

Editor's Note



he photo on the front cover features a display of corn from the Iowa State Fair. This fair, which has become an institution in the United States, first took place in 1854 and has been held almost every year since. (The fair closed during World War II when the fairgrounds functioned as a supply depot.)

The largest state fair in the United States, the Iowa State Fair runs for 11 days and hosts tens of thousands of visitors each day; on Saturdays and Sundays attendance often swells to well over 100,000. The Iowa State Fair includes agricultural activities that showcase the surrounding farming communities. Livestock shows and competitions for the best and largest animals and the best crops draw large numbers of entries. And detailed schedules are drawn up to accommodate all the cattle, horses, sheep, goats, llamas, and other animals that are shown at the fairgrounds each year.

Back to the cover photo... The blue ribbon indicates that the corn in the picture—the competitor had to submit 30 ears for judging—won first place in the farm crops competition. A blue ribbon is a symbol of excellence that all fairgoers recognize, and they are likely to take a closer look, as they wander through exhibit halls, at any display with a blue ribbon attached to it.

In English, *blue ribbon* can be used (as an adjective) to denote something of high quality. For example, one might refer to a “blue-ribbon performance.” (Likewise, in talking about a topnotch cooking school, one might use the French equivalent, *cordon bleu*, even in the United States.) The term *blue ribbon* might also be used to describe a specially selected group of people, commonly known as a “blue ribbon commission” or “blue ribbon panel.”

The Iowa State Fair has its own Blue Ribbon Foundation, an organization formed to raise money to renovate and preserve the Iowa State Fairgrounds. The fairgrounds are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, an official list of districts, sites, and buildings throughout the United States that merit preservation because of their cultural and historical value.

Distinct cultural and historical aspects of the United States are revealed by state and county fairs. You can learn more about these fairs in the feature article in this issue. And the lesson plan that follows the feature article offers an opportunity for your students to experience task-based learning and have some fun with an imaginary trip to a fair.

With all of this, and a nice collection of other articles, this just might strike you as a blue-ribbon issue of *English Teaching Forum*.

—MK