

Movie Vocabulary/Idioms

Groundhog Day

(1993. Info at <http://us.imdb.com/Title?0107048>)



Groundhog Day is one of the most popular movies in recent times. The DVD has subtitle options for French, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, and Thai! However, please don't rely on these; **use my notes below, and listen carefully to the English.**

First, the bad news. Quite a bit of the spoken English in this movie seems *muted* (quiet) and somewhat “muddy” and difficult to hear. You may want to **turn the sound up** a little louder than you would normally.

But there's also good news! This film is a feast of classic American idioms, some of the best American pop music, simple everyday American street talk, and—most importantly—a cosmic message that speaks to the deepest part of each of us; the part that wants to know true love and be truly loved. Enjoy!



“Close call, folks...”



A close call: A “close call” is when something bad *almost* happens to you; you very narrowly avoid it. “Whew! *That* was a close call!”

The phrase literally comes from a **call** made by a referee in sports. Sometimes, the ref's decision is “**close**” and many fans may even angrily disagree with that “**call.**”

Home Shopping
Network



“...swallows
returning to
Capistrano...”

The **Home Shopping Network™** was a TV show *launched* (started) in 1982 to sell things via TV. If you see something you like, you can call a number on the screen and order it. The joke here is that **HSN** is considered by many to be a sort of “low class” television show. In part, this is because it advertised health and beauty care products that *didn't work*. In 1995, the **Federal Trade Commission** found them guilty of false advertising and made them pay \$1.1 million in fines.

The famous cliff swallows of San Juan Capistrano, that leave town every year in a swirling mass near the Day of San Juan (October 23), are returning from their winter vacation spot 6,000 miles south in Goya, Corrientes, Argentina.

They land at...San Juan, California, on or around St. Joseph's Day, March 19, to the ringing bells of the old church and a crowd of visitors from all over the world who are in town awaiting their arrival and celebrating with a huge fiesta as well as a parade.

Source: <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/swallows1.html>

prima donna

Literally, Italian for “first woman.”

It is usually used as a mild insult towards people who see themselves as more important and valuable than their *peers* (co-workers), especially in the professional world, and particularly in the arts.

“It’s a **fleabag**.”



Fleabag: In this context, a bad, cheap, and uncomfortable hotel or living space. The expression implies that the place is infested with fleas.

“Would you help me with my **Pelvic Tilt?**”

Pelvic Tilt: A slight body *deformity* (“bad” shape) involving both the spine and pelvis.

I Got You Babe
[song]

Famous pop song recorded by Sonny & Cher, written by Sonny Bono. It ran in the U.S. as the number one “hit” popular song for 3 weeks, in August of 1965.

Sonny and Cher were very popular at this time, and even had their own TV show.



Rise and shine!



An old-fashioned morning greeting, calling you to get up out of bed (rise) and have a good attitude (“shine”).

Painting “Getting up” by Morisot Berthe (1841-1895).

making chitchat

Making small talk; light conversation about unimportant subjects, like the weather, the price of tea, etc.

“I **sure as heckfire** remember you!”

“Sure as **heckfire**” *emphasizes* (stresses) the verb *to remember*. It means “certainly.”

Here, he says “**heckfire**” instead of “hellfire” or “Hell;” bad words that refer to the eternal fires of Hell, the place where bad people are tortured forever according to some forms of the Christian religion. So this is a cute way of speaking “forcefully” while avoiding strong or negative language.

Shingles

What is shingles?

Each year, an estimated one million Americans *are afflicted with* (suffer from, are hurt by) **herpes zoster**, a painful viral infection commonly called shingles, which is caused by the **chicken pox** virus. Shingles can develop in anyone who has had chicken pox. ...

In some people, the virus "awakens" within the nervous system to cause shingles. Shingles may include a blistering rash and severe burning pain, tingling or extreme sensitivity to the skin, usually limited to one side of the body and lasting about a month.

Source: <http://www.aftershingles.com/shingles.html>

"I got friends of mine who live and die by the actuarial tables, and I say...it's all a big crapshoot, anywho..."



