

# Fargo

(Drama) ( 1996)

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## Major Characters

- Jerry Lundergaard.....William H. Macy  
A pathetic and financially desperate Minnesota car salesman who decides to arrange for the kidnapping of his own wife so that he can collect the ransom money, which he is sure that his wife's father would pay in order to get her released.
- Carl Showalter.....Steve Buscemi  
A disgusting and "funny looking" common criminal who agrees to kidnap Jerry's wife in exchange for a car and \$80,000 dollars.
- Gaar Grimsrud.....Peter Stormare  
Carl's strange and very quiet partner in crime.
- Marge Gunderson.....Frances McDormand  
A sweet and pregnant police officer from Brainerd, Minnesota, who gets involved in solving several murders related to the kidnapping.
- Jean Lundergaard.....Kristin Rudrud  
Jerry's wife, who is kidnapped by Carl and Gaear.
- Wade Gustafson.....Harve Presnell  
Jean's father and Jerry's father-in-law, who is a successful business man and owner of the car dealership where Jerry is executive sales director.
- Scotty Lundegaard.....Tony Denman  
Jerry and Jean's 12 year old son.
- Shep Proudfoot.....Steven Reavis  
A native American Indian who works as a mechanic at Jerry's car dealership, and who had introduced Jerry to Carl and Gaear.
- Stan Grossman.....Larry Brandenburg  
An accountant and businessman who works with Wade.
- Norm Gunderson.....John Carrol Lynch  
Marge's loving husband, who wants to be an artist or painter.
- Mike Yanagita.....Steve Park  
A lonely friend from high school that Marge sees after many years.

## Plot Summary

*Fargo* is based on a true story, which happened in the Midwestern state of Minnesota, in 1987. It is the story of Jerry Lundegaard, a financially desperate executive sales director at a car dealership in Minneapolis (the state's biggest city), who decides that he can make a lot of money by having his own wife kidnapped. Jerry does not actually want to hurt her, but he does agree to pay two common criminals \$80,000 and a car, if they successfully kidnap her by getting her father to pay \$1,000,000 dollars in ransom money. His wife's father, Wade, is a wealthy businessman and in fact owns the very car dealership where Jerry works.

Unfortunately for Jerry and everyone involved, the kidnapping takes place, but soon things start to go terribly wrong. While taking Jerry's terrified wife back to their hiding place, Carl and Gaear are stopped by a policeman near the Northern Minnesota town of Brainard. Soon after, three innocent people are killed, and a major hunt begins for the killers. Marge Gunderson leads the investigation, and she soon finds herself in Minneapolis, searching for answers by finding out what Jerry knows of this horrible crime.

As the police get closer to finding the truth, the aftermath of the kidnapping becomes increasingly violent and complicated. Carl demands more money from Jerry, and Wade tries to personally find out who has kidnapped his daughter. The situation spins out of control, and in the end, several more people's lives are destroyed, all because of "a little bit of money."

A note on the language used in this film: *Fargo* was very popular in the US, in large part because of the "Upper Midwest accent" used throughout the movie. There is no other film which so enthusiastically explores this particular regional dialect, which probably exists from Wisconsin to North Dakota (The city of Fargo is actually in North Dakota, and not Minnesota). You should quickly get used to the pronunciation of yes ("yaw," which almost rhymes with law) and the never ending use of "you betcha" ("you bet," which means for sure, or certainly). Also notice the use of the meaningless sentence-ending filler word "here," which some Minnesotans seem to use as much as California teenagers use the filler word "like."

## Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

***Jerry meets with Carl and Gaear, in order to arrange the kidnapping of his wife.***

The events depicted in this film took place in 1987.

“To depict” something is to describe, or represent it in writing or film.

Shef Proudfoot said you’d be here at 7:30; What gives, man?

“What gives?” is a slangy way of asking someone what is going on.

“Man” is a silly slang word added to the end of sentences with no particular meaning, though it is often used by certain people.

He told me 8:30; It was a mix-up, I guess.

In this context, a “mix-up” is a misunderstanding, or confusion.

This is Graer Grimsrud, my associate.

A person with whom you do business together.

We’re all set on this thing; why wouldn’t we be?

In this context, to be “set on” something is to be agreed on a plan.

