

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #509
Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence
15th Oct, 2024

Transcript	3
Key vocabulary	27
Language spotlight	33
Quiz	36
Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions	36
True or False	38
Fill-in-the-Blank	39
Vocabulary Practice	39
Answers	42

Transcript

[00:00:04] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] 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.

[00:00:20] I'm Alastair Budge, and today is part two of our three-part series on crime and punishment.

[00:00:27] In case you missed it, in part one we talked about the history of crime and punishment in Britain, and learned about the various ways through British history that Britain dealt with criminals, or people who were suspected to have committed crimes.

[00:00:43] In part three we are going to talk about the [evolving](#)¹ role of prisons, and in today's episode, part two, we'll talk about the [grisly](#)² but important subject of capital punishment, otherwise known as the death penalty.

¹ changing or developing over time

² horrible and shocking

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:00:56] As a little warning before we start, this episode is about the death penalty, it will contain some descriptions of capital punishment, although we will try to keep it as family-friendly as a discussion about the death penalty can be.

[00:01:11] So, with that [disclaimer](#)³ out of the way, let's get started and talk about capital punishment.

[00:01:19] The word “capital” is a strange one in English.

[00:01:23] It can mean the main city in a country, the place that is the administrative and governmental centre.

[00:01:31] It can mean money or [assets](#)⁴ owned by an individual or a company.

[00:01:36] It can mean a large letter, the kind of letter you start a sentence with or use at the start of someone's name or the name of a town, city or country.

[00:01:47] In old fashioned English, when used as an adjective it even meant “very good”, so you might say “that's a capital idea”, meaning “that's a very good idea”.

³ a warning or statement to avoid responsibility for something

⁴ things or property

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:02:00] But put “capital” in front of punishment and it certainly does not mean “excellent”, at least from the point of view of the person on the receiving end of it.

[00:02:11] In this sense, capital means the most extreme, the highest level of punishment.

[00:02:18] Capital punishment means the death penalty, the [state-sanctioned](#)⁵ killing of a person for a crime.

[00:02:27] The classical scholars among you might know why this kind of punishment is called “capital”; it is because it comes from the Latin word for head, caput, and many capital punishments involve doing something to someone’s head, typically chopping it off.

[00:02:46] Now, the [grim](#)⁶ reality of capital punishment is that if you were to draw a large line starting at the beginning of human history and going all the way up to the modern day, only a tiny [slither](#)⁷ at the very end would be “the bit without capital punishment”, or at least without much capital punishment.

⁵ approved or allowed by the government

⁶ gloomy serious or sad

⁷ small thin piece

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:03:08] If you remember from the last episode, 18th century Britain went through a period where there was something called The Bloody Code, which listed 200 different crimes for which execution was a recommended punishment.

[00:03:24] But of course, capital punishment is far from unique to Britain.

[00:03:31] For as long as humans have documented history, there are records of societies killing their citizens as punishment.

[00:03:40] To be precise, the 1700 BC Code of Hammurabi, which was written almost 4,000 years ago in Babylon, [lays out](#)⁸ 25 different crimes for which people could be put to death.

[00:03:56] Some, you might think “ok, fair enough, that really is a bad crime”, for example stealing the son of another citizen or [sneaking](#)⁹ into a house and committing [rape](#)¹⁰.

⁸ explains or describes in detail

⁹ moving in a secret way to avoid being noticed

¹⁰ a serious crime involving forced sexual activity

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:04:07] Others you might think are a little [harsh](#)¹¹.

[00:04:11] For example, the code specified that, and I'm quoting directly, "if a builder builds a house and a wall falls down and kills the person inside, the builder shall be put to death".

[00:04:24] Or "if a meeting of criminals takes place in a [tavern](#)¹² and the [tavern](#) owner doesn't immediately report it to the authorities, the [tavern](#) owner shall be put to death".

[00:04:36] I can't imagine that this would have [encouraged](#)¹³ many people to become builders or [tavern](#) owners, if one honest mistake at work could cost them their life.

