

Shmanners 356: Read and React: Guide to American Culture and Etiquette

Published May 5, 2023

[Listen here on themcelroy.family](https://themcelroy.family)

[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 love.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: I said, "My love." Oh no!

Teresa: That's okay.

Travis: The banter is ruined!

Teresa: Oh no, it's fine.

Travis: Oh. Okay. Well, oh.

Teresa: I give you permission.

Travis: I guess nothing matters.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Nothing matters anymore. It's all up in the air. Hi, how are you?

Teresa: I'm alright. How are you?

Travis: Oh, I got allergies.

Teresa: Well, yeah, you and everybody else.

Travis: Alright.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I guess I was hoping for a smidgen of sympathy, but uh—

Teresa: Well, let me tell you. I have very little sympathy at this moment in time, because both of the children are suffering with allergies.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And frankly, I think that the oldest one may have overblown her symptoms to us. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah. Listen...

Teresa: [keeps laughing]

Travis: I don't wanna blow up her spot, but we had to have our first like, "I need to stay home from school."

"Do you really need to stay home from school?"

I—Can I tell you folks something I did not realize, in parenting? There's so many things, the day-to-day adventures, surprises, learning experiences.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: I did not realize how quickly the, "Oh, I don't want to go to school anymore—"

Teresa: [laughs hard]

Travis: ... would set in. Where like, pre-preschool, she was so excited to go to school.

Teresa: She begged me to go to school.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Every day she begged.

Travis: And then like day four of preschool, she was like, "I don't want to wake up for school anymore."

Travis: Ugh!

Travis: "I don't want to do it." And like, now she's in kindergarten and she has homework, but it's just like, you know, like "trace these letters" and, you know, simple, like counting. These things.

But still, she's like, "I... I hate doing homework."

And I'm like, "Have I got bad news for you—"

Teresa: "... news for you."

Travis: "... bud. You haven't even started first grade yet. You have a ways to go."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Ugh. I thought we'd have more time.

Teresa: [laughs] So, she got us, she got to stay home today.

Travis: Well, and she is... I mean, she does have allergies.

Teresa: Yes, absolutely she does. And we gave her medication and she feels a lot better now.

Travis: She's great. Ugh.

Teresa: Alright, well, you know.

Travis: She also, once again, just ugh. Just she recently learned the concept of the game of Truth or Dare. And so she was playing it and she asked our friend Robin, Truth or Dare and Robin said truth, and Bebe's truth question was, "What's the worst thing that's ever happened in your life?"

Teresa: [shocked laugh]

Travis: And we had to be like, "Okay, well... this is more of a party game and that's not really a party question."

Teresa: [still laughing] Oh no.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So we got a ways to go.

Teresa: From the mouths of babes.

Travis: Yeah, we got a ways to go with learning. She knows the rules of Truth or Dare, but not quite the nuance.

Teresa: You know, speaking of which, today's Read and React episode—

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: ... is about learning cultural differences and etiquettes.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: And I believe that, you know, school age children, they also learn about our culture, don't they?

Travis: Sure, okay.

Teresa: I'm going to read to you some excerpts today from an online article—

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: ... from Penn State.

Travis: Cool.

Teresa: Entitled, "Guide to American Culture and Etiquette."

Travis: Well, we're gonna lock it all down now.

Teresa: Well, it's not really about—

Travis: This is going to solve everything.

Teresa: It's not really about us.

Travis: Oh.

Travis: So, this guide, as it says, ahem, "This guide has been prepared for international students to read and refer to during your time here. It gives you information about American customs and describes some points that may be different from your culture."

So I think that—

Travis: Is it accurate?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Oh, okay. I couldn't tell if this was going to be a like, "What!? They said that?! I've never done that in my life."

Teresa: No, no, this is accurate and it is very interesting, as an American who has grown up in our culture, it's very interesting to me the things that are referenced in this article. That... I mean, and we'll get to it right?

Things that I may not have thought were so different across the globe, but indeed they are.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And also in this guide are some firsthand accounts from some of their students included in this article.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: It starts out with alcohol, smoking and drugs. And basically outlines the legal... the legal ramifications, right?

Travis: That is important, yes. Because in many countries it's, first of all, 18.

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: And I think less frowned on... This is a bit puritanical stuff, you know? Alcohol specifically—

Teresa: Alcohol specifically.

Travis: I don't know about smoking and drugs, but—

Teresa: But one of the things that I had actually taken for granted, is now in the United States, smoking isn't allowed in most public places, even if they're outside.

There are typically designated smoking areas.

Travis: Does that include vaping, ripping mad cotton?

Teresa: Mm... I don't... That's not on this list.

Travis: Cheesin' those clowns? It probably does.

Teresa: But... It probably does.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? And that's something that I like, I have definitely taken for granted.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And I feel like—

Travis: [sarcastic] 'Cause you do your vape tricks everywhere.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Every time—

Teresa: [sarcastic] Oh yes.

Travis: [sarcastic] Like you'll be in an elevator and you'll blow mad rings and you're shooting cotton. You're like Gandalf with that baby. You know what I mean?

