

EPISODE 10: EMBARRASSING CLASSROOM SITUATIONS

A: Embarrassing stories about our students...

C: Embarrassing stories about our students, yes... Go!

A: Ah...Okay. I'm not sure how this story makes me sound but it was a long time ago, and it was not in Spain, so I think it's okay. Mm... I guess it starts with St. Patrick's Day... So, what is St. Patrick's Day to you?

C: St. Patrick's Day is one of the most important days of the year for me as an Irishman!

A: Okay

C: ... 17th of March...

A: Okay

C: When we celebrate that Patrick...

A: Turned all the beer green according to American folklores. That's what happened?

C: That's not exactly...

A: He turned the rivers green, and he turned the beer green... ?

C: Not exactly that but I'll tell you what the story is though. Is that St. Patrick...Patrick came to Ireland, and he introduced the Catholic religion to the Irish through a **shamrock** he picked up from the ground and as you know shamrock is said...

A: They're magical

C: Cause he was explaining and goes... yeah... Catholicism, like, you got one God but three Gods... They thought "are you mad?" because you know you cannot have three people and one person and he said: No, it's like a shamrock. Picks up the shamrock says: just like this! And they all say: Wow!

A: A shamrock? Really?! I didn't know this.



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C: That's why the shamrock is the symbol of Ireland and then St. Patrick... well, Patrick at the time, he wasn't a saint yet. And he said...

A: It was Pat...

C: Pat, yeah, Paddy.

A: Yeah, there you go.

C: He said, well, right since you're all going to be Catholic now, good (you know) people, I'll give you a miracle what you want, you know...

A: Wow

C: And the Irish said: Ah! We don't like snakes. Can you **get rid of** the snakes? So, Patrick banished all the snakes to England, of course...

A: Of course, where else would they go?

C: If you, until this day, till this day, if you ask an Irish person: Are there any snakes in Ireland? They will go... No, of course not! St. Patrick!

A: So, St. Patrick is the Pied Piper?

C: Of getting the snakes out of Ireland... send them over...

A: But like the Pied Piper with capital "P" and capital "P" right?

C: Yeah, exactly.

A: Like the one from the story

C: Pretty much, yeah.

A: But in the story didn't he have a flute and that was how he like got all the snakes to follow him?

C: No, Patrick had a Guinness and was...

A: Okay, okay, interesting. So, they were drunk snakes that went back to UK. Alright, well, so we are setting the scene in the US St. Patrick's Day. It's a huge thing in the typically American overdrawn, overgrown, crazy, exaggerated way. The same thing



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they've done with the "5 de Mayo", the Mexican day that most people in the US think is the Mexican Independence Day which it is not. It's the day of "the battle of Puebla". US did the same thing with St. Patrick's Day. Now of course, there was huge demands of Irish immigration back in the day to the US. I mean, tons and tons...

C: Millions!

A: There's Irish Americans. Millions and millions. So, it was St. Patrick's Day and I was teaching at a university in the United States as a Teaching Assistant, which is as an "associat" basically here, and there was this very funny, very typically American fraternity guy but nice, friendly guy, good amount of self-awareness and he came to me the class before St. Patrick's day and said: Aaron I just want to let you know we're gonna get up really early in St. Patrick's day and start drinking and then we are going to come to class cause we love your class, and we really love (I was teaching Spanish) so we love your class we are going to come but we might smell a little like beer, whatever. And I said: Ok, that's fine. So, he came to class that morning and I was: Hey how you guys doing? I really liked the guy; he was a smart guy, but he was just very much in the American college experience. **We say college, you say university.**

C: We do.

A: And, so he came to class and I'm like: Okay now there's one thing... I'm like: you've come to class... I think I had told him actually when he warned me that he was going to come to class after partying in the morning. This was a 10 AM class, okay that we had. They were up at like 7 in the morning, dedicated, paying a homage to St. Patrick!

C: Of course, as you do.

