

Kissing Jessica Stein

(Romance) (2002)

© 2002 by Raymond Weschler

Major Characters

- Jessica Stein.....Jennifer Westfeldt
A smart, pretty and somewhat neurotic 28 year old single Jewish New Yorker who can't find a good man to marry, in part because she is such a perfectionist that she doesn't think any are good enough.
- Helen Cooper.....Heather Juergensen
A very free spirited and liberal bisexual woman who puts out a personal ad asking any interested women if they would be interested in a friendship, or something more serious.
- Judy Stein.....Tovah Feldshuh
Jessica's mom, who is desperate to get her daughter married off to any young Jewish man who happens to be available.
- Josh Meyers.....Scott Cohen
Jessica's boss at the newspaper where she works as a copy editor, who she had also dated in high school.
- Joan.....Jacki Hoffman
Jessica's friend and co-worker who's pregnant with her first child.
- Roland.....Tibor Feldman
Helen's gay friend who encourages her to pursue her new relationship with Jessica.
- Martin.....Michael Mastro
Helen's other gay friend who feels that Helen should not pursue a relationship with Jessica because Jessica isn't really gay.

Plot Summary

Jessica Stein is a smart, pretty and typically neurotic 28 year old copy editor living in New York City who can't find a decent man to marry. She goes out with lots of them, but unfortunately, she is also a somewhat crazy perfectionist who is never satisfied with the men she meets. Her mom would be satisfied if she would just marry any guy who is Jewish, but Jessica is looking for more.

One day Jessica decides to think a little bit differently, and thus she decides to answer a personal ad from a woman who is looking for "friendship, or possibly more." Jessica has always considered herself heterosexual, but she is curious to

see what it would be like to at least go out with another woman. She finally meets Helen, who is an assistant director at a modern art gallery. Jessica is both attracted to her and horrified that she could actually find herself in a lesbian relationship. Helen, who is a liberal, attractive, and adventurous bisexual woman, does her very best to slowly convince Jessica that there is nothing to fear, and soon enough, Jessica and Helen are just another crazy couple.

Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

Jessica continues her hopeless search for the prefect man.

For the **sin** we have committed is **gluttony**....and the sin we have committed by **succumbing** to **despair**.

The words of a Jewish rabbi: A “sin” is a crime against God, and “gluttony” is the act of eating, drinking or consuming too much. “To succumb” is to surrender or give in to, and “despair” is great sadness.

....and for the sin we have committed by **rashly** judging others.

To do something “rashly” is to do it carelessly or without reflection.

The blue **yarmulke**.

A small cap worn by religious Jews.

Absolutely **gorgeous**. That’s Ben Feldman, **M&A**, J.P. Morgan.

“Gorgeous” means very beautiful. In business, “M&A” stands for Mergers and Acquisitions, or the process by which companies buy each other (J.P. Morgan is a very big and well-known bank).

Mother, would you stop feeding her **perfectionism**?

The quality of always wanting everything to be absolutely perfect.

I didn’t care for him.

“I didn’t really like him.”

He had no **sex appeal**.

An important quality that refers to how sexy or attractive a person is, as seen by others.

Would you shut up? I’m **atoning**!

“To atone” for a sin or other bad behavior is to do something good that will make up for it, or perhaps to ask God for forgiveness.

Howard, **define** “**nonplussed**.” :: Speechless, **perplexed**.

“To define” a word is to explain what it means. “Nonplussed” does indeed mean speechless, often because of shock or great confusion. If a person is “perplexed,” they are uncertain or confused.

That cellist with the thing.

A person who plays a cello, which is a large stringed musical instrument.

You're glowing. Are you thrilled?

If a person is glowing, they are showing great happiness and energy.

If a person is "thrilled," they are very excited and happy.

Deep-seated; Who knew?

If a belief is "deep-seated," it is deeply held or firmly established.

This profile; You gutted it!

A "profile" is an article that spends considerable time describing the life and personality of a particular person. "To gut" a piece of writing is to greatly reduce it in size, perhaps even eliminating some critical parts.

It was sappy and long-winded. You practically went down on the guy.

If an article is "sappy," it's too sweet, sentimental or emotional. If it is "long-winded," it is too wordy or takes up too much space. "To go down" on a person is a slangy way of saying to perform oral sex on them.

He's one of the great directors of our time;

I think he merits a little praise in the lead.

"To merit" something is to deserve it. "To praise" a person is to express a favorable or positive judgement about them. In this case, "the lead" of an article is its opening paragraph.

It's an article, not a puff-piece. :: It's a tribute!

A "puff-piece" is a silly or not serious article that is often written just to say nice or superficial words about somebody. A "tribute" is the act of showing great respect or affection for what a person has accomplished.

I proposed to Rach!

"To propose" to a person is to ask them to marry you.

It is not inertia alone that is responsible for relationships repeating themselves...

"Inertia" is the force in nature that keeps things moving at the same speed, or keeps things that are without motion staying that way.

...incredibly monotonous and unrenewed....

If something is "monotonous," it is boring because it is the same thing, repeated over and over.

It is shyness before any new experience...with which one does not think oneself able to cope.

More words of poetry: "To cope" with something is to be able to accept or survive it, or perhaps to deal with it.

Only someone who excludes nothing, not even the most unenigmatic, will live the relation to another as something alive.

“To exclude” something is to prevent it from entering, or to keep it separate. If something is “enigmatic,” it is mysterious or hard to understand (but *unenigmatic* is not a real word).

It was so bold of you to come up to me at the gym.

If a person is “bold,” they are brave or fearless. “To come up to” a person is to approach them. A “gym” is a large room for various indoor sports, from basketball to lifting weights.

I thought I’d finally give it a shot.

“To give it a shot” is to try something, even if it is difficult or risky.

Sometimes you seem so focused on your work-out.

“To focus” on something is to concentrate on it. A “work-out” is a period of time devoted to serious exercise, such as jogging or biking.

That’s the whole gestalt of the gym thing.

A useful German word that refers to the entire whole, as opposed to the individual parts. The above sentence is a slangy way of saying “That is why people go the gym.”

