

The Station Agent

(Comedy) (2003)

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Major Characters

Fin McBride.....Peter Dinklage

A simple, nice and lonely dwarf (4 feet, 5 inches tall), who moves from a New Jersey City to an abandoned railroad station in a tiny New Jersey town. He moves after he inherits the station and surrounding land from the owner of the model train store where he had worked for many years.

Joe Oramas.....Bobby Cannavale

A young man in the town where Fin moves to, who sells hot dogs from his father's catering truck. He is determined to become friends with Fin even though at first, Fin prefers to be left alone.

Olivia Harris.....Patricia Clarkson

An attractive divorced women in her early 40s who is struggling in life because her son had died in an accident two years earlier, who becomes friends with Fin and Joe.

Emily.....Michelle Williams

A young and sexy librarian who becomes attracted to Fin.

Cleo.....Raven Goodwin

A sweet African-American girl who tries to find out about Fin's life.

Plot Summary

This film is the story of Finbar McBride, a simple, nice and lonely dwarf who decides to move into an abandoned railway depot in a small New Jersey town. Fin inherited the depot and surrounding land from his boss at the model train store where he worked, after he suddenly died of a heart attack. Fin's life seems to be dominated by three things; The fact that he is a 4 foot 5 inch dwarf and thus other people are always fascinated by his size, his love and fascination with everything related to trains, and perhaps most of all, the fact that he is a lonely person, although he would never admit that to anyone, including himself.

In any case, after arriving in New Foundland New Jersey, Fin quickly meets a series of people who are attracted to him, including Joe, the young hot dog seller who is managing his father's food truck, and Olivia, the divorced older woman whose son had died a couple years earlier. Fin, Joe and Olivia become an unlikely trio, but perhaps it works out because they're all looking to end their loneliness. Fin also finds himself involved with Emily, the sexy teenager who works at the library, and Cleo, the sweet African-American girl who wants him to speak in front of her class. Between the four of them, Fin discovers that it's hard to stay alone for long, and that in fact, it's probably for the best that he doesn't even try.

Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

Fin's moves to New Foundland, New Jersey for some peace and quiet, only to meet Joe the day after he arrives.

Dr. Klaus will be by to pick up those three 629 Pullmans and 630 Observation.
The names of models of trains, and here, more specifically, small model trains.

What do we have on the board today?
In this case, a chalk board, which is a green board on which notes are written in white chalk.

Hey, buddy, where's Snow White? Sleepy's over there.
"Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" is a famous children's fairy tale about a beautiful princess. "Sleepy" is the name of one of the seven dwarfs, or tiny people, with whom Snow White is friends.

Paper or plastic?...Cash or charge?
Common words in a grocery store. Groceries can be put in bags made of either paper or plastic, and you can pay for them with cash or charge, which means charged to a credit card.

I was on the hood.
The "hood" of a car is the metal cover that goes over the engine.

Here I was hanging out shooting this.
In this case, to "hang out" from the side of a train is to be holding on to the train while your body is leaning away from it.

The scenery was really **spectacular**.
"Scenery" is the view of the countryside as one drives by, and if something is "spectacular," it is sensational or exceptionally great.

It was not extremely windy, but the smoke did bellow.
"To billow" is to rise in waves or rings.

You're one of those memorable people.
If a person is "memorable," they stay in your mind and are not easy to forget.

I brought you down here to discuss your inheritance.
"To discuss" something is to talk about it. A person's "inheritance" is the money, property and other valuable things that one gets from a person who has died, usually as instructed in the dead person's will.

In his will, Henry bequeathed to you some property in New Foundland, New Jersey.

A “will” is a legal document in which a person tells to whom he wants to give his property after he has died. “To bequeath” is a legal verb meaning to give or pass on to, after dying.

It’s about half an acre of land. It’s got an old train depot on it.

An “acre” is a piece of land about the size of 43,000 square feet.

A “train depot” is a small building where passengers would wait for the train to arrive.

I have an appraisal of the property for your records.

An “appraisal” is an official estimate of what a piece of property is worth.