A: I told him, I'm like... His name actually might have been Patrick too. Like you can come to class but you're not allowed to leave to go to the bathroom. This is a one-hour class, this is not a two-hour class, this is a one-hour class I believe.

C: Yeah

A: And I **banned** him from going to the bathroom cause you know, you do what you want in your time but when you are in class, like, you belong to me. And I guess this gets kind of dark. So, towards the end of the class, ten minutes left to class, he's like: Aaron can I go to the bath? And I'm like we had a deal. And he was like: Ok, fine. He did not insist. I did not literally, really, force him to. And so, the bell rings at the end of the class, he gets up, leaves his jacket, leaves his bag, goes running to the bathroom. I waited for a little while and he didn't come back. And one of his friends was like: I got it; I'll stay with his stuff. So, he stayed with his stuff. The next day, it was over the next



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week, like on Monday, we get to class, and he comes in. And I guess, in the end, this isn't actually an embarrassing story cause he wasn't embarrassed in the slightest bit. He comes and he's like: Aaron you would never believe what happened. I'm like: What? He's like: I peed myself on the way to the bathroom.

C: Ooh

A: This guy, he is so full of confidence that this was a badge of honor for him. There was no shame, this was not a traumatic experience in his life, you know. And he came back, and it was really, really funny. Yeah.

C: I've got one actually and it involves Shakira of all people.

A: Really?

C: She was not a student though. But it was, quite a few years ago, it was when Shakira and Pique were still not together but there were rumors that they were...

A: Oh, the dark times.

C: The dark times yeah.

A: The dark times before the lights.

C: And I had an afternoon class, and yeah, coming in, in the first ten minutes when the people are still coming in, I like to chat and say: How was your weekend? Stuff like that. And one girl worked, she worked in a restaurant, kind of a posh restaurant up-town, and she said: Hey you'll never believe, you know. Yesterday, in the restaurant, Shakira and Pique were having lunch.

A: Ooh

C: And she said, well, you know, what they say is true because, you know, they were really...you know, pretty close, intimate, and so...

A: Alright

C: And this is before it (their relationship) was **coming out**.

A: OMG (Oh my God). Just to be clear, neither of them was married to someone else at the time or something, right?



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C: Oh... This is where we're going.

A: Ah, okay. Sorry, my bad.

C: In the evening I had my proficiency class, seven to nine, up in *Quimicas*, in the faculty, I get in there and I always like the first five to ten minutes to, you know, **break the ice** a bit with the students and I was there they were coming, and I was like: Hey you'd never believe what I heard. This is gospel truth; I've got a student she works in a restaurant, and she saw Shakira with Pique yesterday. I mean, everything the gossips say is true, they are together, and there is one girl just **shaking her head** getting really angry, going: No, it's not true. And I said: No, no, seriously, this girl I've got in class...She is so honest she would not lie about this. It's real. And she is getting really agitated this girl, going: This is not true, how dare you say... And then I think: Oh, hold on, this is getting a bit...

A: Someone has crossed the line

C: I was going: Okay. And I said: Well, what's the problem? And she said: No, no, because my best friend is Piqué's girlfriend, and this wouldn't... At this point I thought: Okay, just go to... can we all open the books on page 42 and let's study.

A: I don't feel so bad about making that student piss his pants now... That's pretty horrible

C: In my class there are no more gossip stories!

A: OMG, that's terrible. I mean this didn't happen in class but when I was working in the Spanish department back in my university there, I ran across, I ran into a guy who is in the department teaching then he was dressed in all black and what did I say... Cause I'm an idiot

C: Oh, dear.

A: I said: Oh, you know, are you going to a funeral?

C: Oh no!

A: He said: Yeah, my grandmother, who raised me my whole life, died. And I'm like: Oh Aaron you're such an idiot. I got him a card the next day. I have to say. But that's when I learned my lesson. I don't ask if someone is pregnant which is inappropriate anyways, but like also, no, don't say if anybody died, you look happy no, you look sad no, no,



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definitely don't. When someone looks sad do not ask a student why they are sad because that can never go anywhere good.

