

# ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS





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## Episode #191

# The Curious History of Apples

## 7th Sep, 2021

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:12] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about Apples, the fourth most popular fruit in the world.

[00:00:31] If you're wondering what numbers 1, 2, and 3 are, tomatoes are technically the world's favourite, although I know that some people might consider them to be a vegetable, then it's bananas, then watermelons, and then comes the topic of this episode, apples.

[00:00:50] So, in today's episode, we are going to start with the history of apples, where they come from, how they developed, and why apple production is different to that of the majority of fruits.



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:01:04] Then, we'll talk about the weird history of an unusual American, a man so associated with apples that he was given the nickname "Johnny Appleseed".

[00:01:16] We'll then talk about apples today, and see how apple cultivation has changed over the years to [satisfy](#)<sup>1</sup> the needs of the global economy.

[00:01:26] And finally, we will look at some fun [linguistic](#)<sup>2</sup> marks that apples have left on the English language, and I'll explain how you can use a few phrases that involve apples.

[00:01:41] [Let's get stuck in](#)<sup>3</sup> right away.

[00:01:44] To many of us now, apples are a [fundamental](#)<sup>4</sup> part of our diet, and of our [cuisine](#)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> cover or meet (for a need)

<sup>2</sup> relating to the study of language

<sup>3</sup> let's start doing something with enthusiasm

<sup>4</sup> basic, very important

<sup>5</sup> style of cooking



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:01:51] In England, we have baked apples, apple [crumble](#)<sup>6</sup>, [delicious](#)<sup>7</sup> [cloudy](#)<sup>8</sup>

English apple juice, and of course, schoolchildren up and down the country are encouraged to eat apples as a snack.

[00:02:05] And for billions of people around the world, the apple is a fruit that [features](#)<sup>9</sup> [prominently](#)<sup>10</sup> in the national [cuisine](#).

[00:02:13] But, where does it actually come from? And how did it become such a popular fruit?

[00:02:21] To the first question, the answer might surprise you.

[00:02:25] The fruit that you and I know as the apple is thought to have [originated](#)<sup>11</sup> from central Asia, probably in modern day Kazakhstan.

[00:02:35] Indeed, the largest city in Kazakhstan is called Almaty, the word Almaty is closely related to the Kazakh word for apple, “alma”.

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<sup>6</sup> a baked dessert

<sup>7</sup> having a very pleasant feeling when you eat it

<sup>8</sup> having small pieces of fruit that make it not clear

<sup>9</sup> is an important characteristic of something

<sup>10</sup> in a way that can be noticed immediately

<sup>11</sup> come from a particular place



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:02:45] And the Russian version of the city's name is "Alma-Ata", which is translated as "father of apples".

[00:02:54] Names [aside](#)<sup>12</sup>, all apples are thought to have originated from this area of the world, from a type of tree called "Malus Sieversii".

[00:03:05] Now, this episode isn't going to go deep into the biological history of apple trees, but there are some important points to note about apples that help us understand firstly how they have developed and changed over time, and secondly how they are grown now.

[00:03:26] So, the first point to understand is that apples are what's called "extreme heterozygotes".

[00:03:34] What this means, in practical terms, is that you can take the [seeds](#)<sup>13</sup> from an apple, put them in the ground, and wait until an apple tree grows.

[00:03:46] But the apples that this tree produces will probably look nothing like the original apple.

[00:03:54] It will still be an apple, yes, but it won't be the same. It could be a different colour, different taste, different size, it could be a completely different type of apple.

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<sup>12</sup> apart (used to show a change of subject)

<sup>13</sup> small, round objects produced by a plant and used for reproduction



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:04:06] This means that, if you find a [delicious](#) type of apple, and you think that you would like to plant a tree that will produce more of those [delicious](#) apples, you can't just plant the [seeds](#).

[00:04:20] What you need to do is find a piece of the original apple tree and stick it into a different tree.

[00:04:28] The word for this process in English is "[grafting](#)<sup>14</sup>".