Ned treats us to a firehose of idiomatic speech:

"I got...": This is a commonly heard (usually among children) form of the more correct "I *have*..."

"friends of mine": This is a common, and again somewhat childish, expression for "friends."

to "live and die by" something: To trust something—an idea, a person, a theory—completely.

actuarial tables: This isn't slang or idiom; it's a reference to the statistical information that insurance companies use to calculate risk and set the terms of their insurance coverage.

crapshoot: *Craps* is a gambling game, using dice. A "crapshoot" is a throw of the dice; "dumb luck."



anywho: There is no such word as "anywho." This is a playful *corruption* ("incorrect" change) of **anyhow**.

The native English-speaking viewer gets the impression that, because Ned uses these schoolyard terms and corruptions, he is *stunted* or "frozen" in childhood. Emotionally, he never quite grew up.

"...could be **the ticket** for you."

When something "is the ticket for" you, it's the perfect thing, the very thing you need.

"...it's a **doozy!**"

"It's a big one!" "It's very impressive!" Very old-fashioned and "corny" (not really funny) idiom. It's also a bit childish.

"A giant **leech** got me."

Leech: A kind of worm that lives in water. Some leeches attach themselves to people and suck their blood.



“They’re **hicks**,
Rita...”

Hick: A **hick** is a person who lives in the country. This term implies that the person is not as *sophisticated* (clever and smart) as a city person. This is an insulting and *condescending* (“looking down” on someone) term.

“...this tiny
hamlet...”

A hamlet: A small town. This is a “quaint,” *literary* (“bookish”) word, and is seldom used in conversation.

“...as legend has
it...”

This the same as saying “according to the legends...”, according to the stories people share about traditions, people, and historical events.

“It’s the same
old **shtick** every
year...”

shtick: A *Yiddish* (Hebraicized German) word used to describe an actor or comedian’s standard jokes, routines, and mannerisms. Calling someone’s repeated behavior a “shtick” can be insulting because it *implies* (suggests) the person lacks the creativity to do something new.

If you listen to Phil Connor’s voice as he says this, you can tell he intends to be condescending and insulting.

“**Patch** me
through on that
line.”



“**Patch me through**”: Connect me. The verb “**patch**” used in this context refers back to the earlier days of manual switchboards (*patch panels, patch cords*) for telephone communication, *as shown on the left*. These days, operator call routing is done using pushbutton panels, or virtual computer interfaces.

“...maybe read a
little **Hustler**©”

Hustler is a particularly tasteless pornographic magazine, published by Larry Flynt.

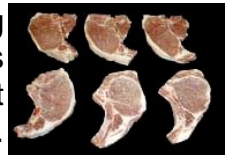
What the hell...?

This is a somewhat vulgar expression of strong surprise.

“Don’t **mess**
with me, **pork**
chop!”

To “**mess with**” someone is to deceive (fool, lie to) them, usually with some underhanded (evil) purpose.

A **pork chop** is a cut of pig meat. Calling someone this is insulting, because it carries the sense of the person being overweight (like a pig).



“Do you ever have **déjà vu**, Mrs. Lancaster?”

Déjà vu: French for “already seen.” Oddly, French speakers don’t use this expression like English speakers do. It refers to the weird, strange feeling we sometimes get that what we are experiencing has happened before; that we have “already seen” what we are seeing, already heard what we are hearing, already thought what we are thinking. Mrs. Lancaster’s response is priceless.

sharp as a tack



The adjective “**sharp**” is sometimes used to describe a person as intelligent: “She’s very sharp” = “She’s very intelligent.”

“**Sharp as a tack**” is an old expression meaning the person is very sharp. **Tacks** are short nails with large heads.

“This is a **riot!**”

The usual definition of **riot** is a serious social disturbance in which many people become violent, hurting each other and destroying property. In this context, it means “fun.”(!)



“More coffee, **hon?**”

“**Hon**” is short for “honey,” and is an *affectionate* (gently loving) term used with strangers, just as the British say “love” in everyday communication with strangers.

