

## **Shmanners 14: Accessories: Handkerchief, Napkin, and Fan**

Published April 4, 2016

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**Travis:**

Hey, Teresa, how do you feel about etiquette accessories?

**Teresa:**

I'd say I'm a fan.

**Travis:**

It's Shmanners!

[theme music plays]

**Travis:**

Hello, internet, and welcome to Shmanners. I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

**Teresa:**

And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

**Travis:**

And this is Shmanners.

**Teresa:**

It's extraordinary etiquette...

**Travis:**

...for ordinary occasions. I'm very excited to do this episode, um, we're sorry that it's a little bit late. Teresa has been very sick for the last couple days and has found herself in need of some of the accessories they were talking about in this very episode.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] I would say that it is quite topical of us.

**Travis:**

It really is.

**Teresa:**

And maybe prophetic?

**Travis:**

Little bit, ooh. Little, uh, not ominous, but some other word that I'm thinking that I can't pull to the front of my brain.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] I can't recall. Did we choose this topic before I became deathly ill?

**Travis:**

We did. We did.

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

We did, and it all led to this moment. We're talking about handkerchief, napkins, and fans. And speaking of fans, before we get into the episode, I want to say thank you to everybody who donated to the Max Fun drive. We really appreciate it.

It was hugely successful, and it was all thanks to you and you should be very proud of yourselves. If you haven't donated and you feel like you missed your chance, don't worry. You can still support all the shows you love on Max Fun. You won't get all of the special bonus stuff, but you can listen to all of the bonus content by becoming a donor at any time in the year.

So go to [MaximumFun.org/donate](http://MaximumFun.org/donate), and that's the last thing we'll say about because we've already talked about it way too much over the last two weeks and now I want to talk about accessories.

**Teresa:**

All right. Let's accessorize.

**Travis:**

And this is probably going to be one of, like, several because eventually I want to get to a point where we're talking about, like, snuff boxes. We're talking about, like, walking sticks. But this is just handkerchiefs, napkins, and hand fans.

**Teresa:**

All right, so like a lot of things that we have today, handkerchiefs and napkins are very old. [laughs]

**Travis:**

That makes sense to me. They seem like a pretty simple concept. I don't know that there's been a lot of revolutions in the technology surrounding napkins and handkerchiefs over the years.

**Teresa:**

Right. Um, and also, like a lot of things that are very old, there are some highly contested facts about them.

**Travis:**

Ooh, I like highly contested facts. Please tell me some, please.

**Teresa:**

Well, let's go into a couple of, uh, like very ancient things. 1000 BC to 200 BC-ish, in there. So, the Zhou dynasty in China, uh, handkerchiefs were used to shield a person's head from the sun.

**Travis:**

Ooh.

**Teresa:**

And we know this because there are several statues, uh, from the period that have these pieces of decorative cloth carved in stone.

**Travis:**

I feel like I've seen that in, um, Chinese artwork where you see, like, tied at the four corners to kind of hold that in place on the person's head. And it's almost like a makeshift hat out of a handkerchief.

**Teresa:**

Yeah, totally makes sense. So a little bit later than, during the Roman period, which is, like, 200 BC to, like, 3 AD, there was a piece of cloth, you know, for rich people...

**Travis:**

Hm.

**Teresa:**

... because a lot of the stuff in Rome is either for really rich people or really poor people, um, called the sudarium, which was just used to, like... it was a, kind of an extension of the toga, and it was to wipe your sweat off your brow, 'cause it's quite hot in Rome.

**Travis:**

Especially when you're all wrapped up in all that fabric. It's got to get warm.

**Teresa:**

Right. And this piece of cloth was also used, um, during the Roman games, so they would, they would drop a piece of this cloth and, um, to signal, like, a ready, set, go, right? And...

**Travis:**

Oh, I've seen that just, like, on a Fast and the Furious when there's the lady and she stands in the middle and she waves the little flag thing. And every time she drops it, and everybody starts racing. Like that?

**Teresa:**

Right. And people would also wave their pieces of cloth to, like, show excitement and stuff for the games.

**Travis:**

Excellent.

**Teresa:**

The handkerchief probably as we know it was, um, I don't want to say created, but I want to say standardized...

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

... in France in the 14th through the 16th century.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

Um, because so this handkerchief thing was commonly made out of fine silk and lace in various shapes and sizes, squares and oblong, um, and it was known as a pleuvoir.

**Travis:**

Ooh.

**Teresa:**

In France.

**Travis:**

Ooh.

**Teresa:**

Uh, from the word, pleut, which means to tear, rain, or cry.

**Travis:**

Okay. That makes sense.

**Teresa:**

And these handkerchiefs were often used as a, um, supplement to a lady's dowry.

**Travis:**

Really?

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

That's pretty cool. It makes a lot of sense to me and seems like you... uh, we don't necessarily think of handkerchiefs this way today, but I get the impression that back then they were, like, we would think of, like, a tie or cuff links.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

The handkerchiefs were an article of fashion that someone might say like, "I love your handkerchief." Or like, "Oh, he really accessorized well." Or, "She really accessorized well with her handkerchief." And then it was, like, more of a fashion statement than a practical thing.

**Teresa:**

Right, well, we're totally getting to that.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

Because the height of the idea of fashion is probably the court of Louis XVI...

**Travis:**

Oh, that guy.

**Teresa:**

... and Marie Antoinette.

**Travis:**

Oh, that lady.

**Teresa:**

Um—

**Travis:**

They did a lot of that fashion stuff.

**Teresa:**

They surely did, and they decided that handkerchief should be square and that's why handkerchiefs were square.

**Travis:**

So there wasn't, like, a universal shape before that?

**Teresa:**

Nope. It was just kind of like a piece of cloth. It could be square, it could be oblong. It could be more like a lacy doily thing that was, like, round.

**Travis:**

I see.

**Teresa:**

But they decided handkerchiefs should be square.