[00:04:47] Now, while The Code of Hammurabi might be the first recorded instance of a legal code [setting out](#)¹⁴ capital punishment, there is evidence that it was used all over the world, it is not as if the idea came from the Middle East and people elsewhere hadn't thought of it.

¹¹ very strict, unkind or severe

¹² a place like a pub where people drank alcohol

¹³ given support or hope

¹⁴ starting

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:05:04] After all, for all its criticisms, one can see why it was considered an effective legal tool.

[00:05:12] It permanently removed people who committed [undesirable](#)¹⁵ acts from society, theoretically meaning that there would be fewer people in that society to commit crimes.

[00:05:23] Not only that, but it would act as a [deterrent](#)¹⁶, a reason to encourage people not to commit crimes in the first place. We'll come to whether that's true in a bit, but that was the theory at least.

[00:05:36] And with time, as the method of execution became more and more creative and executions were carried out increasingly publicly, [deterrent](#) was an ever important reason.

¹⁵ unwanted or unpleasant

¹⁶ something that would make people stop or avoid doing something bad

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:05:51] Nobody wanted to die if they could avoid it, but the **prospect**¹⁷ of being killed in some **gruesome**¹⁸ and extremely painful way was an extra reason not to commit a crime and potentially **face**¹⁹ the same **fate**²⁰.

[00:06:05] So, most societies justified capital punishment through a mixture of removing criminals from society and **detering**²¹ people from committing criminal acts in the future.

[00:06:17] And there was the extra element of when capital punishment was considered **divine**²² punishment, it was the will of God for someone to die.

¹⁷ the possibility of it happening in the future

¹⁸ very disgusting and horrifying

¹⁹ have to accept or confront

²⁰ destiny or end

²¹ preventing or stopping

²² relating to God or a higher power

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:06:27] From Ancient Israel right through to Medieval Europe, and still in some countries today, people were and still are sentenced to death for crimes [deemed](#)²³ [contrary to](#)²⁴ the will of God.

[00:06:40] In countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan this is still the case for [blasphemy](#)²⁵, and going back to Medieval England, for example, hundreds of women found themselves sentenced to death for crimes associated with [witchcraft](#)²⁶, which was seen as a religious crime.

[00:07:00] Clearly this was bad news if you were one of the poor women who found herself accused of being a witch and ended up burned at the [stake](#)²⁷, but there is an argument that this kind of [brutality](#)²⁸ was a necessary step towards a realisation, in Europe at least, of the problems with capital punishment.

²³ considered or judged

²⁴ opposite to or different from

²⁵ speaking disrespectfully about god or religion

²⁶ the practice of magic or casting spells

²⁷ a wooden post used to tie people to for burning

²⁸ cruel and violent behaviour

[00:07:22] Burning someone at the [stake](#) or drowning them in a pond is a horrific thing to do, especially if you later realise that they were completely innocent of the crime that they were accused of.

[00:07:35] And moving into the 17th and then 18th centuries, Enlightenment thinkers started to question capital punishment from a moral and practical perspective.

[00:07:46] In much of Europe at least, this hadn't really been a major concern for people.

[00:07:52] The death penalty was [part and parcel](#)²⁹ of life, it was how societies had always dealt with criminals, and its use or effectiveness had rarely been questioned.

[00:08:05] However, as we [touched on](#)³⁰ in the last episode, Enlightenment thinkers started to ask these questions.

[00:08:12] Could it ever be morally justified to end someone's life?

[00:08:17] Was capital punishment really an effective [deterrent](#)?

[00:08:22] In other words, did it do what it was meant to do?

²⁹ an essential or important part

³⁰ mentioned briefly or talked about a little bit

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:08:26] As you might remember from the last episode, a lot of this can be [traced back to](#)³¹ the great Italian Enlightenment philosopher, Cesare Beccaria, and his seminal work, On Crimes and Punishments.

[00:08:40] Given that capital punishment was so [prevalent](#)³² in Europe at the time, and that it was such a final, non-reversible, sentence, Beccaria dedicated a [sizable](#)³³ portion of the book to the subject.

