

Movie Vocabulary/Idioms

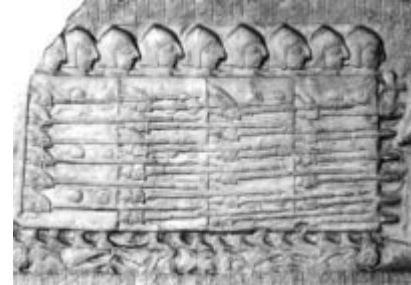
Dead Poets Society

(1989. Info at <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0097165>)

Slow down you horrible **phalanx** of **pubescence**!

Phalanx: Greek military term for a line of “unstoppable” heavily armed foot soldiers.

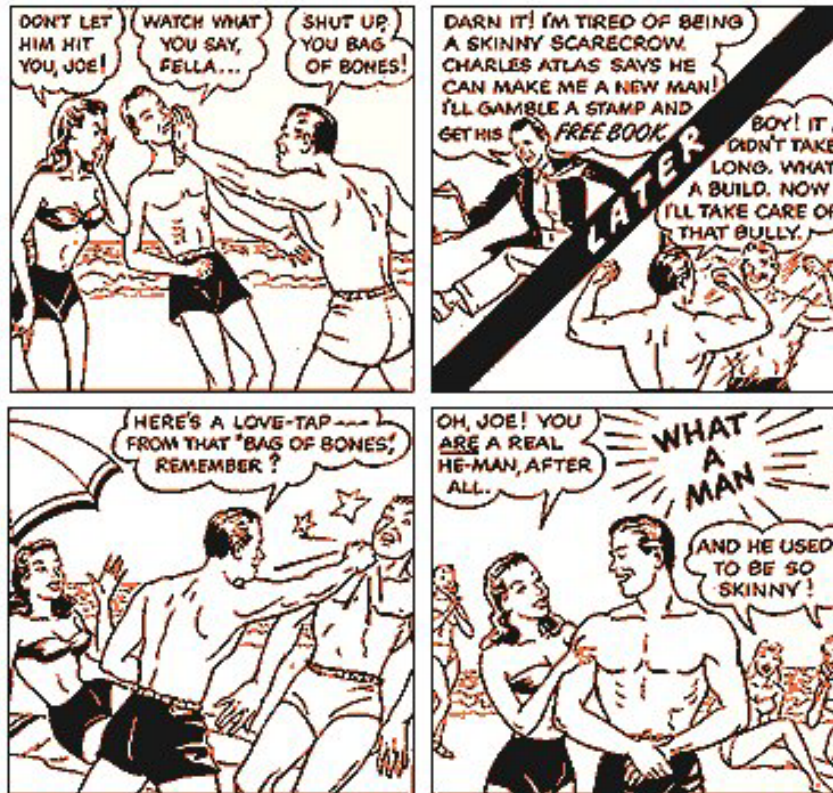
Pubescence: Light “fuzz”; used here in reference to the boys’ immaturity/dawning puberty.



a phalanx

98-pound weakling

Reference to a classic bodybuilding advertisement in the 1940's and 1950's.



The world is their oyster

An old expression meaning; They're happy and confident, and life is theirs to enjoy.

trig

Trigonometry, a branch of mathematics.

laying pipe

This is a reference to digging a trench and “laying” pipe (for water, gas, etc.) into it. Here, Williams is implying this is the ultimately “unromantic” job.

American Bandstand



Dick Clark

This was a popular teenagers’ music TV show in the 50’s and 60’s, hosted by **Dick Clark**. He would spin records, and kids would dance! It’s important to understand that American Bandstand’s purpose was to promote selected Rock ‘n’ Roll as wholesome, mainstream, middle-American entertainment.



freethinker

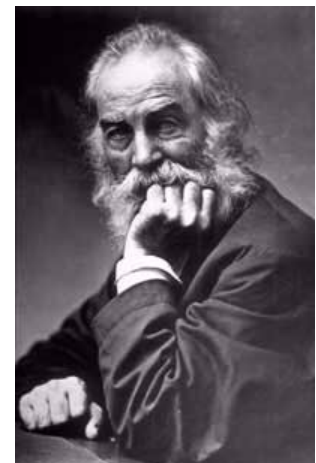
This is an old term, though it does have a vogue among philosophical skeptics and atheists today. A “freethinker” is generally a person who is not afraid to challenge *conventional* (normal) thinking. Years ago, it could be used as an insult, to accuse someone of atheism, or it could even be used to refer to someone of loose sexual morals, as in Oliver Goldsmith’s 1766 novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), was a writer and American transcendentalist philosopher. He is perhaps most famous for his classic book *Walden*, about time spent in a shack by Walden Pond (in Massachusetts), contemplating, tending a garden, and writing.

