

Erin Brokovich

(Drama) (2000)

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Major Characters

Erin Brokovich.....Julie Roberts

A divorced mother of two young children who discovers that the residents of a small Southern California town have been poisoned by industrial pollution created by the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), which is the one of the state's biggest companies.

Ed Masry.....Albert Finney

A trial lawyer and head of a small legal firm who becomes involved in legal action against PG&E after Erin starts to work in his office.

George.....Aaron Eckhart

An unemployed construction worker and motorcycle lover who becomes romantically involved with Erin.

Donna Jensen.....Marge Helgenberger

A sick mother of two children who lives in Hinkley, California, the town where Erin is investigating the pollution caused by PG&E.

Scott.....Jamie Harold

A teenager who works at the local water board, which is where Erin copies many of the documents that lead her to believe that Hinkley has been horribly damaged by PG&E's negligence (irresponsible behavior).

Pamela Duncan.....Cherry Jones

A resident of Hinkley who at first isn't sure whether she should believe Erin or PG&E about the dangers of the town's water supply.

Charles Embry.....Tracey Walter

Another resident of Hinkley and a former employee of the local PG&E industrial plant, who agrees to give Erin some very important company papers.

Kurt Potter.....Peter Coyote

An experienced tort (injury) lawyer who agrees to work with Ed in the lawsuit against PG&E.

Theresa Dallavalle.....Veanne Cox

Kurt's assistant lawyer who also starts to work on the Hinkley case.

Plot Summary

This is a movie based on a true story that occurred in Southern California in the mid 1990s. At that time, Erin Brockovich was a very strong and beautiful divorced mother of two who was struggling to survive financially when she becomes injured in a car accident. She hires a lawyer named Ed Masry who promises to get her money for her injuries, but because Erin is very emotional and loves to use foul language, a jury refuses to award her any money. Desperate for income, Erin convinces Ed to hire her as an office clerk, and it is there that Erin becomes a great investigator.

After looking into a simple property case from Ed's files, Erin soon discovers that many people have become horribly sick in the small desert town of Hinkley, about two hours East of Los Angeles. She begins to investigate the situation as if she were a well trained lawyer, but in fact, she had never been to law school. What she gradually learns is that the huge Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) was letting a toxic chemical called Hexavalent Chromium 6 spread throughout the Hinkley water supply, and that this was in turn causing hundred of residents to get cancer and other deadly diseases.

A lawsuit against a huge company is an expensive and very risky process, and thus much of this story concerns Erin's endless attempts to convince the town's residents as well as her new boss, Ed, her new boyfriend, George, and even her own children that the enormous time and energy that such a struggle will require is still worth the effort. In the end, this is the story of Erin's incredible energy and determination, and how it helped a lot of very poor and mistreated people find some real justice.

Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

Erin looks for a job, gets hit by a car, and loses a lawsuit that she would have won, had she only known how to control her temper.

I've seen nurses give my son throat cultures.

A medical test in which a cotton swab (Q-tip) is put down a person's throat in order to look for bacteria or other infections.

A urinalysis, where you take that dipstick to see if the white count is high.

A "urinalysis" is a test that is done to analyze what is inside a person's urine (piss). A "dipstick" is a stick that is placed inside a liquid, such as car oil, to see how much liquid is present. In this context, "white count" refers to the count or number of white blood cells.

You show me something in a lab once, and I got it down.

A “lab” is short for a laboratory, where scientific or medical experiments are done. If a person has “got it down,” they have mastered a particular topic or piece of information. This is Erin’s way of saying that she learns very quickly.

I always wanted to go to medical school, but I kind of blew that.

“To blow it” is a great colloquial expression which means to do something very badly, or fail at it completely.

My boy came down with the chicken pox.

“To come down” with a disease is to get sick because of it. “Chicken Pox” is a common childhood disease.

My ex-husband was useless, too, so that didn’t really work out.

“Useless” is a very strong insult if used when describing a person. If a situation “doesn’t work out,” it ends up badly.

Awe, fuck, god damn it!

Two common but vulgar obscenities to express emotion such as anger or frustration.

She was referred.

If a client is “referred,” they choose to go to a particular lawyer or other professional because of a personal recommendation.

I never thought just standing could take it out of you, but ever since that shithead hit me...

If something “takes it out of you,” it takes all your energy and leaves you extremely tired. “Shithead” is a crude but excellent insult word to describe a jerk, bastard, ass, etc.

Whoever did this to you made one hell of a mistake.

A set expression placed before a noun to show emphasis (“They made a very big mistake”).

Out of nowhere, his jaguar came racing around the corner like a bat out of hell.

If somebody comes “out of nowhere,” they arrive suddenly and unexpectedly. A “jaguar” is a well-known sport car (and a beautiful big cat), and to move “like a bat out of hell” is to go extremely quickly, perhaps because of great fear.

I couldn’t take pain killers because they made me too groggy to take care of my kids.

“Groggy” means very sleepy, or lacking the energy to focus.

What's the point? :: Broke, three kids, no job. A doctor in a jaguar must have looked like a pretty good meal ticket.

“What’s the point?” is an excellent way of asking a person what they are really trying to say. If a person is “broke,” they have no money. A “meal ticket” is a silly expression for a potential source of money.

Objection! :: Sustained!

In a trial, if a lawyer yells “objection,” they are asking the judge to stop another lawyer or witness from saying things that are irrelevant to the trial and that the jury should not hear. If a judge says “sustained,” she is agreeing with that lawyer’s objection

He came tearing around the corner out of control.

If a car is “tearing around a corner,” it is driving and turning extremely quickly, probably in a way that is not safe.

An ER doctor who spends his days saving lives was out of control?

“ER” is short for emergency room.

That asshole smashed in my fucking neck!

“Asshole” is a very common insult word which is much more vulgar than jerk, creep, etc. “To smash in” something is to crush or destroy it. Note the use of “fucking” as an adjective, which is very crude, and very common in this movie.

Open and fucking shut!

An “open and shut” case is one that is expected to succeed very easily, because the law or facts are so in favor of one side. Here, Erin is being very angry and sarcastic.

I told you the questions might get personal! :: No, you told me I’d be set!

If questions get “personal,” they involve people’s private lives. In this context, if a person is “set,” they are placed in a good or favorable situation (Here, Erin thought she’d get a lot of money).

You told me I had a good shot. I had no shot!

“A good shot” at being able to do or accomplish something is a good chance or possibility of doing it.

Let’s settle down. :: Fuck “settle down!,” I got \$74 in the bank.

To “settle down” is to calm down, or act more quietly. Note that the vulgar expression “fuck that” to express anger can be modified to have any words, including those words that were just said by another person.

Do they teach lawyers to apologize? Because you suck at it.

If a person “sucks at” doing something, they’re very bad at it. Vulgar!

Erin gets Ed to give her a job, and then meets George, who is happy to take care of her kids.

A cheeseburger deluxe.

A common adjective, placed after the noun, to describe a product that is considered to be the best version in its class (This is a favorite word among advertisers and can apply to things from hamburgers to cars).

A cup of chicken broth.

A type of thin or clear soup that is made with meat.

I'm still stuffed.

