

Do you make art? Do you paint or draw or sing? Do you do it for yourself, or for other people? In today's story, a woman called Felicity starts making art for herself, but slowly learns that she's better at making art for others. Keep listening to learn English.

[intro]

Hello my Lovely Learners, and welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great. I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's beginner-level story is called *The Shape of Art*. As always, the transcript and PDF are available at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com, and you can find the link in the description.

OK, I'll just explain some words that are in today's story.

Squares, triangles and circles are all **shapes**, S H A P E S. Shapes are very important in mathematics. Geometry is the study of shapes. If someone is 'in shape', then they are fit and they have a nice body.

A **sculpture**, S C U L P T U R E, is when someone uses wood, metal or clay to make the shape of something. For example, the Ancient Romans and Ancient Greeks made marble sculptures of people. They took pieces of marble and cut them until they were in the shape of someone. The most famous sculpture in the world is Michelangelo's *David*. Sculptures often appear in gardens and parks. People who make sculptures are called *sculptors*. I know, very confusing.

The **law**, L A W, is the system of rules that governments use to keep people safe. For example, there is a law that says you cannot kill people, or you cannot steal things. People who study law often become **lawyers**, L A W Y E R S. Lawyers argue that someone has broken the law or that they didn't break the law, and then a judge decides if the person should go to prison or go free.

Wrong, W R O N G, can mean 'not correct', but it can also mean when you feel bad but don't know why. For example, maybe you have very complicated feelings about a friend or family member, but you don't understand your feelings, so you just feel wrong. Or maybe you go to work and someone isn't there, but you don't know who it is, so something just feels wrong.

Art supplies are things that you use to make art. For example, art supplies might be paper, pens, paints, wood, scissors, glue... The type of art supplies depends on the art being made. Painters buy paints for their supplies, and sculptors buy marble or wood or clay for their supplies. Being a writer is easy (and cheap!) because you don't need a lot of supplies.

A **landscape painting** is a painting of the countryside or nature. Landscape paintings are usually of mountains, forests or fields. Landscape paintings usually have no people in them or very few people. The focus of the painting is on nature.

A **portrait**, P O R T R A I T, is a painting or a picture of a person. In the past, before there was photography, portraits were the main way of making a picture of someone. Rich and important people paid to have portraits made of them. *Mona Lisa*, one of the most famous paintings in the world, is a portrait.

Abstract, A B S T R A C T, means unclear, not real, fantastic. Normally, painters paint real things: landscapes, dogs, people. But sometimes painters make abstract paintings. There are lots of shapes and colours, but you don't really know what it is. Piet Mondrian, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko are all famous abstract artists.

When you throw something away, you usually throw it in a **bin**, B I N. For example, when you eat a banana, you throw the banana peel, the yellow bit, in the bin. Once a week, you need to take your bins outside so that they can be collected. In many countries, there are different bins for rubbish and recycling.

OK, so listen and enjoy!

The Shape of Art

Once, there was a woman called Felicity. Felicity always wanted to be an artist, but she never knew it. Felicity's parents were artists, and when she was growing up, her parents never had any money. Felicity's mother made sculptures of dogs, and her father made sculptures of cats, and generally they made very little money.

One summer, Felicity said, 'Mum, Dad, I want a brother. I'm so bored. You're always making your sculptures. I've read all the books in the house. I'm bored. Please give me a brother!'

Felicity's parents looked at her.

'Darling,' said her mother, 'we don't have enough money. I'm sorry. But look, I'm making these new Pekingese sculptures! I think they'll sell really well. Maybe next year we'll have the money.'

When Felicity went to university, she studied law, and she worked hard to become a lawyer. Felicity's parents were happy for her, but they didn't know anything about law. They never knew how to talk to her about work.

When they asked questions about her job, Felicity told them about it, and then they said, 'Oh, we don't understand what you're talking about! We're artists, remember?'

Felicity was good at her job, and she made a lot of money. By the age of 25 she had bought a house. Still, something felt wrong. She thought maybe she needed to fall in love. So she got a boyfriend, but that still felt wrong. She got a girlfriend, but that also felt wrong. Something was wrong in her life, but what was it?

One day, Felicity walked past an art supplies shop. Suddenly, it was like someone else was moving her body. She went inside, bought painting supplies, went home and started painting.

Why am I painting? thought Felicity, but she didn't stop. The more she painted, the better she felt.

All this time, Felicity had needed art. The wrongness she felt – it was because she needed to make art. She took a few months off work and told her boss that she needed a break, and she spent all her time painting.

A few months later, Felicity looked at what she had made. She had painted landscapes: the mountains, the sea, all kinds of places. She could see where she had started, how bad her work had been, but she knew from her parents how difficult art was. She knew what hard work was. And her last landscapes were good.

But when Felicity got back to work and showed her landscape paintings to her friends, they weren't interested.

'Oh, that's nice,' said Annabelle. 'I sometimes paint mugs. It's really relaxing.'

'Hmm, do you think you'll sell it?' said her boss. He could only think of money.

Felicity felt awful. Couldn't they see how important this was? She went home, and almost threw away her art supplies, but first she decided to try something else.

Felicity started painting portraits. At first, she asked people off the street if she could paint them. She didn't trust her friends. But as she got better, she asked her friends if she could paint them. Slowly, she painted portraits of everyone she knew, including her parents. Again, several months passed, and again, Felicity looked back at her work and knew her portraits were good.

But the only people who said nice things about them were Felicity's parents. Everyone else said things like, 'That's not how my nose looks!' or 'You've used the wrong colour there!'