[00:08:54] And he was against it, both on moral and practical grounds. He argued that there was no crime great enough to [warrant](#)³⁴ capital punishment.

[00:09:05] It was morally unacceptable because there was no legitimate social contract under which the state could decide to end someone's life, so the state deciding to execute someone [constituted](#)³⁵ murder.

³¹ found or discovered to have started by

³² common or widespread

³³ quite large

³⁴ justify or make it necessary

³⁵ was equal to, was

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:09:19] It was also practically a bad idea, because, it was not an effective [deterrent](#), it didn't actually stop people from committing crimes, no matter how public and no matter how awful the method of execution.

[00:09:34] According to Beccaria, the greatest [deterrent](#) is the certainty of punishment, the knowledge that if you commit a crime, you will be caught and punished.

[00:09:45] Because the death penalty was the stated punishment for so many different crimes—often crimes that we would now consider minor crimes—sentences were often passed in an [arbitrary](#)³⁶ and [inconsistent](#)³⁷ manner.

[00:10:00] One judge might decide that someone should be executed for theft of a horse, but another more [lenient](#)³⁸ one, or one who was feeling particularly generous that morning, might decide that a small [fine](#)³⁹ would be [sufficient](#)⁴⁰.

³⁶ random or without reason

³⁷ not steady or the same throughout

³⁸ not strict, forgiving

³⁹ a sum of money paid as punishment

⁴⁰ enough or as much as needed

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:10:15] Same crime, but an [inconsistent](#) application of the law.

[00:10:21] Beccaria argued that what needed to happen was for the law to be applied uniformly.

[00:10:27] It was this certainty of punishment that would be a better [deterrent](#) than thinking, “well, I might be hanged but I could well escape with a small [fine](#)”.

[00:10:37] What’s more, and we’ll touch on this in greater detail in the next episode, Beccaria argued that a far greater [deterrent](#) than the death penalty was life imprisonment.

[00:10:50] Life imprisonment was, by definition, a longer punishment than a [swift](#)⁴¹ execution.

[00:10:57] Instead of being killed in front of a [bloodthirsty](#)⁴² crowd, and perhaps even being [glorified](#)⁴³ in the process, the criminal would be forced to [live out](#)⁴⁴ the rest of

⁴¹ quick or fast

⁴² enjoying violence or killing

⁴³ made to seem better or more important than they were

⁴⁴ continue living until the end

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

their days in prison, and it was this, not the [threat](#)⁴⁵ of execution, that would be a bigger [deterrent](#) to [would-be](#)⁴⁶ criminals.

[00:11:19] And [lest I forget](#)⁴⁷, another very important but obvious argument that Beccaria made against capital punishment was its irreversible nature. If someone was wrongly convicted, if evidence later [came to light](#)⁴⁸ that they were innocent of the crime, capital punishment was irreversible, it could not be undone, someone cannot be un-executed.

[00:11:46] Now, Beccaria's On Crimes and Punishments was published in 1764.

[00:11:52] Although you might have been listening to his arguments and [nodding along](#)⁴⁹, thinking "that all sounds perfectly reasonable to me", these ideas were revolutionary at the time.

⁴⁵ a warning or danger of harm

⁴⁶ someone who wanted to be one in the future, potential

⁴⁷ so that I don't forget

⁴⁸ became known or discovered

⁴⁹ showing agreement by moving your head up and down

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:12:03] Why?

[00:12:04] Well, the [prevailing](#)⁵⁰ view, at least in most of Europe, was almost [diametrically](#)⁵¹ opposite to Beccaria.

[00:12:12] People believed that the state did have the moral right to execute people.

[00:12:17] People believed that capital punishment was an effective [deterrent](#).

[00:12:22] People believed that criminals had [forfeited](#)⁵² their human rights.

[00:12:27] And the justice system was more about [retribution](#)⁵³—revenge—and absolute state control than reliable justice.