C: What I also learned was that you should always have a complete backup plan to every lesson.

A: Explain.

C: When **blended learning** started off, now, blended learning is...

A: With smoothies?

C: It sounds like it should be... It's even worse, when people call it semi-presential. What is that? Half of you are there, you know...

A: Just the mental part stays home, and the physical part goes there.

C: Exactly. So, these classes were, I mean the idea is that you do most of the work at home then you come into class... At the time I was like, let's focus the class completely on speaking you know...

A: Sure

C: ... interacting with the teacher. So, first two lessons I'll get all these questions together. The first lesson was about fashion and clothes, so I'm like you know, I'm getting all my questions together going: What's the most amount of money you've ever spent on an item of clothing? You know, what do you think looks good on somebody? What would be attractive? What would be good to wear to an event?

A: Okay, what **floats your boat**.

C: Oh, I mean I think I've got the questions, you know...

A: You're **the bee's knees**, as you could say

C: The coolest teacher, you know, with not the boring questions

A: Alright.

C: And then, on top of that, the second topic was romance and relationships.

A: Bad, bad.



C: This is, you know, many years ago. I would not touch that nowadays. But you know it was romance and relationships, I was thinking okay: What's the best chat up line you've ever heard? I've got all the questions, I am so confident going into this class, students start walking in. Fantastic. I've got all these people I think this is just going to go really really well and the last student to walk in was a nun.

A: Oh, no, no, I have no problem with this situation.

C: I see the nun walking in and the first I think is: Is this a joke from the coordinators? The coordinator at the time was a guy from Chicago and I thought: This is a joke, very funny!

A: Chicago humor, (laughs)

C: He knew exactly what... yeah, this class about fashion and relationships...

A: This is not a nun in the "Ali G" way that we are talking about?

C: No, this is a NUN.

A: A fully practicing nun, older lady?

C: Fully practicing, older lady. Sits down and I kind of look at my first topic and it's; What's the most amount of money you've ever spent on an item of clothing? And she is looking at me going: What on earth is this?

A: See, maybe this is because I am American or maybe because I am not Christian or maybe I don't know... I am more of a jerk or not, but I think that that would be fascinating to talk about if I were in a group, in a language class, with a nun. I would have a million questions. First of all, because I know nothing about nuns other than the typical thing, that they are poor that they can't have intimate relations bla,bla,bla. I have a million questions. That would be a great conversation!

C: No, in fairness she was **a good sport**, she really, really, joined the thing.

A: Sure, if you are ashamed of your choices that have led you to that point, I mean being a nun is not like a life changing surgery that you cannot go back on, you can stop being a nun at any point you decided that you are tired of people asking how much your habit cost?

C: Yeah



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A: Which could be interpreted in two different ways. How much does your habit cost? But you know...For those that don't know, a habit is a nun's clothing. Right?

C: Right, that is correct.

A: Alright

C: And, exams? Have you ever had any students copying or cheating in exams?

A: I'm sure. Because... Well, I don't know. I would assume so because you know kids gonna kid... university students go to university but I... I don't have any story that stands out.

C: I love this here because in one of the classes I had, I asked everyone okay everyone stand up and get a bit of movement and keep standing if your answer to this question is yes. So I started and the first question is okay, everyone stand up and keep standing if you've ever cheated in an exam. And everybody stays standing. So, I immediately say...

A: In Catalonia? In Barcelona? In the city?

C: Hold on a second, did you guys understand the question? Because... And they were like, oh yeah of course.

A: Yeah we got you teach!

C: Including the nun, I'm looking at her...

A: Really?

C: Yeah

A: She cheated on the Jesus exam!

C: She did. I thought this was brilliant. She was part of the gang in the end.