A person’s “records” are the official papers or documents they keep.

What’s happening with the shop? :: The building’s been closed.

Gold and Spike will be closed and the inventory liquidated.

“Gold and Spike” is the name of the model train store where Fin worked (A “spike” is a pointed metal bar or large nail). “Inventory” is the contents that a store has in it, and if it is “liquidated,” it is quickly sold off, usually for a very low price.

This is all of course in accordance with the terms they drew up in Henry’s will.

If a plan is “in accordance with” a will, it follows the writing of the will.

The “terms” of a legal document are the exact points or instructions.

“To draw up” a legal document is to officially write it.

If everything goes as planned, no hitches or anything, these things take about six weeks.

A “hitch” is a small problem that delays progress.

I have some preliminary paperwork for you to sign.

“Preliminary” means initial, or presented at the very beginning.

“Paperwork” refers to official documents that need to be read and signed.

Let me tell ya, it’s pretty, but there ain’t nothing out there.

Note that “you”----> “ya” in rapid speech. “Ain’t” is common but very ungrammatical slang that replaces the conjugation of ‘to be.’ Don’t use it!

Holy shit! Hey, let me call you back.

A colloquial, interesting and vulgar way of expressing emotion such as surprise or anger (“Holy” means sacred or perhaps blessed by God).

Coffee con leche; Our special! You’ll love it.

In Spanish, this means “with milk” (Joe is Cuban-American and speaks some Spanish throughout the movie).

Hoboken? No shit? I lived in Manhattan, dude.

Hoboken is a big New Jersey city just outside of New York. "No shit?" is a crude but fun way of asking "Really; Is that true?" Manhattan is the famous center island of New York City. "Dude" is a very slangy word that is used to address people, and it is also used to mean 'guy.'

How much do I owe you for the coffee? :: It's a buck.

The most common alternative to dollar.

Is there a convenience store nearby? :: Down the road, about a mile and a half, on the right.

A "convenience store" is a small store that sells drinks and food (They are expensive, but more convenient and easier to shop at than a supermarket). A mile is a unit of measurement about 5,280 feet.

This is my pop's truck, by the way.

"Pop" is a colloquial word for dad or father.

I'm taking care of this shit for him. It's driving me crazy.

If a situation "drives you crazy," it is making you very upset or frustrated.

Can I give you a ride somewhere?

An important word for the act of transporting or carrying a person in a car or other vehicle.

Hey, hue hue!

A silly but still used way of attracting a person's attention.

Coffee con leche and sugar, coming up.

The words a waiter says when they are just about to bring the food.

Two packs of drum and some beef jerky.

Drum is brand name of chewing tobacco, and "beef jerky" is a type of salted dried beef that's eaten as a snack.

Fin meets Olivia in a most dangerous way, and soon both her and Joe become a steady part of his new life at the train depot.

I'm so sorry. I saw you and I tried to put my coffee con leche down and it spilled all over my ass.

If a liquid "spills," it falls out of its container (and often makes a mess).

No, I'm fine.

A common way of saying OK or possibly good.

I don't know, make some shit up! Call you back, bye!

"To make up" a story is to create from your mind, and then tell it as if it were true even though it isn't.

Hey Fin! Bro, you live here?

“Bro” is short for brother, and thus a slang word for a friend.

You want to go down to the Mill and grab a beer later?

“To grab” a beer is a common way of saying to get and drink one.
(The Mill Lane Tavern is the bar or tavern where Joe likes to drink).

How about if I get a six and we can have it right here?

In this context, “a six” is short for a six-pack of beer,
in which six cans of beer or soda are sold together.

I’m going for a walk. :: Cool, mind if I come along?

“Cool” is still a very popular way of saying good or excellent. “Do you mind if…” is a way of asking if somebody would be bothered or upset.

I need the exercise. I’m turning into a fat shit out here.

Joe’s crude way of referring to a fat person (Shit is one of Joe’s favorite nouns, used by him to refer to many types of things in general).

I prefer to go alone.