It’s so narcissistic and shallow. I think we all try to maintain a certain anonymity while we’re there.

If a person is “narcissistic,” they are often only concerned with their own selves, and especially their own beauty. If a person is “shallow,” they only care about superficial things such as physical appearance. “To maintain” something is to keep it in a certain condition, and “anonymity” is the state of not being known or recognized.

I really get a high from all those endorphins pumping.

“To get a high” is to have a feeling of intense well-being or happiness. “*Endorphins*” (note correct spelling) are chemicals or proteins that are naturally in the brain that can make you feel better. If a chemical is “pumping” through your body, it is travelling through your bloodstream.

I’ll have a frozen strawberry margarita with salt. :: I see great minds think alike.

A “margarita” is an alcoholic drink made with crushed ice and salt.

A “great mind” refers to a very smart or brilliant person.

We split the salad, but as I recall, you ate a little bit more, including more of the arugula, which is one of the more expensive greens.

“To split” a salad is to divide it between two or more people. “To recall” is to remember, “arugula” is an herb used in salads, and in this case, “greens” refer to various green and leafy vegetables.

That leaves your portion at \$42.73 and mine at \$18.44.

A “portion” is a share or part.

Normally, I'm a pretty self-defecating guy.

If a person is "self-deprecating," they are humble and enjoy making fun of themselves, but there is no such word as self-defecating, since "to defecate" means to shit or poop!

Let me tell you something; You're "phat."

A ridiculously slangy word for good, or more colloquially, cool.

I'd love to see you twirl in that dress.

"To twirl" is to spin around and around.

I think we're connecting, and I'd like to represent you as your accountant and your boyfriend.

In this case, when two people "connect," they feel romantically attracted to each other (Note that you can "represent" a person as their lawyer or accountant, but this is a ridiculous verb in the context of a boyfriend!).

Helen tires of boys and starts to look for a new female friend.

Ok, The New Yorker loves us. The reviewer is creaming in her pants.

The New Yorker is a very famous and well respected magazine.

If a person "creams in their pants," they are perhaps having an orgasm.

A very slangy, somewhat crude and dated expression.

Exhale please. His back has been like solid concrete all night.

"To exhale" is to breath out (which is what you need to do when you want to relax). "Concrete" is the rock-hard material used for making building, sidewalks and other structures.

Your boyfriend has on his serial killer face again.

A "serial killer" is a person who kills many people, often for sexual pleasure, until they are caught.

My cab driver is Ukrainian and my Slav is only so-so.

"Slav" refers to the major ethnic group of Eastern Europe that includes Russians and Ukrainians (But there is no such language as Slav, as implied here). If something is "so-so," it's ok or adequate, but not great.

I'll be in the 16th century archive, nude....with a book dangling precariously from my dick.

An "archive" is a place where public records or historical documents are stored. "Nude" is another word for naked. If something is "dangling precariously," it is hanging in such a way that it is likely to fall and become damaged. "Dick" is a common slang word for a penis.

A photo ID and a library card.

“ID” is short for identification, and usually refers to such documents as a driver’s license.

Jesus Christ! OK, I got it.

A common way to express great emotion such as anger or surprise.

Why are you always doing things to destroy our relationship?

:: We’re not in a relationship; We’re in a situation.

“To destroy” something is to ruin it, or even put it out of existence. Note that a “situation” is a very general word that can apply to any state of affairs, from a political battle to, as here, a complicated relationship.

How does this make you feel? Does it turn you on?

Does it make you hot? Does it minimize you as a man?

In this case, “to turn on” a person is to sexually excite them, and if they are “hot,” they are sexually excited. “To minimize” a person is to make them be or feel very small.

You go with your frisky self and you

don’t let Mr. Fuddy-duddy piss on your parade.

“Frisky” is an excellent adjective that means very playful and lively. A “fuddy-duddy” is a sour person who is angry and not interested in having a fun time. “To piss on a parade” is to try and destroy the good time that others are having. This expression is slangy and a bit silly.

Oscar Wilde is too flip, Emily Dickinson is too trite.

If a person is “flip,” they are not respectful or serious enough. If something is “trite,” it is unoriginal, cliché and lacking freshness. Wilde and Dickinson were famous writers.

It has to be just so. Maybe George Elliot.

“Just so” means just right or perfect (Eliot is another famous writer).

Why do I have to have a quote again? :: If it’s brainy enough, it will weed out the real unwashed masses.

A “quote” is the exact words of another person. If a quote is “brainy,” it is intelligent or sophisticated. “To weed out” people is to remove or exclude them from those who are better or more qualified. Here, “unwashed masses” refers to the vast majority of people, as opposed to the intellectual elite or highest social level.

If it’s well chosen, you come across as someone who understands the plight of your prospective partner, the plight of humanity.

“To come across” in a certain way is to appear to others like that.

A person’s “plight” is their great problem or difficult situation.

“Prospective” means likely to happen in the future.

And by couching that understanding in the words of a great writer, you appear sophisticated but earnest. Grounded, but hopeful.

“To couch” words in the quote of another is to surround them with that quote. “Sophisticated” means complicated, evolved or reflecting high education or intelligence. If a person is “earnest,” they are genuine and sincere. If they are “grounded,” they are stable and emotionally healthy.

Sweetie, you’re gonna have more pussy than you know what to do with.

“Sweetie” is a word of affection, like dear or honey. “Pussy” is a vulgar way of referring to women’s sexual organs, or more generally, sex.

Rilke is very profound.

Rilke is a famous poet. If a writer is “profound,” they are deep thinkers of important topics such as philosophy.

Why? :: Then you have access to all the bi-curious straight girls.

If you have “access” to a person, you’re able to approach or contact them. If a person is “bi-curious,” they are basically heterosexual but wonder what it would be like to have a homosexual encounter. “Straight” is a widely used slang term for a heterosexual person (the opposite of gay).

Jessica finds herself a little bi-curious, and soon concludes that there is no hope for her and men.

Virgin flesh!

A “virgin” is a person who has never had sex, and flesh refers to an animal’s muscle, fat or other soft parts of the body.

Professional EEUWS, VGL, NS, DWM, seeking same.

