

# Weekly English Practice



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English Coaching Projects

[weeklyenglishpractice.wordpress.com](http://weeklyenglishpractice.wordpress.com)



## WHY FINNISH BABIES SLEEP IN CARDBOARD BOXES

*For 75 years, Finland's expectant mothers have been given a box by the state... and some say it helped Finland achieve one of the world's lowest infant mortality rates*

**dates back to:** *started in*

**background:** *class, ethnicity, education, etc*

**gift:** *present*

**expectant:** *pregnant, expecting a baby*

**bodysuit:** *an item of clothing which covers the whole body*

**outdoor gear:** *things needed when outside*

**nappy:** *a piece of absorbent material which covers a baby's bottom*

**mattress:** *a rectangular object to sleep on*

**nap:** *a short sleep in the middle of the day*

**grant:** *money which you don't have to pay back*

**opt for:** *choose*

**insurance:** *a financial arrangement to guarantee security and protection*

**network:** *an inter-connected group*

It's like a starter kit of clothes, sheets and toys that can even be used as a bed – a tradition that **dates back to** the 1930s and it's designed to give all children in Finland, no matter what **background** they're from, an equal start in life.

The maternity package – a **gift** from the government – is available to all **expectant** mothers.

It contains **bodysuits**, a sleeping bag, **outdoor gear**, bathing products for the baby, as well as **nappies**, bedding and a small **mattress**.

With the mattress in the bottom, the box becomes a baby's first bed. Many children, from all social backgrounds, have their first **naps** within the safety of the box's four cardboard walls.

Mothers have a choice between taking the box, or a cash **grant**, currently set at 140 euros, but 95% **opt for** the box as it's worth much more.

To begin with, the scheme was only available to families on low incomes, but that changed in 1949.

"Not only was it offered to all mothers-to-be but new legislation meant in order to get the grant, or maternity box, they had to visit a doctor or municipal pre-natal clinic before their fourth month of pregnancy," says Heidi Liesivesi, who works at Kela – the Social **Insurance** Institution of Finland.

In the 1930s Finland was a poor country and infant mortality was high – 65 out of 1,000 babies died. But the figures improved rapidly in the decades that followed.

Mika Gissler, a professor at the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Helsinki, gives several reasons for this, such as the maternity box and pre-natal care for all women in the

1940s, followed in the 60s by a national health insurance system and the central hospital **network**.

*This story was adapted from:*

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22751415>

“**Something to chat about**”

- *Do you think babies should sleep in cardboard boxes? Why (not)?*
- *Do expectant mothers in your country receive anything similar to this 'starter kit'?*
- *What essential items does a mother need to look after a baby?*
- *Given the choice, would you take the box or the cash grant? Why?*
- *In Scandinavian countries parents often leave their babies outside for their naps, even if it's freezing. Would you consider doing the same?*
- *What are cardboard boxes normally used for? Think about shops, business, homes and so on.*



# “iLook, iThink, iSpeak” Express yourself better!



## Lyrics to the song **Little Boxes**

by Malvina Reynolds

‘Little Boxes’ is a protest song written and composed by Malvina Reynolds in 1962, which became a hit for her friend Pete Seeger in 1963.

The song is a political satire about the development of suburbia and associated conformist middle-class attitudes.

‘Little Boxes’ uses a word, ticky-tacky, that only became officially recognised due to the song’s popularity in the 60’s and 70’s.

It refers to the low quality building material that was used in suburban housing projects that proliferated in the USA after World War II.

Listen to the original song by clicking [here](#).  
What’s the message of this song?  
What is the writer criticising?

More info: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little\\_Boxes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Boxes)

## DID YOU KNOW?

New words are invented all the time and if they become popular and are used frequently they are accepted as correct language by dictionaries, such as Oxford in the UK and Webster in the USA.  
*(There is no ‘Royal Academy’ for English in the same way as there is for Spanish or some other languages)*

### **ticky-tacky** [mass noun]

Inferior or cheap material, especially as used in suburban building.

- ◆ Can you think of any new words that have been officially accepted into your language recently?
- ◆ Are there any words or phrases that you use but your parents or grandparents don’t use because they were different in the past or didn’t exist when they were growing up?

Little boxes on the hillside,  
Little boxes made of ticky-tacky  
Little boxes on the hillside,  
Little boxes all the same.  
There’s a green one and a pink one  
And a blue one and a yellow one,  
And they’re all made out of ticky-tacky  
And they all look just the same.

And the people in the houses  
All went to the university,  
Where they were put in boxes  
And they came out all the same,  
And there’s doctors and lawyers,  
And business executives,  
And they’re all made out of ticky-tacky  
And they all look just the same.

And they all play on the golf course  
And drink their martinis dry,  
And they all have pretty children  
And the children go to school,  
And the children go to summer camp  
And then to the university,  
Where they are put in boxes  
And they come out all the same.  
And the boys go into business  
And marry and raise a family  
In boxes made of ticky-tacky  
And they all look just the same.  
There’s a green one and a pink one  
And a blue one and a yellow one,  
And they’re all made out of ticky-tacky  
And they all look just the same.

<http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/MALVINA/mr094.htm>

And now for something completely different...

Can you match these words to form **collocations**?



cardboard	jacket
leather	bottle
glass	chain
wooden	box
plastic	toy
paper	bag
metal	plane

More than one answer is possible