Teresa: [sarcastic] Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Travis: [sarcastic] And your vape rig is sick. You're getting mad ohms. You know what I mean? It's huge.

Teresa: No, I don't know what you mean.

Travis: [sarcastic] It looks kind of steam powered, because it's a vape. And so you're very steampunk vaper. You know what I mean. Darth Vaper, they call her.

Teresa: Oh no. Okay I'm saying—

Travis: Don Vaper.

Teresa: I'm saying something now to get you to stop.

Travis: Teresa's never vaped in her life.

Teresa: There's no surprise that a lot of this article centers around classroom etiquette.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: And here are a couple of the finer points, "Class discussion and participation are highly encouraged and may contribute to the overall grade.

"Understanding, not just memorizing class material is important. Students remain seated when the professor arrives or when the students name is called."

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: Yeah, right?

Travis: There's only a couple things in there of like, I guess, one, take it for granted that discussion is just what you do in college.

And also like, I guess there are cultures where it's a sign of respect. When the teacher walks in you stand up.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: I would feel real weird if I did that for- But then I also- Man, there's another—

Teresa: I remember seeing those sorts of behaviors like in, you know, old-timey movies, right? Set in like—

Travis: Like *Dead Poets Society*.

Teresa: *Dead Poets Society* or I'm thinking—

Travis: And then they stand on desks. And we gotta say, like, “Hey, sometimes people stand on desks here in America to protest.”

Teresa: I'm thinking *Anne of Green Gables*, right?

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: And there's a lot of classroom scenes in like, the '80s Canadian movie, right? And every time the teacher comes in, everybody stands up. Every time their name is called, the person stands up.

Travis: Exhausting.

Teresa: I feel like that even happens in a lot of the like... Don't they happen in like the *Peanuts* cartoons? Don't the kids stand up when they're called?

Travis: Get up beside their desks or something?

Teresa: Yeah, don't they?

Travis: Maybe.

Teresa: But we don't do that. Don't do that anymore. I don't remember really at any point in my academic career doing any of that.

Travis: I barely stood up. Sometimes I would just, you know, stay in the classroom. Even when class was done, I'm just like, “Meh, I don't want to.”

Teresa: So here is the account of someone from China.

“Almost every professor allows us to eat during class. If eating can help students concentrate better in class, why not? It differs in my hometown since eating in class is totally banned.

One day, I did not have enough time to have lunch, so I brought some cookies to class. I didn't know students could take a bite of food here, so I grabbed the cookie quickly into my mouth when the professor turned back to write on the board.

My friend sitting next to me wrote, 'What are you doing?' on her notebook. And I wrote 'Eating' back.

She laughed out loud after class and told me that I did not have to act like this because most professors allow us to do so."

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Very interesting, right? I feel like definitely in college this is something that we were allowed to do.

But I remember in high school that there were certain classes, like study hall, you were allowed to have a snack, right?

Travis: I never had study hall.

Teresa: Oh.

Travis: That wasn't a thing in my school.

Teresa: I see. Or like... Oh, if you were a teacher's aide for a...? No, you guys didn't have teacher's aides...?

Travis: Didn't have that either. Nope, no, no.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: This is interesting though, because—

Teresa: Or like, first period homeroom. Did you guys have that?

Travis: In high school?

Teresa: Yeah. Ever? Did you guys do homeroom every- We did it, probably... I think we did it once a quarter or something—

Travis: Maybe.

Teresa: We would have a home room stop-in before first period and you could... It was a little earlier and you could have breakfast. It was at the first bell or something?

Travis: So this is the problem with how my memory works, is I'm trying to remember a general, "Did I ever eat in school?"

And my brain's like, "I don't know, man, get more specific."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Right? It's like, I definitely ate in the lunch room.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I ate breakfast sometimes.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And it's like, "Did you eat in class?"

"I dunno man, what class? What teacher was it? What were you eating? Gotta get specific man. I don't even remember generalities. Did I ever eat in any class, ever? I don't know!"

Teresa: I mean, I remember certain teachers—

Travis: I remember a teacher showing me how he could put a cigarette out on his tongue. And in class, he said if we did really good on a test, he would show us how he could put a cigarette out on his tongue and how he could flip a lit cigarette back into his mouth, hold it for a second and then flip it back out fully lit, and keep smoking it.

That dude ruled. His name was Ferg, Mr. Ferguson, he ruled. He was great.

Teresa: [hesitantly] Sounds... sounds great.

Travis: He smoked so much... He coached the girls track team, and he smoked too much so he couldn't run. So when they would like run laps around the park, he would just drive in his car [laughs] around the park because he didn't have the lung capacity to run with them.

He was great.

Teresa: I don't... I don't know what to say about that.

Travis: Yes, nobody does.

Teresa: Okay, so let's move on to some dating etiquette that's outlined in this article. I think it's very great, but also a little telling, that the one of the first points is, "When a person says no, he slash she, means no."

Travis: Yes. That's—hey, that's just a good rule across the board.