[00:04:32] Now, this is a great simplification of what happens, but the point is that if you want to consistently produce the same kinds of apples, this is how you do it.

[00:04:44] Planting the [seeds](#) won't work.

[00:04:47] Now, that is the [horticultural](#)<sup>15</sup> part of the episode over.

[00:04:52] Let's get back to how this is relevant to the history of apples.

[00:04:57] It's thought that the original apple tree was [domesticated](#)<sup>16</sup> anywhere between 4 and 10,000 years ago, it is an incredibly old fruit.

[00:05:09] Given the fact that it [originated](#) from an area in the middle of The Silk Road, apples started to be transported both ways, towards Europe and across the Gobi Desert to China.

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<sup>14</sup> putting a piece from a living plant to another plant

<sup>15</sup> relating to the science of growing plants

<sup>16</sup> brought under human control



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:05:23] As these apples were transported and their [seeds](#) were planted elsewhere, entirely new types of apples would have [sprung up](#)<sup>17</sup>.

[00:05:33] For people who didn't know about grafting, the process of attaching a piece of apple tree to another tree, they would plant the [seeds](#) and completely new apples would [emerge](#)<sup>18</sup>.

[00:05:45] It's not completely clear exactly when, or how, societies discovered [grafting](#).

[00:05:52] There are some theories that it was known as early as the third century BC, based purely on the amount of apples of the same variety that were being produced in The Middle East, but historians are not completely sure.

[00:06:08] The Romans did an excellent job at taking apples all over Europe, and are thought to have been responsible for bringing them to the UK, where they [thrived](#)<sup>19</sup>, and have become almost a national fruit.

[00:06:24] The Romans were aware of how to use [grafting](#) to reproduce apple varieties, which led to the first "[orchards](#)<sup>20</sup>" in Britain - orchards being the collection of trees planted together, all producing the same kind of fruit.

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<sup>17</sup> grown

<sup>18</sup> appear

<sup>19</sup> grown successfully

<sup>20</sup> collections of the same kind of trees planted together



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:06:40] When the Romans left Britain, at the end of the 4th century AD, knowledge of apple [cultivation](#)<sup>21</sup> started to die out, but there is evidence of apple production mainly through old town names given by Anglo-Saxon invaders.

[00:06:58] For example, there is a town in England called Applegarth, which means Apple Orchard, and “Appleton”, which means “where apples grow”, these settlements were presumably given these names because of how many apple trees there were there.

[00:07:15] When the Normans invaded Britain in 1066, they brought with them a love for good food, a [renewed](#)<sup>22</sup> interest in apples and a knowledge of how to grow them, plus they were [thirsty](#)<sup>23</sup> for [cider](#)<sup>24</sup>, the alcoholic drink you make from [fermented](#)<sup>25</sup> apples.

[00:07:34] All of this, combined with the fact that apples grow very easily in Britain, meant that apple trees again became a [feature](#)<sup>26</sup> of the English landscape.

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<sup>21</sup> planting and harvesting

<sup>22</sup> happening again after a pause

<sup>23</sup> wanting very much

<sup>24</sup> an alcoholic drink made from apples

<sup>25</sup> chemically changed

<sup>26</sup> important part





## The Curious History of Apples

[00:07:45] And by The Middle Ages, across much of Europe, apples were a [permanent](#)<sup>27</sup> part of the national [cuisine](#), for similar reasons that they are still popular today.

[00:07:58] They are [tasty](#)<sup>28</sup>, they grow [relatively](#)<sup>29</sup> easily in much of Europe, they are quite cheap, you can transport them easily, they don't go bad quickly - I mean, you can store them for a long time after picking them from a tree - there are a lot of advantages to apples.

[00:08:18] It was, therefore, no surprise that when European [settlers](#)<sup>30</sup> sailed to America, they took this [delicious](#) and [versatile](#)<sup>31</sup> fruit with them.

[00:08:29] The first [orchard](#)<sup>32</sup> was planted in America in 1625, and reportedly, by 1644, 90% of all farms in Maryland contained apple [orchards](#).

