like—and it's this thing that I have seen so many actors do where they bow and they kind of put their hands together, like they're almost clapping, and they're—

**Teresa:** The prayer hands.

**Travis:** A little bit. And they're like, "[quietly] Aw, thank—" and it, like—I don't know. It just comes off a little bit much for me, when actors do that. But then again, I also myself, in my younger days, did, like, the full sweeping arms.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** You know? Out to the side. "[pompously] Yes. [holding back laughter] You're welcome."

Don't do that either. I think, you know, like—now I'm trying to remember how I bow. One hand on your stomach, one hand on your back—no. Um, how are you supposed to bow?

**Teresa:** Um, so everybody kind of has their own style, but here are a couple of descriptions of some famous bows.

Um, Tony Award nominee Mr. Burn—

**Travis:** Gabriel Burn, yeah.

**Teresa:** —Gabriel Burn. Um, when he was starring in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, he really preferred the ensemble bow, which is where everyone comes out, holds hands, hands go up together, and then everyone bows down with the hands,

right? So we're all holding hands, kind of like a wave, but it all happens at once.  
[laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah. I'm—now I actually have been able to remember how I bowed when I was in theater, and I can't—I don't know if I'm proud of it or not, but it was much more of, like, a head incline while still keeping my eyes up, and—unless, like, I was blowing a kiss? Like—I think it's the sign language for thank you.

[keyboard clicking]

Now, I've gotta look and make sure that—'cause that's what I've always thought—yes!

**Teresa:** "Thank you" is a touch to the lips and down.

**Travis:** Yeah, thank you. So, like, that is what I have always done: bow and sign language "thank you."

**Teresa:** Yul Brynner at the end of his famous role in *The King and I* would often thrust his arms up like signaling a touchdown, and then take in the applause and bow, swooping all the way to the floor.

**Travis:** Ah. See, what I like to do is a back flip.

**Teresa:** [holding back laughter] Uh-huh?

**Travis:** I like to do a standing back flip. where I land in a split, giving a thumbs up. And that's, like, *my* bow.

**Teresa:** Um... what most people I have seen do is they bend at the hips with their feet together and their legs straight. Um, nodding while they bow, and sort of—bending, I would say, no more than 15 degrees.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Uh, I—I don't know if I've ever seen anyone go directly down to the floor on their bow. Um, but then I have also seen a small curtsy with another head nod and palms down, uh, facing out towards the audience.



**Travis:** You know what? Do whatever you want. That's the thing, is—okay. With one exception. Don't take forever. That's the—

**Teresa:** Exactly. Hoo!

**Travis:** —like, do your bow, get off. But if you—if you want to, like, wave or if you want to, like, sweep your arms off—if you wanna do the prayer hands, you can do prayer hands. But, like—

**Teresa:** I always love when the director choreographs the bows.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** With the timings, and says, "Everybody's gonna do it just like this, and everybody looks the same—"

**Travis:** "Go, go, go, go."

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** And then we'll take our time on a big group bow. Yes.

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** Alright! That's gonna do it for us—this is *our* curtain call. Thank you.

**Teresa:** Thank you, audience!

**Travis:** Um, that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much. Um, thank you to Max Fun for having us. If you wanna go check out all the other amazing Maximumfun.org shows you should, 'cause they're all incredible, and you'll love them. Uh, you can also go to mcelroy.family and check out all our various McElroy projects and merch and tour dates there.

**Teresa:** Speaking of our McElroy projects, my new favorite—I love *The Empty Bowl*. Justin and the author of cerealously.com. Ugh, really nice. Very contemplative. Do—do recommend.

**Travis:** I would say in one sentence, it's a meditative podcast about cereal. Yeah? Pretty much?

**Teresa:** Yeah, totally.

**Travis:** Um, so go check that out. Uh, *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* and *The Adventure Zone* are coming to Birmingham, Alabama and New Orleans in—well, so, *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* is going to be in Alabama, and then *Adventure Zone* and *My Brother, My Brother, and Me* will be in New Orleans. So if you wanna check that out, maybe get tickets to it, you can go to [mcelroy.family](http://mcelroy.family).

Also, we're gonna be at PodCon! Uh, we're not doin' a *Shmanners* there, but we'll be there, so you'll probably see us around. We're gonna do *My Brother, My Bro—* any—it doesn't matter.

**Teresa:** [snort-laughs]

**Travis:** Um, let's see. What else, Teresa? Is that it?

**Teresa:** No. we always do our thank yous to Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found.

Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. Thank you to Keely Weis Photography for our cover banner for the fan-run Facebook group, *Shmanners Fanners*. Please go join that, if you need or like to give shmannerly advice!

Um, please send us your topic ideas to [shmannerscast@gmail.com](mailto:shmannerscast@gmail.com), and you can also send us a tweet to [@shmannerscast](https://twitter.com/shmannerscast).

**Travis:** And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week!

**Teresa:** No RSVP required.

**Travis:** You've been listening to *Shmanners*...

**Teresa:** Manners, *Shmanners*. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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