“To seek” something is to actively look for it (The various initials are used in personal ads---I’m not sure what the first part means, but the last five appear to be “non-smoker, divorced, white male”).

I’m not really versed in single scene acronyms.

To be “versed in” a topic is to be familiar with it. The “singles scene” refers to social events or places where single people look for partners. An “acronym” is actually a word formed from initials (such as NATO, but the letters in the entry above are not acronyms but simply abbreviations).

This guy used a quote. :: That is so cheesy.

“Cheesy” is a slang word for something that is in poor or ridiculous taste, or perhaps cliché or overly-used.

“It is shyness before....” **Blah, blah, blah**.

An excellent way to end a sentence when the listener has a general idea what is to follow, but the speaker doesn’t want to continue. It is often used for “etcetera” when people are naming those things on a long list.

How does he describe himself? “Esoteric quote man?”

If something is “esoteric,” it is only known to a few people.

OK if I bring a date tonight? :: Sure, the more the merrier.

In this case, a “date” is the person with whom you are going out socially.

“The more the merrier” is a way of saying that the more people there are at a particular event, the more people will enjoy themselves.

I’m looking for someone to mother a child with me; Would you be into that?

Although rare, note that “mother” can be used as a verb, meaning to give birth to, raise or nurture. If a person “is into” something, they are very interested in doing it.

Come on, it will be so adorable! :: You are totally loving this, aren’t you?

The most versatile phrasal verb in English, here meaning “please!”

Note that the stative verb to love is used here in the progressive tense.

I’m 160 pounds and I wake up vomiting. I have to live through someone.

“To vomit” is to throw up food. “To live through” another person is to enjoy your life by getting pleasure from their experiences.

It’s gonna be weird.

An excellent word meaning strange, odd or bizarre.

Hey, it’s Hel. Leave it at the beep.

A “beep” is the sound that an answering machine makes before allowing you to leave a message (This is Helen’s very slangy way of telling people to leave a message after the beep stops).

To tell you the truth, I’m hanging on by a thread here, and I could really use someone special.

If a person is “hanging on by a thread,” they are barely surviving in a very difficult situation.

Thank you all for not being freaks or morons or using words incorrectly. Bless you all.

A “freak” is a person who is extremely strange-looking or abnormal. It is a powerful word with a very negative connotation. A “moron” is an idiot or very stupid person. “Bless you” is a somewhat religious way of thanking a person, or more literally, asking God to treat that person well.

Tell me about it! Most people I meet at the salon are totally malcompetent.

“Tell me about it” is a way of telling a person that you completely agree with what they just said, and that you in fact have had experiences from your own life that support what they said. In this case, a “salon” is a shop or small business, such as a beauty salon for getting your hair cut.

“Incompetent” means unable to work or function effectively, but “malcompetent” is not a word (i.e....this is an incompetent speaker!)

I'm sorry; is this supposed to be a setup?

A "setup" is the arranged meeting of two people by others who feel that they might have the potential to become romantically involved.

We've all been through it. It's just a jungle out there.

"To go through" a situation is to experience it. "It's a jungle out there" is a way of saying it's very difficult out in the real world.

You have no trouble meeting people of your caliber.

"Caliber" refers to a person's level or degree of quality or excellence.

Stein, why don't you cut yourself a break.

"To cut a break" for a person is to bend the rules or treat them gently in order to make life easier for them.

You're clearly not open to it.

"To be open to" something is to be willing to try it.

How would you know? :: I do have a little history to draw from.

"To draw lessons from history," is to try to guess what is likely to happen in the future based on what has already taken place in the past.

In that time, you've insulted and dismissed a panoply of men based on facts as reductive as a linguistic misstep....

In this case, "to dismiss" a person is to not take them seriously.

A "panoply" of men is a wide variety of them. "Reductive" means reduced to, or unimportant. A "linguistic misstep" is the misuse of a word (such as malcompetent instead of incompetent).

....a different view from yours on going Dutch, a kind reaction to your legendary lateness, and a genuine interest in yoga.

"To go Dutch" on a date means that both partners share the bill or expenses. "Genuine" means sincere or real, and "yoga" is a type of Eastern meditation and body relaxation

I'm not much of a Nin fan, but I do feel that bit sums you up to a T, Stein.

Anais Nin was a well known writer. Here, a "bit" is a small piece of writing, and to "sum up" a person is to describe who they are. If you describe a person "to a T," you're showing them exactly as they are.

I don't think the problem is with these freaks and morons, as you put it.

In this case, "to put it" means to describe it, often with memorable words.

Jessica and Helen meet, have their first date, and slowly get to know each other in ways Jessica had never expected.

I was starting to get worried. I was starting to think that you weren't going to show at all.

Note that "to show" is a slangy way of saying to show up or arrive.

I've been trying to be a little less me, lately, but really, I'm still me, you see?

This is Jessica's way of saying that no matter how hard she tries, she doesn't think that she can be gay, or have a homosexual relationship.

Come on, you don't want to go to your dinner so frazzled.

If a person is frazzled, they are emotionally upset or extremely tired.

I missed my yoga class this morning and I'm not my usually centered self.

If a person is "centered," they are emotionally well balanced or stable.

I find it keeps me strong and energized and usually graceful.

If a person is "energized," they have a lot of energy, and if they are "graceful," they move with great charm, elegance or physical appeal.

I'm a terrible insomniac.

An "insomniac" is a person who has trouble falling asleep.

Don't decide right now. Let it marinate for a while.

If meat "marinates," it soaks in juice until it is tender, but if a person marinates an idea, they think about it over a period of time.

He wasn't funny. :: Oh, bummer.

A "bummer" is a good slang word for a bad piece of news or disappointment.

I think that's been my big thing.

"This has been what I think is most important."

Just funny-stupid, or funny-dopey, but not funny-witty or funny-ironic or funny-goofy, you know?

If a person is "dopey," they are silly or act in a foolish way. If a person is "witty," they are funny in a clever or intelligent way, and if they are "ironic," they use humor to be sarcastic or express irony. "Goofy" means funny in a completely ridiculous sort of way.