[00:08:44] The [settlers](#) found an [abundance](#)<sup>33</sup> of land in America, and built [vast](#)<sup>34</sup> [orchards](#).

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<sup>27</sup> lasting without change

<sup>28</sup> having a pleasant feeling when you eat them

<sup>29</sup> when compared to other things

<sup>30</sup> people who move to a place to create a community

<sup>31</sup> capable of growing in different places and under various conditions

<sup>32</sup> collection of the same kind of trees planted together

<sup>33</sup> the situation in which there is more than enough of something

<sup>34</sup> extremely big



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:08:52] They knew about [grafting](#), but they would also experiment with new apple varieties, testing out how planting different [seeds](#) in different types of [soil](#)<sup>35</sup> would lead to new, and potentially even more [delicious](#), types of apple.

[00:09:09] Planting a new orchard from apple [seeds](#) must have felt a little like playing the [lottery](#)<sup>36</sup>, but a [lottery](#) that would take years for you to figure out whether you had won or not.

[00:09:22] You would plant the [seeds](#), then wait typically six years or more before the tree even started producing fruit, and only then would you be able to taste it and see whether it was any good.

[00:09:36] Now, although apple growing was popular almost from the day the [pilgrims](#)<sup>37</sup> first set foot on the continent, there is one man who has forever gone down in history for his association with apple growing in America, a man called John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed.

[00:09:58] Johnny Appleseed was born in 1774, in Massachusetts.

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<sup>35</sup> the surface of earth in which plants grow

<sup>36</sup> a gambling game or a game of luck

<sup>37</sup> people who travel to holy places in order to pray



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:10:03] This was at the time of the American [frontier](#)<sup>38</sup>, when people were heading west to seek out new land and [fortune](#)<sup>39</sup>.

[00:10:13] There were economic [incentives](#)<sup>40</sup> for people to move west and [settle](#)<sup>41</sup>. One of these was that anyone would receive approximately 40 [hectares](#)<sup>42</sup> of land if they planted an [orchard](#) of a certain size.

[00:10:28] Johnny Appleseed had some training in apple farming, and he headed out west with his 12-year-old brother.

[00:10:37] So the legend goes, everywhere he went, he planted [orchards](#).

[00:10:43] He wasn't doing this for economic reasons, and he lived a very simple life. He wore simple clothes, was very [generous](#) with everyone he met, and he was a vegetarian, which would have been very [rare](#)<sup>43</sup> at the time.

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<sup>38</sup> the unknown, wild area beyond the edge of a populated area

<sup>39</sup> chances, luck

<sup>40</sup> things that make you want to do something

<sup>41</sup> move to and live in a new land

<sup>42</sup> units of measurement of a land area

<sup>43</sup> not common



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:10:59] He followed a particular form of Christianity which focussed on love for the natural world, which probably explains his wanting to [go forth<sup>44</sup>](#) and plant trees everywhere.

[00:11:13] Importantly for our story, and for the development of apples in the United States, he did not use the technique of [grafting](#), as he believed that it hurt the trees.

[00:11:26] [Grafting](#) involves cutting off a branch of an apple tree, and Johnny Appleseed didn't want to do this, because he didn't want to cut and hurt a tree.

[00:11:37] He planted his [orchards](#) directly from apple [seeds](#), which, remember, means you have no control over the type of apple trees that would grow.

[00:11:49] What Appleseed would do is plant an [orchard](#), then leave it for someone else to manage and farm, then move further west and plant another one.

[00:11:59] He did this for over 50 years, and left a huge variety of different apples in all of the [orchards](#) he planted. Because he didn't use [grafting](#), all of these apples would have had slightly different tastes.

[00:12:17] Given that the main use of his apples would have been to make [cider](#), which was hugely popular in America at the time, it didn't really matter that much that they tasted so different.

