

English Conversation Club – Saratoga Library

Oct 9, 2025

Dolly Parton and Reading

This week's topic is very different from the topics of the past several weeks. We will take a break from Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Age. We will come back to those topics in a few weeks.

Today, we will read about a woman named Dolly Parton. She is a famous American country music singer and songwriter. First, review the following vocabulary.

Vocabulary: Match the words to their meanings.

1. bedazzled (bih-daz-uhld)	A. coarsely ground, white or yellow corn used in various boiled, fried, or baked dishes
2. choir (kwyuhr)	B. a singing group or musical composition for two voices or instruments
3. cornmeal (kohwrn-meel))	C. a small, simple house or cottage, made of wood logs
4. to credit (kred-it)	D. an organized group of singers that often sings in churches
5. duet (doo-et)	E. decorated with items such as sequins and buttons that are shiny, sparkly, flashy and eye-catching
6. to enroll (en-rohl)	F. to commend, praise or publicly acknowledge the help someone provided in accomplishing something
7. log cabin (lawg kab-in)	G. a distinctive characteristic of a person or thing that they are famous for
8. theme park (theem pahrk)	H. the way that someone feels about the importance of work, usually the belief that it is important to work hard; taking work seriously
9. trademark (trayd-mahrk)	I. to sign up; to register for a class; place upon a list
10. work ethic (wurk eth-ik)	J. an amusement park in which landscaping, buildings, and attractions are based on one or more specific themes, such as jungle wildlife, fairy tales, or the Old West

ANSWERS : 1 –E; 2 - D; 3 -A; 4 – F; 5 – B; 6 – I; 7 – C; 8 – J, 9 – G; 10 –H

Dialogue One

Cal: My son Tom **enrolled** in the school **choir** this year.

Kim: My daughter Sara is in the **choir** too. She is going to sing a **duet** with her friend.

Cal: I think **choir** is a good activity for high school students.

Kim: I agree. Sara **credits** her strong **work ethic** to it.

Cal: Tom said teamwork and **work ethic** are **trademarks** of the **choir**.

Kim: Plus, Sara loves the **bedazzled** costumes they wear for the holiday music show.

Dialogue Two

Cal: We're going to the **theme park** next weekend. Do you want to come?

Kim: Sure! I heard there's a new campground that opened. There are a bunch of new **log cabins** people can rent for the day.

Cal: Ok, let's get one. There are food stalls too. We can have **cornmeal bread** and barbecue.

Kim: Sounds like fun. There's a concert every evening too.

Cal: Who is performing?

Kim: My favorite country music **duet** – the Blue Ridge twins.

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They call me the Book Lady: The Story of Dolly Parton

Based on an article by Morgan Byrn

March 19, 2021



Parton family photo, taken from Dolly Parton's official website dollyparton.com.

Dolly Rebecca Parton was born on January 19, 1946. She was born in a **log cabin** near the Little Pigeon River in East Tennessee. Dolly was the fourth of twelve children! Many of her songs lovingly recall her childhood in the **Great Smoky Mountains**.

The Great Smoky Mountains are a mountain range rising along the Tennessee–North Carolina border in the southeastern United States. The range is sometimes called the Smoky Mountains or the Smokies. It stretches about 71 mi.

The Smokies are the home of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The park was established in 1934. It has over 11 million visitors per year. It is the most visited national park in the United States.

Dolly's whole family lived in that one room log cabin and were very poor. In fact, when she was born, they had no money to pay the doctor. Her dad gave the doctor a sack of **cornmeal** as payment.

In the **Great Smoky Mountains**, it was normal for people who didn't have a lot of money to use goods as payment. This is called bartering.



Dolly's mother would pass the time by telling and singing mountain folk tales to her children. Dolly credited her mother with her love of music from an early age.

Her dad worked hard to support her big family. Dolly said that even though he couldn't read, he was the smartest person she knew. She credited him with her hard **work ethic** and business smarts.

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Dolly loved to sing and play musical instruments. Her uncle gave Dolly her first guitar at the age of eight. She also sang in her grandfather's church **choir**. When she was ten, she sang on a radio program in Knoxville, Tennessee.