Note the importance of the verb “to prefer” if a person is trying to be polite or diplomatic (“I want” would be seen as rude in this context).

This is for you. A sort of house-warming, slash, sorry-I-ran-you-off-the-road gift.

A “house warming” gift is given to a person who has just bought or moved into a new home. “Slash” is the ‘/’ symbol, but it is used as a way of linking lots of different ideas, especially when piecing together words to make a very long adjective, as is done above. “To run a person off the road” is to force them off, probably with a car.

Do you have any glasses, or we could just swig from the bottle. :: I have mugs.

“To swig” a drink is to drink it from the bottle, often in a messy or crude manner. A “mug” is a type of cup.

When I was 19, I actually slept with a guy because he rolled his own cigarettes.

“To sleep with” a person is to have sex with them.

Cheers.

The words you say when you want to make a toast, by raising your glass and gently touching the other person’s glass.

My phone’s disconnected.

If a phone is “disconnected,” it is not plugged in.

He’s not my husband right now. We’re separated.

If a husband and wife are “separated,” they are no longer living together, but they are not yet divorced and are legally still married.

How did you find this place? :: I inherited it.

“To inherit” a property is to receive it from a person who has died.

I’ve been here for six weeks. I don’t get two words out of her, you’re here 24 hours, and it’s sleep-over time.

Joe’s silly way of saying how impressed he is that Fin was able to get Olivia to sleep over night at his house, so soon after they met.

She bought me a bottle of bourbon.

A type of liquor.

Something’s ringing. She left her phone—sweet!

Note that a phone “rings” when somebody calls. “Sweet” has become a common colloquial way of saying excellent, or expressing satisfaction.

Come on, man, you gotta tell me what happened.

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

She’s got that sexy, smart, older woman thing going. That’s nice.

Note that “thing” can be used after almost any adjective (or group of adjectives), to describe a general personal quality or situation.

Hey, you’re the man!

Silly but popular words that are used to congratulate a guy for having accomplished something impressive (In this case, to Fin, for apparently having charmed or seduced Olivia so quickly).

I had a client down here, so I thought I’d drop by.

A “client” is a customer for a professional, such as a lawyer or architect. “To drop by” is to come by a person’s house, often without announcing that you are coming over.

I actually got to run.

If a person has “got to run,” they have to leave in a hurry.

Can I help you? :: Can I check this book out?

“To check out” a book from the library is to borrow it.

I need a proof of address, so if you could bring in a piece of mail, then I could give you a card.

“Proof of address” is evidence, such as a gas bill, that you live in the house or apartment that you claim you live in.

Sorry about last night—I overstayed my welcome.

If you “overstay your welcome” at a friend’s house, you stay longer than your friend wanted you to stay. A useful expression.

Gorgeous Franks.

Note the sign on Joe's dad's truck can mean different things. "Gorgeous" means beautiful, but "Frank" could be either a person's name or an alternative word for a hot dog.

Hey Fin, I'm taking off. Manana, baby.

In this context, "to take off" means to leave (Manana is a Spanish word that means tomorrow). "Baby" is a common way of addressing people, although usually just boyfriends or girlfriends.

Fin and Cleo become causal friends, and Joe learns more than he ever thought he would want to about the wonderful world of trains.

The wheels in the trains are called the trucks.

Something that few people know!

What grade are you in? :: I'm finished with school.

A student's 'grade' is the level they are in at school (A typical 8 year old is probably in 4th or 5th grade).

Are you a midget? :: No.

A "midget" is an abnormally small person, though this word is a bit dated and offensive to some (*Dwarf* is now considered a better choice).

Hey, Joe! :: What's up, fellas?

"What's up" is a common way of greeting a person while asking them what's new in life. "Fellas" is a colloquial way of referring to group of male friends (A fellow is a British word for a guy).

How's your old man? :: Doing better.

A slangy and somewhat dated expression for a person's father.

How long is he going to be out of commission, man?

If a person is "out of commission," they are not able to work, often because they are sick. "Man" is a common filler word that is added to the beginning and end of sentences.

Holy shit, look at that!

