



# English Learning for Curious Minds

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## **Episode #124 Oasis vs. Blur 15th Jan, 2021**

**Alastair Budge:** [00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:13] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:23] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about the battle of Blur vs. Oasis, the battle of Britpop.

[00:00:33] We haven't really had that many music-themed episodes yet, so I'm really excited to share this one with you today.

[00:00:41] It's not just about music though.

[00:00:44] Through this story you'll learn about British culture, regional rivalries, and the UK in the 90s, so I hope you'll enjoy it.

[00:00:53] Before we get right into that though, let me quickly remind you that you can get all of the bonus episodes, plus the subtitles, that transcript and the key vocabulary



## English Learning for Curious Minds | Episode #124

### Oasis vs. Blur

for this episode and all of our other ones over on the website, which is [Leonardoenglish.com](http://Leonardoenglish.com).

[00:01:10] This is also where you can check out becoming a member of Leonardo English and join a community of curious minds from all over the world, doing meetups, exchanging ideas, and generally improving their English in a more interesting way.

[00:01:24] So if that is of interest, and I can't see a reason why it wouldn't be, then the place to go to is [Leonardoenglish.com](http://Leonardoenglish.com) .

[00:01:34] OK, then, Blur vs. Oasis.

[00:01:37] I imagine you will have heard of Oasis, and you may well have heard of Blur too.

[00:01:44] As a reminder, here's Oasis:

[00:01:50] And here's Blur:

[00:02:15] Oasis are far better known internationally now, as the band stayed together for a lot longer, but back in the mid 1990s they were both incredibly popular in the UK.

[00:02:52] These two bands were at the [forefront](#)<sup>1</sup> of a movement called Britpop, British pop music, which was a musical and cultural movement that [emerged](#)<sup>2</sup> in the 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> the most important position

<sup>2</sup> came out



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### Oasis vs. Blur

[00:03:04] Britpop was a celebration of all things British, it was a reaction to the dark, grunge<sup>3</sup> type rock music that was coming out of the US, stuff like Nirvana and Pearl Jam.

[00:03:18] It emerged as a reaction to this fixation<sup>4</sup> with American, dark music, instead Britpop was optimistic<sup>5</sup> and celebratory.

[00:03:29] Britpop celebrated the very fact that it was British.

[00:03:33] Bands at this time would pose<sup>6</sup> in front of the Union Jack, the British flag, and they would sing about very British things.

[00:03:42] And, unlike in the era of Spotify and streaming, actually selling music was big business in the 1990s.

[00:03:51] How this would work is that a band would make an album, but one or more singles, the single songs, would be released before the album, and then also after the album was released.

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<sup>3</sup> a type of rock music popular in the early 1990s

<sup>4</sup> unable to stop thinking or talking about something

<sup>5</sup> the quality of being full of hope

<sup>6</sup> to stand (in front of something)



[00:04:03] The singles served the purpose of being an advert for the future album, and also being a nice way for [record labels<sup>7</sup>](#) to sell songs twice - once as a single, and again as part of the album.

[00:04:18] The charts, the position in the [rankings<sup>8</sup>](#) of what song was the most popular that week, what song was 'number one', was decided by how many copies of a song was sold each week.

[00:04:30] The song that sold the most copies of its single got to number one, simple.

[00:04:36] As Britpop became more and more popular, the media [latched onto<sup>9</sup>](#) this cultural phenomenon to try to drive more and more interest in it - the popularity of Britpop, at least from a cultural interest point of view, was powered by a huge amount of interest from the media.

[00:04:56] And Oasis and Blur were the kings of Britpop.

[00:05:00] There were other bands, such as Suede and Pulp, but they weren't really in the same category, at least of popularity.

[00:05:09] Although Oasis and Blur were both Britpop, they were very different.

[00:05:15] Oasis were from the north of the country, they were from Manchester.

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<sup>7</sup> companies that produce and market music for bands

<sup>8</sup> the lists of the most popular songs

<sup>9</sup> to follow something closely and be very interested in it



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### Oasis vs. Blur

[00:05:19] Blur were from London.

[00:05:21] Oasis were ostensibly<sup>10</sup> working class, with two brothers as frontmen<sup>11</sup>,

Liam and Noel Gallagher, who had been playing music together since they were kids.