You don’t hear it much anymore, but it is still used.

“I’m **racking my brain...**”

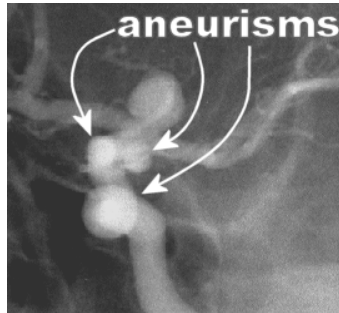
“I’m thinking as hard as I can, trying to understand a confusing situation.” This is used to express frustration with irrational or unethical behavior. A **rack** is a device used to stretch something, like cloth. You’re literally saying you’re trying to “stretch” your **brain** to the point where you can understand someone’s strange behavior or actions.

I think you should get your head examined.

This is an old expression, once again expressing frustration with someone’s actions or words.

It refers to psychiatric (behavioral) counseling, and the expression is sort of “politically incorrect” these days because of ongoing efforts to encourage more people to seek professional psychiatric help for behavioral problems like panic, depression, and relationship difficulties.

“No...**clots**,
tumors,
lesions...
aneurisms...”



clots: Blood clots; lumps of coagulated blood.

tumors: Cancers.

lesions: Bleeding sore spots.

aneurisms: Inflated (ballooned) places in a blood vessel (a vein or artery).

CAT scan or
MRI

CAT scan: Computed Tomography Imaging. This is a technology whereby thousands of X-ray readings (scans) on a subject—usually living tissue—are *digitally* (computer) processed to produce a *3D* (three dimensional) image.

MRI: Magnetic Resonance Imaging. A technique involving radio waves, powerful magnetic fields, and digital processing to produce a 3D image of living tissue for medical diagnosis.



“Who else **could go for** some **flapjacks** right now?”



There’s an interesting idiom and vocabulary word here:

When you “**can go for**” something, you want it.

Flapjacks is a northern U.S. word for **pancakes**.

Take it like a
man!

This is the classic thing said to men who feel deep and uncontrollable emotions in response to a sad or tragic event, like the death of a loved one or a miserable failure. It tells them to “hold in” their emotions, to keep cool and “in control” during an emotionally difficult time.

“...a man of
advancing
years...”

This is a *euphemism for* (nice way of saying) “a late-middle-aged man.”

“...throwing
caution to the
wind.”

To “throw caution to the wind” means to not be *cautious* (careful); to not care enough about your success or survival to be very careful when you do something.

“The wretch...”

Quote from the poem *Breathes There the Man*,
by **Sir Walter Scott** (1771-1832):

Breathes there the man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,
As home his footsteps he hath turned
From wandering on a foreign strand!
If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
For him no minstrel raptures swell;
High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim
Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
**The wretch, concentrated all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonored, and unsung.**



Note that there are lots of *archaic* (old, no longer used) words in this poem (“concentred”), as well as unusual grammatical forms you often find in old English poetry.

Note that the whole poem is concerned with *patriotism* (love of one’s own country). This is a little different from the situation that Rita is addressing when she quotes this bit of the poem to Phil. He is not being unpatriotic; he’s just being self-centered (“...concentred all in self...”).



Willard Scott

Willard Scott was a popular NBC News *Today Show* weather reporter and media personality. He enjoyed his greatest popularity during the 1980’s.

egocentric

Concerned only with your own success and well-being; not caring about others.

« bon appétit ! »

French for “good appetite!” This is a nice thing to say to someone before they eat.

“...**cue** the truck...”

To **cue**: To give an actor, actress, or stagehand an indication (sign) that they can begin. To Phil Connors, life is scripted, like a play, since he knows everything that’s going to happen. So in this scene he’s pretending he’s *directing* the waitress and the security personnel, just as film or stage directors **cue** the actors and other stage people.

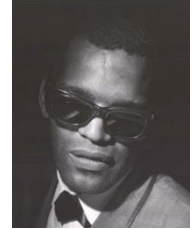
“I just like to **go with the flow**...”