The word to use when you have eaten so much that you can't eat any more. It literally means filled, packed tightly, or full.

I don't really have a resume.

A typed report that usually describes a person's work history and educational background, which is used by potential employers.

I'm a client. I want him to call me. It's as simple as that.

A person who pays a professional person, especially a lawyer, for services and advice.

There's two things that aggravate me, Mr. Masry.

"To aggravate" a person is to anger or upset them.

I don't need pity. I need a paycheck.

"Pity" is the feeling others have for a person that they feel sorry for.

It's hard to get a job that pays worth a damn.

If something is "*not worth a damn*," it is worthless, or not worth the trouble of doing it. Unlike here, it's usually used in the negative.

We have a full staff right now. :: **Bullshit!** If you had a full staff, this office would return a client's damn phone calls.

If an office has a "full staff," then all the positions are filled and there are no available job. "Bullshit" is a classic obscenity that means lies, distortions of the truth, or just nonsense.

If it doesn't work out, fire me. Don't make me beg.

If something "works out well," it is considered successful.

No benefits.

In an employment context, “benefits” refer to the things workers get beside just their salary, such as health insurance and paid vacations.

At any time, we can tell the status of a file.

The “status” of something is its current position or situation, and in this case, a “file” is the paperwork for one particular legal case.

Do I get to pick my own code?

A system of words, letters or numbers that are either designed to keep a message secret or to help start up or use a machine.

I was wondering, can you tell me who I talk to about getting an advance on my paycheck?

“I was wondering” is an excellent and gentle way of starting to talk about something that is sensitive or delicate. An “advance” on a paycheck is a payment that is made before it is due.

Rosalind handles the payroll and petty cash.

“To handle” something is to take care of it. “Payroll” is the part of a business that deals with writing all the paychecks for its employees, and “petty cash” is the money that is given to employees to pay for minor business-related expenses such as office supplies.

Oh, for Pete’s sake, here.

A funny and curious way of expressing frustration or surprise.

There, we’re introduced, so shut the fuck up.

A very crude but not uncommon way of telling a person to shut up.

Hey, come on, don’t be like that.

The most versatile phrasal verb in English, here, meaning please.

Why don’t I take you out to dinner to apologize for my rudeness?

If a person is “rude,” they are impolite or perhaps rough or abusive.

With all the numbers I gave you, I guess zero is the number of times you’re gonna call it.

Note that in rapid speech, “going to” -----> “gonna.”

How do you remember your bank account number off the top of your head like that?

To remember something “off the top of your head” is to easily remember a small or old fact without even thinking about it.

The real estate thing. Pro bono.

“Real estate” refers to the sale of houses, building and land, and if a lawyer works on a case “pro bono,” they do it for free.

Now that you’re working here, you may want to rethink your wardrobe a little.

The type of clothes that a person owns and wears.

Why are these medical records and blood samples in the real estate files?

“Blood samples” are tiny containers of blood that are used to see if people have various diseases like AIDS or cancer.

What the hell happened?

A common addition to Wh question (especially this one), which is used to show emotion such as anger or frustration.

She said something came up and she had to drop the kids off.

If something “comes up,” it happens unexpectedly.

That stupid bitch!

A very crude insult word for a mean or abusive woman.

Want a hot dog? There’s an extra one on the grill.

A set of bars over an open fire that’s used for cooking, especially meat.

Mom, what do you think about getting a tattoo?

A picture that is drawn directly on to the skin.

Goodnight, buddy.

Another word for friend or pal.

This is a Harley-Davidson. The best damn motorcycle ever made.

Harley-Davidson is a brand of American motorcycle. “Damn” can be used as a vulgar adjective to express emotion or emphasis.

If I catch you near one, I’ll knock you silly.

To “knock a person silly” is to hit them so hard they can’t think.

Keep it down! The baby’s asleep.

A common way of telling people to speak more quietly.

You have great kids. ∴ I’m sure I’ll fuck them up eventually.

“To fuck up” a child is to harm or damage them, in this case by being a bad parent.

I'm not a good judge of character, or I would never have left them with that idiot, who cost a fortune and smelled like chicken fat.

A person who is "a good judge of character" is able to see if another person is honest or responsible or just a good person in general. An "idiot" is a common and excellent insult word for a very stupid person.

How many decks do you guys have?

A "deck" of cards is the 52 different cards that are played in a game.

I work when I need to. :: And what do you do the rest of the time, live off of your trust fund?

"To live off of" something is to take the money you get from it to survive financially. A "trust fund" is an account that one person sets up for another, which generally pays out a certain amount of money every month or year.

I do construction, which pays real good, and I make it last by living cheap.

"Construction" is the profession of building houses and other buildings. "To live cheap" means to spend little money.

You always this hard on people who try to help you?

"To be hard" on a person is to treat them poorly or disrespectfully.

I don't mind you taking me up on that.

"To take up" a person on an offer is to accept it.

I like hanging out with them. They keep it simple.

"To hang out" with a person is to pass time with them. A widely used colloquial phrasal verb.

It's no big deal. If it doesn't work out, you can always send them back to the chicken fat lady.

If something is "no big deal," it's not that important or significant.

This isn't going to get you laid. :: That's good, cause I don't find you attractive either.

"To get laid" is a very common slang term meaning to have sex.

"Attractive" is a useful adjective to describe either a good-looking person or one with a good personality.

Good, then we're even.

If two people are "even," they are in balance, so that, for example, if one person does something bad to the other one, they are even if that second person later does something bad in return to the first one.

I'm so **glad** we got that out of the way.

"Glad" is a common alternative to happy or content. In this context, "to get that out of the way" means to discuss a sensitive topic early on, so that it doesn't need to be discussed later.

Now I can just look after the kids and I don't have to worry about you coming on to me all the time.

If a man is "coming on to" a woman, he is trying to attract or seduce her so that they might have sex. Very slangy and useful.

Erin drives to Hinkley to learn about Hexavalent Chromium 6 and what it can do to people, but she soon finds herself without a job.

Toxicology report.

A study which shows how poisonous or dangerous a chemical is.

Decreased white blood cells. Increased lymphocytes. T-helper cells.

These are all medical words that deal with people's blood (Cells are the basic biological building blocks, with a wall and a nucleus, which is the center of the cell).

Pro bono case.

A case that a lawyer agrees to work on for free, perhaps because it is for a good cause, or the clients are too poor to pay anything.

You're a lawyer. :: Hell no, I hate lawyers. I just work for them.

A very slangy and strong way of denying what has just been said.

I don't want to be a pain in PG&E's backside, especially after all they've done for Hinkley.

A "pain in the ass" is a very common term for a person who is causing a problem or disturbance, and a person's "backside" is their ass, though this word and the full expression are fairly rare.

I don't want to move! Uproot the kids?

To "uproot" people is to pull them away from where they are used to living (Plants and flowers can be physically uprooted).

Honest to God, I don't know if I have the energy.

An old-fashioned way of saying honestly, or frankly.

There is just so much correspondence, I just keep it all in one place.

Another word for letters, forms or other types of communication.

They paid for a check-up for the whole family.

A “check-up” is a common way of referring to a routine medical exam.