[00:05:32] Blur had met at art school, and were labelled<sup>12</sup> by the media as middle class, soft, southerners.

[00:05:40] Liam and Noel Gallagher were loud and confrontational<sup>13</sup>.

[00:05:44] Blur, in general, were more reserved<sup>14</sup>.

[00:05:47] The lead guitarist<sup>15</sup>, a guy called Graham Coxon, seemed to hate interviews, and they didn't seem so interested in insulting<sup>16</sup> other Britpop bands or fighting journalists.

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<sup>10</sup> claiming to be

<sup>11</sup> the most important people in a musical group (usually the singer and/or guitarist)

<sup>12</sup> described (as)

<sup>13</sup> behaving in an angry and unfriendly way, looking to cause an argument

<sup>14</sup> being shy and not talking about feelings or emotions

<sup>15</sup> the most important guitarist in a band

<sup>16</sup> being rude to someone



[00:06:00] But the differences were there, and the media started to create this huge [circus<sup>17</sup>](#) based on the idea that Blur and Oasis hated each other, and the fact that music fans needed to choose between them.

[00:06:15] You were either Blur, or you were Oasis.

[00:06:19] And your choice of group reflected on you as a person.

[00:06:24] If you were from Manchester, you better not be a Blur fan.

[00:06:28] And if you thought of yourself as more of an [artsy<sup>18</sup>](#) type of person, well you probably weren't going to be an Oasis fan.

[00:06:36] In one British [tabloid<sup>19</sup>](#), The Sun, there was a story about a married couple.

[00:06:55] The husband was Blur, and the wife was Oasis. They couldn't get over their musical disagreements, and she ended up [smashing up<sup>20</sup>](#) all of his Blur [records<sup>21</sup>](#).

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<sup>17</sup> a situation where there is too much excitement and noise

<sup>18</sup> someone who knows a lot about art, film, and music

<sup>19</sup> a popular newspaper with small pages, mainly dealing with non-serious stories

<sup>20</sup> breaking

<sup>21</sup> a flat piece of plastic with a hole in the middle, used to store music



[00:07:08] There were the inevitable<sup>22</sup> comparisons to The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, with Oasis being The Beatles and Blur being The Rolling Stones, and the newspapers were full of these kinds of stories.

[00:07:08] Even though it might have been hyped up<sup>23</sup>, it might have been exaggerated<sup>24</sup>, the bands knew that it helped sell their records, sell their music, so they kept it up.

[00:07:19] There were stories about the frontmen insulting each other at parties, and talking each other down to the press, saying bad things about each other to the newspapers.

[00:07:30] Oasis were the more aggressive of the two, and what might have started out as a bit of fun turned into a serious rivalry.

[00:07:39] All this came to a head<sup>25</sup> in August 1995, it culminated<sup>26</sup> in the summer of 1995.

[00:07:47] Blur had scheduled to release their lead single, the first single of the band's fourth album.

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<sup>22</sup> certain to happen

<sup>23</sup> made to seem larger and more exciting than it really is

<sup>24</sup> made to seem larger and more exciting than it really is

<sup>25</sup> if something comes to a head, it comes to a climax

<sup>26</sup> ends with



[00:07:54] It was called Country House, and the album was called The Great Escape.

[00:07:59] Rival bands would not normally release their songs too close together, because doing so would **harm<sup>27</sup>** their chances of selling as much as possible.

[00:08:10] Instead, the **record labels** would carefully **coordinate<sup>28</sup>** the release dates so that there was enough time between them to **maximise<sup>29</sup>** sales.

[00:08:20] But Oasis had a different idea.

[00:08:23] They knew the date that Blur's lead single was to be released, and they decided to release a single from their upcoming album, one week before Blur's one.

[00:08:34] The single Oasis chose was called Roll With It, from the album What's The Story Morning Glory?

[00:08:42] Releasing it a week before Blur's would really hurt Blur's chances of getting to number one, and give an opportunity for Oasis to get **one up on<sup>30</sup>** Blur.