**Travis:**

Did you find anything in your research about, like, handkerchiefs, uh, used, like, during plague times and used, like, you know, to, like, shield you from infected people?

**Teresa:**

No, not really.

**Travis:**

Okay, maybe that's just something... 'Cause I always picture people, like, in movies, like, holding handkerchiefs and stuff up over their mouths when they come upon, like, a really disgusting scene. But maybe that wasn't like a

traditional thing. Maybe that's just a thing we've done in movies to show how shocked and appalled someone is.

**Teresa:**

Well, I mean, it does, it does tend to lend itself to it being a barrier...

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

... between you and something else, but germ theory is relatively new.

**Travis:**

Well, I feel like it's more of a perfumed so you didn't have to smell how gross the, uh, the ravel was. Ravel? Ravel.

**Teresa:**

Rabble.

**Travis:**

Rabble, rabble.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Well, certainly, uh, handkerchiefs had their places in nosegays, which is what that would be something that you put up against your nose to keep yourself from smelling bad vapors.

**Travis:**

Excellent.

**Teresa:**

But not specifically handkerchiefs did I find anything about that.

**Travis:**

But that was a thing that they did...

**Teresa:**



Sure.

**Travis:**

... like along with a lot of other things. Perfume boxes and, like, oranges with cloves in it and that kind of thing.

**Teresa:**

Right. So moving onto the early 20th century, um, specifically the Depression-era United States, um, the handkerchief really became a lady's accessory.

**Travis:**

Really?

**Teresa:**

More than a man's accessory because due to, um, general shortages all over, uh, the only way you could change your outfit was to change your hanky.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

So you probably had just one, one dress you wore most of the time and the only way that you could, you know, look fashionable was to change or update your handkerchief.

**Travis:**

Um, we had a couple people ask about handkerchiefs versus bandannas. Are they the same thing?

**Teresa:**

Um, I am not quite sure about the origin of the bandana, but I would argue that a bandanna is a type of handkerchief, it's just where it's worn.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

Um, but I had the same thought about pocket squares.

**Travis:**

Oh, I see.

**Teresa:**

Did we get any questions about that?

**Travis:**

We did. We were asked about pocket squares as handkerchiefs.

**Teresa:**

Yeah. The earliest pocket squares were these small handkerchiefs made of silk, usually.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

And you would carry one handkerchief to show, and one handkerchief to blow.

**Travis:**

Okay. I like that.

**Teresa:**

So the show handkerchief evolved into the pocket square, and it was usually silky or lacy or pretty, and you kept that in your breast pocket normally.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

Or for ladies, they would keep them up their sleeves with a little bit of the laciness, funness hanging out. Um, and then the other one, your other handkerchief, your blow handkerchief was the dirty one that, uh, you would keep hidden away to use. Um.

**Travis:**

I could say now, I don't know much about fashion, so don't, like, quote me on this, the next time you're in, like, Milan during Fashion Week or something, but I'm almost positive that there is now a very defined line between handkerchiefs and pocket squares. Pocket squares are a very unique thing and there's not nearly as practical. They're a decorative item.

**Teresa:**

Correct.

**Travis:**

They are not to be used, so don't, like, pull out your handkerchief and fold it up, and put it, most of the time, 'cause it's probably too big, too. Because there a size difference between most, uh, pocket squares and handkerchiefs. The material is a lot thinner for a pocket square. If you try and fold a handkerchief into a pocket square, it's going to end up looking bulky and weird.

**Teresa:**

Yeah, probably.

**Travis:**

And it's supposed to complement your tie and the chances that you have handkerchiefs that complement your tie is rare.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

Um, but if you have more questions, ask Jesse Thorn. He knows all about pocket squares.

**Teresa:**

He knows a lot about pocket squares. So the thing that happened in the 1930s, can you guess how handkerchiefs became out of fashion?

**Travis:**

I'm going to guess World War II?

**Teresa:**

Um, no.

**Travis:**

Damn. Great Depression?

**Teresa:**

No, no.

**Travis:**

No.

**Teresa:**

Uh, what happened was...

**Travis:**

Aliens?

**Teresa:**

[laughs] No.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

A highly successful marketing campaign by Kleenex.

**Travis:**

Oh. That makes a lot of sense to me.

**Teresa:**

And, um, the slogan was "Don't carry a cold in your pocket."

**Travis:**

Ooh.

**Teresa:**

Because they wanted you to ditch your handkerchief and buy their disposable paper tissues to blow your nose into and cough into a wipe any part of your face that feels moist.

**Travis:**

Okay. I guess, uh, it's funny that it declined in the '30s, because I, that's what I think of when I think of handkerchiefs. I think of, like, you know, like, the, the hard working men of the, you know, '30s, '40s, '50s with, like, lunch pails and going to, like, mines and lumber mills and stuff with, like, handkerchiefs and dabbing their brow after a hard day's work and it going out of fashion when we entered into, like, the '70s and 80s and people doing a lot less manual labor in their jobs. But...

**Teresa:**

That makes sense to me, but it's not really what happened...

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

... because I think that the decorative handkerchief/pocket square was probably still on the scene...

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

... especially in men's suit and, um, women's evening wear.

**Travis:**

But it makes a lot of sense with the, uh, the Kleenex because, um, I also want to spill the beans a little bit, I wasn't there in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s...

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

... so most of what I know is based off of movies and TV, um, and it's a very dramatic too see somebody a, you know, a bandana, handkerchief out of the pocket and, like, dab their brow and wipe away the coal dust, but that probably wasn't happening as much as I picture it happening.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

I am curious, if anybody's listening and they're a germologist, what would that be? There's a word for that? A pathologist?

**Teresa:**

I don't know.

**Travis:**

But if you know about germs and the way germs spread, is it less... 'cause we had questions about that, about, like, is it gross to have a handkerchief in your pocket and to, like, blow your nose and use a handkerchief. And I feel like it probably is to some degree, but it, compared to, like, Kleenex, what's the actual difference? So if you know, please let us know @shmannerscast.