Why did they do that? :: Because of the chromium.

A type of mineral or metal.

That’s what kicked the whole thing off.

“To kick off” a series of events is to start it.

There’s straight up chromium. Does all kinds of good things for the body. There’s chrome 3, which is fairly benign.

In this case, “straight up” is a way of saying pure, or not mixed with anything else. If something is “benign,” it’s harmless or not dangerous.

Then there’s chrome 6, hexavalent chromium, which depending on the amounts, can be very harmful.

A type of chromium that causes horrible medical problems.

With repeated exposure to toxic levels, anything from chronic headaches and nosebleeds to respiratory disease, liver failure.

“Exposure” is a way of saying physical contact. If something is “toxic,” it is poisonous or very harmful. “Respiratory” diseases are those that effect the lungs and your ability to breath.

Bone or organ deterioration.

“Deterioration” is the process of falling apart, decaying or dying.

Highly toxic, highly carcinogenic.

A scary adjective that refers to anything that causes cancer.

If it gets into your DNA...you pass your trouble along to your kids.

The biological or genetic material in human cells, that is passed from one generation to the next.

What’s it used for? :: A rust inhibitor.

“Rust” is the reddish-brown surface found on metal when it’s exposed to water. An “inhibitor” tries to prevent something, in this case, rust.

The utility plants use piston engines to compress the gas.

“Utility plants” produce electricity and gas, and a “piston engine” is a widely used type of engine. “To compress” something is to crush or squeeze it, so that it takes up less space.

Chromium is in the water to prevent corrosion.

“Corrosion” is the process by which metal slowly becomes weakened.

Have you been to the water board? Every county has one.

A “water board” is a local government office which has all official records related to water. A “county” is a local governmental division (Most US states have at least several counties within them).

They have records of anything water related within their jurisdiction.

A legal word which usually refers to the geographic limits over which a court or other legal body has authority or control.

I wouldn't advertise what you're looking for if I were you.

In this case, “to advertise” is simply to tell other people. Note the use of the subjunctive tense (were) , which is alive and well!

Incriminating records have a way of disappearing when people smell trouble.

If something is “incriminating,” it is possibly evidence of criminal activity or other wrong-doing.

Believe it or not, I'm on the prowl for some water records.

“To be on the prowl” for something is to be actively looking for it (Lions are often on the prowl for other animals to eat).

Tell me what you want to look at, and I'll be glad to dig them out for you.

“To dig out” something is to look for it, often when it is hidden in piles of lots of other stuff.

He's in this water dispute.

A “dispute” is a heated argument, or in this case, a lawsuit.

It would probably be easiest if I squeezed back there and poked around myself.

“To squeeze” oneself is to breath in deeply in order to become smaller, so that you can fit in a very small space. “To poke around” is a way of saying to look for something by searching every little thing.

Is that your middle name? No, maiden.

A woman's “maiden name” is her family name before she got married.

Groundwater

Water that is found in wells, or below the surface of the ground

Contamination extends one mile North.

“Contamination” refers to toxic substances or pollution. If something “extends” in a certain direction, it stretches out toward that way.

Where's my stuff? What the fuck did you do with my stuff?

“Stuff” is a widely used word for things. Note that “the fuck” is added to question to express anger or other emotion. Crude and common.

Don't you use language like that! Who do you think you are?

The type of question a parent will ask a child when they are very angry because of what the child has just done (In this case, using dirty words).

That's not how we work here! You don't just leave a message and take off!

A very common phrasal verb meaning to leave, often in a hurry.

What am I supposed to do, check in every two seconds? :: Yes, it's called accountability.

"To check in" with a person is to contact them, to make sure everything is OK. "Accountability" is an important word that refers to the act of being responsible for one's own actions.

Erin, this incident aside, I don't think this is the right place for you.

An "incident" is a particular event or occurrence." The expression "this thing aside" is a way of saying "Even without this thing..."

I'm going to make some calls on your behalf. :: Don't bother.

To do something "on somebody's behalf" is to do it for them.

"Don't bother" is a way of telling a person to not do what they are planning to do (perhaps because it would be too much trouble).

Ed hires Erin back after he learns how much she has already done, but the first offer from PG&E does not seem very encouraging.

What the hell are you doing here? :: I'm fixing the leak under your sink.

A "leak" is a tiny amount of water that escapes from a pipe or container.

Look at this mess that you made. All this crap.

A "mess" is a good word for disorder, untidiness or filth (often said when there is lots of junk or trash in a room). "Crap" is an interesting slang word for lies or nonsense, or in this case, trash or junk.

Jesus! Who fucking lives like this?!

A common way of expressing great emotion such as fear or anger.

Who lets their kids run around in a place crawling with bugs the size of house cats?

If a place is "crawling with" bugs, it is filled with them (To crawl is to move on hands and knees, like a baby).

All we have to do is call an exterminator.

A person who is paid to kill bugs, spiders and insects.

I was Miss Wichita, for Christ's sake.

Wichita is a major city in Kansas, and if Erin was "Miss Wichita," she was voted the prettiest woman there. "For Christ's sake" is another way of expressing emotion such as anger, surprise or here, just happiness.

I'm not up to it.

If a person is not "up to" doing something, they don't have the strength or determination to do it.

Some slim pickings, here, baby.

A sad expression that means few choices (In this case, few jobs).

Maybe that's Ed McMahon. Wrong Ed.

A well known TV personality.

UCLA.

Short for the University of California at Los Angeles.

He wanted you to know the legal limit for hexavalent chromium is .05 parts per million.

The maximum amount of a substance that is allowed by law.

.58 could be responsible for the cancers you asked about, the Jensens.

Note that PG&E was apparently more than 10 times over the legal limit!

I just assumed you were off having fun.

A person who is "off" doing something is doing it elsewhere.

So by that standard, I should assume you never get laid.

To "get laid" is a common way of saying to have sex, but it's crude and rarely used when people are talking about their husbands and wives.

She gets a call from PG&E saying there's a freeway to be built, and they want to buy her house to put in an off-ramp to the plant.

An "off-ramp" is the small part of the road that lets people drive off the freeway and puts them on city streets (An "on-ramp" is the opposite).

Note the use of the historical present verb tense.

Meanwhile, the husband's sick with Hodgkin's, and she's in and out of the hospital with tumors.

Hodgkin's disease is a type of cancer, and "tumors" are lumps or growths in the body that result from cancer.

Get this! They had a seminar....They're telling them how good Chromium 3 is for you, when all the while they're using chromium 6.

"Get this" is a way of telling someone that you are about to tell them something shocking or very interesting. A "seminar" is a class or conference on a particular topic.

Extortion.

A powerful word to describe the act of threatening to hurt somebody if they don't do what you want them to.

10% raise, and benefits, but that's it. I'm drawing the line.

A "raise" in salary is an increase, and benefits refer to other things that employees get beside pay, such as health insurance. "To draw the line" in a situation is to refuse to move any further in a given direction.

That place is a pigsty.

A sad little word for an extremely messy and dirty place.

What makes you think you can just walk in there and find what we need? :: They're called boobs, Ed.

A silly slang word for female breasts. Still, a safer word than tits.