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<sup>44</sup> get out, go away



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:12:30] His [legacy](#)<sup>45</sup> though, other than being an example told to schoolchildren of how to be a good, honest, kind and [generous](#) person, is of creating an enormous variety of apples.

[00:12:44] Indeed, even now there are 2,500 different varieties of apple grown in the United States.

[00:12:54] Now, this brings us to apples today, and how they have [conquered](#)<sup>46</sup> the world, or at least [feature](#) in the national [cuisines](#)<sup>47</sup> of a large number of countries.

[00:13:05] Partly thanks to Johnny Appleseed, and mainly thanks to the [vast](#) size and natural geography of the country, apple production in the United States continued to grow.

[00:13:17] It had a slight [hiccup](#)<sup>48</sup>, it [dipped](#)<sup>49</sup> slightly, during the Prohibition era, when alcohol was [banned](#)<sup>50</sup>, and apple trees were cut down and [orchards](#) burned, so that they couldn't be used to make [cider](#).

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<sup>45</sup> something left for the next generations to use

<sup>46</sup> taken control of, been everywhere in the world

<sup>47</sup> styles of cooking

<sup>48</sup> a small difficulty

<sup>49</sup> had a drop or decrease

<sup>50</sup> not allowed by law





## The Curious History of Apples

[00:13:32] Since then though, apple production has continued to increase, and the US is the world's second largest apple producer, behind China.

[00:13:43] The US produces around 5 million tonnes of apples per year.

[00:13:48] China actually produces more than 8 times the US production, at 42 million tonnes of apples per year. Indeed, almost half of the apples produced in the entire world are grown in China.

[00:14:05] For those of you living in Europe though, if you're thinking that you haven't eaten a Chinese apple, most of the apples grown in China are either eaten in China, or exported to South East Asia.

[00:14:18] So, coming back to apples today, even though the fruit is so variable, and its **seeds** will naturally produce different trees, and different fruits, a small selection of apple varieties **dominate**<sup>51</sup> the global apple market.

[00:14:36] There are about 7,500 different varieties of apple grown all over the world, but in the US just 11 varieties are responsible for 90% of apple sales.

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<sup>51</sup> have the biggest part



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:14:50] Creating the **supposed**<sup>52</sup> “perfect apple” is now a real science, and gone are the days of people like Johnny Appleseed **roaming**<sup>53</sup> around the country **scattering**<sup>54</sup> **seeds** and wondering whether a **delicious** new variety will emerge.

[00:15:07] One of the world’s most popular apples, the Honeycrisp apple, was developed at the University of Minnesota.

[00:15:15] New versions of apples are even **patented**<sup>55</sup>, to stop others from copying them.

[00:15:21] And new varieties of apple are not chosen only for their taste.

[00:15:27] They need to look attractive, they need to be just the right amount of **juicy**<sup>56</sup>, they need to travel well, they need to not go bad for a long amount of time, they need to be able to be **piled**<sup>57</sup> on top of each other in supermarkets, there are all sorts of **factors**<sup>58</sup> that go into the development of new types of apples.

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<sup>52</sup> considered as such but without certain knowledge

<sup>53</sup> moving around without having a specific destination

<sup>54</sup> throwing in various random directions

<sup>55</sup> protected by law in order not to be copied by others

<sup>56</sup> having a watery feeling

<sup>57</sup> positioned

<sup>58</sup> facts that affect the result of something



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:15:50] And when apple producers think they have found a [winning formula](#)<sup>59</sup>, they launch new varieties of apples in a similar way to if they were launching a new chocolate bar or breakfast cereal. At the end of 2019, the producers of Honeycrisp and Enterprise came together to create an apple called Cosmic Crisp, which had a \$10 million marketing budget behind it.

[00:16:20] So, things have come a long way since the days of Johnny Applesseed.

[00:16:25] And as with anything that has been a [fundamental](#) part of society for so long, apples have also [made a mark](#)<sup>60</sup> on the English language.