When she was thirteen, she made her way to Nashville, Tennessee where she sang at the **Grand Ole Opry** (Ah-pree). The **Grand Ole Opry** was a very popular live radio program that started in 1925. It is still going strong today! Dolly's performance would change her life. She just knew that she had to be a singer.



When she graduated from high school, Dolly moved to Nashville with dreams of becoming a star. One of her first jobs was as the **duet** partner of Porter Wagner, a country music singer. He had his own TV show. With a lot of hard work and lots of failures, Dolly eventually became famous.

In fact, she became a household name! She even got her own show called *Dolly* in 1976. One of Dolly's **trademarks** was wearing **bedazzled** and colorful outfits!



While Dolly became rich and famous, she never forgot her home. Many of her songs focus on growing up in the Great Smoky Mountains and her family. "My Tennessee Mountain Home" and "Coat of Many Colors" are two of her most popular songs. Dolly also never forgot about the people of her home state.

One of the first things Dolly did to help the people of her hometown of Sevierville was to open *Dollywood* in 1986. *Dollywood* is a **theme park** that hires many local people to work there. *Dollywood* and her other businesses helped to bring in many tourists throughout the year. This increased the local economy.

In 1995, she noticed that in her home county of Sevier the reading levels of the students were not high. But she had an idea, one inspired by her father who never learned to read because he couldn't go to school. If she gave every child a book to read, they could have the chance to learn to read.

Dolly Parton's *Imagination Library* started in her hometown that same year. Every child would receive a book on the day they were born and then every month until their fifth birthday. Her program was a huge success!

In 2004, the governor of Tennessee made it a statewide program. It became so popular that states around the country picked up the program. By 2019, children in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and The Republic of Ireland enjoyed receiving books from Dolly!

In 2018, Dolly Parton was invited to read her story *Coat of Many Colors* to children at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. It was to celebrate the 100 millionth book given to a child. In 2020, the *Imagination Library* gave out its 150 millionth book.

Dolly has worked hard all her life. Because of this, she can give back not only to her Tennessee community, but to places and people all around the world.

And now in 2025, all children five years or younger who live in Santa Clara County, California can receive a FREE BOOK every month from Dolly! They just have to **enroll** in Dolly Parton's *Imagination Library*. Use this link to enroll: <https://scclld.org/imaginationlibrary/>.



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Discussion Questions:

1. What is American country music? Have you heard American country music before?
According to filmmaker and historian Ken Burns, "American country music is not—and never was—one style of music. It has always been a mixture of many styles."

Country music rose from deep and mixed roots – from fiddle tunes and church hymns. It also comes from work songs and ballads. Ballads are songs or poems that tell a story. Often, they are slow, romantic songs that end in heartbreak or deep regret.

Country music comes from hidden mountain hollows or small mountain villages in the southeastern part of the United States. It also comes from dusty towns along the southern border and the wide-open spaces of the American West.

2. Have you heard of Dolly Parton before? If so, how did you hear of her?
3. Do you know of any of these songs by Dolly Parton?
 - a. [Coat of Many Colors](#)
 - b. ["9 to 5"](#)
 - c. ["Jolene"](#)
 - d. [I Will Always Love You](#)
4. Does your home country have famous ballads and country or folk music? Describe it.
5. What do you think of Dolly Parton?
6. Do you know of other famous people who have given back to the community that they came from? Who are they and what have they done?
7. Do you think there should be more people like Dolly?
8. Do you know of any young children in Santa Clara County who would be interested in getting free books?

References

The material for this week is based on the content from these sources.

<https://scclld.org/imaginationlibrary/>

<https://dollyparton.com/front-porch-stories/daddys-dinner-bucket-lee-parton>

Harden, L.D. (2025). *Parton, Dolly*. In *World Book Student*.

<https://www.worldbookonline.com/student-new/#/article/home/ar416330>

Photo Credits:

Pantsuit worn by Dolly Parton on her show Dolly, Tennessee State Museum Collection.

Dolly Parton's Coat of Many Colors Album, Tennessee State Museum Collection.