These papers are a matter of public record and I'm not leaving until they're copied.

Papers that are in "the public record" are legally available for any person to request and examine.

An on-site monitoring well.

If something is "on-site," it is located on the same site as a bigger business or place. A "monitoring well" is a deep hole in the ground with water that can be examined to see if there is any pollution in it

This hexavalent chromium...it's poisonous.

Very harmful or even deadly.

The toxicologist I've been talking to gave me a list of problems that can come from Hexavalent Chromium exposure.

A person that studies chemicals and other substances to see how poisonous or harmful they are, especially to humans.

The minute she sent that fax, PG&E's claims department was on the phone scheduling a meeting.

The "claims department" of a business is the division that deals with people or other businesses that say they are owed money.

Let me do it, cause you're **driving me nuts**.

"To drive a person nuts" is to make them go crazy.

Sure as hell sounds like they're sitting up and taking notice.

"Sure as hell" is a very slangy way of saying almost certainly.

"To sit up and take notice" of something is to be suddenly concerned or interested in it.

I understand they've had a bad run of luck, health wise.

"Health wise" is one way of saying "as far as their health is concerned."

That's not PG&E's fault. ∴ You're **kidding**, right?

If a person is "kidding," they are joking around or not being serious.

Breast cysts, uterine cancer, Hodgkin's disease, immune deficiency, asthma, chronic nose bleeds.

All of these are very serious medical problems. A "cyst" is a small growth or lump in the body that contains liquid. "Uterine" is the adjective for uterus, which is the female organ in which a baby grows. "Asthma" is a lung disease in which it can be very difficult to breath, and if something is "chronic," it is long lasting or permanent.

A million things could have caused those problems.

Poor diet, bad genes, irresponsible lifestyle.

"Genes" are the biological material at the center of a cell that determine hair color and other qualities that are passed from one generation to the next. A "lifestyle" is a way of living one's life, but in this context often refers to things that others disapprove of, such as the use of illegal drugs or homosexuality.

\$250,000 is all I'm authorized to offer.

If a person is "authorized" to do something, they are officially given permission to do it.

Before you go off on some crusade, you might want to remember who you're dealing with here. PG&E is a \$28 Billion dollar corporation.

"To go off on a crusade" is to decide to spend great energy in working for a political or social cause, such as human rights or helping the poor.

They sent a mail clerk to jerk me off, waste my time.

A "clerk" is a low level office worker. "To jerk off" a person is to mistreat, lie to, or manipulate them, but note that to jerk off (without a direct object) is to masturbate!

They have 28 billion dollars at their disposal.

If something is "at your disposal," it is available for you to use.

What are you yelling at me for?! :: Because I'm **pissed off**.

An excellent adjective meaning angry (It's also a great phrasal verb).

Fuck you! :: Fuck you back!

"Fuck you back" is a clever response to "fuck you," but in reality, it's never used.

The yets said they had a bunch of tumors and stuff.

In this case, a "vet" is a veterinarian, which is an animal doctor (A vet is also a veteran, which is a person who was in the military).

We figured that might have to do with us, too.

If one thing "has to do" with something else, they are related, or involved with each other.

Mandy has had five miscarriages. :: I'm so sorry.

A "miscarriage" refers to the process of losing an embryo (a baby still inside its mother) before it is born. "I'm so sorry" is a very appropriate thing to say to someone who has just experienced a tragedy.

Donna said this chromium might be to blame for her problems, so I **figured** maybe it wasn't just me.

"To figure" is a common way of saying to think or believe.

I know you're **upset**, but the way this job is, things come up at the last minute.

If a person is "upset," they are very angry, frustrated or unhappy. If something "comes up," it usually arrives suddenly and unexpectedly.

If PG&E messed with our water, why wouldn't they just keep quiet about it?

In this context, "to mess with" something is to mistreat it or abuse it.

To establish a statute of limitations to file suit. PG&E figures we'll let the cat out of the bag, tell people the water's not perfect...

A "statute of limitations" is a legal term that refers to the last point in time in which something can take place. "To file suit" is to bring a law suit in a court, usually demanding money for what somebody has done in the past. "To let the cat out of the bag" is to tell a secret to others that they didn't know before.

...and if we can ride out a year with no one suing, we'll be in the clear forever.

"To ride out" a period of time is to survive it without being too hurt. If a person is "in the clear," they are no longer in danger (In this case, in danger of being sued).

And for you two, a comparable retroactive bonus on your sale price.

If a policy or contract is “retroactive,” it applies to events that took place at an earlier date. A “bonus” is an extra amount of money beyond what is usually expected (Here, PG&E is willing to pay more for the Jensen’s house than they agreed to earlier, in hopes they won’t later sue).

That’s why PG&E can still look good to their shareholders, because they’re not involved in an ugly lawsuit.

“Shareholders” are people who own the stock of a company.

***Ed and Erin begin to organize a major lawsuit,
and Erin is soon threatened at home.***

Boy, do I know how you feel! The first time I heard that number, I said “You got to be kidding me.”

“Boy” at the beginning of a sentence is way of expressing great surprise or amazement (And note that “I do know” is inverted grammatically for emotional emphasis). “You got to be kidding” is a way of expressing great disbelief.

40 God damn percent?! This joker sits at a desk all day and he wants to walk away with about half my award.

“God damn” is a crude but common way of showing emotion such as anger. A “joker” is a clown, or perhaps a fool.

Plus, he’s out all the costs.

If a lawyer is “out the costs” of a law suit, he has to pay all the expenses, such as support staff, even if their clients win no money.

Bunt cake.

A type of yellow cake that has no frosting.

Seems like everybody in the family ended up with a rash somehow.

A “rash” is a group of red spots on the skin that is caused by illness.

I never did keep track of it...I just couldn’t get rid of it, that’s all.

“To keep track” of something is to follow or observe it through time.

“To get rid” of something is to eliminate it or perhaps throw it away.

Can I ask why? :: **What’s the point?**

A very useful way of asking a person what they are trying to say, or in this case, of simply asking “Why?”

You people don't give a shit.

If a person “doesn't give a shit” about something, they don't care about it. Vulgar, but very common.

You drive all the boys crazy, don't you?

In this case, “to drive the boys crazy” it to get them sexually excited.

We add plaintiffs, and suddenly were in the middle of a toxic tort...

A “plaintiff” is a legal word for a person who sues another for a harm that was done to them. A “toxic tort” is a lawyer's way of referring to a lawsuit with a plaintiff who was harmed by something poisonous.

....with a statute problem against a massive utility.

A “statute” is another word for a law, “massive” means extremely big, and a “utility” is a company that provides electricity, gas or water (The statute problem is the deadline by which a suit must be filed).

Work hard?! I built a firm and managed to keep it alive through lawsuits, injunctions and evictions.

In this case, a “firm” is a law firm, or an office with several lawyers working together. An “injunction” is an order by a judge to do or stop doing something or face punishment. An “eviction” is the legal process of removing a person from a building.

A quadruple bypass.

A very serious form of heart surgery.

Diabetes.

A disease in which a person's blood sugar is not at a normal level.

They're a huge corporation; They can bury us in paperwork for the next 15 years.

