

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. Welcome to 6 Minute English, I'm Neil.

Rob

And I'm Rob.

Neil

Rob, would you say that were a **snowflake**?

Rob

Wow, I can't believe you said that, that's so **offensive**. How could you be so rude?

Neil

So I guess that's a yes then? Sorry, I only asked.

Rob

Don't worry, I wasn't really upset, I just wanted to demonstrate the meaning of the word. The word **snowflake** has taken on a new meaning in recent years. These days it's used as an insult. It's used to criticise people or groups that are seen to be very easily **offended** or upset by things that others say.

Neil

There is usually a political side to it too, isn't there?

Rob

Yes, people who use the word **snowflake** tend to be from the political right and they usually use it about those on the political left, particularly millennials - young, socially aware adults.

Neil

Well we'll explore this topic in more detail shortly, but first a quiz question. In which year was **snowflake** one of Collins Dictionary's words of the year? Was it...

- a) 1996
- b) 2006
- c) 2016

Rob

Well, we said it's quite a recent word so I'm going for c) 2016.

Neil

Well, we'll find out if you're right later on in the programme. The topic of **offence** is a very complicated one. First what do we mean by **offence** Rob?

Rob

Thanks for that. That is a really difficult question. Something that is **offensive** is rude, insulting and makes people feel hurt and upset. What's difficult about it though is that we don't all find the same things **offensive**. Some people can be deliberately **offensive** and some people may be **offensive** without meaning to be.

Neil

Also, different people respond to **offence** in different ways - some accept it as the price of free speech and some try to stop the people they think are **offensive** from saying the things they do.

Rob

These terms come up quite a lot in discussions about equality, race, religion and of course, politics.

Neil

The topic was discussed in detail in the BBC Radio programme Sweet Reason. Evan Davis presented the programme and here is the first part of his summary of the discussion. What does he say is the reason some people talk about offence?

Evan Davis

First, on occasion, people probably do **invoke** offence when really they just have a political disagreement and on occasion groups that suffer discrimination or exclusion perhaps find it exhilarating or uniting to **call out** that discrimination.

Neil

He says that some people take offence when it's just a political disagreement. He says they **invoke** offence.

Rob

If you **invoke** something it means that you use it to support your point or explain your action. So to **invoke** offence is to say that we are acting this way because we are offended by what you have said, although the offence may only be a political difference rather than something truly offensive.

Neil

Davis goes on to say that groups that do suffer from discrimination may get some feelings of unity when they **call out** discrimination. They feel more together when they publicise and highlight the discrimination they have experienced. Even though some offence that is taken

may not be genuine, that doesn't mean people don't have a right to be **offended**. Here's Evan Davis again.

Evan Davis

Where the so-called **snowflakes** surely have a point is this, societies are entitled to make certain things **taboo** and the millennials use of the word **offensive** is simply designed to say some views are not just wrong they are in a special category of wrong.

Rob

His point here is that societies can decide that certain things are **taboo**. In this context something that is **taboo** is something that is regarded by society as being shocking and **offensive** and that it is OK for people to be **offended** by these things.

Neil

And I think the point he makes is a good one. The word **snowflake** is usually used as an insult - but some people may feel proud to be a **snowflake** because it means they are standing up for a particular standard, they have a level of decency and social responsibility that is higher than that of those who are calling them **snowflakes**.

Rob

Well I hope we haven't caused any offence today. Before we review the vocabulary, can we have the answer to today's question Neil?

Neil

Of course, I asked in which year was **snowflake** one of Collins Dictionary's words of the year? Was it...

- a) 1996
- b) 2006
- c) 2016

Rob

And I said c) 2016. It's got to be right!

Neil

Well, do you want to hear the story? Interestingly the term was coined in 1996 in the book Fight Club, but it was in 2016 that it was one of the dictionary's words of the year. Now let's review our words of the day. First there is **offence**.

Rob

People can **take offence** and be **offended by** something that is **offensive**. Something that is **offensive** could be rude, insulting and shocking. It might take the form of humiliation or discrimination against a person or group.

Neil

The term **snowflake** is a word used by some people to talk about other people who they think get offended too easily and unnecessarily. They don't want to change their language or

ideas just because **snowflakes** get upset. Then we had the word **invoke**. If you **invoke** something you use it as a reason to explain your actions and feelings

Rob

To **call something out** is to challenge it, to highlight it and look for justification.

Neil

And finally we have **taboo**. Something that society says is **offensive** and shocking. So there we have it. What do you think Rob of this topic.

Rob

Well it is a very difficult subject, particularly when it comes to politics, religion and society. Free speech is good but at times, particularly on social media, I think can be unnecessarily unpleasant.

Neil

Well, try not to be offended but it is time for us to leave you for this programme. Do join us next time. Remember you can find us on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and of course our website bbclearningenglish.com. And of course, we have a new app which you can find on our website. It's free and it's brilliant isn't it Rob?

Rob

Absolutely!

Neil

See you soon, bye.

Rob

Bye!