Teresa: But it shows that in different cultures this is not a widely accepted... Consent is not a widely accepted like, social norm.

And so this is something that as like a global community we are still learning, right?

Travis: To be fair, it's not like here in the US of A, we're like top notch 100 percent out of.

Teresa: Indeed. Indeed. Here are some. This is written by a student from Nigeria.

"It is not always the man who asks. In some cultures, women are seen as promiscuous if they ask a man on the date. However, in the United States, the asker is not limited by gender.

"Women can freely initiate the dating process without being seen as committing a taboo."

Travis: Did you ever ask people out?

Teresa: Uh... Nah.

Travis: Yeah, to be fair, I don't remember asking too many people out either. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Um, that was just 'cause I was very shy and there was a lot of like, [high-pitched waffling] "I think some friends... We're gonna go see a movie..."

Teresa: I... Yeah, I remember that.

But like, I feel like the whole asking out on a date thing is a little more prevalent in movies and TV, right?

Where usually I feel like unless you have set up some sort of like, dating site, right? That's something where you have to, like, ask and make plans and stuff like that.

But I feel like, especially in my experience, it has been more kind of like, organic, through outings with friends.

Travis: Sure. But I mean also you and I got together when you were like 23 and I was 25 and we haven't really dated anyone since then.

So I think there was a period of—

Teresa: I suppose.

Travis: There was a period of time for me from 22 to 25, where it wasn't like, like in college, you could be like, "Do you want to go to this party with me?" right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Where like, you would hang out with them while you were there and then kind of start dating 'cause you were hanging out in school so much.

There was a period from like 22 to 25 where it was like, if I want to go out with people, I need to ask them.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: I need to say like, "Would you like to go to a movie with me? Do you want to go out to dinner with me?" Right?

There wasn't that seamless kind of transition from like, "Yeah, we sit and have lunch at school together every day. And like we hang out between classes every day, and eventually we're just kind of dating," you know what I mean?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: There had to be a much more specific like, "Would you like to go on a date with me?"

Or more... I wouldn't say it like that. That's a thing that they do in movies and we were just talking about this yesterday—

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: On TV shows where they're like, "Would you go out on a date with me sometime?"

And they're like, "Yeah."

And they're like, "Awesome."

And then the two parties—

Teresa: There's—

Travis: ... walk away from each other!

Teresa: [laughs] They don't make any plans. They don't exchange phone numbers.

Travis: Somebody's like, "Hey, do you wanna go to dinner?"

And they're like, "Yeah." Break.

And it's just like, "Whoa! Hey, how about a time?" Then like... And the way my brain works, I look at that and I'm like "And they never spoke again."
[laughs]

Teresa: But it's implied, right? That's implied.

Travis: I mean, I guess. I guess it's not very interesting to watch a TV show where people pull out their phones and they're checking calendars and like "Friday?"

"Well, I could do like 7?"

"Uh, it's a little... Umm..."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Thursday?"

"I can't Thursday."

Like, I guess that's not interesting.

Teresa: No.

Travis: But at least have your character say, like, "Will you go to dinner with me this Friday night?" Right? Something there.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: I feel there's like a- Not just, "Would you like to go to dinner with me?" And the answer is "Yes."
All you've established there is, like, "The idea of going to dinner with you? I would be open to it."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: "Cool. Just making sure."

Teresa: Again, it's implied.

Travis: I guess.

Teresa: It's the same reason why, in movies and TV, people have bathrooms in their apartments, but you don't get to watch people do that.
[laughs]

Travis: Well, it's the same reason, I guess, when phone calls end, it's just like, "Yeah. Did you hear from this guy?"

"I did." Click. And then it hung up, and like, "Hello? Hel-Oh, he hung up on me."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Nobody ever says goodbye.

Teresa: Okay, so here's another one.

"A date is a planned activity. If you watch some American romantic comedies, you will notice that when a couple goes out on a date, they actually put effort into planning an activity that they could term as a date.

"Activities include, but are not limited to, going out for food, going to watch a movie, playing golf or even going to a theme park."

Travis: Do other people... Do other cultures not do events for dates?

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But this Nigerian said that this was worth noting.

Travis: Maybe it's just clarifying that if somebody says like, "Do you want to go out on a date with me?" That's what they mean, right?

Teresa: Oh, maybe.

Travis: Not just like a planned... Because, like, "Do you want to go out on a date with me?" What... What could that possibly mean?

If you don't know what the word "date" means, like, I don't think that it conveys anything directly. Right?

Where it's different if you said, "Do you want to do an activity with me?"

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Right? That's clear. "Do you want to do an outing with me?"

It's like, I don't need to know exactly what that means.

"Do you want to go on a date with me?"

"Huh. I have no concept of what that means—"

Teresa: I—

Travis: "... if I don't know what the definition of the word 'date' is."

Teresa: [skeptically] Yeah... yeah. I feel like you could describe it, like you said, as, "Do you want to do an activity with me?"