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<sup>27</sup> damage, hurt

<sup>28</sup> to work together to make things happen at an agreed time

<sup>29</sup> make the most amount of something

<sup>30</sup> if you get 'one up on' someone, you get an advantage over them



[00:08:54] So, Blur had to do something. They had to move the release date of their song otherwise it would be [crowded out<sup>31</sup>](#) by Oasis's Roll With It, which would have had a week's time on the [airwaves<sup>32</sup>](#).

[00:09:08] A week after Oasis was just not going to work, but instead of pushing it back a few weeks or forward a few weeks, Blur decided to release Country House on exactly the same day as Roll With It.

[00:09:23] This was something that just wasn't done in the music industry, as it would hurt both song's chances, and both groups would end up selling fewer [records](#) than they would if there wasn't this [clash<sup>33</sup>](#).

[00:09:36] Nevertheless, the date was set, August 14th 1995.

[00:09:43] Now, just in case you hadn't heard these [tracks<sup>34</sup>](#) before, these songs before, or you need a quick reminder, here is Blur's Country House.

[00:09:53] And here's Roll with It from Oasis.

[00:10:24] The funny thing is that neither of these songs were the bands' best songs, and they both knew it at the time.

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<sup>31</sup> if something is crowded out, there isn't enough space for it

<sup>32</sup> the news channels (radio, TV)

<sup>33</sup> a fight

<sup>34</sup> songs



## Oasis vs. Blur

[00:11:15] Country House is a relatively [straightforward<sup>35</sup>](#), it's an uncomplicated song, and no serious Oasis fan would rate Roll With It in their top 5.

[00:11:27] Nevertheless, these two [tracks](#) were chosen, and they were set to be released on exactly the same day.

[00:11:34] This was something that just wasn't done, and the media went mad reporting on it.

[00:11:40] The month of August in the UK is nicknamed 'silly season' because there isn't a huge amount that happens in the news, and the newspapers and news shows end up reporting on a load of stories that really wouldn't make the [headlines<sup>36</sup>](#) in a normal news period.

[00:11:59] This battle of Blur vs. Oasis, the battle to see who would be number one that week, was [dubbed<sup>37</sup>](#) by the media as 'The Battle Of Britpop', and with not a huge amount of other, more important news to be reporting on, it was all over the front pages and TV news.

[00:12:18]**Newsreader:** [00:13:00] Two of Britain's most popular pop groups have begun the biggest chart war in 30 years. The Manchester band Oasis and their [arch](#)

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<sup>35</sup> easy and simple

<sup>36</sup> the main stories in a newspaper

<sup>37</sup> given the name of



rivals<sup>38</sup> Blur released new singles today, each hoping to reach the number one spot next week.

[00:12:32] **Alastair Budge:** [00:13:14] The fight was on, the two giants of Britpop were releasing songs on exactly the same day, and it was to be a battle for number one.

[00:12:43] The media did everything they could to remind everyone about the differences between the bands, and that your choice of what single to buy wasn't just about which one you wanted to listen to, it was also about what sort of person you were.

[00:13:00] Were you Blur, or were you Oasis?

[00:13:03] It was almost like a general election, but instead of going to the polling booth<sup>39</sup>, to the polling station<sup>40</sup>, you went to the local record<sup>41</sup> store and made your choice.

[00:13:14] And much like politicians do in the run up<sup>42</sup> to an election, the bands did everything they could to make sure their single was as attractive as possible.

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<sup>38</sup> very serious rivals

<sup>39</sup> a small enclosed place in a polling station (the place where people vote)

<sup>40</sup> the place where people vote

<sup>41</sup> a flat piece of plastic with a hole in the middle, used to store music

<sup>42</sup> the period before something



## Oasis vs. Blur

[00:13:26] With Blur, you actually got an extra CD with your purchase of Country House, so you got two CDs for 99p, which was the price of the single.

[00:13:37] Oasis tried to do a similar thing, but they were a little too late and couldn't actually give an extra CD away with the single, so they put [barcodes<sup>43</sup>](#) inside the single which gave you the right to get another CD.

[00:13:52] But of course that wasn't nearly as [enticing<sup>44</sup>](#) as getting two CDs immediately.

[00:13:58] So, who ended up winning the battle of Britpop, who ended up with the number one single?

