English articles

It's useful to read articles in English, even if you don't understand every word - it will help you increase your vocabulary and keep up to date with things happening in English-speaking countries!

*This page will be updated on **Mondays**. The first article is aimed at a B1 and upwards level and the second article is aimed at a B2 and upwards level*

Articles of the week

A designer dressed Chappell Roan with seaweed. But don't expect to find the approach in stores — yet

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By KIKI SIDERIS and MELINA WALLING Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — At her kitchen stove, fashion designer Caroline Zimbalist looks like an alchemist at work as she stirs a pot full of corn starch and a thickener made from seaweed. The peppermint-

scented mixture glitters as she carefully pours it into silicone molds of hearts and leaves.

When the material hardens, Zimbalist will stitch it into unique, made-to-order dresses that she sells on her website. She hopes her designs, which have been worn by celebrities including Chappell Roan, will put a spotlight on materials that aren't sourced from planet-polluting fossil fuels, such as oil.

“It's almost like a vessel to show the world,” she said.

Other small-scale designers are testing out tapioca, gelatin and other kitchen-shelf ingredients. Meanwhile, big names such as Adidas and Hermes have experimented with mushroom leather, while the Lycra brand is incorporating a new largely corn-based material into stretch fabric. Some experts are skeptical that these textiles — commonly referred to as biomaterials — will go mainstream, but designers such as Zimbalist hope their experiments will set an example for larger brands to follow.

Over 60% of clothing comes from petroleum-based synthetics like polyester, according to Textile Exchange, a nonprofit that promotes sustainable fashion. Manufacturing those materials creates emissions. Synthetic garments can also shed microplastics during washing. And as fast-fashion brands pump out new clothes for customers who expect new designs every few weeks, many garments end up in landfills.

Zimbalist's designs gained attention in 2024 when Roan wore one on “The Tonight Show.” The New York-based designer has since dressed stars such as comedian Atsuko Okatsuka and actors Anna Lore and Reneé Rapp. She takes commissions for custom clothing pieces, which cost between $150 and $1,200, via her website, which notes her “unique recipe of biodegradable and natural materials.”

As to whether her approach could be reproduced at a larger scale, Zimbalist says her materials could most practically be used to replace plastic hardware such as buttons and zippers. She acknowledges they can be sticky if not dried correctly, stinky if not treated and melty if exposed to extreme heat.

“Even incorporating it in small ways to start would be really strong,” she said.

Why biomaterials are hard to find

Fossil-fuel derived fabrics are ubiquitous because they're cheap and made from plentiful raw materials, said Dale Rogers, an Arizona State University professor who studies supply chains.

Many clothes are also made of materials that come from plants or animals such as cotton, silk, wool and cashmere. But some have environmental impacts. Cotton uses a lot of water. Sheep and goats burp out methane.

Some biomaterials have gotten closer to widespread use. Mycelium leather, made from mushrooms, has been used to create luxury shoes, accessories and handbags by brands such as Stella McCartney, Lululemon, Adidas and Hermes.

Still, Rogers said he's not convinced there's enough demand for alternative materials to overcome companies' aversion to the higher costs of producing them at a large scale.

“Honestly, in the end, cost drives almost all decisions,” he said.

Wrinkles in aiming for sustainability

Getting larger companies to use alternative materials depends on whether they will pay more for a fabric that matches their values, said Jon Veldhouse, the CEO of Qore LLC.

His company makes a product called Qira that replaces about 70% of the fossil-derived components of elastic synthetic fabrics with a corn-based material. The Lycra Company, which sells its stretchy material to major brands, initially expects to incorporate Qira in around 25 percent of its Spandex business, said Lycra chief brand and innovation officer Steve Stewart. But that option will be more expensive, and they haven't yet announced any takers.

It can also be hard to measure the sustainability of farming practices that go into producing raw materials for new fabrics. Cargill is Qore's partner and corn supplier, and it gets its grain from farmers in the vicinity of their processing plant. Veldhouse said many already plant cover crops or reduce tilling to lower environmental impact, but he couldn't provide data on how many use those approaches.

Sarah Needham, a senior director at Textile Exchange, said it's great to see a large organization such as Lycra making its production systems more sustainable. But she also stressed the industry needs to reduce its overreliance on virgin materials, perhaps considering agricultural waste as a source of fabric.

The role of experimental designers

Needham said experimental designers are often the ones coming up with those alternatives to virgin materials and building appetite for new approaches.

But small designers might not have the resources to test the biodegradability of their materials, which often do involve processing, even if it's by hand, said Ramani Narayan, an engineering professor at Michigan State University.

“If I take something — like seaweed or whatever it is — and I apply a process to it, then I can no longer call it natural,” he said.

Zimbalist, the New York designer, acknowledges that her materials aren't ready to replace conventional fabrics and that her work is more of “a piece that leads to larger conversations.”

Rogers, of Arizona State, thinks the fashion industry is a long way from meaningful change, but that “it's incredibly valuable” for artists and specialty manufacturers to try new materials.

“What they're doing is likely to have long-term benefit, maybe even after their lifetimes,” he added.

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Bald eagle's new status as the official US bird brings pride and hope to many Native Americans

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

PRAIRIE ISLAND INDIAN COMMUNITY, Minn. (AP) — Some Native Americans traditionally bestow bald eagle feathers at ceremonies to mark achievements, such as graduations, and as a form of reverence for the bird they hold sacred as a messenger to the Creator.