But you could, you know, put some like qualifiers on and be like, "Do you want to come with just me and see if we're romantically compatible?"
[laughs]

Travis: Oh, I see. "Would you like to get to know me in a very awkward one-on-one kind of way?"

Teresa: [laughs hard]

Travis: "With absolutely no buffers and no outside person to help like, carry the conversation along, if there's a lull. And we're gonna put a lot of weight onto this like, two-hour thing and see how we feel. Where are you going? Please come back."

Teresa: [laughs] I don't know. That might really help people set up expectations.

Travis: Listen, all I'm saying is you and I have been together for like, 13 years, and I'm still getting a feeling for how we work together. You know what I mean?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: What's the chemistry like? Do we get along well?

Teresa: Let's move on. Driving laws and etiquette. Here are some of the points.

"Honking your horn means a lot in America."

Travis: It sure does.

Teresa: "You can make drivers angry—"

Travis: It means freedom.

Teresa: "... if it seems unnecessary. Limit how often you honk your horn.

"In the states, you must stop at least 10 feet away from a school bus when you see it stopped with its lights on, or its sign extended. And you must stay at the stop until the lights are off, the sign is retracted and the bus begins to move."

Travis: Once again, another thing that I would argue some people in the US of A don't do.

Teresa: That's true.

Travis: Is there anything in there about when stop lights go out from power outages and you treat it like a stop sign?

Teresa: No, there's nothing, nothing like that.

Travis: That's one of my biggest pet peeves. I don't know if it's everywhere, right, or if it's just here in Cincinnati.

But when the power goes out and like the lights stop working or they're just flashing red. And people are just like, "I guess I better gun it!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Instead of just like, you know, you treat it like a stop sign and everybody takes turns as you would at a stop sign.

It's not like, "I better go faster and hope no one hits me!" There's a process to it, and the number- Ugh.

Teresa: Well, in some cultures I've seen that it is kind of like, whoever wants to go just goes.

Travis: Whoever wants it the most?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Whoever wants it the most.

I was very interested to read about the honking of the horn. And I had to think about, um... It really does seem to convey some kind of like, anger, right?

And even when we're just trying to... Say the light turns green and you're trying to get the attention of the person in front of you to go, it's a very short... Like you almost kind of just like, [hesitant horn noise].

Travis: [hesitant horn noise]

Teresa: Just a little bit.

Travis: Just goose it.

Teresa: [laughs] A little bit on the horn, because you don't want to upset the other driver.

Travis: Well, we don't want to—

Teresa: You don't want to—

Travis: Because we're good people with kind hearts.

Teresa: You don't want to seem like you're angry at them, and because the loudness—

Travis: This is why we talked about the... We talked about the car horns on *My Brother, My Brother and Me*—

Teresa: I know.

Travis: ... where the "Good job, cool horn" comes from.

Teresa: I know, right?

Travis: Great job.

Teresa: I know.

Travis: But that is a thing—but I—there's probably lots of places where it's like, you could honk to just like, "Hey, what's up?" Right? Or just honk 'cause you're frustrated or honk because you're honking and everybody'd be like, "Yeah, what—" Everyone—

Teresa: "Whatever."

Travis: But if I hear that, when I see, like street scenes in, you know, movies set in other countries where, like, everybody just kind of honking all the time?

I just picture everyone in their car just absolutely pulling their hair out, like constantly. That's probably not it.

Teresa: Well, that's one of the big clichés that we see in movies about New York City, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Where because it's a big place, and like you always hear—

Travis: There's always Godzillas.

Teresa: [laughs] You always hear the honking as part of the soundtrack, like the ambience in the street and stuff like that.

And my experience... I haven't... I haven't lived there, but my experience is, yeah, that can happen when there's a lot of traffic, but generally speaking it's not a constant noise.

Travis: Do you ever feel like, in our love story, that New York City is kind of like its own character, right? It's kind of like the third character in our love story. You ever feel like that?

Teresa: No, I don't, Tom Hanks.

Travis: You don't ever feel like that.?

Teresa: No, I don't.

Travis: Ugh. I feel like- You know, what do you feel like?

Teresa: What?

Travis: I feel like we should take a break for a word from some other Max Fun shows.

Teresa: Nice.

[ad break]

Travis: Okay, tell me more. Tell me more. Did she buy you a car? That's not the line, is it? Tell me more. Tell me more. Did she buy you a car?

Teresa: No, no. He's- The girl's say like, "Does he have a car?"

Travis: Oh, that makes a lot more sense. Okay.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: For some reason the words, [laughing] "Did she buy you a car?" popped in my head and that was all my brain could do in that moment.

Teresa: Let's do some eating culture and etiquette.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, here are some of the finer points.

"In general, Americans eat quietly with their mouths closed. Burping is seen as rude, not as a compliment to the cook."

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: “Burgers, sandwiches and pizza are eaten with hands instead of utensils.” I think that Miss Manners and Emily Post might argue about that, but... Um—

Travis: I think what we're just talking about here, because, like, I'm sure listening to this my first thought was like, “Yeah, ideally all of those things.”