That's funny, but funny-tragic.

If something is "tragic," it is a source of great suffering.

That's awful. :: No, ugly doesn't do it for you.

"Awful" is a good alternative to horrible. If something "doesn't do it for you," it doesn't interest or excite you.

Could you give me a celebrity who falls into that category?

A "category" is a specific group or classification, in this case of famous people who are both sexy and ugly.

So we should settle the tab?

A slangy way of saying to pay a restaurant bill.

What color lipstick are you wearing? :: It's three different kinds; I blend.

"To blend" different types of make-up is to mix them together.

I start with MacVillGuam 3, which is a great base,
and I add the Prescriptive's Poodle on top.

A "base" is another word for foundation or most important part.
(The above sentence refers to different types of lipstick brands).

The moisture and the spray. It has the best texture.

"Moisture" is another word for wetness, and "spray" is tiny drops
of water that flies through the air. "Texture" refers to the feel that a
material has when it is touched, from smooth to rough.

And then I finish with Philosophy Supernatural Nude,
which is more of a... :: A glossy kind of thing?

"Glossy" refers to something with a smooth and bright surface, often
that reflects light (The first sentence refers to more types of lipstick).

It would look gorgeous on your complexion.

If something is "gorgeous," it is extremely beautiful, and a person's
"complexion" refers to the appearance of the skin on their face.

The blending thing is a little labor-intensive for me, you know?

If something is "labor-intensive," it requires a lot of work to finish.

I call Roland when I'm hungry, Steve when I'm bored and Greg when I'm horny.

"Horny" refers to a person who really wants to have sex.

I don't get sick. :: Oh, good system.

In this case, "system" refers to the immune system,
which helps people's bodies fight against disease.

Who doesn't do email? :: I hate computers. I object to them.

"To object" to something is to strongly dislike it, or to be offended by it.

Have you discussed this with your therapist?

:: There's too much on the agenda already.

A person's "therapist" is their psychologist. Here, an "agenda"
is the list of things that a person wants to accomplish.

Older, nothing to show for it, no kid or anything, why am I on the planet?

If you have "nothing to show for it," you've worked hard but have
gotten little in return for that work. This is Jessica's way of saying she
thinks her life until now has not turned out how she wanted it to.

I think, you know, they're just doing their thing.

If a person is just "doing their thing," they're just doing what they enjoy.

They don't do anything. They play the tambourine all day and ask for people's money.

A musical instrument that is like a small hand-held drum.

They have no goals. :: I think they have a pretty lofty goal.

If a person's goal or intent is "lofty," it is a serious, important or noble.

Spiritual enlightenment, happiness. :: They're weird, look at them!

"Spiritual enlightenment" refers to a thoughtful understanding of the spiritual or religious world. "Weird" means strange, odd or bizarre.

Some people smoke pot, some people bungee jump, some people chant.

"Pot" is a common slang word for marijuana. "To bungee jump" is to use a long flexible rope to jump off bridges or other tall structures. "To chant" is to sing the same group of words over and over again.

I'm not just out for me and my enlightenment. What they do is selfish.

If a person is looking for "enlightenment," they want great wisdom or insight, often about general subjects such as the meaning of life.

They are dealing with their stuff and the energy they put out to the universe. That's a lot more valuable than being miserable all the time.

"Stuff" is a very versatile word that means things in general, or in this case, emotional or spiritual energy. If a person is "miserable," they are extremely unhappy.

I'm saying that underneath all the neurosis, you may have a profound capacity for happiness that you're not allowing to exist.

"Neurosis" is an important word in psychology that refers to great anxiety and other mental or emotional problems. A "profound capacity" is one way of saying a deep or fundamental ability.

If you know yourself well, you can gauge how you're gonna react to something.

"To gauge" something is to estimate or measure it.

Helen grows a bit impatient as a nervous Jessica considers the issue of sex.

She didn't return any of my calls. I think she's devastated.

If a person is "devastated," they are extremely upset or in a state of complete chaos, confusion or destruction.

Glad there are no hard feelings.

If a person has "hard feelings," they are angry or upset over what has been said or done.

They're very sexy. They suit you.

If clothes "suit" a person, they fit or look good on them.

Can we cut to the chase for a sec? Just get the hard topics out of the way.

"To cut to the chase" is a slangy way of saying to go directly to the most important point without talking about other things first. A "sec" is short for a second.

Whenever I've thought about lesbianism in the past, I've always said "ew."

"Lesbianism" refers to homosexual relations between two women.

"Ew," which rhymes with blue, is a way of expressing disgust or a deep feeling of unpleasantness.

I've taken the liberty of getting some informational materials on the topic.

"Informational materials" are books, pamphlets or anything else that teaches people about a particular subject.

This one leaflet was particularly interesting to me. Lesbian Sex: Hot, Safe and Sane.

A "leaflet" is a small brochure or booklet.

I was surprised to learn that lesbians accessorize.

"To accessorize" is a rare verb which means to use various tools or accessories, in this case, such as sex toys like vibrators.

On page 11, I dog-eared it. They showed some of the hyper-tech lesbian accouterment.

"To dog-ear" a page is to bend the top corner over in order to mark your place in a book. "Hyper-tech" refers to very advanced technology, and "accouterments" refers to the tools, equipment or other accessories that people use when trying to make something easier or more enjoyable.

Wow! :: Gosh, how would this work?

"Wow" is a common way to express excitement, and "gosh" is one way of expressing surprise.

I think I would just strap that on. :: That's not fair. We should certainly trade off and share the load, in terms of giving and receiving.

"To strap on" something is to use a belt or holding device to make sure it stays close to your body. "To trade off" doing something is to take turns doing it, and to "share the load" is to share the responsibility of doing something, in this case of giving sexual pleasure.

That doesn't address the actual gross-out factor, if you will.

If a person is "grossed-out" by something, they are disgusted by it or it makes them very queasy or sick. A "factor" is any force or condition that leads to a result, in this case the result of Jessica being made sick by the thought of engaging in lesbian sex.

No offense! :: None taken.

An exchange where one person says something that could be seen as offensive and the other assures them that they were in fact not offended.