[00:12:37] It didn't matter, therefore, if the occasional innocent person was executed; the death penalty was all about [cleansing](#)⁵⁴ society and [detering](#) future criminals.

⁵⁰ most common or widespread at that time

⁵¹ completely or directly

⁵² lost or given up as a punishment

⁵³ punishment given in return for a crime, revenge

⁵⁴ making it pure or clean

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:12:48] Moving towards the modern day, clearly there still is this division between countries and societies that have come to the conclusion that capital punishment is [barbaric](#)⁵⁵ and unacceptable, and countries in which it is still considered to be an important part of the justice system.

[00:13:07] As of 2024, there are 112 countries that have [abolished](#)⁵⁶ capital punishment altogether.

[00:13:15] 7 more have removed the death penalty from regular law, but still have a [provision](#)⁵⁷ for it under special circumstances, for example during war.

[00:13:25] 22 countries haven't [abolished](#) it officially, but haven't used it for at least 10 years, so are believed to have internal guidance not to use it.

[00:13:36] So, that's 141 countries, 72% of all nation states, most countries in the world.

[00:13:45] But when it comes to the number of people who live in countries with capital punishment, it is a different story. Over half of the world's population lives in countries where capital punishment is still legal and used.

⁵⁵ extremely cruel or uncivilised

⁵⁶ ended or done away with by law

⁵⁷ a rule or condition

[00:14:01] This is because, of the world's 10 most populous countries, 9 still have capital punishment.

[00:14:08] The only one that doesn't is Brazil, which practically [abolished](#) it in 1876.

[00:14:15] So, more than half of the world's population live in a country in which they could theoretically be executed if they commit a serious enough crime.

[00:14:26] And, of course, what is considered a capital crime varies [drastically](#)⁵⁸ by country, and some capital crimes are celebrated behaviours elsewhere in the world.

[00:14:37] Taking drugs, being gay or deciding to follow a different religion might be perfectly legal and even celebrated behaviours in many countries, but do exactly the same thing in somewhere like Saudi Arabia or Pakistan and you might find yourself beheaded or hung.

[00:14:57] Of course, there is also a religious element to this; most of the Islamic countries where capital punishment is still legal allow it on religious [grounds](#)⁵⁹, whereas the majority of non-Islamic countries have a [secular](#)⁶⁰ legal system.

⁵⁸ in a very big or extreme way

⁵⁹ reasons or justification

⁶⁰ not connected with religion

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:15:12] In other words, there is a clear division between the justice system and religious [doctrine](#)⁶¹.

[00:15:18] Now, what is really interesting to talk about is public opinion towards capital punishment.

[00:15:25] In the UK, where capital punishment was abolished in 1965, public opinion is [split](#)⁶².

[00:15:33] Surveys tend to show that more Brits oppose the death penalty than support it, but the [margin](#)⁶³ is slim.

[00:15:43] The last survey from the market research company YouGov suggested that around 50% of the British population oppose the death penalty while 40% support it, and the remaining 10% are undecided.

⁶¹ set of beliefs or teachings

⁶² divided or separated

⁶³ difference

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:15:59] Interestingly, though, when you dig down deeper into surveys like this, support for the death penalty tends⁶⁴ to rise when crimes are specified, especially particularly bad crimes.

[00:16:13] Terrorism, multiple murders, or the murder of a child. In these cases, in the UK at least, a majority of the population does support the death penalty over life imprisonment.

[00:16:27] Now, in the case of this survey at least, the respondents weren't asked why they supported it, but perhaps we can make some educated guesses⁶⁵ when looking at surveys from elsewhere.

[00:16:42] In the United States, where 27 out of 50 states have the death penalty, the market research company Gallup has been tracking⁶⁶ public opinion on the subject for almost 100 years.

⁶⁴ usually does or happens in that way

⁶⁵ guesses based on knowledge or information

⁶⁶ following or observing

[00:16:55] Although there is [broader⁶⁷](#) support for the death penalty in the United States than in the UK, with 53% supporting it and 44% opposing it as of the last survey, support is decreasing and if it continues to decrease at a similar rate, in a decade or so the majority of Americans will oppose the death penalty.