Teresa: Well, yeah.

Travis: Right? Where it's just like, “Yeah, you don't burp. We... You know, we chew with our mouths closed. This is exactly what you're supposed to do.”

Teresa: Those are the expectations. But of course, I mean—

Travis: You do your best.

Teresa: You do your best, yeah. A student from India writes, “Eating etiquette among friends is different here. In the US, friends usually eat their own meals and rarely share water bottles or cups.

“Whereas in India you could pick up your friend's water bottle and drink from it, or eat from their plate.”

Travis: Okay, now listen... Listen...

Teresa: Maybe this is a little outdated, right?

Travis: We're going to assume that. But even beyond that, even if this was like ten years ago and I was just sitting there and anyone, even if like Justin or Griffin, reached over...

Like you could do it, right? You could reach over and grab a bottle of water I was actively drinking from and take a swig without asking. But if anyone else did it—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: ... I would be actively upset.

Teresa: Yeah, I think so.

Travis: The eating of the plate thing—

Teresa: I do it with my children. I let my children... Well, when they're not sick.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: I often let them drink from my cup or eat from my plate.

Travis: Well yeah. I mean, those are your kids. I would let my kids do that too, for a price.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But the eating off the plate thing, the only hang up I have about that is I need to have the first bite of stuff.

Teresa: Yeah, I mean, but that's your thing.

Travis: It's my thing of like, if I—even, if I get like a piece of cheesecake and Teresa's like, "Can I have a bite?" I'm like, "Yes, hold on."

And I take a bite and then you can have a bite. And this is really difficult when you have like a three-year old.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Who's like, "Can I have a bite?" And you're like—

Teresa: [groans]

Travis: I'm not gonna stare you in the eyes while I take a bite first and go "Now you can."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: So it's like, "Yes you can." [grumbles]

Teresa: Um—

Travis: I do the same thing with drinks too. Where if I've just sat down, I have a glass of water, and somebody's like, "Hey, can I have a drink of that?"

I'm like, "But I haven't.. I haven't tried it yet." [grumbles]

Teresa: [laughs] I love when I'm eating a protein bar and Dottie wants a bite of my protein bar and she takes a giant bite out of this protein bar.

Then she goes, [mouth full] "Mmm. It's so good!" [laughs]

Travis: [laughs] That is a very Travis McElroy thing to do.

Teresa: Okay, here's one, an observation from a student from China.

"People do not share dishes together, although they may have food at the same time around a table. Everyone has their own plates or packages of food when they hang out together." Um—

Travis: That's interesting because that gets me... I'm thinking about it now how many restaurants we've gone to—

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... where they will specify, "This is a family style restaurant," which means like, "We're gonna bring you a big plate of something that's meant to be shared."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Except—

Teresa: But everybody still has their own plates and cutlery and napkins and stuff.

Travis: Well, what's interesting, even in... And I'm not wild about the family style thing because it infers a certain amount of like, everybody being on the same page.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And one of my favorite things about going to restaurants is as opposed to like, eating at home, you go to a restaurant and it's like, "Everybody can choose the thing that they want and specifically have that thing."

And when it's like, "Oh, our dishes are meant to be shared. So like, if you get this, it's for four people."

And I want to be like, "How about you just give me a quarter of the plate. Just get a smaller bowl and just give me that and then I don't feel bad."

Teresa: Yeah. Well, I mean—

Travis: But that's me and I don't know if people are picking up on this from the thing I said earlier about taking the first bite? I've got some control issues.

Teresa: [laughs] Yes, we are picking up on that.

Travis: Yep.

Teresa: So, when... Another thing about eating that I wanted to point out was the idea of seating around a table.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Which isn't explicitly mentioned in this, but it is talked about by one of the Chinese students.

“In China people usually follow a strict seating rule during a family dinner. If all family members are seated at the rectangular table, the host or hostess and the senior members of the family usually sit at the far edges of the table.”

That makes sense, right? We've talked about the head and the foot of the table.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And, “Also no one starts eating before the senior members do.”

Again, that's a kind of older etiquette thing that we've talked about here in the US.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: “But,” he says, “When I came to the United States several years ago, I found out the people here do not follow a specific set of eating rules.

“Most of the dining tables here are round and dinner participants can sit wherever they want, regardless of their identities or shape of the tables.

“When the hosts announce the beginning of the dinner, people start to pass the food containers around the circle. This way, regardless of age, everybody sitting at the table can get their food whenever the container is passed to their hands.”

Travis: Yeah, that's interesting because I think one of the things about the, especially this kind of deal, right? I think about this here in the US of A.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Is how non-uniform it is?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Where there are some places where they pass around dishes and you serve yourself. There's some places- Some families might dish up plates and then set them out for people. Some families might have set...

Like, our family has set seating just 'cause it's where we end up sitting, right?

Teresa: Well with the—

Travis: We wanted to position it—

Teresa: Yeah...

Travis: So it was like, "Parent, kid, parent, kid."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Around the table, right? And it's like, yeah, that's what happened in my family growing up is like, "Yeah, man, there were five of us. And this is just kind of where everybody ended up sitting."