Shep vouched for you; I’ve got every confidence in you fellas.

“To vouch” for someone is to assure someone else that you trust or have confidence in that person. Note that “fellows” -----> ‘fellas’ in rapid speech.

The new vehicle plus \$40,000.

Another word for car or automobile.

The deal was the car first, and then the ransom.

A “deal” is a key word for an agreement. “Ransom” is the money that is paid kidnappers in order to get back the person who’s kidnapped.

It’s not a whole pay-in-advance deal.

An agreement in which all the money is paid before the service is performed.

It’s real sound; It’s all worked out.

If something is “sound,” it is strong or in good shape.

If a deal is “worked out,” it is agreed upon and ready to go.

It’s like robbing Peter to pay Paul.

An old expression which suggests that one person is being forced to pay another, but no real wealth is being produced.

It’s not me paying the ransom; The thing is, my wife, she’s wealthy.

Another word for rich, or at least having a lot of money.

Her dad, he’s real well off.

Another expression that means wealthy or doing well financially.

It's your fucking wife, ya know.

A very crude but common adjective added to show emotion such as anger or disgust.

These are personal matters.

"Personal matters" are the private parts of a person's life that they want to keep private, and not expose to other people.

Ah, fuck it, let's take a look at that Sierra.

"Fuck it" is a common but vulgar way of expressing anger or impatience. A "Sierra" is a type of car, produced by General Motors.

***As Jerry looks for money wherever he can,  
Carl and Gaear head toward Minneapolis.***

Dad, are you staying for supper. :: Yah.

"Supper" is an old-fashioned but still used way of referring to dinner. Note that "yes" is pronounced "yah" in states like Minnesota and North Dakota, though it's probably a bit exaggerated in this film.

May I be excused?

One way a child may ask if he can leave the dinner table.

Wade, have you had a chance to think about that deal, those 40 acres in Waizetta?

"Acres" are a measure of land, about half the size of a soccer field. Here, Jerry is talking about a business deal near the town of Waizetta

It's a lot of money; A heck of a lot.

Note more conservative people will tend to use "heck" while others use hell. Both expressions are a way of saying a lot.

Stan passes on this stuff before it's kicked up to me.

In this case, to "pass on" something is to approve it, and to "kick up" something to someone else is to have them take a look at it.

Stan will say no dice; that's why you pay him.

"No dice" is a very slangy way of saying no, or absolutely not.

Are you nuts? We had pancakes for breakfast.

"Nuts" is a colloquial and common way of referring to a crazy person.

I want a place where I can get a shot and a beer and a steak maybe, and no more fucking pancakes. Come on!

A “shot” is a small glass of hard liquor such as bourbon. “Come on” is the most versatile phrasal verb in English, meaning everything from hurry up to try harder. Here it means “be serious.”

We can stop, get pancakes, and then we can get laid.

“To get laid” is a slightly vulgar but common way of saying to have sex.

I sat right here and said I didn’t want any true coat.

This is the name of the special paint protection that Jerry tries to sell to people who buy cars at his car dealership.

You will get oxidation problems; It will cost you a heck of a lot more than \$500.

A scientific adjective (oxygen) that in this case deals with chemical processes over time which could harm the paint on a car.

You’re talking in circles, like we didn’t go over this already!

An expression which means to say the same thing over and over, often as if the person was not hearing what the other speaker had to say.

You called me 20 minutes ago and said you’re ready to make delivery.

In this case, a way of saying ready to physically deliver a car.

I’m paying nineteen five for this vehicle here.

Note that \$19,500 can be abbreviated to “nineteen five.”

You going to the Gophers on Sunday? Oh, ya betcha.

“Gophers” are cute rat-like animals, and the name of a Minnesota hockey team. “Ya betcha” is a Minnesota pronunciation of “you bet,” which can mean yes, absolutely, or for sure. Often used in this film!

You wouldn’t have an extra ticket? :: Are you kidding?

When used in this question, “to kid” is a common way of asking someone if they are being serious or just joking around.

Seeing as it’s special circumstances and all, he says I can knock \$100 off that true coat.

“Special circumstances” refers to a situation that is unusual or unexpected (and is a totally abused expression by Jerry in this scene). “To knock off” \$100 from the price is to reduce it by that much.