A: Wow. Okay. So that was the same class. Alright, I liked that. What did you do with them? Did you make them explain the story when they sit down?

C: Of course. Yeah. So they all have to tell their different stories.



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A: What were some of the questions you used for that? Not that I am going to steal this activity ever in a class but what are the type of questions would you ask them?

C: In this one I like to ask if you have ever... Okay, keep standing if you have ever shoplifted, if you have ever been in trouble with the police, if you have ever broken a bone... things like that. See, I get to know the students quite well. There's a lot of fun.

A: Sure. And it's great for a review of present perfect. I mean is basically the never have I ever, is the same like drinking game or whatever game that people would play no? The never have I ever?

C: This is what I love to do at the end of the class as well. To say, what did we do today? And the students will say: we had fun! And I said: No, no, I didn't mean that. And then: We did the present perfect! And they looking at me going, we don't care about that.

A: What? Who is perfect? Yeah, you're a perfect teacher. Leave us alone.

C: I also have another story about exams which... this is really embarrassing. It was a student who basically stopped coming after a couple of weeks. And, you know, it came towards... I think it was about the first year I was teaching, so I was trying to be conscientious.

A: In Barcelona also?

C: Yeah. Sorry, did you start teaching in Barcelona? Is this the first place you taught?

C: I taught in Liverpool

A: Oh, the Liverpoolians.

C: Yeah, the Liverpoolians.

A: I've heard they are very interesting learners like the Glaswegians I believe.

C: I taught in Cambridge.

A: Oh, who is posh now!

C: Exactly, and then I even elevated myself higher, to Barcelona. At the University of Barcelona...



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A: Interesting, nice which you know... we love the UB!

C: And the first year I was really trying to do a good job, so I **chased up** this student. I thought, you know, I'll see what happened.

A: Chased up?

C: Yeah, I wanted to see...

A: What does "chase up" mean? Phrasal verb time?

C: Uuuf, yeah, yeah.

A: Chase up?

C: Well, to see what had happened, to get the story.

A: Oh, you followed up with this student.

C: Chased up yeah.

A: Chase them down would be like to like run after them in the street and tackle them. That's not allowed anymore when students don't come to class.

C: I investigated what had happened with this particular student

A: This particular individual.

C: Who had disappeared a few weeks since the course... So, I managed to get I think it was the **landline** if you know what that is.

A: I remember those yeah

C: Yeah, those were so... I got a telephone number called up and it was his wife who answered. And I said I'm just curious because you know your husband... she said yeah yeah he does English class and I said yeah exactly but you know he hasn't been attending for a couple of months and she said No, no, he goes every Monday and Wednesday, and I said: Well, he should be, but he hasn't been coming since...

A: Oh, you're the worst man, Jesus.



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C: It didn't click, it didn't click. Cause I kept talking I was like if he wants to do the exam, he has still got...

A: You're making me feel great about the student who pissed himself!

C: And at that point it suddenly **dawned on me** I said okay, my work is done here...

A: My question: was there another student who also stopped coming at that same time and were those two students having time together or...

C: Coincidentally there was another student who was no longer attending

A: Was that it? The two of them...

C: That was it.

A: Oh, wow. The EIM, bringing people together.

C: Or apart.

A: Or apart, wow.

C: True story

A: You make me feel so much better about myself, thank you.

Vocabulary bank

a shamrock = three leaves in one leaf, the national emblem of Ireland

get rid of = make something disappear

college and **university** are used interchangeably in the U.S.

banned = prohibited

coming out = becoming public knowledge

break the ice = create a relaxed atmosphere



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shaking her head = saying “no” with a movement of the head (from side to side)

blended learning = mixing online learning with traditional face-to-face classes

floats your boat = to your personal liking

the bee's knees = excellent, outstanding

(to be) a good sport = someone who integrates happily into a situation that could have been embarrassing or difficult

chased up = investigated what happened

landline = a telephone in a house, usually with wires

dawned on me = I realized / I became aware of the situation