To a point where like if you came to the table and somebody was like, sitting in your chair, you'd be like, "What are you...? Are you...? No. Move over there."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Right? It wasn't like we had assigned seats, it was just we had seats. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs] I feel like in my family, we very early on moved from the kitchen table to the dining room because it was further away from the TV. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: We didn't have TV during meals and so my mom and my dad had specific places. My dad always sat at the head because he was closest to the microwave. He likes his food boiling lava hot.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And my mother would sit next to the door to the kitchen so that she could go in and out and get the things that she needed.

And then us kids just kind of—

Travis: Would sit under the table.

Teresa: No, we just kind—

Travis: And plot.

Teresa: ... wherever we ended up, really.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Was fine.

Travis: You didn't sit in regular... You just sat in different places?

Teresa: Um...

Travis: You rotated?

Teresa: I mean, I think that everybody had their preferred seat, but I don't remember it feeling like someone was in my seat.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Except when you sat in Dad's seat and then you were definitely in Dad's seat.

Next on the list is eye contact. This is something that I've heard about.

Travis: I've never done eye contact before. I've heard about eye contact.

Teresa: Mmm. You're doing it with me right now!

Travis: No I'm not, not anymore.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: You creeped me out.

Teresa: The article says, "Eye contact is mandatory, in public and particularly on public transportation is the exception. People avoid making eye contact with strangers."

Travis: Now, once again, sure. If you're asking me, a hundred, like out of a hundred times.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Yeah, most people would say like, "Yeah, you make eye contact with people." Not everybody. This guy? Not wild about it, especially when talking directly to someone I tend to want to look over their shoulder when they're talking so I can listen better because I don't listen with my eyeballs.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: I listen with my ears. And if I'm looking with my eyes, I'm thinking... Now, I have ADHD.

Teresa: [laughs knowingly]

Travis: And I'm thinking about listening instead of actually listening. So I gotta kind of zone out the front of my face so that the sides of my head work better.

Teresa: Yeah, but you do look in their general direction.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so like... And you'll check in with my eyeballs while we're talking.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: You don't like, stare at them or anything, but here is, um—

Travis: I'm just saying that there are plenty of people out there with different kinds of neurodivergence—

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: ... that makes it so that they do not make eye contact. And I think that there's nothing wrong with that.

Teresa: Here is the observation of a student from Thailand.

“Eye contact is very important here, especially in a formal setting. It shows that you are paying attention to the speaker or to your speaking partner.

“At first I felt uncomfortable when people opened their eyes widely and stared into my eyes while I was talking, but after a few conversations, it felt better.

“After another time when I was giving a presentation, many people stared at me, but this time it felt good as I now knew they were paying attention to me.”

Travis: Now I will say this, this is something that we've recently had to deal with doing live shows.

Teresa: Mmm.

Travis: Where, like, there is not a lot of separation from us and the... You know, it's us sitting at a table.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And the people who sit up front, or in like the front three rows? If you're not careful, you will make direct eye contact with somebody when you're sitting on the stage.

Teresa: Yeah...

Travis: And suddenly that's all I'm thinking about.

Teresa: Ugh!

Travis: And so you gotta kind of like blur your vision a little bit, and you're like... This is a thing that they teach you in theater all the time.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: 'Cause like, when you're performing a show and you're in character in a thing, you can't just like... And you have to turn to the audience, you can't just like look at, you know, Judy in the front row.

You gotta like kind of soft focus over everybody.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So the audience is like, "Oh, he's looking at me!" And it's like, "I'm not looking at anybody. If I look at anybody, it's gonna freak me out."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Anyway. I don't like—

Teresa: There's... There's that whole 4th wall deal.

Travis: ... making eye contact with people. I don't know if that's clear.

Teresa: [comically seductive voice] You make eye contact with me all the time.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: I'm just a special one.

Travis: Yeah, you're my wife, and I'm legally obligated to make eye contact with you.

Teresa: [laughs] I thought this was interesting, getting in line.

"In the US, people get in line and wait their turn when buying tickets, shopping, using the restroom, waiting for a bus, etcetera. It is considered rude to cut in line or push your way through.

"If you're not sure whether there is one line or several lines, you should wait your turn and simply get behind everyone who arrived before you."

Now we have the... You know we've heard about the very British queuing kind of instinct, right? But in other parts of the world, there really aren't lines.

It's just whoever kind of like you know, the... the survival of the fittest gets to the front, right?

Travis: I... I actually fully support that.

Teresa: You do?

Travis: `Cause I think I would be the fittest.

Teresa: [laughing] Oh, sure.

Travis: Listen, I can flow like water through people in line. You've seen it. I'll leave you behind. You're in my dust.

Teresa: But that doesn't make it good. That doesn't make it a good idea.

Travis: Hey, I try not to judge other cultures Teresa, especially when it means I would be successful in them.

Teresa: [laughs] I think in general it's probably a nicer thing to wait your turn.