**Teresa:**

Well, one of the things that I would say is a lot of etiquette regarding the handkerchief revolves around the using of the handkerchief...

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

... rather than the holding of the handkerchief. Um, so, um, I know that I tend to, um, really rely heavily on Emily Post, but one of our listeners ever so politely mentioned to me that I ought to check Miss Manners as well. Um, so here is what Miss Manners has to say about the handkerchief.

"Miss Manners suspects that the problem might be that the handkerchief is a forgotten artifact and no one knows how to operate it." So here are the instructions.

"There must be a fresh handkerchief every day. It must be kept within easy reach in an outside pocket or tucked into the cuff or décolletage. The freshly pressed and folded handkerchief is shaken out, time permitting, and the sneeze goes directly into it."

"It is then not folded to look pristine, but returned crumpled to its resting place, and repeated as necessary. Miss Manners is confident that people who manage to carry, operate, and whip out their electronic devices will with practice be able to master this."

**Travis:**

I am a big fan of handkerchiefs. Like, let me get out my, uh, oh, lay my cards out on the table. Big fan of it. Um, as with a lot of my, uh, modern day manly etiquette I learned from, uh, Nick Offerman, who talks about in, uh, in his book that, like, having a handkerchief is very useful.

And since carrying one, I find so many uses for it. It's wonderful to hand to someone, maybe when they're crying. It's a very nice gesture and a very practical gesture. There's about, like, I have something for you while you're crying that's, like, there's something about the giving of someone a handkerchief that's, like, very touching and thoughtful and practical.

**Teresa:**

And at one time, also considered romantic.

**Travis:**

Really? Oh, a favor!

**Teresa:**

Yes.

**Travis:**

Yes.

**Teresa:**

Um, because when someone would hand you their handkerchief, the correct protocol as a person receiving the handkerchief was to use it, and then hold onto it, launder it, and return it. So when you, uh, receive the handkerchief, you need to have some way of getting it back to the person. It's kind of like...

**Travis:**

So it's an excuse of, like, I'll see you again when you return the handkerchief.

**Teresa:**

Yeah. And kind of like where's, what's your number kind of thing.

**Travis:**

I see. It's making a connection.

**Teresa:**

Right? How can I reach you to return this to you?

**Travis:**

Um, speaking of making a connection, we had a couple of people ask about the gay handkerchief code, and I wanted to bring this up. Do you know about it?

**Teresa:**

No. I do not know about the gay handkerchief code.

**Travis:**

Well, so it's a very interesting thing. Um, basically what it is, because so many people asked about it and I had already heard about it so I wanted to address it just in case you were interested in a little bit of trivia.

Maybe you're young and you don't know this, but for a very, very, very long time, and I would say until very recently and still working on it, still growing,



um, people were afraid to let anyone that they were homosexual. It was a very scary thing in the world to say, like, "This is me living out in the open."

And so there was a code of different handkerchief colors and positions depending on which handkerchief you carried that was a signal to other, um, other homosexual men to say, like, "Hey, I'm a homosexual. Here's what I'm into because we can't openly discuss it without discrimination and judgment and hatred and all of these terrible things."

**Teresa:**

Hm.

**Travis:**

It has since gone out of fashion because people are now a lot more comfortable being a lot more open and, you know, people are able to live the lives they want to a lot more. Still working on it. Still improving every day. Good job, America. Uh, but yeah. So that's ... If you're interested, I highly recommend looking it up. You can find it on Wikipedia. What can't you find on Wikipedia these days?

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

But yeah. So I think that it has gone out of fashion only because it's not a necessity anymore.

**Teresa:**

Well, it is getting a resurgence now, um, because it's a very green way to take care of your bodily fluids.

**Travis:**

And I also think, like, there's something a lot classier about pulling out a handkerchief than, like, pulling out a handful of, like, Kleenex and, like, blowing your nose into a thin, thin piece of tissue paper versus, like, a hearty cotton buddy.

**Teresa:**

Well, I think that I saw something on, um, on MythBusters about how a handkerchief itself isn't going to stop, you know, droplets of things because it is quite porous.

**Travis:**

It's better than nothing.

**Teresa:**

Sure.

**Travis:**

It's better than just sneezing into your gross, gross hands.

**Teresa:**

Yes.

**Travis:**

That's the things, too, it's like, uh, when people were like, "Oh, it's way grosser than a tissue," it's like, yeah, but if you get into the habit, I have at this point got, like, 30 different handkerchiefs, get used to just carrying one every day and swapping them out at the end of the day, and I'm way more likely now to have a handkerchief than I ever was to have a tissue on me.

**Teresa:**

Hm.

**Travis:**

So it's like, yeah, it's not as, like, reusable as a— or it's not as, something, like, maybe sanitary as, like, throwing it away every time you do, like a tissue. But it's also, like, how often do you find yourself with a tissue in your hand?

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

I will also say that there's a wide array of handkerchiefs. I've seen them anywhere from, you know, just, like, a square of, you know, blue cotton or a

square of flannel to, like, linen and embroidered and, like, beautiful. And it, but, like, man, carry it. They're really cool. They're really cool looking.

**Teresa:**

And, and, um, a good looking handkerchief, a useful looking handkerchief has been around for a very long time. The most, um, prolific example I have found is, have you ever seen those pictures of the war— The hero flying ace with the, like, silk scarf or whatever?

**Travis:**

Yeah. Yeah, the World War I flying ace.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

You know, like Snoopy.

**Teresa:**

Yeah, like Snoopy. Those scarfs were actually, um, printed on. They had maps of usually, uh, Europe or the enemy territory. And so if a, uh, plane went down, they would use their scarf to help them figure out where they were.

**Travis:**

You have just blown my mind wide open.