To “**go with the flow**” is to accept and welcome events around you, responding to them without *resisting* (fighting) unnecessarily. This is a somewhat outdated expression; not many people use it anymore.

You Don't Know Me [song]

This is a wonderful performance by the great **Ray Charles**. Mr. Charles is one of the U.S.'s musical treasures.

You Don't Know Me was written by Cindy Walker and Eddy Arnold.



“This whole day has been one long **setup**!”

A **setup** (in this context) is a series of occurrences that have been carefully planned in order to *deceive* (fool) someone.

“He’s **out of his gourd**.”

A **gourd** is a vine vegetable, like a squash. However, they’re usually *bred* (specially grown) to be dried and used for making bowls, percussion instruments (e.g., maracas), or as decorations.



To be “**out of your gourd**” means to be “out of your mind,” i.e., crazy.

“Hi there, Mister! **Something I can do you for?**”

Note the **two** playful ungrammatical forms here:

- The correct interrogative sentence (question) would be: “**Is there** something...?” This shortened form is common in everyday speech.
- The correct word order is “...do **for you**,” not “...do **you for**.” Playful word swapping like this is common in many cultures.

“He must’ve just **snapped**.”

To “**snap**,” in this context, means to go crazy.

Hot Dog!

An old, small-town shout of success/victory. The recent replacement in American culture is “Yessssssssssss!”

“What the hell is he doing?”

This expression is a sort of slow mutation from a (slightly) more grammatical one:

- “What *in hell* is he doing?”
- “What *in the hell* is he doing?”
- “What *the hell* is he doing?”

In all these cases, the words in italics are slang *intensives*; they simply intensify (make stronger, more emphatic) what’s being said.

Although this is strong language, it could be worse!

“I’m **a** god, not **the** God.”

Please take special note of the very expressive use of both the **definite** and **indefinite articles** (“the” and “a”).

Only God can make a tree.



The last line of a famous poem *Trees*, by **Joyce Kilmer** (1886-1918). Don’t let the name fool you; he was a man.

Let’s go for it!

Another instance of the expression “**to go for**” something. Here, however, it means “**try**.” “Let’s try it!”

“Winter **slumbering** in the open air...”

Another quote from a poem, this one called *Work Without Hope*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Slumbering is sleeping

“I want to see his **chart**.”

Phil is referring to the old man’s hospital **medical chart**, which shows readings of various vital signs (temperature, blood pressure, etc.).

“When **Chekhov** saw the long winter...”

This is a reference to **Anton Chekhov** (1894-1905), a famous Russian writer.

“...**bereft** of hope...”

Bereft: A seldom-used, poetic word meaning “lacking” (not having something).

“...**lustrous**
winter...”

Lustrous: An adjective describing something that has “luster;” a healthy, vital glow of life.

“You little **brat!**”

A **brat** is a slang word for a child who plays tricks on people or is “spoiled” and mean-spirited.

[Heimlich
Maneuver]



In this movie, you'll see Phil Connors perform the **Heimlich Maneuver** on the Mayor.

This emergency procedure was developed in 1990 by Dr. Henry Heimlich and has been credited with saving many choking victims' lives. You might want to learn it! For more information, visit this web site:

<http://www.heimlichinstitute.org/>

“What did you do
today?”

“**Same old same old**” is a popular expression. It means “nothing new happened; the same old boring routine.”

“Oh, **same old
same old.**”

Wrestle Mania!



“I can't even
make a **collie
stay!**”



A **collie** is a variety of dog.

The first thing most people try to teach their dogs is to “**stay**,” to sit and **stay** in one place, even when you walk away.

Note the picture of the nice collie “staying.”

*Almost Like
Being in Love*
[song]

This is another wonderful performance by another American musical treasure, **Nat King Cole** (1919?-1965).

Almost Like Being in Love was written by **Alan Jay Lerner** (lyrics) and **Frederick Loewe** (music), a famous American Broadway musical theater songwriting team.

