
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

Get the short straw



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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Feifei

This is The English We Speak, I'm Feifei...

Rob

And hello, I'm Rob.

Feifei

Rob, it's very kind of you to bring me to this cafe and to buy me a milkshake – I love milkshakes.

Rob

Did I say I was paying? Anyway, I wanted to talk to you about work...

Feifei

...mmm, strawberry, my favourite.

Rob

Errr, yes, me too.... But back to talking about work – you know we're moving the desks around?...

Feifei

...Why do milkshakes taste so good?...oh look I've finished mine.

Rob

...as I was trying to say, it looks like you've got the short straw.

Feifei

Oh, that's why I've drunk my milkshake quicker than you – I had a short straw!

Rob

No, Feifei. Forget the milkshake – if you get – or draw - the short straw, it means you're the person in a group who gets the most unpleasant outcome in a situation.

Feifei

Right, and why have I got the short straw?

Rob

Well, I'm afraid they're moving your desk to just outside the toilet!

Feifei

We'll see about that – let's hear some examples of other people who've got the short straw...

Examples

It looks like I've got the short straw – I'm doing the late shift while everyone else goes to the pub!

Oh dear, Tom's got to do the washing up after our dinner party – looks like he's got the short straw.

We were given free tickets to the theatre, but I got the short straw because my seat was right at the back and I couldn't see a thing!

Feifei

This is The English We Speak from BBC Learning English and we're talking about the expression 'to get the short straw', which describes a person in a group who gets the most unpleasant or difficult outcome in a situation. You can also say 'to draw the short straw'. And Rob, you're saying I've got the short straw in the office reshuffle?

Rob

Yep – that's why I thought I'd take you for a milkshake as a way of making you feel better about it.

Feifei

You mean, as a way of saying sorry more like. I've seen the new office plan and you were supposed to sit by the toilet but you changed the name to mine – what a cheek!

Rob

Well... errr... How about if I pay for your milkshake?

Feifei

Maybe, if you buy me *another* milkshake.

Rob

Oh OK then... remind me what flavour?

Feifei

Strawberry – with TWO long straws.