**Teresa:**

Yeah, that's pretty awesome. And that was carried over into, um, political campaigns. People would print up hankies with, uh, different, you know, slogans for presidents and it was carried into different maps of hometowns and souvenirs and [inaudible 00:19:40]

**Travis:**

I mean, we see them now. You can find ... I have handkerchiefs that we got for, like, stuff in Cincinnati that's like a map of downtown Cincinnati that they handed out.

**Teresa:**

Right, yeah. And they had, you know, little works of art on them. Nursery rhymes and Christmas carols and Boy Scout, like, mottoes, and everything. They used them as, as little, uh, propaganda and mementos.

**Travis:**

Cool.

**Teresa:**

Let's move onto napkins because while they are similar, they have a little bit of a different origin. So most scholars agree that the first napkin was not a napkin, really. It was ... [laughs]

**Travis:**

What was it?

**Teresa:**

It was probably a piece of dough...

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

... uh, that was served along with dinner, cut into small pieces and, like, mixed and kneaded at the table. So you would eat with your hand, and in between, if you wanted to wipe off your hand, you would kind of just wipe it on this piece of dough.

**Travis:**

Weird.

**Teresa:**

Um, it led ... And that morphed into a slice of bread that you would kind of wipe your hand on.

**Travis:**

But then would you still eat it?

**Teresa:**

Um, during the Middle Ages when you had a trencher that your food was served on which is a larger piece of bread, you would eat it. Or you would pass it off to someone less fortunate than yourself and have, and they would eat it.

**Travis:**

Oh, gotcha. So then how did it become a napkin?

**Teresa:**

Well, so I mentioned trenchers, right?

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

So, the idea of a trencher became kind of a napkin plate and in that same Middle Ages, you kind of, um, also used whatever was around. Like the tablecloth, your dress, your tunic.

**Travis:**

Everybody was a lot cooler about stuff like that back then.

**Teresa:**

Other things. Um, so the tablecloth that I mentioned specifically kind of evolved from a tablecloth into a napkin. Does that make sense?

**Travis:**

That makes complete sense to me, because it seems like, especially servants who got sick of washing tablecloths were like, "What if we just gave everybody their own tiny tablecloth?"

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

And it was a lot easier to clean up after that.

**Teresa:**

There was a lot of pomp and circumstance related to the placing of the tablecloths, the layering of the tablecloth, the size of the tablecloth, and all of that stuff. And eventually, because of all this circumstance and ritual, it did get smaller and smaller and became a personal thing.

**Travis:**

It makes complete sense to me.

**Teresa:**

But it wasn't always, um, in your lap or in your hands. So these napkins were often placed on the left shoulder.

**Travis:**

Like a burping towel.

**Teresa:**

Like, yeah, kind of a burping cloth for a baby where you would eat with your right hand, and then wipe your hand on your shoulder on your napkin here, right? Instead of placing it in your lap.

**Travis:**

I see.

**Teresa:**

And, um, and this is the same way that they would often drape napkins across an arm to be distributed. So if you see pictures of butlers or whatever holding the napkin across their arm...

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

... that was often to take these napkins and distribute them to diners.

**Travis:**

I see.

**Teresa:**

And, you know, different patterns emerged and different places had different sizes and all kinds of things. Um, so the diaper [laughs] I think it's pronounced, uh, which is the English word for napkin, was a white cotton or linen fabric with small repetitious...

**Travis:**

That's why they call them nappies.

**Teresa:**

Oh, maybe.

**Travis:**

Now it all makes so much sense to me.

**Teresa:**

Uh, was it, uh, with small repetitious diamond-shaped patterns. And a serviette was a large napkin used at the table. The serviette de collation, maybe, was a smaller napkin used while standing to eat. The similar, uh, thing that we have today is a cocktail napkin.

**Travis:**

Uh, yeah, it was going to say. I've heard of that.

**Teresa:**

Right, so, like, all of these things were put into dining in probably the 16th century. So you had all these little pieces of cloth and smaller things and everything got so... along with dining, things got a lot more elaborate, so you had a lot more pieces. So just like in the dining episode, one of the things that really changed the napkin was the fork.

**Travis:**

Uh-huh, 'cause then you weren't using your hands as much.

**Teresa:**

Exactly.

**Travis:**

Okay. I am with you.

**Teresa:**

This is when the napkin was reduced in size. So before it was kind of very large and you could fold it up, but it was, it was quite expansive in the way of a tablecloth, right? Um, it got reduced in size to, like, 30 x 36, so kind of rectangular, smaller personal size. But now, I mean, it could be any size or color or shape that you really want.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

Um, but that's when they decided that that's the, like, personal size napkin. So in the same vein as the hankie, in the '30s, a paper product towel napkin was introduced by Scott paper towels.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

And it was mostly used as a kitchen cleaning device, but it very slowly caught on and it became the paper napkin we have today.

**Travis:**

Once again, though, it doesn't strike me as super green. You know what I mean? Like, I guess on the one hand it balances out 'cause you don't have to wash the towels.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

But then you're also just, like, burning through a lot of paper towels.

**Teresa:**



I think maybe it, um, went the same way as the hygiene where if you're cleaning you food spills and such, you probably don't want to just hang around with that napkin.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

Maybe it's just easier and more convenient. More... maybe more modern.

**Travis:**

Oh, yeah, I could see that.

**Teresa:**

To dispose of it.

**Travis:**

It feels a lot cooler that you're saving time and it's a much more convenient than saying, "Oh, I've got things to do."

**Teresa:**

Right, yeah. Yeah, microwave dinners and such. [laughs]

**Travis:**

Exactly. You— These kids today with their microwaves and their hula hoops and their paper towels.

**Teresa:**

That's right.

**Travis:**

I'm, uh, the more we talk about it, though, the more I want to take our whole house all the way back to everything fabric. Fabric towels, fabric handkerchiefs, fabric toilet paper. Everything.

**Teresa:**

Well, you're in—

**Travis:**

That probably wasn't a thing.

**Teresa:**

You're in charge of laundry, so...

**Travis:**

Okay, never mind. Paper toilet paper. We'll stick with that one.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Are there any questions about napkins?