You’re a bald-faced liar. A fucking liar!

A powerful adjectival expression meaning horrible and shameless.

Where's my god damn check book; Let's **get this over with**.

"God damn" is a vulgar but common term which shows emotion such as anger or frustration. A "checkbook" is a little booklet that holds checks. "To get something over with" is to do it as quickly as possible, so that you no longer have to think about it. Common and useful.

I'm not talking about your **potential**; You're not a C student!

"Potential" is an important word that means future possibility.  
A "C student" get lots of Cs as grades (Parents want As and Bs).

It's a disparity that concerns me.

A "disparity" is a difference in size, rank or ability, or perhaps the distance between what is and what could be.

Come on, what's the big deal?

A way of asking "why is this so important?"

Look dad, there's no fucking way... :: Let's watch that language!

This is what an angry parent tells a child who has just used a vulgar word such as fuck or shit.

Stan says your proposal is pretty sweet. :: **No kidding?**

In this case, a "proposal" is a business offer. If it's "sweet," this means it has the possibility of making a lot of money. "No kidding?" is a common way of asking somebody if they are being serious.

I vouch for Grimsrud; Who's his buddy?

A "buddy" is a widely used colloquial word for friend.

Ya know, it's like proven that second-hand smoke is...uh...a cancer agent.

Note that "like" is often added to sentences as a filler word with no meaning, but you should avoid this. "Second-hand smoke" is the smoke that one breathes when next to a person who is smoking.

Look at that; Twin cities.

The "Twin Cities" refers to Minneapolis, the biggest city in Minnesota, and St. Paul, the state capital, which are right next to each other.

The tallest skyscraper in the Midwest, after the Sears in Chicago.

A "skyscraper" is a very tall building. The "Midwest" is the central part of the US that includes states like Minnesota and Illinois. Until the 1980s, the Sears Tower in Chicago was the tallest building in the world.

Would it kill you to say something?

One way of asking "Could you please say something?"

The first thing you said in the last four hours; That's a fountain of conversation. That's a geyser. Wow laddy, stand back!

A "fountain" is a stream of water that shoots into the air, and a "geyser" is a fountain under the ground that shoots hot water high into the air. "Wow" is an exclamation of surprise, and "laddy" is a rarely used version of "lad," which means boy, man or fellow.

Ya know, to keep our spirits up, fight the boredom of the road. You can't say one thing in the way of conversation?

Carl's way of trying to convince Gaear to stop being so quiet.

Fuck it---I don't have to talk to you.

A vulgar but common way of expressing anger or great frustration.

Total fucking silence---two can play at that game.

A silly expression that means "I can also do what you're doing."

GMAC.

This is the financial division of General Motors, which helps consumers to get loans to in order to buy GM cars.

On these financing documents, I can't read the serial number of these vehicles.

A "serial number" is a number that identifies an individual product, such as a car or computer.

It's OK, the loans are in place.

If something is "in place," it's been taken care of and is ready to be used.

The vehicles you're borrowing on....I can't read the serial numbers.

"To borrow on" a car is to use the car as security in order to obtain the loan. More often, individuals borrow on their houses.

We have an audit here...and if I can't correlate these loans with the specific vehicles, then I've got to call back that money.

An "audit" is an official examination of the money that a business is spending and earning (A "tax audit" examines taxes). "To correlate" two objects is to show a relationship between them. "To call back" money on a loan is to demand immediate repayment. Note that "got to" ---->gotta in rapid speech.

***Jean is kidnapped from her home as Jerry continues to look for business deals, and soon the simple plan goes very wrong.***

We want all you to come with.

Note that in the Midwest, one can end a sentence with the set expression “come with” or “go with,” but this sounds funny elsewhere.

I need unguent.

This is a type of cream used for burns and other skin injuries.

If these numbers are right, this looks pretty sweet.

In this case, the estimated costs and income potential of the business deal that Jerry is proposing.

What kind of finder’s fee are you looking for?

A “finder’s fee” is the amount of money that a person demands for telling investors about a potential business deal.

The financials are pretty thorough, so the only thing we don’t know is your fee.

A useful word which means completely and carefully done.

What the heck are you talking about?

A Minnesota version of “What the hell are you talking about?”