This year, many are doing so with elevated pride and hope. The bald eagle is now the official bird of the United States, nearly 250 years after it was first used as a symbol of the newly founded nation that's deeply polarized politically today.

“The eagle is finally getting the respect it deserves. Maybe when the nation looks at the eagle that way, maybe there will be less division,” said Jim Thunder Hawk. He's the Dakota culture and language manager for the Prairie Island Indian Community, a small Mdewakanton Sioux band on the banks of the Mississippi River in Minnesota.

This wide, unruffled stretch of water framed by wooded bluffs is prime bald eagle territory. The size of Minnesota's population of the majestic, white-head-and-tail birds that are exclusive to North America is second only to that of Alaska.

The legislation that made the eagle official came from members of Minnesota's Congressional delegation. The federal act recognizes the eagles' centrality in most Indigenous peoples' “spiritual lives and sacred belief systems,” and a replica of it is on display at the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minnesota, 40 miles (65 kilometers) downriver from the Prairie Island community, which partners with the center in eagle care.

“If you grew up in the United States, eagles were a part of your everyday life,” said Tiffany Ploehn, who as the center's avian care director supervises its four resident bald eagles. “Everyone has some sort of connection.”

Fierce symbols of strength and spiritual uplift

A bald eagle, its wings and talons spread wide, has graced the Great Seal of the United States since 1782, and appears on passport covers, the $1 bill, military insignia, and myriad different images in pop culture.

But a prolific collector of eagle memorabilia based in Wabasha realized recently that, while the United States had an official animal (the bison) and flower (the rose), the eagle was getting no formal credit. Several Minnesota legislators sponsored a bill to remedy that and then-President Joe Biden's signature made it official in December.

With their massive wingspan and stern curved beak, bald eagles are widely used as symbols of

strength and power. In reality, they spend 95% of their day perched high in trees, though when they hunt they can spot a rabbit 3 miles (5 kilometers) away, Ploehn said.

For many Native Americans, the soaring eagle represents far more; it delivers their prayers to the Creator and even intercedes on their behalf.

“My grandma told me that we honor eagles because they saved the Ojibwe people when the Creator wanted to turn on them. The eagle, he can fly high, so he went to speak with the Creator to make things right,” said Sadie Erickson, who is Ojibwe and Mdewakanton Sioux.

Marking life milestones with eagle feathers

Erickson and a dozen other high school graduates received a bald eagle feather at an early July celebration by the riverbank at Prairie Island.

Thunder Hawk said a prayer in the Dakota language urging the high school graduates and graduates receiving higher education degrees to “always remember who you are and where you come from.”

Then they lined up and a relative tied a feather — traditionally on the left side, the heart's side — as tribal members sang and drummed to celebrate them.

“It just feels like I went through a new step of life,” said Jayvionna Buck.

Growing up on Prairie Island, she recalled her mother excitedly pointing out every eagle.

“She would genuinely just yell at me, 'Eagle!' But it's just a special occurrence for us to see,” Buck said. “We love seeing it, and normally when we do, we just offer tobacco to show our respects.”

Some Native Americans honor the eagle by taking it as their ceremonial name. Derek Walking Eagle, whose Lakota name is “Eagle Thunder,” celebrated the graduates wearing a woven medallion representing the bird.

To him, eagles are like relatives that connect him to his future and afterlife.

“Being able to carry on to the spirit world … that's who guides you. It's the eagle,” Walking Eagle said.

That deep respect attaches to the feathers, too.

“It's the highest respect you can bestow on a person, from your family and from your people, from your tribe,” Thunder Hawk said. “We teach the person receiving the feather that they have to honor and respect the eagle. And we tell them why.”

Persistent troubles, but new hope

In many Native cultures, killing an eagle is “blasphemous,” he said. It is also a federal offense.

Historically, Sioux warriors would lure an eagle with rabbit or other food, pluck a few feathers and release it, said Thunder Hawk, who grew up in South Dakota.

Today, there's a nationwide program that legally distributes eagle feathers and parts exclusively to tribal members, though it's very backlogged. U.S. wildlife and tribal officials worry that killings and illegal trafficking of eagles for their feathers is on the rise, especially in the West.

In Minnesota, eagles are most often harmed by road accidents and eating poison – results of shrinking

wildlife habitat that brings them in closer contact with humans, said Lori Arent, interim director of the University of Minnesota's Raptor Center.

The center treats about 200 injured bald eagles each year. Of those they can save, most are eventually released back into the wild. Permanently disabled birds that lose an eye or whose wings are too badly fractured to fly are cared for there or at other educational institutions like the Wabasha eagle center.

The official designation could help more Americans understand how their behaviors inadvertently harm eagles, Arent said. Littering by a highway, for instance, attracts rodents that lure eagles, which then can be struck by vehicles. Fishing or hunting with tackles and ammunition containing lead exposes the eagles eating those fish or deer remains to fatal metal poisoning.

Humans have lost the ability to coexist in harmony with the natural world, Thunder Hawk said, voicing a concern shared by Indigenous people from the Chilean Andes to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

He hopes more people might now approach the eagle with the same reverence he was taught. It's what leads him to offer sage or dried red willow bark every time he spots one as a “thank you for allowing me to see you and for you to hear my prayers and my thoughts.”

Erickson, the new graduate, shares that optimism.

“I feel like that kind of shows that we're strong and united as a country,” she said by the Mississippi, her new feather nestled in her hair.

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