**Travis:**

Well, I figured we'd go through all three of the histories and then do all of them.

**Teresa:**

Oh, okay. Sure. No problem. So then fans, um, I mean, I have seen fans today at special occasions.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

Like weddings. I'll see people...

**Travis:**

Horse races.

**Teresa:**

Horse races. Uh, maybe the souvenir fans.

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

I've seen those. The early history of fans, um, probably dates back to 3000 BC, and there's evidence that the Greeks and the Romans all used fans for cooling themselves and as ceremonial devices.

**Travis:**

Like the big palm fronds like Cleopatra...

**Teresa:**

Exactly.

**Travis:**

... and you have the dudes in the loincloths waving the stuff. I gotcha.

**Teresa:**

Right. And ancient Chinese literary sources associate the fan with ancient mythical and historical characters.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

They were all in the beginning the fixed type. So not the folding kind.

**Travis:**

Gotcha. There was like, you were looking like a stick with, like, a thing at the end. And circular, or like a spade-shaped thing.

**Teresa:**

Yeah. And they got more heavily ornate-

**Travis:**

Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:**

... sort of the more higher up in, uh, the social status that you went. Obvs.

**Travis:**

But at that point, they were practical. There were, like, for cooling yourself down.

**Teresa:**

Exactly, exactly. Um, so then we got the fans. I'm not going to say we. I'm going to say Europe got the fans, uh, that we pretty much know today from spice routes.

**Travis:**

Gotcha.

**Teresa:**

Right? So they encountered the traders and they saw these things. They were like, "Whoa, this is really awesome." So they liked it and they took it and, you know, they appropriated it just like a lot of European things did.

**Travis:**

Now, I have a question for you. So we talked about, like, for, if you're in Egypt, the fans were very practical 'cause it's super hot.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

When you get back to, like, Europe, and it's a lot more of a temperate climate, were they still used practically?

**Teresa:**

Well, I would say that once the folding fan was really invented in the 17th century, that's when they really became more about the showmanship of fanning the fan and less about being cooled off by the fan.

**Travis:**

Okay, 'cause when I think about fans now, I still think about them practically. Growing up in, like, West Virginia and doing outdoor theater, I would always see people, like, you know, at outdoor concerts and outdoor theater and outdoor events, like, with the paper fans advertising the local

radio station, fanning themselves like their wrist was about to fall off. You know what I mean?

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Right. Uh, so the fan flirting really came into effect in the early 1700s.

**Travis:**

Wait, hold on, what?

**Teresa:**

Fan flirting.

**Travis:**

That's a thing?

**Teresa:**

It's a thing. Well, it was a thing. See, the thing was, um, it wasn't acceptable to go up to a gentleman that you had not been introduced to, and also not acceptable to talk to a person of the opposite sex without a chaperone.

**Travis:**

Okay, so fans were used to kind of communicate that.

**Teresa:**

Exactly. Like smoke signals. [laughs]

**Travis:**

Or like text messages.

**Teresa:**

Right. Um, so a man named Joseph Addison who was a publisher in the 1700s of *The Spectator* was known to have said that if he could only see the fan of a disciplined lady, he could tell her mood and what she was feeling.

**Travis:**

Man, we should bring this back.

**Teresa:**

No.

**Travis:**

No, I'll tell you what, hear me out.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

We get questions on My Brother, My Brother and Me all the time where it's like, "How do I talk to people? How do I do ... " What if you have had a thing, maybe not a fan, but something that from across the room, someone could look over and be like, "Oh, no, they're not into it."

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

"I'm just going to stay right where I am."

**Teresa:**

Kind of like, uh, leash and collar codes for dogs?

**Travis:**

Yeah, or, like, you know, at restaurants where you flip the green and that lets the waitress know...

**Teresa:**

That lets the waiter know that you want more meat?

**Travis:**

Yeah, like that where it's like someone looks over and you just, like, have a light on about your table and you're like, "Oh, they want to be flirted with." And if you have the light off, it's like, "No, I'm just here with my friends, thank you very much."

**Teresa:**

Oh, well—

**Travis:**

I'm going to be rich. Please don't steal that idea. I'm going to put that in a restaurant. You can steal it, Teresa, 'cause you're my wife, but I'm going to put that in a restaurant, and people are going to love it.

**Teresa:**

Okay, well, memorize these so that you can put this in there.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

Carrying a fan in the left hand signified that you were desirous of acquaintance.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

So you were ready to meet people. Carrying a fan, uh ... Allowing a fan to rest on the right cheek meant yes, on the left cheek meant no.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

Um, placing a fan on the left ear signified you have changed.

**Travis:**

Wait, what? You have changed?

**Teresa:**

I think that...

**Travis:**

Like, the person you're looking at, like, I used to like you, but you've changed.

**Teresa:**

Maybe.

**Travis:**

Hm.

**Teresa:**

Um, drawing a fan across the forehead meant we are being watched.

**Travis:**

Oh. Well, can I guess ... Well, I guess mean, like, you, like, the person holding the fan has changed. Like, I'm not interested anymore.

**Teresa:**

Oh.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

Maybe.

**Travis:**

Something has changed.

**Teresa:**

Something has changed. Um, opening a fan wide meant wait for me. Dropping a fan meant we could be friends.

**Travis:**

Dropping a fan might also mean oh, I dropped my fan.

**Teresa:**



[laughs] Uh, if you fanned yourself fast, that meant that you were married. Um, swift drawing of a fan through the hand meant I hate you.

**Travis:**

Whoa, this ... yeah, it got real.

**Teresa:**

Uh, placing the handle of the fan to the lips meant kiss me. That's pretty obvious, you guys.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

Twirling—

**Travis:**

Eating the fan meant I'm hungry.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Twirling a fan in the left hand meant I wish to be rid of you. Twirling a fan in the right hand meant I love another. Oh, so sad. And an open fan held in the right hand in front of the face meant follow me.