Travis: You say that until you're standing beside someone behind someone who's not queuing well and like they're not moving when people are like... There'll be a big gap ahead of 'em.

You can't tell me you've been in line at an amusement park and you see people, like, they're not paying attention.

And suddenly it's like, "We could be moving right now. You're not moving."

But you don't have a part of your brain that's like, "I'm just gonna step past them. I'm just gonna go."

You can't tell me you don't have that impulse!

Teresa: I have felt the frustration of seeing a large gap and the person not noticing, yes.

Travis: The problem is, the line, the queuing, is only good if everybody in the line is good at it.

When people aren't, right, and it's just like, "Okay, well, you missed your chance. You were bad at this, so I'm going to move forward."

I'm just saying, maybe a survival of the fittest slash queuing line where it's like, everybody gets one shot.

Teresa: [laughs] Alright. So I think... I think one more. Restaurant etiquette, I think, is something that differs around the world for sure.

So they recognized in this section that tipping your server 15 to 20 percent is required. I would argue these days it might be 20 to 25 percent.

Travis: Agreed.

Teresa: "Although no tips are needed at fast food restaurants or for carry out. Doggie bags are a common way to package leftovers and take them home."

A student from Brazil talked about how, "In Brazil we can go to a restaurant and not order anything or take a long time to order and in the end we always stay after eating to talk. And it may sometimes last for hours.

"You pay the check whenever you want.

"In the US, you are expected to enter the restaurant, order, eat, pay and leave. And sometimes you don't even need to ask for the check. When you eat the last bite of food, the server may bring the check to you.

"In the beginning it was weird and stressful to me, but I got used to it.

"If you do not want to eat but just want to have drinks, you should ask the host or hostess at the restaurant if you can get a table or you may go to the bar inside the restaurant."

Travis: You know, I bet a lot of that, 'cause I've thought about this before—

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... is about the tipping aspect of it.

Teresa: You think so?

Travis: Well, 'cause if you're a server, right? And you're operating on tips instead of getting paid hourly, the more tables you can turn over the more money you make in the evening.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: As opposed to if you are being paid hourly, whether you wait on one table an hour or 10 tables an hour, you're getting paid the same amount.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: So when you are a server, as I've done this before 'cause I've been a server before, you are striving to be like, "I want to seem attentive, I don't want to rush them. But if a table's sitting there forever and not paying, that's a table that I can't seat... You know, that I'm missing out on.

And it's people I'm paying attention to who I'm not earning any money from because they're already done eating.

Teresa: Which is why we should pay people a living wage.

Travis: Or better.

Teresa: Or better.

Travis: Yeah, a thriving wage.

Teresa: Thriving wage. Um, social courtesies also stood out to me.

Here's one, "Americans like their personal space and stand about two feet apart when touching. Physical touching when in a conversation actually makes Americans uncomfortable."

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Um, let's see. What else? Another one, "If an American offers you something, they will understand your 'yes' to really mean yes and your 'no' to literally mean no."

This is something I think that there may be... There's like a kind of social script for some other cultures where someone offers you something and you decline it at first and then they offer it again and then you say, "Oh, no, no, no."

And then the third time you are socially accepted to like... to have it.

Travis: Yeah, I would say that that's not universal across American cultures though. Because I would say a very Midwestern thing is like, "Hey, do you need help?"

Like, "No, I've got it."

Like, "Oh, let me help you."

"Okay."

Right? There is- I—

Teresa: I'm not saying that that's not the way that we do it sometimes in America. But like I am saying that if —

Travis: Don't be surprised if that happens.

Teresa: Don't be surprised if when you're offered something and you decline, they go "Okay."

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Right? That definitely does happen. Whereas in other cultures that might not happen.

The last one I want to go over is time management.

Travis: Mmm.

Teresa: I think that this fits in really well with like the restaurant thing, right? Where it says, "Time is an American value. There is an expression that says, 'Time is money.' So Americans, quote, 'save time' and quote 'spend time' like money in a bank."

Travis: [sadly] Yeah...

Teresa: [sadly] Yeah.

Travis: [laughs] Yeah. Hmm.

Teresa: Yeah...

Travis: Yeah...

Teresa: And this definitely makes sense as something that someone from another culture might not get right away, because there are... You know, we expect people to be punctual and let us know if they're going to be late.

You know, whereas in another culture it might be expected that if I say five o'clock, I really mean eight o'clock you know that kind of stuff, right?

Travis: [incredulous] What!?

Teresa: Yeah, definitely.

Travis: Five o'clock to eight o'clock? That's three hours!

Teresa: See? You're really upset about it, but there are definitely places where it's expected.

Travis: Babe, I'm upset if it's like two minutes.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Where I'm like, "That's two minutes I could have not been here."

Teresa: Right. It's considered rude, right?

Travis: Yes. But once again, I have control issues.

Teresa: Yeah. Well...

Travis: So it's especially rude to this guy, when I'm like, "It's 3:05 and they're not here. They said three o'clock and they're not here."