[00:16:35] English is, of course not unique in terms of its use of apples in idioms: French listeners will be familiar with what “falling into apples”, “tomber dans les pommes” means - for the non-French speakers, it means to [faint](#)<sup>61</sup>, to [pass out](#)<sup>62</sup>, to lose consciousness, and I’m sure there are some fun and interesting expressions in your language based around apples.

[00:17:01] But here are a few in English that you might come across, and might want to use for yourself.

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<sup>59</sup> a successful way

<sup>60</sup> had an effect

<sup>61</sup> lose consciousness

<sup>62</sup> lose consciousness



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:17:09] Firstly, “bad apple”. If someone is a bad apple, they are **fundamentally**<sup>63</sup> a bad person, they have a bad character. It’s normally used to refer to one person who is bad among a group of good people.

[00:17:25] You might think, ok, well if someone is a good person, can I call them “a good apple”?

[00:17:32] No, sorry. You can call them a good egg, which is pretty much the opposite of a bad apple.

[00:17:39] Confusing, I know.

[00:17:42] Our second apple expression is “an apple a day keeps the doctor away”. You might be familiar with a similar expression in your language, and in English it means, as you might imagine, eating apples is good for you.

[00:17:56] Third, is the expression “it’s like comparing apples to oranges”. You can use this expression if you think someone is making an unfair comparison, that they are comparing two things that shouldn’t be compared.

[00:18:12] So, for example, if you are comparing someone’s English ability to their cooking skill, you could say “that’s like comparing apples to oranges”.

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<sup>63</sup> basically



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:18:25] Our fourth expression, our **penultimate**<sup>64</sup> expression, is an expression I particularly like, and that's "how do you like them apples?"

[00:18:35] You can say this as a **comeback**<sup>65</sup>, as a way of replying to someone else to show that you have actually done something better, and surprising.

[00:18:45] For example, a child taking a test might ask their friend what **score**<sup>66</sup> they got, they might say "I got a B", and the other one might turn the paper around, show the "A" grade, and say "how do you like them apples".

[00:19:02] You might think that it sounds grammatically incorrect, because of course it should be "how do you like those apples", or "these apples". Indeed, as I was writing this episode, Google Docs tried to correct my grammar, but the expression really is "them apples".

[00:19:22] And our final apple-related expression is "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree".

[00:19:30] This is used to communicate the fact that a child is similar to their parents, so if there was a child that was, let's say, very talented at the violin, and the child's mother was a famous musician, you might say "well, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree".

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<sup>64</sup> second last

<sup>65</sup> a quick, clever reply

<sup>66</sup> rating or grade





## The Curious History of Apples

[00:19:50] It's actually more frequently used to describe negative qualities, so let's say that a child does something bad, or gets into trouble, and they had a parent who also got into trouble, you might say "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree".

[00:20:08] Although on one level this phrase makes [etymological](#)<sup>67</sup> sense, because the idea is that similar [talents](#)<sup>68</sup> are passed down the family, when you know about how apples actually reproduce, you realise that this expression doesn't make much sense at all.

[00:20:27] So, there we have it, a brief look at the curious history of apples.

[00:20:34] I hope it's been an interesting one, that you've learnt something new, and that next time you take a bite out of a Golden Delicious, a Fuji, a Granny Smith, Braeburn, or whatever type of apple is most popular in the country you live in, then you'll know a little bit more about the fascinating history of this [delicious](#) fruit.

[00:20:55] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:20:59] What is the most popular type of apple where you are from?

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<sup>67</sup> relating to the origin of words and their meaning

<sup>68</sup> natural abilities to be good at something



## The Curious History of Apples

[00:21:03] This episode focussed on the history of apples mainly in the English-speaking world, but tell me, what stories are there about apple [pioneers<sup>69</sup>](#) in your country?

[00:21:13] And finally, there are no doubt so many fun expressions that use apples in your language.

[00:21:20] What are they, and what do they mean?