Let's not put the cart before the horse with all the high-tech.

An expression which suggests a person is irrationally doing one thing before they should be doing another (A "cart" is a two-wheeled vehicle that is often pulled by a horse).

I have always preferred the standard organic old-fashioned way.

Let's face it. It's the other stuff that works for women anyway, right?

In this case, "organic" means completely natural, without devices or toys.

"Let's face it" is a common way to suggest one should accept the truth.

Cheers.

This is used as a toast when drinking, for encouragement or applause.

Is this with tongue? :: I think we should play it by ear.

"To play it by ear" is to let a situation just occur over time and then decide what to do, instead of planning everything out in advance.

So I figure if we keep going like this, we'll get there in like two weeks or so.

"To figure" is a widely used verb meaning to think or believe.

It's not working out.

If a relationship is not "working out," it is not going well.

She's a cock-tease! I mean, a tease. :: A poon tease.

A "cock-tease" is a crude word for a woman who likes to attract or seduce men, but then will refuse to have sex with them (A cock is a vulgar word for a penis). "Poon" is a rare and crude term for women's sex organs.

She's nervous and neurotic and straight, and not that into it.

A person who is "neurotic" is often very anxious, with lots of mental or emotional problems, and a person who is "straight" is not gay. If a person is "into" something, they are really interested in it or enjoy it.

I took out an ad, for Christ's sake, and I end up with a Jewish Sandra Dee.

In this case, an "ad" is a personal ad in a newspaper looking for a romantic relationship. "For Christ's sake" is a common way to express emotion such as anger or frustration (Sandra Dee is an actress with a very clean and conservative reputation).

What are the odds? Who do you have to blow to get some pussy around here?

"Odds" are chances of something happening (for example, 1 in 3).

"To blow" a man is to give him oral sex (A "blow job" is the act of giving oral sex on a guy). "Pussy" is a crude term for a woman's sex organs.

You a little jumpy today, Stein? You got a hot date?

If a person is “jumpy,” they’re very nervous or jittery, and thus they are moving around a lot. A “hot date” is a way of saying you are going out with somebody who you are very attracted to.

We should have seen Gimme Shelter. :: I know; What were we thinking?

“What was I thinking?” is a way of asking yourself why you did something so stupid (Gimme Shelter is a movie with The Rolling Stones).

The guy on the stoop.

A “stoop” is a small porch or landing in front of a building.

Stein has the pleasure of working for me. :: Then you must be “that complete asshole” she’s always talking about.

A crude insult word for a jerk, creep, bastard, etc...

Don’t mind her. She’s just working out some residual anger from college.

“Don’t mind her” is a way of saying that you shouldn’t pay attention to her. In this case, “to work out” an emotion is to learn to move past it, and “residual anger” is anger that is still around, a very long time after it should have disappeared.

I was a freshman when they were seniors. :: We dated for a year.

A “freshman” is in the first year of college and a “senior” is in the last.

She didn’t think I was living up to my potential.

If a person is not “living up to their potential,” they are not doing all the good things that they are capable of.

Whatever. He was an extremely talented writer.

Now he’s a professional i-dotter and t-crosser.

“Whatever” is a very popular way to say that what somebody else just said may be true, but you don’t really care. A person who “dots i’s and crosses t’s” may be an editor who wants to make sure every word is correctly written (A dot is the tiny point above the i, and a cross is the shape of a t). The expression suggests a person who wants perfection.

We thought Stein was gonna be the next Georgia O’Keefe, but she turned out to be a pretty good t-crosser herself.

Georgia O’Keefe is a great nature painter. Josh is saying that Jessica did not use her natural gifts as a painter but ended up only as a copy editor.

You paint? :: No, I don’t. I’m really a hack.

A “hack” is negative word for an artist or writer who works only to make money, but doesn’t really have that much talent.

It’s not “you will gain great wisdom through some life-altering event.”

“Wisdom” is a combination of great knowledge, insight and judgement. “To alter” something is to change it, often in a fundamental way.

“Home is where the heart lies.” :: You got an adage.

An “adage” is an expression that contains some useful observation.

The whole notion of the fortune cookie is a sham.

A “notion” is an idea or concept. A “fortune cookie” is a type of cookie that is served in Chinese restaurants that contain a small slip of paper which gives you great philosophical observations or predict your future. A “sham” is an excellent word for any product or idea that is designed to trick people into paying for it even though it has no value.

There are no fortunes being dispensed here.

A “fortune” is a huge amount of money or wealth (Though in a fortune cookie, it could be just a prediction or words of wisdom). “To dispense” something is to distribute it or hand it out.

***The new couple grows closer, and Helen has
a long Shabbat dinner with Jessica’s neurotic family.***

Me and my friends over at the bar have a little pool going.

Here, a “pool” is a group of people who bet or gamble on something.

You see, that’s the thing. We’re sitting over there scratching our heads.

If you are “scratching your head,” you are often trying to understand something that doesn’t make sense (“To scratch” is to literally rub something that itches).

We were wondering if a woman whose only been with men could be sexually attracted to a woman?

“To wonder” is to be curious about, and it is the best verb to use when you want to ask a delicate question or request (“I was wondering if you’d like to go out with me tomorrow night?”).

What is the male obsession with lesbian sex about? I don’t get it.

An “obsession” is something that you are extremely interested in or are always thinking about.

Just two women’s bodies together is hot. Their hips, their legs, their belly buttons. I mean, it’s all good.

Here, “hot” means sexy. “It’s all good” is a silly but popular expression, often used even when it’s clear that not everything is good or positive!

I just have a slight leg cramp.

“Slight” means very weak or trivial. A “cramp” is a sudden muscle pain.

I'm worried about her leg. And I really think I should get her into bed.

A clever play on words: To "get a sick person into bed" is to put them in bed so that they can rest, but more generally, to get a person into bed could be to have sex with them.

And now I'm gonna get going so you should carry on.

"To carry on" is to continue doing what you were doing
(Note that "going to" -----> "gonna" in rapid speech).

Jess, you forgot the juicer you wanted to borrow.

A nice machine that makes fresh fruit juices.