The idea that someone's clock is different from mine, never even enters my head.

Teresa: [laughs] I think that around the world there are definitely values around efficiency.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Right? Getting your job done well in a good time frame, things like that.

But socially, a lot of cultures have different ways of... Where they, you know, where they sit as far as, like punctuality and about like... You know, we read about the Brazilian restaurant anecdote, right?

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Where that is like... It might take several hours to go through dinner. And if you were expected to sit at a restaurant table for several hours, I don't know what might happen to you.

Travis: Am I allowed to play on my phone?

Teresa: [laughs] Mmm...

Travis: `Cause then maybe?

Teresa: Mm, maybe.

Travis: I... When I'm done eating, which is usually before everyone else, I start to be so antsy.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Until everyone else is done, because it's like, "Hey, this activity is done now. We've com- I've completed this. It's time for me- I don't like in between time."

Teresa: Well, what about like the idea of, like, hanging out at someone's house for dinner or something? Does that feel like you have like "times where we are doing this" and "times where we are doing this"?

Instead of like "We're going to... You know, there's food out on the table if you want to like nosh, and there's drinks and couches and things like that."

Travis: That's different. Then we're doing the activity, right?

Teresa: Oh, that is the activity.

Travis: But if somebody says like, "Come over for dinner and then we'll play a board game." And I'm finished with dinner and the board game hasn't begun yet, I'm in this amorphous, very uncomfortable period of like, "So when are we going...?"

"Because I know... They're supposed to... Is that... Is it gonna be like five minutes or ten minutes 'til we start the... What's the next? When's the next thing?"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "When's the next thing happening?"

Teresa: So then you do your deep breathing and play on your phone for a little bit.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah. Or I close my eyes and I pretend I'm anywhere else—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: ... doing things. This happens... Like I- Anytime I travel with friends or do anything and they're like, "Yeah, we'll just go back to the hotel and hang out before the next thing."

And I'm like, "No, we need to find something else to do before the next thing or else what are we- We're just going sit at the hotel and wait? And wait for the next thing?"

And they're like, "No, we'll like rest and chill."

And I'm like, "Rest? Rest by not doing stuff?"

Teresa: Says the man who loves his afternoon nap.

Travis: That's different. That's the activity.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: If someone had scheduled in, "We're gonna do this thing. Then we're gonna take a nap, and then we're gonna go see a movie"? I'm like, "Sounds great."

But if someone's like, "Here's just an empty 30 minutes where anything could happen or nothing could happen."

And I'm like, "But what do I do with that time? What are we supposed to be doing with that time?"

Otherwise I'm just waiting. In a perfect world, I'm ready for an event 30 seconds before I'm supposed to be there, and then I can just teleport there immediately. That's the thing.

If I start getting ready too early and I'm like, "I'm just gonna leave early and get there while the caterers are still setting up" or something. I don't know.

But I hate in between times. And I feel like I've revealed so much on this episode.

Teresa: You know, I'm actually really glad that you're so self-aware about this.

Travis: Oh yeah. If there's one thing about me, I know what's messed up. [cackles]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Uh, that's gonna do it for us. I've revealed too much, I... ugh. I've given it all away.

I'm gonna tell you, Teresa, and people at home, about the new merch for May.

Teresa: Ooh!

Travis: We've got some really exciting- We have Nalgene water bottles.

Teresa: Hey, nice!

Travis: We have an *Adventure Zone* one, and a *My Brother, My Brother and Me* one with patterns designed by Justin Gray.

And we have a "Never know when to stop dreaming" shirt designed by Sabrina Volente. That's from *The Adventures Zone: Steeplechase*.

We've got a bunch of other stuff on there too, and 10% of all merch proceeds this month go to the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, which works across Congress, courts, and communities to end gun violence.

So check all that out at mcelroymerch.com.

Also, we've got another *Sun and Sea: Surf the Vibe* tour show, a couple of 'em coming up in two weeks. On May 19th, we're doing *My Brother, My Brother and Me* in Columbus.

On May 20th we're doing *Adventure Zone* in Columbus.

And then on May 21st, we're doing *My Brother, My Brother and Me* in Milwaukee. And then we have other shows coming up after that. Check out all of that and get tickets at bit.ly/mcelroytours.

Also want to say thank you to our researcher Alex, without whom we would not be able to make this show.

We want to say thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we would not be able to make this show. We wanna say thank you to you for listening and supporting this show. We can't make it without you, I've decided this time.

Teresa: Indeed.

Travis: What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always think Brent "Brentalfloss" Black, who wrote our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found.

Thank you to Bruja Betty Pin Up Photography for the cover picture of our fan run Facebook group, "Shmanners Fanners." If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

Also, if you would like to submit topics, ideas, or if you have, I don't know, if you have an article you want us to read and react to, any of that kind of stuff, go ahead and send it to schmannerscast@gmail.com and say hello to Alex because she reads every one.

Travis: And that's going to 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?

[outro, theme music plays]

Maximumfun.org.

Comedy and culture.

Artist owned.

Audience supported.