A fun little expression to express surprise or other emotion ("Holy" means sacred or perhaps blessed by God).

That's fucking mini-me.

A well known midget in the film *Austin Powers* (starring Mike Myers).

Shut the fuck up! Shut up!

Note the addition of "the fuck" in the middle of a phrasal verb expresses anger, frustration or other emotion. Crude but useful.

Why don't you ease up, Joe?

"To ease up" is to relax, or to stop being so upset or nervous.

You should bring your little buddy.

A common alternative word to friend.

Take it easy, Joe.

A common expression which often means calm down, though in the right context, it's just a way of saying goodbye.

This one's on the house, if you do me one favor.

If a drink is "on the house," it is free as a gift from the bar.

What do you do for fun? :: I don't.

The question is a way of getting to know a person, and the response is Olivia's clever way of saying she is not interested in having fun.

You're not exactly pleasant towards me.

An alternative word for agreeable or possibly nice.

Totally boring. Mind if I hang out a while?

To "hang out" with a person is to pass time together with them.

You're gonna be so happy you did this. Trust me.

Note that "going to" ---> "gonna" in rapid speech. "Trust me" is what a person often says if they want to convince a person that they will do what they have promised to do, or in this case, the reality of a situation will be just as they said it would be.

My feet are killing me.

One way of saying that your feet really hurt a lot.

You've never ridden an Amtrak train? That's **weird**.

Amtrak is the official train system of the US government. "Weird" is an excellent word meaning strange or bizarre.

He's driving me nuts, but he's better, thanks.

If something is "driving you nuts," it's making you crazy.

Yeah, really, we have got to give thanks.

In this context, "to give thanks" is to pray or thank God, in this case for having enough food to eat at a meal.

Please let my dad heal, because he's driving me fucking crazy....Amen.

"To heal" is to get better over time after being injured or getting sick. Note that Joe's favorite adverb is 'fucking,' which is very crude but common. "Amen" is the way Christians and Jews end their prayers, as a way of thanking God or expressing approval for what has just been said.

A train of the month club?

Note there are many types of similar clubs, with the *Book of the Month* club being the most famous.

There are people called train chasers. They follow a train and they film it.

A subculture of people who spend much of their time following trains or riding on them, often to travel on them, or sometimes to film them ("To chase" something is to run after it if it is trying to run away).

I gotta split...My dad can't find his medications.

Note that "have got to" ----> "gotta" in rapid speech. "To split" is a slangy way of saying to leave (To split an object is to break it in two pieces).

Bon Appetit.

A widely used French expression which literally means 'good appetite,' and is used as a way of telling people to enjoy their meal.

We don't have to talk, we can just eat. I'm cool with that.

To be "cool with" something is a slangy way of saying you're happy to do that.

What's this called again? :: Walking the right of way.

In train subcultures, this means to walk down the middle of the railroad tracks.

You've got to get over the bar thing, dude. Seriously.

"To get over" something is to no longer have negative attitudes toward it. In this case, "the bar thing" is Joe's slangy way of referring to Fin's strong dislike of bars. "Dude" is an overused and very slangy way to address people (It means guy, though young people use it even for women).

You want to see my spike collection.

A "spike" is a large nail or pointed metal object (Many spikes are found on trains and train tracks).

My pop was up coughing all night. He kept me up.

In this context, "to keep a person up" is to prevent them from sleeping.

Hey, man, seriously, why don't you ever sit in the lounge?

A "lounge" is a sitting area with chairs and tables, though unlike in this scene, it is usually found inside, next to a bar or restaurant or in a hotel.

You timed, me? That's cold, bro.

"To time" a person is to see how long it takes them to do something. In this context, "cold" means cruel or mean.

Hey, can we get some sodas?

A "soda" is a common word for soft drinks such as Coke and Pepsi.

Fin and Joe learn more about Olivia's sad and complicated life, and Emily becomes yet one more person attracted to Fin.

This is Joe reporting live from the inside of Gorgeous Frank's hot-dog emporium.

An "emporium" is a store, commercial center or place of trade.