[00:21:22] I would love to know. You can head right into our community forum, which is at [community.leonardoenglish.com](http://community.leonardoenglish.com) and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:21:33] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:21:39] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

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<sup>69</sup> people who are the first to do something



## Key vocabulary

<b>Word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Satisfy</b>	cover or meet (for a need)
<b>Linguistic</b>	relating to the study of language
<b>Let's get stuck in</b>	let's start doing something with enthusiasm
<b>Fundamental</b>	basic, very important
<b>Cuisine</b>	style of cooking
<b>Crumble</b>	a baked dessert
<b>Delicious</b>	having a very pleasant feeling when you eat it
<b>Cloudy</b>	having small pieces of fruit that make it not clear
<b>Features</b>	is an important characteristic of something
<b>Prominently</b>	in a way that can be noticed immediately
<b>Originated</b>	come from a particular place
<b>Aside</b>	apart (used to show a change of subject)



## The Curious History of Apples

<b>Seeds</b>	small, round objects produced by a plant and used for reproduction
<b>Grafting</b>	putting a piece from a living plant to another plant
<b>Horticultural</b>	relating to the science of growing plants
<b>Domesticated</b>	brought under human control
<b>Sprung up</b>	grown
<b>Emerge</b>	appear
<b>Thrived</b>	grown successfully
<b>Orchards</b>	collections of the same kind of trees planted together
<b>Cultivation</b>	planting and harvesting
<b>Renewed</b>	happening again after a pause
<b>Thirsty</b>	wanting very much
<b>Cider</b>	an alcoholic drink made from apples
<b>Fermented</b>	chemically changed
<b>Feature</b>	important part
<b>Permanent</b>	lasting without change



## The Curious History of Apples

<b>Tasty</b>	having a pleasant feeling when you eat them
<b>Relatively</b>	when compared to other things
<b>Settlers</b>	people who move to a place to create a community
<b>Versatile</b>	capable of growing in different places and under various conditions
<b>Orchard</b>	collection of the same kind of trees planted together
<b>Abundance</b>	the situation in which there is more than enough of something
<b>Vast</b>	extremely big
<b>Soil</b>	the surface of earth in which plants grow
<b>Lottery</b>	a gambling game or a game of luck
<b>Pilgrims</b>	people who travel to holy places in order to pray
<b>Frontier</b>	the unknown, wild area beyond the edge of a populated area
<b>Fortune</b>	chances, luck
<b>Incentives</b>	things that make you want to do something
<b>Settle</b>	move to and live in a new land
<b>Hectares</b>	units of measurement of a land area





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<b>Generous</b>	willing to give money and help people
<b>Rare</b>	not common
<b>Go forth</b>	get out, go away
<b>Legacy</b>	something left for the next generations to use
<b>Conquered</b>	taken control of, been everywhere in the world
<b>Cuisines</b>	styles of cooking
<b>Hiccup</b>	a small difficulty
<b>Dipped</b>	had a drop or decrease
<b>Banned</b>	not allowed by law
<b>Dominate</b>	have the biggest part
<b>Supposed</b>	considered as such but without certain knowledge
<b>Roaming</b>	moving around without having a specific destination
<b>Scattering</b>	throwing in various random directions
<b>Patented</b>	protected by law in order not to be copied by others
<b>Juicy</b>	having a watery feeling



## The Curious History of Apples

<b>Piled</b>	positioned
<b>Factors</b>	facts that affect the result of something
<b>Winning formula</b>	a successful way
<b>Made a mark</b>	had an effect
<b>Faint</b>	lose consciousness
<b>Pass out</b>	lose consciousness
<b>Fundamentally</b>	basically
<b>Penultimate</b>	second last
<b>Comeback</b>	a quick, clever reply
<b>Score</b>	rating or grade
<b>Etymological</b>	relating to the origin of words and their meaning
<b>Talents</b>	natural abilities to be good at something
<b>Pioneers</b>	people who are the first to do something

*We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.*

*What did you like? What could we do better?*



**English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #191**  
**The Curious History of Apples**

*What did you struggle to understand?*

*Let us know in the forum [community.leonardoenglish.com](https://community.leonardoenglish.com)*