Look, maybe we bit off more than we could chew here.

If you "bite off more than you can chew," you try to do something that is too big or hard, and that you're not really able to do.

He's really hot. I think you should go for it.

In this context, "to go for it" means to try and seduce or sleep with him.

I'm gonna go get rid of him, right now.

"To get rid of" a person is to get them to leave or to eliminate them.

What if he leaves and I chicken out again, and then you don't get any and I'm wracked by guilt?

"To chicken out" is to become too scared to act or do what you want.
To be "wracked by guilt" is to feel horribly guilty for a past act.

He's a sure-thing, and I'm not.

An interesting noun which means a person (or thing) that can be completely counted on (in this case, counted on to have sex).

Oh, this is so humiliating.

A useful word meaning extremely embarrassing, or causing others to think very poorly of the person who is humiliated.

I'm a big medicator.

A rarely used word for a person who loved to take pills.

Jewish penicillin. :: You have to give me the recipe.

"Penicillin" is a well-known medicine used to treat various diseases, including syphilis (They are talking about Chicken noodle soup).

A queen-size bed is perfect.

Note that bed sizes include king, queen, twin and single.

I need a lock and a "Do not disturb" sign.

"To disturb" is to bother or annoy. In a hotel, a "Do not disturb" sign means the maid should not knock on the guestroom's door.

She is so seeing somebody.

Note the very slangy use of so: “It’s obvious she is dating somebody.”

Joshie, I haven’t spoken to you in ages.

One way of saying in a very long time.

Danny is getting married. ∴ That’s wonderful. Mazel Tov!

A Jewish (Yiddish) word, used in English, which means congratulations.

Thanks for the TLC. You’re an angel. [Written]

“TLC” is short for tender loving care.

Dan is floating on air. That’s how he is.

If a person is “floating on air, “ they are extremely happy.

I have a train to catch. Shabbat dinner in Scarsdale.

“Shabbat” refers to the Jewish day of rest (The dinner is Saturday night). Scarsdale is a very wealthy suburb of New York City.

I will get my act sorted out.

“To sort out” something is to organize it (A more common saying is “to get your act together,” which means to organize your life for the better).

She just got last minute house seats to Cabaret.

Cabaret is a very famous play (Judy was able to get tickets just before the show went on).

The run’s sold out.

In this case, a “run” is a long series of shows or performances.

You swear?

Here, “to swear” is to promise to tell the truth. This is widely used.

I just happen to have a neighbor whose got a son who was a swing in the production.

Generally speaking, “just happen to” means by coincidence, or without planning. A “swing” is an actor in a play.

Not to mention the fact that the lead, who is this really big deal, is out all this week....because he’s got those soft nodules in his vocal chords.

“Not to mention” is a way of saying in addition. “The lead” in a play is the main actor. A “nodule” is a medical word for a small lump or swelling.

It would be a damn shame for you to go tonight.

A somewhat crude filler adjective that expresses emotion such as anger.

Stanley, it’s lovely to have you hear.

A British word meaning beautiful, or in this case, enjoyable or pleasant.

Myers? What the hell are you doing here?

A common filler in WH questions that expresses emotion such as anger, frustration or in this case, surprise.

How are you, buddy?

“Buddy” means friend, though it’s used more generally to address people.

We can raise the kids interfaith. I’m willing to blend.

If a child is raised “interfaith,” they are exposed to the two different religions of their parents. “To blend” two things is to mix them.

I did go to a seeder once, but that’s about the extent of my Jewish education.

A “seeder” is a Jewish ceremony and dinner that celebrates the Jewish Passover holiday. The “extent” of something is its outer limit or border.

My beautiful son, who is a fancy lawyer, and then my daughter, who’s the big deal at the New York Tribune.

“Fancy” means decorated or not plain, though here it means excellent or powerful. If a person is a “big deal,” they are considered important.

I’m a copy editor. :: It’s a big deal to me.

A “copy editor” edits articles for grammatical and content mistakes.

Jessica leans toward hyperbole. I’m the assistant director at the Schuller Gallery in Chelsea.

“Hyperbole” is talk that is marked by exaggerated statements.

A “gallery” is a room or building where art is shown to the public.

Contemporary abstracts, right?

A way of referring to modern abstract art (Something that is abstract is difficult to understand).

If you need a great deal on a new PC, just let me know. I’m your man.

A “PC” is a personal computer.

I just feel like they’re numbing and obscuring our humanity, you know?

“To numb” a person is to make it so they can’t feel anything.

“To obscure” something is to hide it or make it hard to see.

She likes to provoke.

“To provoke” a person is to say something that will make them angry.

He’s adorable, he’s bright, and what’s more, he is your father’s partner’s nephew, so be nice!

“Bright” is a good alternative to smart or intelligent.

For the record, all of your setups have been disastrous.

A “setup” is a date that is arranged by a third person who knows both people. If something is “disastrous,” it is a total failure.

How was I to know Eric was in rehab? :: God, wan, pale, track marks....

“Rehab” is short for drug rehabilitation, or the act of trying to overcome a drug or alcohol addiction. “Wan” means sickly, “pale” means too white or looking unhealthy from lack of color, and “track marks” are marks on a person’s arm that show they’ve used needles to inject drugs like heroin.

I thought he had diabetes.

A disease in which a person does not have enough blood sugar.

You can make my daughter a little less stubborn and a lot less picky. :: Oh, tall order.

If a person is “stubborn,” they refuse to change their minds, or are too persistent. Someone who is “picky” insists that everything be just right or perfect. A “tall order” is a colloquial way of describing a request or desire that will be very difficult to meet.

He would be a great match, wouldn’t he?

In this case, a “match” is potential romantic partner.

Yes, clearly, I’m smitten.

If a person is “smitten” by someone else, they like that person very much or are even infatuated with them.

He’s great, but my plate is a little full right now.

If a person’s “plate is full,” they are busy trying to accomplish too many things.

You probably have men falling over you, left and right.

If men are “falling all over” a woman, they are constantly becoming attracted to or falling in love with her.

It’s been ages since she met anybody worthwhile.