You’re saying we put in all of this money and *you* collect when it pays off.

When an investment “pays off,” it brings back both the original money invested and a profit.

I’d pay you back the principal and interest.

“Principal” is the money that is borrowed, and “interest” is the additional money which is paid for the right to borrow (5%, 10%, etc).

Heck, I’d go one over prime.

“The prime rate” is the interest rate that the biggest companies pay their banks to borrow, and “one over prime” is 1% higher than that.

We’re not going to give you \$750,000. If I’m only getting bank interest, I want complete security.

Note that when people put their money in a bank, it is usually completely guaranteed so that there is no risk of losing it.

Heck, FDIC. I don’t see nothing like that.

The FDIC is the federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, a governmental organization which guarantees money in a bank up to \$100,000. Try to avoid the use of double negatives like in the second sentence.

Ok, I guarantee you your money back. ::  
I'm not talking about your damn word.

A person's "word" is their personal promise or guarantee to tell the truth. "Damn" adds emotion such as anger or frustration.

I don't want to cut you out of the loop, because it's a good deal.

"To cut a person out of the loop" is to keep them from being involved. A loop is a circular shape made by a string or rope.

I assume if you're not interested, you wouldn't mind if we move on it independently.

"To move on" a business deal is to act quickly to take advantage of it.

Wade, we have got to talk. Ah jeez, it's terrible.

"Jeez" is a funny little word to express fear or disappointment.

Welcome to Brainard, home of Paul Bunyon.

A legend in American culture who was supposed to be a giant 100 foot lumberjack, and a person who cut down trees in the Minnesota forest.

Shut the fuck up or I'll throw you back in the trunk.

"Shut the fuck up" is an extremely vulgar way of telling someone to shut up or be quiet. The "trunk" of a car is the back storage area.

Ah shit, the tags. I didn't put tags on the car.

In this case, "tags" are papers that an owner puts in a car window in order to identify it.

Can I help you, officer?

This is the respectful way that a person addresses a policeman.

You're required to display temporary tags either in the plate area or taped to the back window.

A reference to a license plate, which all cars must have in the back.

I was going to tape up those tags to be in full compliance, but it must have slipped my mind.

To be "in full compliance" with a law or regulation is to do everything that is required or necessary. If something "slips your mind," this means that you forgot about it.

License and registration.

Every car must have a license plate in the back and be registered or officially documented with the state.

You're a smoothie, ya know.

A "smoothie" is slang for a person who does things very professionally or with great skill. Here, said sarcastically, or in a joking manner.

Just clear him off the road.

"To clear a person off the road" is to remove them from the road.

***Marge begins the search for two killers, as Wade, Stan and Jerry discuss how to best get Jean back from her kidnappers.***

Oh jeez, be there in a jiff.

An old-fashioned but still used expression which means very quickly.

Time to shove off. :: Love ya, Marge.

"To shove off" is a slangy way of saying to leave.

Note that "you"----->"ya" in rapid speech.

Prowler needs a jump.

The "prowler" refers to a police car, since "to prowl" means to move quietly in hopes of not being seen (A lion can be 'on the prowl' for food). A "jump" is short for a jump-start, which is the use of one car to start another car after it's battery has died.

Thought you might need a warm-up. :: Thanks a bunch.

In this case, a "warm-up" is used to refer to a cup of coffee, to help Marge get warm in the winter cold. "Thanks a bunch" seems to be the most common way of saying thank you very much in Minnesota.

Triple homicide.

"Homicide" is a legal word for murder, and in this case, three murders.

I guess that's a defensive wound.

A "wound" is an injury on the skin, such as a burn or deep cut. Here, probably gotten in self-defense.

Where is the state trooper?

A police officer who works for a state, rather than a city or county.

He's back there in a ditch next to his prowler.

A "ditch" is a U-shaped hole that is cut into the ground, often made for water to run through.

We got a trooper pull someone over, we got a shooter, those folks drive by.  
 Note the use of the historical present verb tense to describe what (probably) happened. When a policeman “pulls over” a car, he orders it to stop, usually in order to ask questions of the driver.

A high speed pursuit ends here, and in this execution type deal.