[00:17:18] But what is particularly interesting in this Gallup data is to look at the reasons given by people who support or oppose the death penalty.

[00:17:29] For those who support the death penalty, the [overwhelming⁶⁸](#) reason, given by between 40 and 50% of respondents over the past 30 years, is some form of “they deserve it”, or “they killed therefore they should be killed”.

[00:17:46] It is punishment, [retribution](#), that this is the morally and ethically right thing to do.

[00:17:54] And for those who oppose the death penalty, the similarly [overwhelming](#) top reason is some variant of “it is wrong to take a life”.

⁶⁷ more general or wide-ranging

⁶⁸ most common by far

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:18:05] There were all sorts of other options given in the survey, practical or economic reasons even, but none of these even came close to the emotional responses on both sides: they deserve to be killed, or nobody deserves to be killed.

[00:18:23] And for all of the Enlightenment thinking, for all of the philosophers and moralists [studiously](#)⁶⁹ documenting the advantages and disadvantages of capital punishment, trying to think through the subject logically and rationally, for most people it remains an emotional decision, a [gut instinct](#)⁷⁰.

[00:18:45] Statistically speaking, you, my dear listener, you probably have strong opinions on capital punishment.

[00:18:52] Perhaps you think it is unacceptable in any situation, no matter the [gravity](#)⁷¹ of the crime.

[00:18:59] Perhaps you think that there are some crimes so terrible that it is the only solution.

⁶⁹ in a careful or detailed way

⁷⁰ a natural or immediate feeling about it

⁷¹ seriousness or importance

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:19:05] Perhaps you think that it is an effective tool in the justice system and that it is completely within the government's [mandate](#)⁷² to choose to end someone's life.

[00:19:15] No matter where you stand, it is hard to see capital punishment being [abolished](#) worldwide in the near future.

[00:19:23] The overall global trend, over the past 150 years, might have been downward, but it is still a part of the justice system that the majority of the global population lives under.

[00:19:36] And 2024, perhaps surprisingly, was the biggest year since 2015 for executions. According to Amnesty International, 1,153 people were executed last year, which doesn't include the thousands of people who are believed to have been executed in China.

[00:19:57] Don't worry, this isn't really a global trend.

[00:20:00] The reason for the jump is actually simple, it's all down to Iran, which accounted for 74% of all registered executions in 2023.

⁷² official order or instruction

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:20:12] Now, to wrap things up, the history of capital punishment is a fascinating one that gets us asking questions about the role of the state, human rationality, and the justice system.

[00:20:25] We have thousands of years of evidence to show that executing criminals does stop them from committing more criminal acts—because they are dead—but it doesn't stop people from becoming criminals, there is zero evidence that it is an effective [deterrent](#).

[00:20:41] So what is capital punishment about?

[00:20:45] Revenge? Justice? Control? The will of God?

[00:20:50] It's clear that the death penalty isn't just about stopping crime—it's deeply tied to our ideas of justice, morality, and control.

[00:21:00] Whether you view it as a necessary tool or an [outdated⁷³ relic⁷⁴](#), capital punishment forces us to ask questions about what justice truly means, and how far we're willing to go to [uphold⁷⁵](#) it.

⁷³ no longer useful or relevant, old-fashioned

⁷⁴ something from the past that is still around

⁷⁵ support or maintain

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509
Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:21:15] OK then, that is it for today's episode on the [veritable⁷⁶ hot potato⁷⁷](#) of a topic, capital punishment.

[00:21:21] I hope it's been an interesting one, and that you've learnt something new.

[00:21:25] As always, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:21:29] The obvious question is...do you support or oppose the death penalty, and what are your reasons for your opinion?

[00:21:37] How has public opinion changed in your country, and what do you think the next 50 years will hold?

[00:21:43] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:21:47] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:21:54] And as a quick reminder, this was part two of a three-part mini-series on the general theme of crime and punishment.