“Huge” means extremely big. In this case, “paperwork” is forms and documents that must be filled out and processed in order to continue with a lawsuit.

With a little effort, I really think that we can nail their asses to the wall.

“To nail a person's ass to the wall” is a crude but interesting way of saying to capture or punish them.

That's why these cases settle. Lack of money.

In law, “to settle” a case is to reach an agreement between the two parties involved before a trial begins, or at the latest, before the trial ends. If there is a “lack of” something, there isn't enough of it.

Do you know what toxicologists and geology experts cost?

A “toxicologist” studies poisons and how they effect humans.

“Geology” is the study of the earth’s surface, rocks, mountains, etc.

We’re looking at 100 grand a month, easy.

A “grand” is a slangy and common way of saying \$1,000 dollars.

I’ve already made a huge dent in my savings.

If there is a “huge dent in your savings,” you have already lost a lot of the money you had hoped to save (A “dent” is a small depressed area in a flat surface, as when one car gently hits another).

We’ll figure it out.

In this case, “to figure out” something is to try and find a solution to a problem.

Lover’s quarrel? :: Bite my ass, Krispy Kreme.

A “lover’s quarrel” is a heated argument between a couple. “Bite my ass” is a silly retort to someone who has insulted you (“Kiss my ass” is more common, and Krispy Kreme is the name of a donut store).

Toxic test well from 1967.

A well in which the water is analyzed to see if it contains poisonous substances that are dangerous to the surrounding area.

This is a whole different ball game; A much bigger deal.

If something is “a whole different ball game,” it is completely different than what it was being compared to before. If something is a “big deal,” it is very important.

Kind of like David and what’s-his-name.

“What’s-his-name” is what you say when you forget a person’s name that you are referring to. In this case, the reference is to David and Goliath, two famous characters in the bible who represent a very powerful person and a very weak one, who eventually fight each other.

If, and only if, you find all the evidence to back this up, I’ll take it on.

“Evidence” is the physical facts, from blood to written documents, that tend to prove something in a court of law. “To back up” a case is to support it, and if a person “takes on” something, they agree to do it.

Remind me of that when I’m filing for bankruptcy.

“To file for bankruptcy” is to legally declare that you have no money to pay off your debts.

Is this the Erin Patee Brokovich that's been snooping around the water board?
 "To snoop around" is to be secretly looking into other people's property or lives without their permission.

You should watch your step.
 One way of saying be careful.

I'm not going to quit because of one creepy phone call.
 An excellent adjective meaning scary or disturbing, like a snake or rat.

The phone might be tapped.
 If a phone is "tapped," there is a device on the phone line that allows others to secretly listen in on the conversation.

We've got a dead bolt; It's not a big deal.
 A "dead bolt" is a very strong metal lock that is put on doors.

You don't think you're a little out of your league.
 If a person is "out of their league," they are trying to compete with or fight against other people or forces that are much stronger than they are (A league is a division or level, especially in professional Sports).

That's what those arrogant PG&E fucks want me to think, but they're wrong.
 "Arrogant" is a very negative adjective meaning snobby, condescending or proud and self-important. Note the use of "fuck" as a noun, which is a very vulgar insult.

Erin, I know what these kids can sleep through [noise]
 "To sleep through" a lot of noise is to continue sleeping without waking up.

Does PG&E pay you to cover their ass, or do you just do it out of the kindness of your heart?
 "To cover a person's ass" is a crude way of saying to protect them, especially by hiding information that could be embarrassing.

I don't know what you're talking about. :: The fuck you don't.
 In this case, a vulgar (obviously) and grammatically interesting way of saying "I don't believe what you just said."

Nobody calls me Pattee. That heavy breathing sicko that called me the other night could have only found out about me from you.
 "Sicko" is a good word for a disturbing person, or one who is willing to hurt people in any way to get what they want.

I want to know how the hell you sleep at night.

In this case, Erin is telling Scott that he should feel so guilty for what he's done that he shouldn't be able to sleep.

Come to think of it, we had a pretty big event around here.

A common way of saying "Now that I think about it..."

She said "ball." Out of the blue, like that.

If something happens "out of the blue," it happens totally unexpectedly.

It was pretty intense, seeing somebody's first word.

A useful and much loved adjective meaning strong, extreme in degree or size, or perhaps greatly felt.

Her beautiful soft, chubby little arms, and her little cheeks.

One way of saying slightly fat.

Our jaws just dropped. We must have stood there for three or four minutes.

If a person's "jaws drop," they are showing total amazement or surprise (Your jaws are the bottom part of the face in which your teeth are set).

Her little lips wrapped around it.

"To wrap around" something is to circle or surround it, though here it's used more generally to mean Beth was able to say a particular word.

Guess what! :: What?

The words to say when you want to tell a person something interesting or exciting, but perhaps warn them first that you're about to tell them.

The lawsuit against PG&E is approved, and as the costs rise, Ed considers the strategic options.

You guys go ahead with me and I'll get a ride with Ed.

The word to use when you are being driven in a car.

They used the hexavalent chrome here, as an anticorrosive.

"Hexavalent chrome" is the deadly chemical that PG&E used in its plant. An "anticorrosive" substance is designed to prevent rust (which weakens metal).

Then they dump the excess water into these ponds.

"Excess" is another word for extra, or an amount beyond what is needed. A "pond" is a small body of water.

If you dig one inch under the surface, the dirt's as green as a fucking shamrock.

An "inch" is a small unit of measurement, about the length of a thumb. "Shamrock" is a green clove (flower), and the national symbol of Ireland.

That's what caused the contamination.

"Contamination" is poisonous or unpure matter that pollutes or damages the environment.

In most cases, you'd line these ponds so this shit doesn't seep into the ground.

"To line" a container is to cover it with an extra layer of material so that it doesn't leak. If water "seeps" into the ground, it slowly leaks and penetrates into it before spreading outward.

Guess what. :: They skipped that step?

"To skip" a step in a process is to forget to do it, or perhaps to decide intentionally not to do it (In this case, to line the ponds).

It's like 14 years of hexavalent chrome just flowing into the groundwater.

When a liquid "flows," it moves or pours out. "Groundwater" is the water that is found under the surface of the earth.

Nelson cares what's in the pond; He used to spend half the day just wading around in them.

"To wade" in water is to walk through it.

What's the matter? :: I don't know if we can pull this off.

One of the truly great phrasal verbs!; "To pull off" something is to accomplish it, especially if it is very difficult.

This is a monster case; We're up to 44 plaintiffs.

This is Ed's way of saying that the lawsuit is now extremely big, with many people (plaintiffs) now suing.

Money is going out, nothing is coming in. I'll have to take a second mortgage on the house.

A "mortgage" is the loan that a person gets from a bank when they are about to buy a house.

I've been making inquiries with other firms....to share some of the cost.

An "inquiry" is an official way of referring to the act of asking for information, or perhaps investigating. Here, "firms" are law firms.

That's **bullshit!** :: We've got PG&E by the balls.

"Bullshit" is a vulgar but excellent word for lies, half-truths, nonsense, etc. If you got a person "by the balls," you have forced them into a difficult situation in which you control what will happen to them (A vulgar but certainly interesting reference to testicles).