Olivia, Scorsese and Coppola here. We're done with the movie and we want to screen it .

"To screen" a movie is to show it, often for the first time in front of a small audience (Martin Scorsese and Frances Ford Coppola are famous movie directors).

We can either do it at Fin's little pathetic hovel of a hole, or we can do it at your beautiful home with your beautiful self.

"Pathetic" is a strong adjective meaning extremely bad, or deserving of pity. A "hovel" is a small, dirty house.

There's liquor in that funny little cabinet in the corner. I'll be right back.

A cabinet is a piece of furniture for storing things like bottles. Note that "I + contracted form of will" is the most common form for expressing an immediate future.

I was just talking about the view. :: **Bullshit!**

A crude but excellent word for lies, half-truths or other nonsense.

How can you not have a garlic press?!

A kitchen tool that is used to crush garlic, which is a popular herb.

It's a nice house. David bought it as a get-away place.

A "get-away place" is a vacation home where people go to get away from the problems of their everyday life.

Can you come up here and talk? Seriously, this sucks.

A crude but very common slang verb. If a situation "sucks," it is very bad, unpleasant or frustrating.

Trains are really cool. So are horses.

The most common colloquial word for good, excellent, etc.

I was really angry...about being a dwarf.

The preferred word for a very short person (like Fin).

It's really funny how different people see me and treat me, because I'm actually a really simple and boring person.

"To treat" a person is behave in a certain way around them (In this case, to be attracted to Fin just because he is short).

He fell off the monkey bar.

Metal bars that children swing on at a playground.

Hey, your Olivia's ex. I just saw your picture in the kitchen.

In this context, an "ex" is a way of saying former or ex-husband.

I think Olivia's sleeping. We tore it up last night.

A very slangy way of saying to have a loud and good time, as if at a wild party.

I didn't feel like talking. :: Yeah, I got that much.

Note that here, "to get" means to understand.

I'd like to know what the hell is going on.

"The hell" is added to certain sentences to express emotion such as anger, frustration, etc. (It is especially common in Wh questions).

I came all the way down here because you won't pick up the God damn phone.

Another crude filler term used to express anger, frustration, etc.

No you're not. If you were sorry, then you'd come.

Note the correct use of the subjunctive tense!

Olivia's ex is an **uptight** white guy.

"Uptight" is a negative adjective that is used to describe a person who is tense and nervous, often in a conservative or even snobby manner.

Can I ask you a personal question?

The type of question that involves asking people about their personal lives, most often concerning sex or money.

Yes, with a regular sized chick.

A stupid but common slang word for a woman.

I just need you to fill that out.

"To fill out" a form is to write requested information in the blank spaces.

A nice chin? Fucking **weird**.

A person's "chin" is the part of their face just below their mouth.

"Weird" is an excellent word for strange, odd or bizarre.

She had to see us, right?

Note that in this case, "had to" functions as a verb of logical deduction (i.e....she drove right by us, so she must have seen us!).

My delivery boy is out of the store right now, so it's gonna be a couple of hours.

A "delivery boy" works for a store and delivers or transports goods to customers. Note that "going to" --> "gonna" in rapid speech.

You're getting a jump on happy hour.

"To get a jump on" something is to start doing it early. "Happy hour" is an early evening time when bars sell drinks for cheaper than usual.

You're like the old guy in the movie who does the telegraph thing.

A "telegraph" was an old 19th century technology in which messages were sent over a wire.

Oh my God, he's such a prick.

A very negative and crude word for an asshole, jerk, creep etc (Literally, a slang word for a penis).

I was going to tell him today. He's probably going to freak out.

If a person "freaks out," they become extremely upset, nervous or angry.

You can have some of my fries.

A common way of referring to French fries (McDonald's style potatoes).

Thanks for hanging out. :: Sure.

"To hang out" with a person is to spend time with them.

Fuck you, Chris. I'm leaving!

The most common and vulgar insult in all of English!

This is none of your business, alright?

If something is "none of your business," it is considered personal and something that you should not be trying to find out about.

Freak!