[00:14:04] It was a [tense<sup>45</sup>](#) week, as music fans made the [pilgrimage<sup>46</sup>](#) to the [record](#) store and [cast<sup>47</sup>](#) their votes.

[00:14:12] It ended up being the best week in a decade for single sales, but Blur beat Oasis, selling 274,000 [records](#) to Oasis's 216,000.

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<sup>43</sup> small rectangular patterns of black lines printed onto a product, which can be read by a computer

<sup>44</sup> attractive

<sup>45</sup> a tense situation is one where you feel worried because of what will happen

<sup>46</sup> a special journey, often made for religious reasons

<sup>47</sup> vote (in an election)



## Oasis vs. Blur

[00:14:26] Blur's [record label<sup>48</sup>](#) threw a huge party, a big celebration, but the victory didn't really mean very much.

[00:14:34] In the interviews years afterwards most of Blur and Oasis admitted that the entire 'battle' was created by the [record labels](#) and the media, and that Oasis [added fuel to the fire<sup>49</sup>](#).

[00:14:49] And if Blur won the battle, there are few that would [contest<sup>50</sup>](#) the fact that Oasis won the war, at least from a popularity point of view, from a sales point of view.

[00:15:01] While Blur grew apart and the [lead guitarist](#) left in 2001, Oasis's popularity grew and grew, despite the rivalries of the Gallagher brothers.

[00:15:13] And although both bands have [devoted<sup>51</sup>](#) followings outside the UK, Oasis's worldwide popularity far [outstrips<sup>52</sup>](#) Blur's.

[00:15:24] In what goes for 'popularity' nowadays, Blur has around 6 million monthly listeners on Spotify while Oasis has 14 million.

[00:15:32] And as for Britpop, it survived for a few more years after the Battle of Britpop.

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<sup>48</sup> a company that produces and markets music for bands

<sup>49</sup> to make a difficult situation even more difficult

<sup>50</sup> debate, disagree with

<sup>51</sup> extremely loyal and loving

<sup>52</sup> to be more important



[00:15:41] Noel Gallagher, the guitarist from Oasis was invited to 10 Downing Street, the home of the Prime Minister, for a party when Tony Blair won the election of 1997, and both Oasis and Blur continued to release [critically<sup>53</sup> acclaimed<sup>54</sup>](#) albums.

[00:16:00] But August 1995, and this battle, was its height, and Britpop [mania<sup>55</sup>](#) never reached the same levels again.

[00:16:09] Within a few years [manufactured<sup>56</sup>](#) pop was back, with [acts<sup>57</sup>](#) like the Spice Girls [dominating<sup>58</sup>](#) the top of the charts for years.

[00:16:19] But this battle of Britpop went down in history as one of the great chart rivalries, and was the high point of one of the [defining<sup>59</sup>](#) moments in British music.

[00:16:31] Neither song may have been particularly great, and it might have all been [hyped up](#) just a little bit, [manufactured](#) so that people were even more interested in it, but it certainly was a lot of fun, and sold a lot of [records](#).

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<sup>53</sup> according to critics, people who give professional judgments about music, films etc.

<sup>54</sup> praised, said to be very good

<sup>55</sup> a strong interest in something, especially one that affects a lot of people at the same time

<sup>56</sup> produced in an industrial way

<sup>57</sup> musical groups

<sup>58</sup> being the largest

<sup>59</sup> being important and influential



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### Oasis vs. Blur

[00:16:47] And if you want a good way to start off a long conversation with a Brit, you can always ask them who's better, Blur, or Oasis.

[00:16:56] At least now you'll know a little bit more about what their response will reveal.

[00:17:03] Ok then, that is it for the story of Blur vs. Oasis, and the battle of Britpop.

[00:17:10] It is a fun story, and one that not that many people outside the UK know. So I hope you enjoyed it.

[00:17:17] And as a final reminder, if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, to unlock the transcripts, the subtitles and key vocabulary, then the place to go to is Leonardoenglish.com.