PG&E Hinkley.... but nobody is going to get rich we until can pin this on PG&E corporate in San Francisco. They're not guilty if they didn't know.

"To pin a crime on" a person is to show others that they are the ones who did it.

They had to know. :: Show me the document that proves it!

A "document" is paper with any type of writing on it that can be used to show or prove something (from a personal letter to business forms).

If they didn't know, we can't hit them with punitive damages.

"Punitive damages" is money that a person or company is forced to pay if it is shown that they acted with great irresponsibility (It comes from the word punishment).

We file a lawsuit to provoke a reaction, to see if they offer a reasonable settlement or just throw more paper at us.

"To provoke" a reaction is to do something that will cause another person to react in some unpredictable way. A "settlement" is an agreement by both sides to end a lawsuit.

There's a downside. PG&E will submit a demurrer... claiming each cause of action has no merit.

A "downside" is a disadvantage. "To submit a demurrer" is legal English meaning to officially protest or deny the charges or accusations. A "cause of action" is legal English that refers to the official reasons a lawsuit is being pursued. "Merit" is worth or value, and thus if a lawsuit has no merit, it is not a valid or worthy action.

If the judge agrees with them, he'll dismiss our case.

If a judge "dismisses" a case, she decides to end it because she feels it is clear that the plaintiff won't be able to win.

Basically, it all comes down to what this one judge decides.

"It all comes down to" is one way of saying "everything depends on...."

I'd got so used to having this come up benign, I guess I just didn't expect it.

In this case, "to come up" means to be, though it often means to appear or arrive. If a cancer test result is "benign," it means that it is not cancerous or dangerous (If it is *malignant*, it cancerous).

You think if you got no uterus and breasts, you're still technically a woman.
 The uterus is the female organ in which a fetus grows into a baby.
 "Technically" is another way of saying in principle, or in theory.

This lawsuit...for damages, medical expenses, and personal trauma due to contamination of the groundwater in the area by the defendant.

"Trauma" is either great medical or emotional harm, often caused by a violent event or sudden shock. A "defendant" is the person or company that is being sued by the plaintiff (In this case, PG&E).

I have some 84 motions to strike and demurrer submitted by representatives of PG&E, each one attacking the validity of this complaint.

A "motion to strike" is an official request that the judge immediately deny a particular part of a lawsuit. The "validity" of a complaint is its truthfulness, and in a legal context, a "complaint" is the official charges that are written in the suit.

Is there anything anyone wants to say? :: No, your honor.

The two words you must use whenever you are addressing a judge.

It is the order of this court, that each of the 84 motions to strike... are denied, and the causes of action against PG&E are upheld.

Note that although judges are human, they are referred to as "the court." Here, the judge is denying PG&E's request that the lawsuit be ended or dismissed.

As a resident of Barstow, I am disturbed by reference to evidence that suggests not only was hexavalent chromium used....

Barstow is a desert town near Hinkley. If a person is "disturbed," they are upset or angry. "Reference to" something is the act of mentioning or referring to it, and "evidence" is any physical object or documents that help prove something in court.

....but that your client actually sent these residents pamphlets telling them it was good for them.

A "client" is a person or company represented by a professional, such as a lawyer. "Residents" of a particular place are those people who live there. A "pamphlet" is a small book with paper cover that usually deals with a topic of public interest.

Jesus, they look like the secret service. :: Intimidation.

"Jesus" is a common way of expressing emotion such as anger or surprise. The "secret service" is the government agency that protects the President and other high level officials. "Intimidation" is the act of trying to scare or threaten someone, either directly or indirectly.

Counselors.

Another word for a lawyer, and the way that many lawyers address each other.

\$20,000,000 is more money than these people have ever dreamed of. :: See, that **pisses me off**.

If something “pisses off” a person, it makes them very angry.

They may not be the most sophisticated people, but they do know how to divide. \$20,000,000 isn't shit when you split it between them.

A “sophisticated” person is very intelligent or educated. “To divide” is the opposite of to multiply (10 divided by 2 is 5). Note that “shit” is vulgar but versatile, and here simply means “a lot”!

They worry about not having to have a hysterectomy or have their spine deteriorate like Stan Bloom, another client of ours.

A “hysterectomy” is an operation in which a woman’s uterus is removed. The “spine” is the backbone, and if it “deteriorates,” it starts to become worse or fall apart.

So before you come back here with another lame-ass offer, I want you to think really hard about what your spine is worth.

“Lame-ass” is a very slangy and negative adjective meaning ridiculous, horrible, or in this case, insulting.

I think this meeting is over. :: Damn right it is!

An enthusiastic way of showing agreement.

Please, don't ask me to give it up. :: What about what your kids are giving up?

“To give up” doing something is to agree not to do it anymore (In the second sentence, to give up is to give away something, and in this case, George is saying the kids are forced to give up their mother).

All I've done is bend my life around what men decided they need. Well, not now.

“To bend around” is to curve from a straight line, perhaps into a circle.

You got a raise. You can afford day care, you don't need me.

A “raise” is a higher salary at work. “Day care” refers to the taking care of small children during the day while the parents are working.

I don't know if I could handle that. Put the kids through that.

In this case, “to handle” something is to be able to deal with or manage it. If you “put a person through” something, you are forcing them to experience a situation that may be very stressful or difficult.

It doesn't matter if you win, lose or draw here.

"To draw" is a way of saying to tie (neither win nor lose).

I'd bring the kids into a hospital with towels soaked from their nose bleeds.

"Soaked" means completely wet or damp, inside and outside.

They called county services because they assumed the kids were being abused.

"County services" are local government agencies that take care of children who often have no safe place to stay. If a child is "abused," it has been very badly mistreated, either physically or emotionally.

What's with the attitude? I just need cool, I need quiet.

"What's with the attitude?" is a slangy way of asking a person why they have such a bad attitude or are in such a bad mood. In this case, "cool" is a way of saying calm or perhaps cooperative.

So when can I get a frickin answer? :: Don't talk to me like that!

"Frickin" is a more gentle way of saying fucking, but it's still crude.

Figuring out who takes Randy to roller hockey is probably easier at Randy's house. Now cool it!

In this case, to "figure out" means to find a solution to a problem.

"Roller Hockey" is a sport similar to hockey that's played with roller skates. "Cool it" is an excellent way to tell a child or anyone else to stop acting so rudely or disagreeably.

Ed convinces Erin that they should join forces with Kurt, and both men decide that arbitration by a single judge is the best course of action.

This is our new partner, Kurt Potter. He is handling Hinkley now.

"To handle" a case is to be responsible for directing it or making sure all the work that needs to be done gets done.

I see what you mean about a secret weapon.

This is Kurt's way of referring to Erin's good looks.

Erin, it's great to meet you. You've done a fabulous job.

A good alternative to excellent or wonderful.

Did I ever tell you about that airline case? ::

What the fuck are you talking about?

Note that "the fuck" is added to Wh questions to show emotion such as anger or frustration. This is much cruder than "the hell."

I got my ass kicked by this guy. He just buried me in paper. **Brutal**.