A “high speed pursuit” is a car chase, like those one sees in the movies. An “execution” is the legal shooting of a person by the state, though here Marge adds “type deal” to show this was not a true legal execution.

I would be very surprised if our suspect is from Brainard.

Marge’s way of saying she doubt’s such a horrible crime could be committed by a person who lives in such a small and innocent town.

From his foot print, he looks like a big fella.

A “foot print” is the marking that a person’s foot leaves behind, in this case in the snow. Note that “fellow” (guy)---->fella in rapid speech.

Do you see something down there, Chief? :: No, just think I’m going to barf.  
 In this context, “chief” is another word for boss or leader.

“To barf” is a funny slang word meaning to vomit or throw up.

I’m fine, it’s just morning sickness. Well, that passed.

“Morning sickness” is the upset stomach that pregnant women often experience, especially in the first three months of pregnancy.

It’s a real shame.

A set expression that people will use to express anger, disgust or disappointment with a situation (though “real” is often not used).

Didn’t monkey with his car there, did ya?

“To monkey with” something is a slang expression meaning to fool around with, use or touch it.

Did you look in his citation book?

The booklet policemen have that keeps track of the citations, or traffic tickets, that they have given out while working.

The last vehicle he rode in was a tan Sierra with license DLR.

Note the past tense of “to ride,” which is a key verb and noun when discussing cars (“I got a ride...”)

I’m not sure I agree with your police work.

In this case, a way of saying detective work, or criminal investigation.

I think that vehicle probably had dealer plates, Lou. :: Yah?

“Dealer plates” are the temporary license plates that a car dealer gives a new buyer of a car before they get permanent ones.

Dealer plates; D-L-R.

“D-L-R” stands for “dealer.”

Did you hear the one about the guy who couldn't afford personalized plates, so he changed his name to J3L204.... :: Yeah, that's a good one.

“Did you hear the one about...?” is a common way of asking a person if they have heard a particular joke. “Personalized (license) plates” are one's that have a person's name or some other message (“Joe's Car”).

They said no cops. They were darned clear on that, Wade.

“Cop” is a common word for a police officer. “Darned” is a less vulgar alternative to damned, which expresses emotion such as anger. If a person is “clear on” something, they express themselves very clearly.

If I give these sons-of-bitches \$1,000,000, what is my guarantee that they're going to let her go?

A “son-of-a-bitch” is a crude term for a mean or disagreeable person. The plural, used here, is fairly rare.

Think this thing through; If you give them what they want, why won't they let her go?

“To think through” something is to think about it carefully. Note Jerry asks “why won't...?”, though the correct tense is “why wouldn't...?”

You don't know. You're just whistling Dixie here.

A funny expression which means to have no idea. Also note the use of “here” as a filler added to sentences, which is common in this film.

I'm leaning toward Jerry's viewpoint, here.

Another way to say point of view, belief, or opinion.

We've got to protect Jenny. We're not holding any cards here, Wade.

Stan's way of using the language of poker to say that they have no real power or bargaining position in negotiating with the kidnappers.

They call the shots. :: You're darned tooting.

If somebody “calls the shots,” they are the ones that give the instructions and control the situation. “You're darned tooting” is an old-fashioned and ridiculous way to say “you're right.”

I'm thinking we offer them half a million. :: No way, Wade, no way!

A common way of saying absolutely not!

We're not horse trading, Wade.

An expression used to describe the trading of products or money in a business situation.

We have got to just bite the bullet on this thing.

"To bite the bullet" is to accept a situation and learn to deal with it, even though it may be very bad or painful to do so.

They're going to call me up and give me instructions for a drop.

In this case, a "drop" is short for the act of dropping off ransom money.

Maybe it's all bull, but like you said Stan, they're calling the shots.

"Bull" is short for bullshit, which is the classic American obscenity that refers to lies, nonsense, manipulation, etc.

Nothing is going wrong; Granddad and I were making sure that this thing gets handled right.

"To handle" a situation is to take care of it, or to deal with it.

We gotta play ball with these guys. You ask Stan Grossman and he'll tell you the same thing. That's the deal here.

In this context, "to play ball" is a slangy way of saying to agree to negotiate or talk with people you would rather not be dealing with.

"That's the deal" is Jerry's way of saying that this is the situation.