Felicity wanted to scream. Couldn't they understand?! This was art! She wasn't trying to paint perfect portraits. She was trying to make the *wrongness* inside her go away.

So Felicity decided to go **abstract**. Instead of landscapes and portraits, she painted strange shapes. She painted angry shapes. She used colours together that shouldn't go together. She made it so abstract that *she* didn't know what she was doing.

Finally, Felicity stopped and looked at her work. And she *hated* it. She loved her landscapes and her portraits, but this abstract work? *What is this?! thought Felicity. I painted this and I don't even know what this is. Do people actually like this stuff? It doesn't mean anything!*

Felicity threw her abstract paintings out of the window. Below the window was a large **bin**, and the paintings flew down to the bin like small birds. Then Felicity got into bed and cried.

The next day, she woke up early because someone was talking loudly outside her window.

'Can you believe it? They just threw it away! This will look great on our wall.'

Felicity looked out of the window. Down below, a man and a woman were pulling her paintings out of the bin and looking at them.

Felicity almost said, 'Hey, those are mine!' but then she thought. Did she want people to know?

'I'll search online,' said the man. 'Maybe it's a famous artist.'

'Oh, Gregory!' said the woman. 'We're not selling them. No, I *love* them.'

Felicity felt sick. This was the first time someone had said something really nice about her art, and she didn't know how to feel. She thought she might cry.

'Hey!' she said, before she could stop herself. 'Those are mine.'

'Oh!'

The man and the woman looked up.

'You don't have to pay for them,' said Felicity. 'Really, if they make you happy, keep them.'

'Oh no, of course we'll pay for them!' said the woman. 'I can't believe you were going to throw them away!'

'Give me just one minute,' said Felicity.

She quickly got dressed and went downstairs. With the help of Gregory and Delilah – that was their names – they collected all the abstract paintings and went into Felicity's house to talk about them.

So Felicity found that there were people who liked her art. Gregory and Delilah talked for a short time about what they liked about the paintings, but quickly they started talking about money. Gregory and Delilah collected art, and they liked to help new artists. Felicity didn't tell them that she'd bought her house herself and that she didn't need help with money.

In fact, as they talked, she realised that the money really wasn't important to her. That feeling of wrongness was gone. It had gone before, when she saw how much they liked her paintings. Suddenly, she understood why her parents spent all that time making those dog and cat sculptures. Maybe they weren't the things that they wanted to make in their heart, but they made the sculptures well, and people loved them.

Surely, Felicity thought, *it's easier to make money painting portraits than strange abstract things?* Felicity *wanted* to paint portraits and landscapes. She could see herself as

that kind of artist. She had never thought of herself as a *strange* person. And people who did abstract art were always strange.

Gregory and Delilah bought the paintings and hung them up inside their house. They sent Felicity pictures, and it was nice to see her work in someone's house, but after the paintings left her hands, she didn't really care what happened to them. She was already working on the next thing.

She painted more and more abstract paintings. When she finished them, she didn't think, *This is awful*. But she didn't love her abstract works like she loved the landscapes and portraits. Gregory and Delilah's friends, however, *did* love her abstract work. Soon, she had so many people asking for her work that she didn't have time to paint it all. She had to work fewer hours as a lawyer to give her time to paint.

How strange, thought Felicity. *I always thought Mum and Dad were making art for themselves. And when I started, I was only making art for myself. But now it's like a gift. A gift I'm giving to everyone else.*

And so more and more houses filled up with Felicity's paintings, and with each painting she finished, her heart grew fuller.

Sometimes, when she was bored, she painted a landscape or a portrait. She never told anyone about these. She hung them up inside her house and never sold them. To be honest, she had no idea if they were good or bad, but it didn't matter. They were for *her*.

The shape of her art was abstract, but the shape of her heart was a smiling face and a field in summer.

THE END

Sometimes, when I write a story for the podcast, the story is really about myself. Today's story is like that. I've been making *Easy Stories in English* for over six years now, and over the years, my feelings about making stories have changed a lot.

When I started the podcast, I wanted to create materials for people learning English, and I wanted to help the students I was teaching, but I wanted to use my writing skills as well. *Easy Stories in English* seemed like a great way to combine the two.

But as I did it for longer, I started to think about other projects. I had other art I wanted to make. I wanted to write novels and make video games and act in plays. Making *Easy Stories in English* meant I had less time to do all those things. I sometimes wished I had more time for my other work. I didn't see the podcast as 'real' art, or I thought it was less important than my other work.

But now I realise how lucky I am to have the podcast. I am so lucky to have an audience, to have so many people who enjoy my work. When I read your comments about how the podcast has helped you, it makes me feel so happy, and I feel like I am doing important work.

Of course, we can make art for ourselves, and we can make art just to sell it. But often, the best art comes in the middle road. The artist puts their love into the work, but they make it for a specific kind of person, or they make it with a specific goal. In other words: sometimes, the thing you *want* to be good at isn't the thing you're *best* at. And sometimes, as an artist, the best thing you can do is to work for your audience and ignore yourself.

So yes, this story came out, and I quickly saw that it was really about me, and how my feelings have changed over the years. But I'm sure it's something many of us can understand. If you're not an artist, you may have had the same feelings with your career, or

with raising children. When God gives you a gift, you have to share it with the world. I'm sorry if you're not religious. I find it hard to not talk about God sometimes.

And speaking of sharing things with the world, why not share *Easy Stories in English* with a friend? Tell your parents, your cousins, your co-workers – tell that person you're standing next to at the bus stop. Hi! And if you can't tell someone, then leave a review and comment. It means a lot to me. Thanks for listening, and see you soon!