“To kick a person’s ass” is to physically hurt them, or in this case, completely defeat them in a lawsuit. “Brutal” is a powerful adjective that means very cruel or ruthless.

This guy was the toughest mother I’d ever been up against. :: Make a point!

“Tough” is strong or difficult to defeat, and in this case, “mother” is a somewhat crude slang word for a disagreeable person. If you are “up against” a person, you are competing or fighting against them. “Make a point” is Erin’s way of telling Ed to say what he is really trying to say.

Of course he wouldn’t hesitate now! We did all the fucking work!

“To hesitate” to do something is to pause before doing it, or to consider not doing it at all.

He’s got more toxic tort experience than anyone in the state.

A reference to lawsuits in which people sue over damages caused by industrial pollution, poisonings and other contamination.

Erin, hire a nanny, look outside and cheer up.

A “nanny” is a young woman who lives with a family in order to help take care of the kids, clean the house and perhaps cook.

PG&E has requested that we submit to binding arbitration.

In this case, “to submit” to do something is to agree to do it.

“Binding arbitration” is a legal term which refers to a decision by both parties in a potential lawsuit, in which it is agreed that all the facts are given to a single judge, and that judge decides the outcome of the case.

That’s where we try the case without a jury, just before a judge.

A group of citizens who witness a trial in order to decide the result.

The judge’s decision is final. There is no appeal.

An “appeal” is a legal term that refers to the decision of the loser in a suit (or a person who has been found guilty of a crime) to try and reverse the decision by going to a higher level court.

Each one gets a go before the judge to determine damages.

In this case, to “get a go” before the judge is to get a an opportunity to talk and present facts and evidence. In a legal context, “damages” refers to the amount of money that a person is awarded for the harm they suffered because of the defendant’s actions.

PG&E has proposed they’re liable for anywhere between \$50 and 400 million.

To be “liable” for something is to be legally responsible for having done it, and to be responsible for the damages that it may have been caused.

Let me get this straight. :: If we went to trial, PG&E could stretch this over 10 years with appeal after appeal.

“Let me get this straight” is a common way of saying “I want to make sure I completely understand.” Here, Erin is trying to understand how PG&E could use legal tactics to prevent paying their victims for years.

We have a lot of work to do before we even broach that subject.

“To broach” a subject is to discuss it for the first time.

Why don't I take Erin down the hall and I'll fill her in on all the details.

“To fill a person in on” something is to tell them about it.

These are my files. :: Yeah, we had them couriered over.

A “courier” is a person who delivers packages between two places (The verb form used here is rare but acceptable).

We're just going to have to spend a little time filling in the holes in your research.

“To fill in the holes” in a person's research is to find those important facts that are still missing.

No offense. There's probably just some things we need to know that you didn't know to ask.

A short way of telling a person “I didn't mean to offend you.”

Don't talk to me like I'm an idiot, OK?

A widely used word for a dummy, moron, jerk or other stupid person.

You don't know 600 plaintiff's numbers by heart.

To know information “by heart” is to know it in your head without having to look it up on a piece of paper.

They have lived on the plume since birth.

This is a French word for feather, although here it refers to the feather-shaped part of land that has been badly polluted by PG&E.

Wanted to be a swimmer, so she spent every minute she could in the PG&E pool. She had a tumor on her brain stem detected last November.

Note that many people speak in elliptical grammar, so that the pronoun at the beginning is dropped (“She wanted...”). A “tumor” is a lump in the body that has cancerous cells, and the “brain stem” is the part of the brain connected to the spinal cord. If something is “detected,” it is discovered, often with the use of sensitive tools.

An operation with radiation shrunk it after that.

“Radiation” refers to tiny waves or particles that can be very dangerous.
 “To shrink” something is to make it smaller (Note that it’s irregular).

Rita has chronic headaches and nausea and underwent a hysterectomy last fall.

If a medical condition is “chronic,” it lasts for a long time. “Nausea” is the feeling you have when you are sick to your stomach or feel like you are going to throw up. Note that a person “undergoes” (has) surgery.

OK, I think we got off on the wrong foot here.

“To get off on the wrong foot” is to start to do something in a very poor or unsuccessful way.

Just because she dresses like a lawyer doesn’t mean she didn’t work her ass off in law school.

If a person “works their ass off,” they work extremely hard.

Excuse me for not going to law school. :: Law school?!

At this point, I’d settle for charm school!

In this case, “to settle for” something is to agree to accept it, even though it is not a great or ideal choice. “Charm school” is place where people learn to behave well by learning to be polite and graceful.

OK, now, if you could walk me through all of the elements of Anabelle’s illnesses.

In this case, “elements” are facts, and an “illness” is a disease.

Specific details, when the symptoms began...prior to the first medical visit.

“Symptoms” are the outward signs of a disease, such as headaches or fever. “Prior to” is another way of saying before.

If you could reserve sentimental embellishments, I’d appreciate it.

In this case, “to reserve” means to avoid, but it is never used this way (To reserve a table at a restaurant is the way it is most commonly used). “Sentimental embellishments” are emotional stories or details that are not completely true, but a little exaggerated.

She’s kind of stuck up, and she upsets Annabelle.

If a person is “stuck up,” they are arrogant, elitist or snobby.
 “To upset” a person is to make them angry, worried or disturbed.

Everyone is pretty upset about the arbitration thing.

“Arbitration” is a legal word for the act of letting an independent judge decide who should win a lawsuit, instead of a jury (Note the use of the phrase “the X [arbitration] thing” is common but sloppy English).

I'm telling you the truth and I will get to the bottom of this.

"To get to the bottom of" something is to find out what the real cause is of a situation, or what is really happening outside of public view.

I'm not saying it's not a strong case. What I am saying is that we still don't have **a smoking gun** that ties San Francisco to Hinkley.

"A smoking gun" is good expression that means a strong piece of evidence which proves illegal behavior (In this case, which shows PG&E executives in San Francisco knew of the Hinkley problem).

Bullshit! If I was on my death bed, if it helped you, you'd drag me out of it.

Naturally enough, the bed on which a person prepares to die.

You stuck me in Siberia dictating to some god damn steno clerk so you could finish this without me.

"To dictate" a letter is to say it out loud so that a secretary can type it. A "steno clerk" is a secretary who types letters that are dictated.

They **screwed up**, Erin! Do I have your attention now? They admit it.

"To screw up" something is to do it very badly, or completely fail at it.

The arbitration proposal they sent might as well have been written in Sanskrit, for all the sense it made to the people in Hinkley.

An "arbitration proposal" is a letter suggesting to parties in a lawsuit that the case be decided by a judge. "Sanskrit" is an ancient language, and thus this is Ed's way of saying there is no way the plaintiffs could have understood the proposal since it was so poorly written.

She called us thieves. They're all listening to her. The whole thing is about to **fall apart**.

A "thief" is a person who steals things from others. If a plan "falls apart," it collapses, fails completely or self-destructs.

You're emotional, you're erratic. You say any god damn thing that comes into your head. You make this personal and it isn't.

If a person is "erratic," they are easily changeable or emotionally unstable. If a person makes their job "personal," they get too emotional about it, rather than seeing it as just part of work.