⁷⁶ truly or genuinely

⁷⁷ a sensitive or controversial topic

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509
Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

[00:22:02] In part one we learned about the history of crime and punishment in the UK, and coming up next will be a deep dive into the evolving role of prison, so keep an eye out for that one.

[00:22:14] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:22:19] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Evolving	changing or developing over time
Grisly	horrible and shocking
Disclaimer	a warning or statement to avoid responsibility for something
Assets	things or property
State-sanctioned	approved or allowed by the government
Grim	gloomy serious or sad
Slither	small thin piece
Lays out	explains or describes in detail
Sneaking	moving in a secret way to avoid being noticed
Rape	a serious crime involving forced sexual activity
Harsh	very strict, unkind or severe
Tavern	a place like a pub where people drank alcohol
Encouraged	given support or hope

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509
Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

Setting out	starting
Undesirable	unwanted or unpleasant
Deterrent	something that would make people stop or avoid doing something bad
Prospect	the possibility of it happening in the future
Gruesome	very disgusting and horrifying
Face	have to accept or confront
Fate	destiny or end
Deterring	preventing or stopping
Divine	relating to God or a higher power
Deemed	considered or judged
Contrary to	opposite to or different from
Blasphemy	speaking disrespectfully about god or religion
Witchcraft	the practice of magic or casting spells
Stake	a wooden post used to tie people to for burning
Brutality	cruel and violent behaviour

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509
Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

Part and parcel	an essential or important part
Touched on	mentioned briefly or talked about a little bit
Traced back to	found or discovered to have started by
Prevalent	common or widespread
Sizable	quite large
Warrant	justify or make it necessary
Constituted	was equal to, was
Arbitrary	random or without reason
Inconsistent	not steady or the same throughout
Lenient	not strict, forgiving
Fine	a sum of money paid as punishment
Sufficient	enough or as much as needed
Swift	quick or fast
Bloodthirsty	enjoying violence or killing
Glorified	made to seem better or more important than they were

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509
Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

Live out	continue living until the end
Threat	a warning or danger of harm
Would-be	someone who wanted to be one in the future, potential
Lest i forget	so that I don't forget
Came to light	became known or discovered
Nodding along	showing agreement by moving your head up and down
Prevailing	most common or widespread at that time
Diametrically	completely or directly
Forfeited	lost or given up as a punishment
Retribution	punishment given in return for a crime, revenge
Cleansing	making it pure or clean
Barbaric	extremely cruel or uncivilised
Abolished	ended or done away with by law
Provision	a rule or condition
Drastically	in a very big or extreme way

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509
Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

Grounds	reasons or justification
Secular	not connected with religion
Doctrine	set of beliefs or teachings
Split	divided or separated
Margin	difference
Tends	usually does or happens in that way
Educated guesses	guesses based on knowledge or information
Tracking	following or observing
Broader	more general or wide-ranging
Overwhelming	most common by far
Studiously	in a careful or detailed way
Gut instinct	a natural or immediate feeling about it
Gravity	seriousness or importance
Mandate	official order or instruction
Outdated	no longer useful or relevant, old-fashioned

English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #509
Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

Relic something from the past that is still around

Uphold support or maintain

Veritable truly or genuinely

Hot potato a sensitive or controversial topic

Language spotlight

1. Part and parcel

- **Meaning:** A necessary or essential part of something
- **Synonyms:** integral, essential, inseparable
- **Antonyms:** optional, unnecessary
- **Examples:**
 - Facing challenges is **part and parcel** of any job.
 - Long hours are **part and parcel** of being a doctor.

2. Came to light

- **Meaning:** To become known or discovered, usually something previously hidden
- **Synonyms:** revealed, uncovered, discovered
- **Antonyms:** hidden, concealed, kept secret
- **Examples:**
 - New evidence **came to light** during the investigation.

- After years of silence, the truth finally **came to light**.