**Travis:**

Man—

**Teresa:**

I could see that. It's kind of a come hither deal.

**Travis:**

And people just, like, I know they just weren't just, like, born knowing this, they were taught this, but what an interesting thing to be like, "No, son, before you go out in the world, it's time you found yourself a bride. Your mother and I are going to teach you the fan code."

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Maybe. Oh, and, uh, drawing a fan across the eyes meant I'm sorry.

**Travis:**

I see. So, uh, when did fans go out of vogue? I feel like it's not a thing. I hardly see people do in casual fashion anymore.

**Teresa:**

Well, so the fan right now in the 21st isn't really like a must-have accessory like it was a long time ago. Um, but, you know, they still have fans. They still make them. They make them, um, uh, in commemoration like when, uh, Prince, uh, Prince William and, uh, Duchess Catherine ... is that how you say. I don't want to be ...

**Travis:**

When, uh, you know, the two of them. [laughs]

**Teresa:**

That when that royal wedding happened, commemorative fans were made and sold. So it's really not that out of fashion to have one, especially to have one, like I said, in commemoration or at a, uh, as a function of something, like I said, at a wedding or you said at a concert.

**Travis:**

[laughs]

**Teresa:**

For advertising purposes they might make fans.

**Travis:**

But it's much as opposed to, like, handkerchiefs which I feel are making an every day resurgence.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

Fans are still kind of relegated to, like, high dress. If you're going with, like, the folding lace or, like, paper even, that's, it's for special occasions. You don't want to be-

**Teresa:**

Maybe it's because we have central air. [laughs]

**Travis:**

Yeah, I was thinking about that, that it might be like now people, if you were fanning yourself in a place with central air, everyone would be like, "You look stupid."

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

"It's cold in here, Debra, stop it."

**Teresa:**

Maybe we just don't spend enough time in the heat.

**Travis:**

That might be it. We don't even know what hot is.

**Teresa:**

I don't know. Um, perhaps, I mean, out of our experience, Travis, maybe in hotter climates, people still use fans a lot more. Maybe it's just not...

**Travis:**

Hm, it's very Southern. I think of, like, I see that fan fluttering and I think, "Very Southern."

**Teresa:**

Yeah. Maybe in places where they don't have as much central air as they do here in America.

**Travis:**

Maybe. Um, so we've got some questions from our listeners that we're going to answer here in a second, but first, here's a word from another MaxFun show.

[theme music plays]

**Speaker 1:**

Hey, this is Pop Rocket. We're your source for all pop culture information.

**Speaker 2:**

It's an intellectual and incredibly snark-filled discussion about pop culture by five Frankie Hollywood 30-somethings. No name calling, no rudeness, just straight talk and a lot of roleplay.

**Speaker 3:**

I'm only 30-something for another year.

**Speaker 4:**

Me too.

**Speaker 3:**

[laughs]

**Speaker 2:**

And I don't tell anybody I'm 30-something.

**Speaker 1:**

Pop Rocket comes out every week for MaximumFun.org.

[ad break ends]

**Travis:**

Hello, everyone, we are back. We're talking about handkerchiefs, napkins, and fans. Here are the listener questions.

**Teresa:**

Yeah, hit me with those questions.

**Travis:**

Every week before the episode goes out, we will put out usually Monday or Tuesday what the episode's going to be on. If you've got questions on it, you can go to the Facebook group. Uh, you can find it at Shmanners with Travis and Teresa or can, you know, find it on Twitter, whatever. Um, these questions are from you, the listeners.

Drina asks, "Where do you put your napkin when you leave the table? Do you place it on the table or on the chair?"

**Teresa:**

Okay. Um, remember how I mentioned Miss Manners earlier?

**Travis:**

Yes.

**Teresa:**

This is one of those things. Miss Manners and Emily Post disagree.

**Travis:**

I feel like you're going to side with Emily Post. Is that the case?

**Teresa:**

Um, hm, hm, hm, maybe not. Um, Emily Post says it should go to the left of your plate on the table. Um, never on top of your plate. Both of them agree about that. Never on top of the plate. Um, but Miss Manners says it's perfectly acceptable to leave it on your chair.

**Travis:**

Is the on top of the plate a signal that you're done, or is it just rude all around?

**Teresa:**

It's rude all around. You really shouldn't put your napkin on top of your plate. It makes it difficult for the server to collect your things, and it also will probably make the napkin a lot dirtier than it would have already been. Um,

also if you put it on top of your plate when you leave the table, you probably don't want to put it back in your lap because it's got more food all over it.

**Travis:**

Yeah, so you're putting it on your food, which is also gross.

**Teresa:**

Right. So I would say, that really probably either one is okay. I would not hang it on the back of the chair, um, but putting it on your chair or on your plate, loosely folded until you return.

**Travis:**

Uh, this one is, uh, this question comes from Lisha. Lisha asks, "Napkins."  
[laughs]

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

"In the lap or tucked in the collar. I was always curious which is more correct."

**Teresa:**

Well, it really depends on where you live, actually.

**Travis:**

Right?

**Teresa:**

There, yeah, there are some countries...

**Travis:**

I thought there was a definitive answer.

**Teresa:**

There are some countries that, um, really do tuck it into the collar almost every time, um, and I think that might have more to do with the cuisine than anything else.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

Um-

**Travis:**

Makes sense if it's like a saucier thing that you would want to cover your shirt.

**Teresa:**

Right. Um, according to my research, Italians are more likely to put the napkin into the collar because nobody wants to have a little bit of tomato sauce flicked up on their shirt. So if you're spinning your spaghetti or bolognese or whatever it is, um, it, putting it on your collar might not be such a bad thing.

Um, I think that applies to, also, other really messy foods like barbecue ribs or lobster. I mean, at a lot of lobster restaurants, if you order a lobster, they will bring you a special bib to put on your [laughs] ...

**Travis:**

'Cause you're a special bib boy.