Whitman

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) was an American poet who also worked many odd jobs. His style was considered ahead of its time for the free meter and mystical themes.



O Captain! My Captain!
O Captain! My Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:...

Source: <http://www.1iglobal.com/wal t/>

Demerits

de·mer·it
Pronunciation: di-'mer-&t, dE-
Function: *noun*
Date: 15th century
3 : a mark usually entailing a loss of privilege given to an offender.
Source: <http://m-w.com/> (Online Merriam-Webster)

One of the boys refers to a system of “demerits” whereby you are cited for some offense against school rules. A mark is written down against you in a record book.

...put to rout...

To put the enemy to rout in war; to rout the enemy. To put up a very good fight, so the enemy is running away to save their life.

canine crudité...
fido flambé...
Pekinese parfait...

Crudité, flambé and parfait are French foods.

Canine is a taxonomic term for a dog. **“Fido”** is a classic dog name, and a **Pekinese** is a Chinese breed of a small pet dog.



Pekinese Dog

bon chance

French for “good luck.”

butt out

Leave me alone. Stop “butting in”; stop hassling me, stop involving yourself in my business.

Devotee

A keen, ardent, interested follower of some belief or activity, like a religion, art form or sport.

Meeks? Time to inherit the Earth!

This is a clever reference to New Testament (Bible):

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)

3 Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. [...]

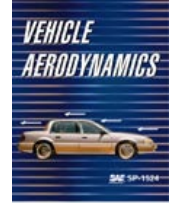
Source: <http://www.bartleby.com/108/>

Puck

Puck is a fictional character in Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He’s a “fairy”—an immortal, godlike being. His character did such a good job of communicating a certain playful and uncontrollable attitude that his name has entered into the English vocabulary as the adjective “puckish,” as in, “he has a **puckish** sense of humor.”

Aerodynamic

Engineering term. When something is aerodynamic (*adj.*), that means it has desirable characteristics when moving quickly through the air. Typically used when referring to cars or airplanes or other quick-moving vehicles.



I'm one of the **proofers**. I slipped it in.

Proofreaders. The person speaking this line is one of the last people to check "copy" (written matter) going into the school paper, so there was no one to stop his provocative piece (about accepting girls at the school) from going to the presses.

At these boys' age, **not on your life!**

Very unlikely; don't bet your life on it!

Brighton **Military School**

Very strict, "disciplined" school environment. Very "rule-based" environment, with strict hierarchies. Most activities are carefully scheduled and controlled by the administrators and teachers, with significantly less room for self-expression or individuality than at a non-military school.



Board of Trustees

A group of people, often elected, who make important decisions concerning a public institution, like a school or estate. They hold regular meetings.



Michigan State University Board of Trustees, East Lansing, Michigan (2002)

Source: <http://www.msu.edu/unit/trustees/>

Scapegoat

Someone who is punished in the place of others who deserve it. The term is usually used in a negative manner, with pity toward the person being used as a scapegoat.

The word came from animal sacrifice. For example, you can place the blame for the sins of a community on a goat, then punish the goat to "pay" for those sins.

fink[ed] A slang term, somewhat out of *vogue* (fashion). To “fink” is to confess the misdeeds (bad behavior) of others. This is a very derogatory term that *conveys* (communicates) disgust with the behavior of the “rat.”

A true fink is someone who is also guilty of the confessed offence, and hopes to obtain some *clemency* (official forgiveness) in exchange for their testimony.

honor code An honor code is a set of rules that everyone in a group must obey. If one person disobeys, it dishonors the group, and it is considered honorable to report the misbehavior to the authorities.

...he’s a rat A fink.

dumbass From “dumb;” stupid.

...let Keating fry Let Keating get punished. In this context, the character is saying “let Keating take the blame for someone else’s wrongdoing.” The word “fry” comes from the image of someone “frying” in the electric chair. The electric chair *[right]* is an *outmoded* (no longer “in style”) method of criminal execution.