What are these, night crawlers?

A type of pastry.

What is this, Arby's?

A fast food restaurant known for its roast beef.

The Haightman's are entering a painting this year.

Note that you can "enter" a painting in a contest.

The night before, two men checked into the The Blue Ox, registering a Sierra, leaving the tag space blank.

"To check into" a hotel is to register there. The Blue Ox is the name of the hotel (An "ox" is a large cow-like animal).

That's a good lead.

A "lead" is a useful word for a piece of information that will help solve a crime, problem or other mystery.

The Blue Ox; That's the trucker's joint out on I-35.

A "joint" is a very slangy word for a place like a club or restaurant.

"I" stands for interstate, or a highway that crosses two or more states.

I went to Normandale, but I dropped out though. :: Yeah, she dropped.

To "drop out" of school is to quit before finishing (Normandale is the name of the school). "To drop" is a slangy abbreviation of drop out.

I went to high school in Washburn Lake---Go, Bears!

High school students love to support their school's sports teams, using the expression above (which varies with the team name).

The little guy was kind of funny looking. :: Can you be any more specific?

"Funny looking" is a very general way of saying a person looked odd, strange or different.

I couldn't really say. He wasn't circumcised!

A man who is "circumcised" has had the skin at the end of his penis cut off. This is done with most American baby boys.

He was a little older; He looked like the Marlboro man.

A reference to the famous male image used in advertisements around the world to promote Marlboro cigarettes.

Maybe I said that because he smoked a lot of Marlboros;

You know, a subconscious type of thing.

A person's "subconscious" is that part of the mind which you are not aware of. This is an important word in modern psychology.

Fucking shit box! Give me a fucking signal, goddamn it!

A TV is sometimes referred to as a "box." A "signal" refers to the radio and TV waves that allow a person to watch TV.

Well, I'm turning in, Norm.

"To turn in" is another way of saying to go to sleep.

Well, how the heck are ya?

A very Minnesota way of asking "how are you doing?"

This is loaded here; This has your front wheel drive, rack and pinion steering, anti-lock brakes, alarm, radar, and I can give it to you with a heck of a sealant.

This is Jerry's usual sales speech to a customer. If a car is "loaded," it has lots of extra features like a good music system that makes it more comfortable. The rest of the sentence refers to various mechanical features of the car which aren't too important, though you should at least know the "alarm" protects the car from being stolen.

Were you thinking of financing? You ought to be aware of this GMAC plan.  
 “To finance” a car is to only pay a certain percent in cash,  
 and then to make monthly payments afterward.

***Jerry’s life begins to fall apart, as Marge arrives  
 in Minneapolis in order to solve the crime.***

Circumstances have changed, Jerry.

“Circumstances” refers to facts, events or a general situation.

Things have changed, circumstances beyond the acts of God, force majeure.

A French expression which refers to unexpected forces  
 that change the situation and free a person from obligations.

Blood has been shed, Jerry!

“To shed” blood means to let it flow out.

What have you fellas got yourself mixed up in?

“To get mixed up in” a situation is to get involved in it,  
 often in a way that leaves the person trapped or desperate.

This was supposed to be a no rough stuff type deal.

“No rough stuff” is a colloquial way of saying  
 without violence or bloodshed.

Don’t interrupt me; Just shut the fuck up!

A very crude but grammatically interesting  
 way of telling a person to be quiet.

We now want the entire \$80,000. :: Oh, for Christ’s sake here.

A set expression which is used to show  
 emotion such as anger or frustration.

We’ve incurred risks. I’m coming to town  
 tomorrow. You have the money ready.

“To incur” risks is to run into or face them.  
 A rare verb, but used in this expression.

A deal is a deal. :: Jerry, you ask those three souls in Brainard if a deal’s a deal.

“A deal is a deal” is an expression that one person says when they  
 believe another is trying to change an agreement. A “soul” is the non-  
 physical part of a person, or in this case, those who have died.

Sir, I've not received those vehicle IDs you promised.

"ID" is a widely used abbreviation meaning identification.

Absent the receipt of these numbers by tomorrow afternoon,  
I will have to refer this matter to our legal department.

This is the banker's way of saying that if he doesn't receive the ID numbers, he will take legal action against Jerry's car dealership.

