

Movie Vocabulary/Idioms

Being There

(1979. Info at <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0078841>)

The movie of *Being There* is considered a classic vehicle for the monumentally talented **Peter Sellers**, famed British character and comic actor (1925-1980). Be sure to appreciate the art and creativity Sellers gives to the role of Chance; a retarded older gentleman who finds his good-natured naiveté serving him in very good stead indeed in the corridors of heavy power.

One very nice thing about this movie is that the language is very slow and carefully enunciated. I was sort of surprised to rediscover this, myself...

The original short story by Jerzy Kosinski is a small masterpiece of irony and narration. Shortly after its publication, the character of Chance was quickly picked up by other writers and social observers as an emblem of “gee-whiz” power politics; a new twist on the American adage that “any boy”—even fairly unintelligent, simple minded ones—can aspire to power. To tell the truth, if/when I teach this class again, I may teach from the book. I do recommend it.



Chance	The name of the retarded gentleman in the house of the “old man.”
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It just don't make any difference to you...	Notice that the woman doesn't use the 3 rd person singular Simple Present “doesn't.” This is fairly common in English spoken by the less educated.
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Yowsum	Yowsum ⇐ Yes M'am ⇐ Yes, Madam.
Yowsah	Yowsah ⇐ Yes, Suh ⇐ Yes, Sir.
	These are typical expressions from old popular media depictions of black people; folksy, “mumble-mouthed” pronunciations. These expressions are <u>very</u> “politically incorrect” nowadays; you won't find them in modern movies.

Honky	Black street lingo for a white person; deprecatory, and a little out-dated; people don't use this term much anymore.
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And now, the piece of resistance	This is an “Americanization” of the French expression “pièce de resistance”; the finishing touch, the last bit of work that makes the product perfect.
Chauncy Gardener	The name Chance creates for himself during his coughing fit.
“I’ve Got a Basketball Jones”	Novelty American pop comedy recording from the period. This record played for a short time on “pop” radio around the country.
...and see the players chugging down this stuff...	To chug (v.t.): To drink a lot of something very quickly. This is often used to describe social beer drinking rituals of college students.
He might be a breath of fresh air ...	This expression refers to something or someone that brings new insights or feelings to an old and stale situation.
Transfusion	A transfusion is when blood is given to someone, due to an accident or some other medical situation.

Why do people need a blood transfusion?

People may need a blood transfusion for many reasons. Some reasons are to:

- replace blood that the body has lost
- restore the blood’s ability to carry oxygen
- help control the forming of blood clots
- help control the blood pressure

Source:

http://www.upmc.edu/patiented/New_PtEd_PDFs/BloodTransfusion.pdf

...what makes my blood boil ...	“What really makes me really mad...”
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kid lawyers
from the **SEC**

The **Security and Exchange Commission** is a government agency whose job is to make sure the U.S. stock market is run according to government rules and regulations designed to keep the market fair and stable.



A “**kid lawyer**” would be a new lawyer—fresh out of law school—in their first job.

flinty soil

Flint is a very hard and common *igneous* (volcanic; from volcanoes) rock. It was used in prehistoric times to make knives and arrowheads. In fact, as shown here, people still make knives from it. Note that by adding the “-y” suffix, it becomes the *adjective* “**flinty**.”

“**Flinty soil**” is dirt that is naturally hard to grow things in, because it’s rocky and lacks the organic matter needed to make plants grow.



...can’t let those
bastards get you
down

Bastard (*n.*): A nasty slang term for a person without a father, or without parents.

Figuratively, a bastard is an emotionally abandoned person who, in turn, emotionally abandons others—a mean person. “Don’t let the bastards get you down” means that you shouldn’t let mean people make you so sad that you give up on seeking fulfillment in life.

...room
upstairs...

Note the clever miscommunication in this exchange between Chauncy and Ben; Chauncy is literally referring to the room upstairs where he’s been sleeping while staying with the Rands, while Ben thinks Chauncy is being figurative and talking about Heaven, or the afterlife.

I’m sure you’ll
sprout some
thoughts in a few
days

To sprout (*v.i., v.t.*): To grow the first tender stem from the seed.

Some mung bean sprouts:



...**up and**
around this

To be **up and around** means to be active at a time when you might be expected to be sleeping, recuperating (from

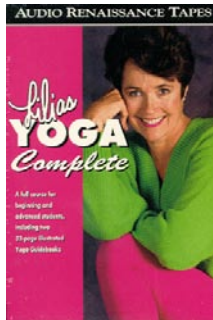
morning... illness), or relaxing.

I've been labeled a king-maker **king-maker:** Someone who helps other people become powerful.

Capitol Hill The Washington Mall, site of the United States Government.

I won't have any of that! "Don't talk like that! That's self-defeating talk! Don't say those negative things!"

[Lilias Yoga]



"Lilias Yoga" was a popular TV yoga program at the time this movie was made. The host was yoga instructor Lilias Folan (shown in this picture).

I gotta **take a leak** [I have got to] urinate.

...your **down-to-earth** philosophy... "Down-to-earth" means practical, simple, uncomplicated, easy to understand and easy to use.

Laconic *Adj.* Not using a lot of words to express oneself.

...plays his cards very close to the chest...



An image from the card game called "poker", where you have to make sure your opponents do not see the value of your cards. A person who "plays their cards close to their chest" (or vest) doesn't let other people know what they're thinking. This means

others are unlikely to know how that person will be acting or what they'll be doing.

...the scuttlebutt is... The *scuttlebutt* is the place on a ship is where the fresh drinking water is kept. "Scuttlebutt" is gossip and rumors

that get exchanged during work breaks.

Your **anonymity**
is likely to be a
thing of the
past...

Anonymity (*n.*); the state of being anonymous, unidentified, unknown by others.
A “thing of the past” is something that used to exist but does not exist any longer.

shortchanged
by the Lord...

To be shortchanged means to be given less change in a financial transaction than you are supposed to receive. In this statement, Louise is saying Chance is retarded; he was “shortchanged” when God was handing out brains.

Gobbledygook

Nonsense.

Mr. Roger's
Neighborhood™

An extremely popular children's show from the period. **Fred Rogers** (pictured) would share his day, his friends, his feelings, and his lighthearted narrative fantasies with the



children in his television audience.
Fred Rogers died on February 27th, 2003.

...have the guts
to admit it.

“To have guts”: To have a healthy emotional life and high self-esteem. To “have the guts to admit” something is to have the self-esteem and self-assurance to tell important facts about yourself that could have a bad effect on your reputation.

...surrender the
horn of plenty
for the **horn of**
Gabriel.

The “horn of plenty” is the “cornucopia”, and comes from Greek mythology. In general it refers to fertility or the abundance of good things that come from the earth, usually food.



The “horn of Gabriel” is the trumpet that will be “sounded” by the Judeo-Christian angel Gabriel to announce the End of Time and the coming of the final judgment of all mankind.



To “surrender” one thing “for” another means to **trade** or **give up** something **in exchange for** something else. This is rather “high” (intellectual) English.