3. Hot potato

- **Meaning:** A controversial or sensitive issue that is difficult to handle
- **Synonyms:** delicate issue, controversial topic, touchy subject
- **Antonyms:** straightforward issue, simple matter, easy topic
- **Examples:**
 - The topic of immigration is a political **hot potato** in many countries.
 - No one wanted to discuss the company's financial troubles as it was a **hot potato**.

4. Lays out

- **Meaning:** To explain or present something clearly and in detail
- **Synonyms:** explain, clarify, present
- **Antonyms:** confuse, obscure, muddle
- **Examples:**

- The manager **lays out** the plan for the upcoming project.
- The report **lays out** the reasons for the budget cuts.

5. Diametrically opposed

- **Meaning:** Completely opposite or in total disagreement
- **Synonyms:** completely opposite, contrary, conflicting
- **Antonyms:** similar, aligned, in agreement
- **Examples:**
 - Their views on the issue are **diametrically opposed**.
 - The two candidates have **diametrically opposed** opinions on climate change.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. What is one of the main concerns about the death penalty mentioned in the podcast?
 - a) It is too popular among the public
 - b) It can lead to wrongful convictions
 - c) It is more expensive than life imprisonment
 - d) It encourages violent crime

2. What does the podcast suggest is a reason for the varying opinions on the death penalty?
 - a) Cultural differences
 - b) Media influence
 - c) Economic factors

d) Political debates

3. According to the transcript, what historical document from 1700 BC laid out capital punishment laws?

a) The Magna Carta

b) The Code of Hammurabi

c) The Ten Commandments

d) The U.S. Constitution

4. What are the origins of the word "capital" as discussed in the podcast?

a) It comes from the Latin word meaning "head"

b) It is derived from the Greek word for "justice"

c) It originates from an Old English term meaning "wealth"

d) It comes from a French word meaning "to execute"

Capital Punishment: The Evolution of the Ultimate Sentence

5. What does the podcast suggest about public opinions on capital punishment today?
- a) Most people strongly support it
 - b) Public opinion is split
 - c) There is little interest in the subject
 - d) People don't understand the issue

True or False

6. Capital punishment was only used for serious crimes like murder in the past.
(True / False)
7. Some countries still have capital punishment today. (True / False)
8. In the podcast, it is mentioned that public executions were once seen as entertainment. (True / False)
9. The podcast argues that capital punishment is always an effective deterrent to crime. (True / False)
10. The death penalty was abolished in Britain in the 20th century. (True / False)

Fill-in-the-Blank

11. Capital punishment means the death penalty, the state-_____ killing of a person for a crime.
12. A lot of this can be _____ back to the great Italian Enlightenment philosopher, Cesare Beccaria, and his seminal work, On Crimes and Punishments.
13. The Code of Hammurabi might be the first recorded instance of a legal code _____ out capital punishment.
14. The respondents weren't asked why they supported it, but perhaps we can make some _____ guesses when looking at surveys from elsewhere.
15. For most people it remains an emotional decision, a ____ instinct.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does the term “**grisly**” mean in the context of the podcast?
 - a) Pleasant
 - b) Shocking and horrifying
 - c) Irrelevant

d) Outdated

17. What does “**state-sanctioned**” refer to?

a) Something that is forbidden

b) Something that is approved by the government

c) Something that is hidden

d) Something that is illegal

18. What does the word “**fate**” mean in this context?

a) Decision

b) Punishment

c) Destiny or outcome

d) Chance

19. What does “**arbitrary**” mean in the context of punishments?

- a) Fair
- b) Random and without reason
- c) Strict
- d) Just

20. The word “**abolished**” means:

- a) Started
- b) Ended or stopped
- c) Changed
- d) Supported

Answers

1. b) It can lead to wrongful convictions
2. a) Cultural differences
3. b) The Code of Hammurabi
4. a) It comes from the Latin word meaning "head"
5. b) Public opinion is split
6. False
7. True
8. True
9. False
10. True
11. sanctioned
12. traced
13. setting
14. educated
15. gut
16. b) Shocking and horrifying
17. b) Something that is approved by the government
18. c) Destiny or outcome
19. b) Random and without reason
20. b) Ended or stopped