A powerful and generally negative word to describe a very strange or bizarre person, especially one whose behavior is totally abnormal.

Hey, what's up?

A way of asking "What happening?" or "What's new" when you see somebody for the first time in a long time.

By the time I called the mill, you were gone already. You got to get a phone, bro.

Note that when people refer to phones, they are more and more frequently referring to wireless cell phones.

What the fuck, man? I said I was sorry. What more do you want from me?

Crude but common colloquial English. "What the fuck" is a way of expressing surprise, anger or other emotion, and "man" is a common filler word added to the beginning or end of sentences.

Emily and Olivia go through hard times, Fin accepts to teach at Cleo's class, and in the end, Joe, Olivia and Fin show that life is with people.

I was just about to knock. I'm sorry.

To be "just about to" do something is to be on the verge of doing it, or almost ready to do it. "To knock" is the verb you use when you gently tap on a door to see if anyone is there to answer it.

Are you going to fix this up? I suppose so.

"To fix up" a house is to spend time and money making it a lot nicer than it is.

Chris can be such an asshole when he gets angry like that.

A crude insult word for creep, jerk, prick, etc.

Everybody is freaking out at my house about me being pregnant.

In this case, to "freak out" is to get emotionally upset.

I was going to move in with Chris.

"To move in with" a person is to start to live with them.

So did the conductor guy used to live here?

A "conductor" is the person who collects tickets on a train and makes sure the passengers are OK.

The station agent worked in here.

A person who sells train tickets and helps passengers in the train depot or station.

They cut hair. :: Really, are you going to open a salon?

A "hair salon" is a shop where people go to have their hair cut.

Aren't you a little young to be retired? ::

No, dwarfs retire early. A common fact.

If a person is "retired," they have decided to no longer work (usually because of old age, but some people, like rich athletes, retire in their 20s!)

You just show up and tell me this?

"To show up" is to arrive, often at a person's house without calling first.

You know me 17 fucking years and you have no clue!

If a person "has no clue," they are totally ignorant or don't understand something (Here, Olivia's ex-husband doesn't understand why she would be so upset that he would choose to have a baby with another woman).

How could you do this? Just go to hell!

A very strong insult (but not as crude as 'fuck you').

You're not a child. Get off the fucking porch and leave me alone!

A "porch" is a covered outdoor area next to a building, often with chairs and tables.

Here I am! Take a look!

One way of telling a person to look at something.

“For a good time, call Joe.”

This is normally the type of message that a prostitute would write.

It was called the Tom Thumb.

Tom Thumb was the name of the first American train, and the name of a famous mythical character that was the size of a dwarf, like Fin.

A long time ago, most people never left their towns because travelling was hard.

A “town” is another word for a village or very small city.

Jacob, come with me. :: Such a **jerk**.

An excellent word for a person who is acting in a very annoying manner, as well as more generally, a creep, moron, idiot, etc...

They’re both **cool**. Trains and blimps.

“Cool” is still the most common slang word for good, excellent, etc.

A “blimp” is a large gas powered balloon that is used as transportation.

Anybody for dessert? :: I’m **stuffed**.

If a person is “stuffed,” they have probably eaten too much and are no longer hungry.

You can go down to the library and ask that little hottie.

A silly slang word for a sexy woman.

She’s already a fantasy; Glasses off, hair down, books flying.

A “fantasy” is a dream or image of what a person would desire or like to happen. In this case, they’re talking about a sexual fantasy with Emily the librarian, since normally, librarians have a very conservative reputation.

The Station Agent

Some Potential Questions for ESL Class Discussion

1. Why is Fin such an attractive character?
2. How hard would it be to be a dwarf? Are there other disabilities you or those you know have, that are similar in terms of how they effect other people?
3. Do trains interest you? Is it surprising to you that there is a train chasing subculture?
4. Trains, blimps or horses; Which is better?
5. Who is the loneliest between Fin, Joe and Olivia?
6. Is it easier to meet people in small towns?
7. Of all the people that Fin meets in New Foundland, who interests you the most?
8. What did you like and not like about this movie?