**Teresa:**

'Cause you're a special bib boy. Um...

**Travis:**

But what would you suggest here in America or, uh, just... I guess we can only speak to America 'cause that's where we are and I'm sure we have listeners in other countries, but in America, I guess I always pictured growing up that tucking it in the collar was kind of, like, "You're embarrassing me, son. Like, put it in your... "

Not that my parents were ever chastising me 'cause I was a good, good manners boy, but just, like, it feels like lap is very classy, and tucked into the shirt is not.

**Teresa:**

I would say tucking into the shirt for very special circumstances.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

Where, uh, if you are eating something extremely messy or if everyone at the table puts it into their shirt, why not? Um, but most of the time, let's go for lap.

**Travis:**

To that point, James asks, "Is it all right to forgo using a napkin on your lap or in your collar? As a capable adult, I rarely see the need to give myself a bib. I'm fully capable of not dropping food all over myself, but I've had people tell me several times that I should use it anyway.

**Teresa:**

Well, if you are provided a napkin, you should use it.

**Travis:**

Okay.

**Teresa:**

Even if it stays completely clean, and sometimes they do. Um, I know that when I serve dinner with my cloth napkins, if my napkin is completely clean, I will reuse it and not wash it between uses. Um, if there's a napkin provided, use it.

**Travis:**

Um, Kate asks, "My question is may I carry a hand fan around with me? Please and thank you."

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Go for it.



**Travis:**

Yeah. You know what? I feel like there's some affectations that I kind of turn my nose at a little bit, uh, but you know what? At the end of the day, I think that fans could have a very practical usage, I think they're really classy, and I would like to see them come back. Now that said, I do think that it's a kind of thing where it would be like it's classy but like a tie is classy and ties are very common.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

But you wouldn't wear a tie with, like, a T-shirt.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

You know what I mean? So, like, you should be, sit there and go, "Is this the right occasion for this fan?" Okay, then, yes.

**Teresa:**

I remember one time getting a fan from, um, one of my great aunts that was perfumed, and I loved it. I took that fan with me a lot of places. I was very young. Probably, like, pre-teens. So [laughs] you guys, that's...

**Travis:**

It's the perfect time to give a child a fan.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] That's how cool I was. Um, but I really loved the smell of that fan, so it was really great to have around because pre-teens don't smell very good.

**Travis:**

Um, this is from Corinne. "Is it okay to offer someone your handkerchief if they need a tissue? Is there a way to handle that interaction without being

weird about germs, bodily fluids, but also being kind and helpful while not getting sick?

**Teresa:**

Yes. I think that you can definitely offer someone a nicely folded handkerchief, but if it already crumpled from your use, you probably shouldn't give it to somebody.

**Travis:**

Yeah.

**Teresa:**

Um, you also need to be prepared for the fact that if you are perfect strangers, uh, and you do not have time to exchange information for the returning of a laundered handkerchief, you are either never going to see that handkerchief again, or they are going to give it back to you soiled.

**Travis:**

Yep. And, you know, at the end of the day, it's funny to me 'cause people talk about handkerchiefs as if every day, human beings are sick.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

But, like, the thing ... and, like, I carry a handkerchief with me every day, or most days, and I'm sick maybe, maybe one day out of the month. Enough that I'm blowing snot into my handkerchief. Most of the time, it's folded into my pocket until I need to offer it to somebody, or until something happens, but that's not snot coming out of my face. I'm sweating or something like that.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

So most of the time, I feel pretty comfortable offering a handkerchief to people. And you can buy them in bulk. You can buy, like, 20 white

handkerchiefs, and then just hand them out willy-nilly like, you know, some kind of magical man just handing handkerchiefs all around time.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] Make it rain handkerchiefs.

**Travis:**

And if you have like a super nice handkerchief that, like, your grandfather gave you or that you, like, had embroidered for your wedding, maybe don't offer that to a stranger.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

Maybe don't carry that around just for, like, everyday use. Save that for, like, I'm going out to eat with, you know, a significant other and I want something special with us.

**Teresa:**

Or this could be a way of making new friends.

**Travis:**

Also true.

**Teresa:**

When you offer someone your handkerchief, maybe tell me how they can reach you to return it when it's clean.

**Travis:**

Have it embroidered in the corner, like, just your phone number.

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

Something to think about. I think that would be a pretty cool move. Uh, this is from Grace. "Is fanning yourself on a hot tube train acceptable,

appreciated by others, or a gross invasion of others' airspace, breezing up everyone's newspapers reading experience?"

**Teresa:**

Um, if you need to fan yourself, it should be pretty personal, right? You shouldn't be blowing your fan stuff all over everybody. Uh, I think that that's okay. It's not going to invade people too much.

**Travis:**

I think it's the force that you do it with.

**Teresa:**

Yeah.

**Travis:**

There's like a hand fan, you know, like, one, two, three, four, like kind of that kind of beat of waving.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

Versus, like, having a huge piece of paper that you're like...

**Teresa:**

Right, yeah.

**Travis:**

Waving as hard as you can. It's like, okay, calm it down. You're not going to get that cool.

**Teresa:**

[laughs] You might expend more energy waving that giant thing around than you would to cool yourself.

**Travis:**

This is from Jacob. "Where do you place the napkin ring that was holding the napkin together when you dine?"

**Teresa:**

Um, on the table. [laughs]

**Travis:**

Yeah. You slide it off, then you set it down. I usually do it up to the right of the plate that's not where my glasses are. It's a very good point, though, Jacob, be careful. Don't put it somewhere where you're going to accidentally set your glass down on top of it and spill your glass.

**Teresa:**

Or don't tuck it underneath your plate.

**Travis:**

Do people do that?

**Teresa:**

I've seen that happen.

**Travis:**

That would create a very wobbly plate situation.

**Teresa:**

Yes. Wobbly plate situation.

**Travis:**

Don't, like, slip it in your pocket or some— ... Don't be weird about it.