Binding arbitration isn't all that different from a trial. It's overseen by a judge, and evidence is presented in much the same way.

If something is "binding," it must be obeyed.

"To oversee" a trial is to direct or guide it.

No jury and no appeal.

In binding arbitration, one judge makes the last, final decision!

Which is it? There's a big difference there. ::

I wouldn't like to speculate at this point.

"To speculate" is to try and make an educated guess about something (Here, how much money PG&E will have to pay).

Those of you about to leave, I'd like you to keep this date in mind. 1978. That's the year of the Love Canal controversy.

"To keep something in mind" is to think about it. Love Canal is the name of famous town in which many people got cancer because of a horrible case of industrial pollution.

Is this a big decision? Absolutely. But I do not believe that this is a sell out. This is the best shot of getting everyone some money now.

A "sell out" is the act of agreeing to do something for the money, even if it is against a person's principles or beliefs. Your "best shot" is your best opportunity to try and do something.

This still leaves us about 150 short. :: Oh shit.

One way of saying 150 below the minimum number needed.

We'll have to go door to door.

If a salesman goes "door to door," they knock at every house in a neighborhood in order to talk to the people inside.

I'll give you some money for a cab if you want to go there.

An alternative word for a taxi.

Charles Embry meets Erin in a Hinkley bar, and agrees to give her "the smoking gun" that will make the case.

I'll make a fresh pot.

A way of referring to newly made coffee.

Don't I know you? I had my eyes on you.

If you have your "eyes on a person," you're watching them carefully.

Would it be important if I told you that when I worked at the Hinkley plant I destroyed documents?

Official forms or papers that can be used to prove something.

Oh, you fucking piece of crap with no signal!

If a machine is a “piece of crap,” it is of very poor quality or does not work well (Crap is another word for shit). In this case, a “signal” is the dial tone or noise that shows that a phone is working.

First I thought he was trying to kill me, but then I thought he was trying to pick me up. But why would he use that as his line?

“To pick up” a woman is to try and seduce or attract her so that she will have sex, or at least go out with you later. A “line” is a question or set of words that a person may use in a particular social situation.

Go back and see if he’ll make a declaration.

A good word for an official statement or announcement.

You’re good at talking people into things...

Don’t pepper him with questions. Don’t do that.

“To talk a person into doing” something is to convince them to do it, even if they didn’t want to before. “To pepper” a person with questions is to ask them a lot of questions, one quickly after the other.

My cousin passed away yesterday. He had kidney tumors, no colon. His intestines were eaten away.

“To pass away” is a gentle way of saying to die. Your “colon” and “intestines” are parts of your stomach and digestive system.

Doctor’s masks.

The coverings that doctor’s wear over their mouths when they perform surgery, in order to prevent the spread of germs.

I was working in the compressor and out of nowhere the supervisor calls me and says “I’m going to give you a shredder machine...”

The “compressor” is a part of an industrial plant or factory. When something happens “out of nowhere,” it happens totally unexpectedly. A “supervisor” is a boss who manages many people within a company. A “shredder machine” cuts paper into tiny little pieces.

.....and send you to the warehouse to get rid of the documents stored there.

A “warehouse” is a large building used to store things that are usually later sold. “To get rid of” something is to throw it out or eliminate it.

A lot of dull stuff. Vacation schedules and the like.

“Dull” is a good alternative word to boring. “And the like” is an interesting way of saying “and things like that.”

But there were a few memos about the holding ponds, the water in them, and readings from the test wells. Stuff like that.

A “memo” is a short note from one person to another. A “holding pond” is a small body of water, and “readings” from the pond are test results concerning the levels of pollution or contamination it has.

You were to destroy those? :: That’s right. Of course, as it turns out, I wasn’t a very good employee.

“As it turns out” is a alternative way of saying “in the end.”

We completely forgot your birthday this year, and seeing how good you’ve been to me, it seems like a terrible oversight.

An “oversight” is a failure to remember or notice something.

634. They’re all signed. Each and every one. :: Holy shit!

A crude but truly great way of expressing emotion such as surprise or disbelief (Holy means sacred, pure or connected to God).

I’m paraphrasing here, but it says, yes, the water is poisonous, but it would be better for all involved if this matter was not discussed with the neighbors.

“To paraphrase” another person’s written or spoken words is to summarize them, or to make them shorter and easily understood.

How did you do this? :: Well, seeing as I have no brains or legal expertise.... I just went out and performed sexual favors. 634 blow jobs in 5 days.

A “blow job” is a common slang phrase for the act of oral sex on a man.

Erin and Ed enjoy the rewards of their efforts.

It’s the last office down the corridor on the right.

A “corridor” is a hallway, usually in a big office or building.

I would rather walk her through this in person. There’s some things I want to show her. Visual aids and documents.

“To walk a person through” a process is to slowly explain it in detail. To communicate with someone “in person” is to be them when you are talking, as opposed to on the phone or through TV or other media.

What’s up? :: I have your bonus check.

“What’s up?” is an excellent way of greeting a person and asking them what is new in their life. A “bonus check” is an extra payment at work for having done an excellent job in the past.

The figure's not exactly what we discussed.

A "figure" is another word for number.

After careful consideration, I felt that figure was not **appropriate**.

"Appropriate" is an important word meaning correct, suitable or right.

Do you know why people think all lawyers are back-stabbing, blood-sucking scumbags?

A truly great insult! If a person is "back-stabbing," they are willing to even hurt their friends if they can benefit from it (i.e....without moral principles). A person who is "blood-sucking" is also horrible and willing to do anything bad to help themselves. Finally, a "scumbag" is a disgusting, immoral person (Scum is the filth on bathroom tile).

I can't believe you're doing this to me now, when I'm up to my ass in Kettleman plaintiffs, which looks like double the amount we had in Hinkley.

If a person is "up to their ass" in something, they have so much of it that they may be overwhelmed. In this case, "Kettleman plaintiffs" are people suing in another pollution case (in the town of Kettleman) that Ed and Erin are working on.

You expect me to get these people to trust me with their lives...and the whole time you're screwing me.

In this context, "to screw" a person is to mistreat them or abuse them (In other contexts, to screw means to have sex).

It is not about the number. It is about how my work is valued in this firm.

This is Erin's way of saying that she doesn't care how much she is paid, but she does want to be appreciated for working so hard.

Do they teach beauty queens how to apologize? Because you suck at it.

A "beauty queen" is a woman who wins a beauty contest, such as the Miss Wichita contest. If a person "sucks" at something, they are very bad at it. This verb is very slangy, crude and common.

Erin and Ed have seven other cases pending...

If a case is "pending," it is still waiting to be decided or settled.

Erin Brockovich

Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion

1. Erin is a complicated person; What are her good features, and what are her bad ones?
2. Ed gets 40% of whatever his clients win in a lawsuit; Is that way too much, or does that seem fair? How would it work in your country?
3. Can you think of similar situations in your country in which a big company has been caught poisoning the air or water? What happened? What *should* have happened?
4. What does Erin originally think of lawyers? How does this film portray lawyers?
5. What are the various people or institutions in a society that can try and prevent the kind of tragedy that took place in Hinkley?