A useful word that means being worth the time or effort (in this case the time trying to get to know them, to see if they’d be a good husband).

Keep me posted, will you? Sometimes Jesse is so secretive with me.

“To keep a person posted” is to keep them up to date on a situation.

And our platform is compatible with the new camera software.

In technology, a “platform” is a type of computer that uses a specific type of operating system. If a computer is “compatible” with a certain type of software, it is designed to work with it.

So Helen, what groundbreaking project is on your docket now?

If an idea is “groundbreaking,” it is an important advance that can fundamentally change things for the better. A person’s “docket” refers to the list of projects or tasks that they need to work on in the near future.

Have you seen her stuff?

In this case, “stuff” refers to Jessica’s paintings.

She’s marvelous. She was the rage at Brown.

“Marvelous” is a good alternative word for wonderful. If an artist is “the rage,” everyone is talking about them because of something sensational they have done. Brown University is a famous school in Rhode Island.

It’s settled; Everyone is staying.

In this case, “settled” means decided or agreed upon by all.

You sure it’s big enough? :: I think we’ll just fit.

If two people “just fit” in a bed, there is just enough room for them.

Poor Stanley; He didn’t know what he was getting into.

If a person didn’t know what they were “getting into,” they didn’t realize how many problems they could have by agreeing to do what they did.

Both Jessica and Helen struggle with their own fears as well as how others around them might react to the news.

Those Stein women are tough to please.

If a person is “tough to please,” it is difficult to make them happy.

I’m much happier tearing down the work of other writers who are not as talented as I am, but also not as paralyzed.

“To tear down” another person’s writing or art is to severely criticize it. If a person is “paralyzed,” they have been injured and thus can’t move parts of their body, though here it’s used to mean that if a writer is paralyzed, they’ve lost the ability to write.

Any artistic frustration I have I just take out on them.

If a person “takes out” their frustration on someone else, they blame that person for their unhappiness and thus treat them with anger.

There’s nothing fucking on.

Note that fuck, while extremely crude, is also very grammatically versatile. Here it used as a filler adjective to express anger or frustration.

Are we breaking up or are you gonna tell me about him?

If a couple “breaks up,” they decide to no longer stay together.

I don’t want to jinx it by talking about it.

If a person “jinxes” a situation, they do something that makes it likely that something bad or horrible will happen. It can be used as a noun to refer to a curse by a witch or supernatural force that will bring bad luck.

How about brunch on Sunday if my water doesn't break?

"Brunch" is a meal that serves as both breakfast and lunch. If a woman is pregnant and her "water breaks," it means she is ready to give birth.

The thing is, we're kind of laying low this weekend.

If a person decides to "lay low," they choose to pass time relaxing, probably at home, and doing nothing too active or exciting.

Why can't you be happy for me? :: Because you are an affront to gay people everywhere and I am a gay people!

If a person is an "affront" to a particular group (in this case homosexuals), their particular beliefs or behavior is totally offensive to them.

You have had more cock than I have, and I was a big whore in the 80s.

A "cock" is a crude word for a penis, and a "whore" is a negative word for a prostitute, or more accurately in this case, a sexually promiscuous person (a person who sleeps with lots of people and is often called a slut).

I can't just put black shoe polish on my face and join a gospel choir.

"Shoe polish" is a type of cream that is put on leather shoes in order to protect them. A "gospel choir" is a singing group that is found in many churches (Gospel music is old religious music).

That's a terrible analogy.

An "analogy" is the pointing out of a similarity in some particular way between two things that may not be alike in any other way.

That's exactly my point!

"That's exactly what I was trying to say!"

Straight girl, gay girl. What's the difference? An orgasm is an orgasm.

An "orgasm" is the climax and most enjoyable part of sex. This is Roland's way of saying that ultimately, sexual orientation is not important as long as people can get pleasure from each other.

If you were blindfolded and I blew you and then Helen blew you, would you ever know the difference?

If a person is "blindfolded," a cloth is put over their eyes so they can't see. "To blow" a person is a crude way of saying to give them oral sex.

OK, too much information, guys.

What you would say to a person who is telling you very intimate or private things about their life that you don't want to hear!

Sometimes when I'm going down on you, it seems like you like it, but then sometimes it seems like you're annoyed.

"To go down" on a woman is to give her oral sex. If a person is "annoyed" they are feeling bothered or irritated.

What are you doing here? :: Shopping, of course.

For some reason, Americans often ask “What are you doing here?” whenever they unexpectedly see somebody they know, though this is probably not a good idea since the question can sound silly.

I had promised to help her make brownies today, and so we’re getting the ingredients to make the brownies.

A “brownie” is a popular chocolate-based type of rich or dense cake.

It’s like this surreal episode. Are you horrified? Do you find me disgusting?

If something is “surreal,” it’s so strange or bizarre it’s as if it’s not real.

In this case, an “episode” is an incident or brief period of activity.

“Disgusting” means repulsive or extremely ugly or unpleasant.

And you’re so conservative! :: Fuck you! I know, I know.

Note that a person can be *sexually* “conservative,” which means that they are not very experimental or adventurous.

God, this is huge. It’s so....radical.

“Huge” means extremely big, and “radical” refers to beliefs or behaviors that are seen as extreme by the majority of people.

I’m a liar and a hypocrite.

A “hypocrite” is a person who says they believe something but then act in a way that is inconsistent or contrary to those beliefs.

It was just a whim! It was this wacky, nutty whim.

A “whim” is an idea or plan that suddenly comes into a person’s head.

“Wacky” and “nutty” both mean crazy or very silly, weird or ridiculous.

You know I’m a Rilke fan and I thought it would be nice to meet someone, just as a friend.

Rilke is a famous poet that both Jessica and Helen like.

You’re hysterical! Breath!

If a person is “hysterical,” they are acting in an extremely emotional and agitated way, often while crying and screaming.

She’s kind and witty and quirky and nurturing and involved and all that crap. But she’s a girl, you know. She’s thin.

“Witty” means funny in a very smart and clever way. “Quirky” means odd or strange, but in a different and appealing way. If a person is “nurturing,” they give a lot of love and support to the people they care about. “Crap” is a crude but useful word for nonsense, lies and other types of things that are often referred to as bullshit.