**Teresa:**

[laughs]

**Travis:**

Just put it somewhere out of the way where it's not going to bother anyone. Speaking of, um, this question comes from Matt. "After sitting down, how soon do you put a table-set napkin on your lap? Immediately, when the food comes?"

**Teresa:**

Um, I would say before the food comes, that way you're not futzing around when someone is trying to serve you your dinner. Um, but the high class answer is a lot like the dining episode that we did. You should wait for your host or hostess to pick up and unfold their napkin and then do the same.

**Travis:**

This question comes from Travis, your husband, sitting across from you.

**Teresa:**

Okay.

**Travis:**

I know what to do with a cloth napkin.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

But when we go to, like, a, you know, maybe a tavern, pubby, bar restaurant and all the utensils are, like, wrapped up in paper napkins-

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm?

**Travis:**

... do I still put that on my lap? Do I still do that the same way? Do I still need to cover my lap with the paper napkin?

**Teresa:**

Yes. You unfold the wrapped up silverware and you place that to one side of your plate. You don't ... One side of your setting. You don't need to separate them and set your own table in that, um, circumstance, but you place them on the table and then put that napkin in your lap.

**Travis:**

Um, the question comes from Kelly. "Is it appropriate for you to blow your nose in front of other people?"

**Teresa:**

Um, I think that we discussed this a little bit before, and I would say that if you can avoid it, you should not blow your nose in front of other people, especially at the dinner table. We talked about, um...

**Travis:**

Or, like, in a plane where you're locked in, just sitting next to them.

**Teresa:**

Well, but I mean, you can't really move very much on a plane.

**Travis:**

That's true.

**Teresa:**

If you can avoid it, don't do it, but if you ... I mean, sometimes it's dripping down your face. You got to do it.

**Travis:**

I would say, here's my kind of rule of thumb with handkerchiefs. Whether it's blowing my nose or, like, sneezing into a handkerchief, I think that handkerchiefs are mostly there for, like, the, I'm wiping away, my nose is running a little bit, I have the sniffles, that kind of thing.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

If you should sneeze into your handkerchief or have to blow your nose into it, that is a, um, now it's time to go, like, wash your hands and that handkerchief is now done unless you have another sneeze come on.

**Teresa:**

Right.

**Travis:**

That is now reserved only for sneezing and you should go wash your hands immediately. So the handkerchief was there to catch most of the stuff you would have just expelled into the world otherwise and now it's time to wash your hands and be done with that handkerchief.

**Teresa:**

I agree.

**Travis:**

Uh, this comes from Trevor. "I feel terrible using cloth napkins at nice restaurants. I feel like they're more for show. What is the limit, if any, for actually using them?"

**Teresa:**

They are not for show. Um, I would say that the limit is cleaning up a spill. You should not clean up a spill with your personal napkin if you can avoid it. You should allow the, um, the service staff to take care of that with whatever kind of cleaning cloths they may have.

Uh, if it is coming at you, like if a spill is running down the table towards you, then use your napkin as a barrier, but not to mop up the mess. Um, other than that, you have it, you should use it. They launder those things, they expect you to use it.

**Travis:**

Let me ask you one specific one. Now I know that the... you take a bite of something and you don't like it, you don't spit it back out. But say, like, you take a bite of something and there's, like, a bone in it or hunk of gristle, right?

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.



**Travis:**

Can you spit that back into your napkin? Or is that heavily frowned upon?

**Teresa:**

You really shouldn't spit it back into your napkin because then you have a thing in your napkin that's a surprise. You ... [laughs]

**Travis:**

[laughs] And not a good... And not a good one.

**Teresa:**

Right, not a good surprise for the waitstaff.

**Travis:**

It's a bad twist ending.

**Teresa:**

Um, if you, if you can, you should use a utensil from the, from the table, you know, your spoon or your fork, put it back onto that utensil and back onto your plate, but like the corner of your plate where you won't hit it again.

Um, also I have read, Emily Post says that at, um, informal settings, it is acceptable to remove the piece of offending matter with your fingers and place it on your plate, but you really shouldn't spit it out into your napkin because then you can't use that napkin anymore, and whoever takes that away is not going to be happy.

**Travis:**

Well, I think that covers a lot of it. If you have any questions, anything we didn't cover, you can tweet at us @shmannerscast.

S-H-M-A-N-N-E-R-S-C-A-S-T. You can also email us, shmannerscast@gmail.com.

Um, if you like the show, and we hope that you do, thank you for listening, please tell a friend. We're a very new show. We haven't even been around, what, even six months at this point.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

I think we're, like, three months old. We are wee babies. Um...

**Teresa:**

Also, if you like the show, you could rate and review us on iTunes.

**Travis:**

That also helps out a lot. It moves us up the chart. So if you like the show, tell a friend, you can share the link. We're going to put a link up with this episode. And once again, we're sorry this one's late. Usually they're up on Friday, um, and we will have one up on Friday this week, don't worry.

**Teresa:**

Well, we will.

**Travis:**

Uh, we don't know the topic yet, but stay tuned. Uh, but yeah, thank you so much for listening.

**Teresa:**

Oh, um, also, you can join our Facebook group. We are almost up to 1,000 members.

**Travis:**

Ooh.

**Teresa:**

We're at, like, 889 or something right now.

**Travis:**

It's the best place to ask questions you need answered, either by the crowd or by us. Um...

**Teresa:**

And I check that often.

**Travis:**

Yeah, we're on there all the time. Um, also, check out all the other amazing shows on MaximumFun.org. There's a lot of really good ones on there. I highly recommend Sawbones. If you liked this show, you're going to love Sawbones. Sawbones—

**Teresa:**

I love Sawbones.

**Travis:**

Sawbones was the inspiration for us, but there's lots of other great shows on there. Can't think of anything else, but I'm sure that you have other questions, so we'll be back again to talk about something else and answer more questions and make the world a little bit better every time.

**Teresa:**

Mm-hmm.

**Travis:**

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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