[00:17:36] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:17:41] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

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## Key vocabulary

| Word                 | Definition   |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Teamed up</b>     | join together to work (on something)   |
| <b>Assess</b>        | judge or decide  |
| <b>Forefront</b>     | the most important position  |
| <b>Emerged</b>       | came out   |
| <b>Grunge</b>        | a type of rock music popular in the early 1990s                                    |
| <b>Fixation</b>      | unable to stop thinking or talking about something                                 |
| <b>Optimistic</b>    | the quality of being full of hope  |
| <b>Pose</b>          | to stand (in front of something)   |
| <b>Record labels</b> | companies that produce and market music for bands                                  |
| <b>Rankings</b>      | the lists of the most popular songs  |
| <b>Latched onto</b>  | to follow something closely and be very interested in it                           |
| <b>Ostensibly</b>    | claiming to be   |
| <b>Frontmen</b>      | the most important people in a musical group (usually the singer and/or guitarist) |



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### Oasis vs. Blur

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>Labelled</b>        | described (as)  |
| <b>Confrontational</b> | behaving in an angry and unfriendly way, looking to cause an argument         |
| <b>Reserved</b>        | being shy and not talking about feelings or emotions                          |
| <b>Lead guitarist</b>  | the most important guitarist in a band  |
| <b>Insulting</b>       | being rude to someone   |
| <b>Circus</b>          | a situation where there is too much excitement and noise                      |
| <b>Artsy</b>           | someone who knows a lot about art, film, and music                            |
| <b>Tabloid</b>         | a popular newspaper with small pages, mainly dealing with non-serious stories |
| <b>Smashing up</b>     | breaking  |
| <b>Records</b>         | a flat piece of plastic with a hole in the middle, used to store music        |
| <b>Inevitable</b>      | certain to happen   |
| <b>Hyped up</b>        | made to seem larger and more exciting than it really is                       |
| <b>Exaggerated</b>     | made to seem larger and more exciting than it really is                       |
| <b>Came to a head</b>  | if something comes to a head, it comes to a climax                            |
| <b>Culminated</b>      | ends with   |



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### Oasis vs. Blur

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>Harm</b>            | damage, hurt  |
| <b>Coordinate</b>      | to work together to make things happen at an agreed time                  |
| <b>Maximise</b>        | make the most amount of something   |
| <b>One up on</b>       | if you get 'one up on' someone, you get an advantage over them            |
| <b>Crowded out</b>     | if something is crowded out, there isn't enough space for it              |
| <b>Airwaves</b>        | the news channels (radio, TV)   |
| <b>Clash</b>           | a fight   |
| <b>Tracks</b>          | songs   |
| <b>Straightforward</b> | easy and simple   |
| <b>Headlines</b>       | the main stories in a newspaper   |
| <b>Dubbed</b>          | given the name of   |
| <b>Arch rivals</b>     | very serious rivals   |
| <b>Polling booth</b>   | a small enclosed place in a polling station (the place where people vote) |
| <b>Polling station</b> | the place where people vote   |
| <b>Record</b>          | a flat piece of plastic with a hole in the middle, used to store music    |



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### Oasis vs. Blur

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Run up</b>                 | the period before something   |
| <b>Barcodes</b>               | small rectangular patterns of black lines printed onto a product, which can be read by a computer |
| <b>Enticing</b>               | attractive  |
| <b>Tense</b>                  | a tense situation is one where you feel worried because of what will happen                       |
| <b>Pilgrimage</b>             | a special journey, often made for religious reasons   |
| <b>Cast</b>                   | vote (in an election)   |
| <b>Record label</b>           | a company that produces and markets music for bands   |
| <b>Added fuel to the fire</b> | to make a difficult situation even more difficult   |
| <b>Contest</b>                | debate, disagree with   |
| <b>Devoted</b>                | extremely loyal and loving  |
| <b>Outstrips</b>              | to be more important  |
| <b>Critically</b>             | according to critics, people who give professional judgments about music, films etc.              |
| <b>Acclaimed</b>              | praised, said to be very good   |



|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Mania</b>        | a strong interest in something, especially one that affects a lot of people at the same time |
| <b>Manufactured</b> | produced in an industrial way  |
| <b>Acts</b>         | musical groups   |
| <b>Dominating</b>   | being the largest  |
| <b>Defining</b>     | being important and influential  |

*We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.*

*What did you like? What could we do better?*

*What did you struggle to understand?*

*Let us know in the forum [community.leonardoenglish.com](http://community.leonardoenglish.com)*