She’s soft and attentive and it’s all wrong.

If a person is “attentive,” they quickly respond to your needs and desires.

She gets you? :: She does.

Here, the first sentence means “Does she understand who you are?”

I think the thing is, we just really click.

If two people “click,” they get along very well and enjoy being around each other (A click is a slight, short and sharp noise).

I look like a Heifer in her 5th month.

A type of young cow (who in this case is pregnant).

Yeah, I’m off. I’ll explain later.

A slangy way of saying “I’m leaving.”

You’re a terrible liar. It’s one of your best qualities.

For a person, a “quality” is a personality trait, like kindness or shyness.

I can’t be with you, and be intimate with you and share wonderful things with you and then get shut out of the most basic things in your life.

“Intimate” can mean to be emotionally close to someone else, though as here, it also often means to be sexually involved with that person.

When you don’t acknowledge who I am to people that matter to you, it makes me feel like you’re ashamed of me.

“To acknowledge” a person (or their importance in your life) is to recognize them as genuine, real or valid.

Six pounds, eight ounces....It’s the worst pain one will ever know.

An “ounce” is 1/16th of a pound.

As Jessica’s brother gets married, the Stein’s warmly welcome Helen into their family (for as long as she’ll agree to stay)...

The only woman who loved me, not just in spite of my faults, but because of them.

“In spite of” is an alternative to despite, or possibly even though.

A person’s “faults” are their bad qualities, such as selfishness.

You know, I’m flattered, but it’s really not a good time.

If a person is “flattered,” they feel honored or touched because of compliments or praise that others have given them.

I heard that the opening was tonight, and I just wanted to wish her well.

The “opening” of a play is its first performance in front of an audience.

It’s amazing that someone like Jessica takes such risks in her works.

An important alternative to unbelievable or remarkable.

Beautiful toast. :: Yes, it was.

A “toast” is the act of raising glasses and drinking after a person makes a proposal or says a few brief words in honor of a person who is there.

You’re my love. My beloved.

If a person is “beloved,” they are greatly loved and cherished.

And you came home after the first day of rehearsal, and you turned to me, and you said “Mommy, I’m just not going to do it. I quit.”

A “rehearsal” is the act of practicing for a play or other performance.

I thought to myself, “oy,” this child will suffer.

A Yiddish (Jewish) word that expresses emotion such as worry or sadness

I don’t know what she sees in her. She’s flat-chested! :: Jesus, mother.

If you “see something in” a person, you are able to see qualities they have on the inside, such as kindness, that others might not see. A woman who is “flat-chested” has small or flat breasts. “Jesus” is a widely used way of expressing emotion such as anger or frustration.

At least you’re Jewish, right dear? :: No, but I’ve been to a seeder.

A meal to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Passover.

You could each try artificial insemination.

The process of trying to get pregnant by artificially placing the man’s sperm directly into the woman.

I really have to pee.

The colloquial and much-loved word meaning to piss or urinate.

It’s kind of hard to describe....it’s pretty fucking awesome actually.

“Awesome” is a popular adjective meaning amazing or truly excellent.

I’ve always felt that if you could just get the guy or gal to come up with a really good quote...a good little nugget like “There’s nothing to fear but fear itself.”

A “gal” is a woman (The female equivalent of guy). A “nugget” is a little piece of material or food, or as in this case, a valuable piece of wisdom.

That’s like immortality in one kind of light bulb moment.

“Immortality” is the ability to stay alive forever. A “light bulb moment” is the moment when a person gets a brilliant or amazing idea (It is said that a light bulb goes off in their head).

You’ve been really happy and that’s made me sad. Inexplicably, deeply sad. I mean different from my general snarky, bitter, tortured thing.

If something is “inexplicable,” it can’t be explained. “Snarky” is annoying or irritating, but this word is rare. If a person is “bitter,” they are angry and frustrated, and here, if they are “tortured,” they are going through great emotional suffering.

I saw your piece, and I stared.

“To stare” at something is to continue looking at it for several seconds or more without turning away.

You know, it hit me, the reason I was so sad when you got so happy...

In this context, “it hit me” is a way of saying “I realized why...”

No, I'm with Helen. :: As in, with, *with*?

Note the importance of a preposition! In this context with the right tone of voice, “with” implies that Jessica and Helen are romantically involved, and not just physically together for that moment.

They're serving the first course.

A “course” is one part of a meal served all at once (Some expensive meals may have four or more courses).

Sweetie, I'm exhausted. I'm gonna hit the hay.

A very slangy way of saying to go to bed.

I just forgot to pick up my dry cleaning again.

“Dry cleaning” refers to clothes that are cleaned without using water.

I want to be with someone who craves me.

Someone who wants to rip my clothes off.

“To crave” something is to very strongly desire it.

Why can't it just be great, and then loving and tender.

In this context, “tender” means loving, soft and sweet.

Maybe you place too much emphasis on sex? Have you thought that it's just one component of a much larger package?

“Emphasis” means focus, stress or special consideration.

A “component” is a solid part or ingredient of a bigger whole.

How's the writing coming? :: It's glamorous.

If something is “glamorous,” it is filled with excitement and romance.

What happened? :: She dumped me.

If one person in a couple “dumps” the other, they decide to break up with or leave that other person.

My new number is on the flyer. Actually, my email is best these days.

A “flyer” is a small brochure or piece of paper that is used for advertising.

I succumbed; Email is best.

“To succumb” to something is to surrender to it, or accept it after trying to resist it for a long time.

Kissing Jessica Stein

Some Possible ESL Questions for Class Discussion

1. How is homosexuality viewed in your culture?
2. Do you think most straight people are “bi-curious?” In fact, are most people actually bisexual without wanting to admit it?
3. Are Jessica and Helen a good couple?
4. In your country, is it hard for a young woman to meet a good man to marry? Or for a young man to meet a good woman to marry? Do people always complain about it, the way Jessica does?
5. What does this film suggest about New York City?
6. How would this film be received in your country?
7. What did you like or not like about this movie?