My patience is at an end. Good day, Sir.

One way of saying "I have run out of patience."

How is the fricassee? :: Pretty darn good.

"Fricassee" is a meat dish covered in gravy.

I thought you was going ice fishing.

This is fishing done on a lake that is frozen on the surface.

Note the bad subject-verb agreement, which you should avoid.

They only deal with me. You feel their nervousness on the phone there?

"To deal with" is one way of saying communicate or discuss with.

With all due respect Jerry, I don't want you mucking this up.

"With all due respect" is a common expression that is used if you think you are about to say something that is truthful but may be insulting to the listener. "To muck up" something is to do it badly or screw it up, but it is rarely used (Of course, to fuck it up is common).

Look Jerry, you're not selling me a damn car! It's my show, and that's that!

Wade's way of telling George that he will make the final decisions.

I had to do a few things in the twin cities, so I thought

I'd check in with you on that USFI search on Shef Proudfoot.

"To check in with" a person is to contact them to see how they're doing, or to hear what news they have. A USFI search is a computer search of known criminals.

The Raddison---Is it reasonable?

If a person asks weather a restaurant is "reasonable," they're asking if it's not too expensive.

We still gotta charge you the \$4. :: I just pulled in here. I just fucking pulled in here!

Note that "have got to"---->"gotta" in rapid speech.

"To pull in" to a parking lot is to drive into it.

I guess you think that you're like an authority figure.

"An authority figure" is a person who has a lot of power and who often can give other people commands (from a police officer to a politician).

That stupid fucking uniform, huh, buddy.

A uniform is a set of clothes that all people in a particular job or organization wear, such as the police or army.

Here's your four dollars, you pathetic piece of shit.

A powerful insult. Note the use of "you" at the beginning to make it stronger. "Pathetic" is an excellent word that means hopelessly unsuccessful, or deserving of pity. A "piece of shit" is a common and very vulgar expression for garbage, trash or other waste material.

You do reside there at 1425 Fremont Terrace?

"To reside" at a particular address is to live there.

I know you've had some problems, struggling with the narcotics, some other entanglements, currently on parole.

"Narcotics" refers to illegal drugs such as cocaine or heroin.

"Entanglements" are problems or relationships in which you become trapped, like a fly inside a spider's web. A person who was in prison who is now "on parole" is free to be outside of prison, as long as they follow certain conditions, such as seeing a parole officer every week.

Associating with criminals.....that right there would be a violation of your parole.

"To associate with" a group of people is to be in contact with them, usually as friends or business partners.

You'd be back in Stillwater.

The name of the prison where Shep served time.

I saw rough stuff in your priors, but nothing in the nature of a homicide.

"Priors" is a word used by the police to refer to the previous crimes that are in a person's written record. This is Marge's way of telling Shep that even though he has been in prison, he had not done anything horribly violent, and that he should not start now.

I know you don't want to be an accessory to something like that.

An "accessory" is a legal word that refers to a person who is not present at a crime, but helps another person do something illegal.

Mind if I sit down? Carrying quite a load here.

A "load" is something that weighs a lot. This is Marge's way of referring to the fact that she is several months pregnant.

Executive sales manager.

This is Jerry's official position at the car dealership;  
The person responsible for sales.

I'm a police officer from Brainard investigating some malfeasance.

This is a very formal legal word for wrong doing or illegal actions.

Home of Paul Bunyon, Babe the Blue Ox.

The nickname of Paul Bunyon.

So, you haven't had any vehicles go missing then?

A funny Minnesota expression which means to disappear.

Okie, dokie. Thanks a bunch, I'll let you get back to your paperwork.

"Okie dokie" is a strange and silly but still used way of saying OK.

"Paperwork" refers to the documents that must be organized in various ways in any business or office.

So, you're living in Edina. It's actually Edina Perry, that school district.

Note that the US is divided into many types of "districts," which are administrative divisions (including for schools, water, parks, etc).

I've been working for Honeywell; They're a good outfit.

An "outfit" can be a colloquial term for a group of people working together (Honeywell is an engineering company).

If you're an engineer, you could do a lot worse.

One way of saying that you're doing pretty well.

Linda had leukemia; She passed away.

"Leukemia" is cancer of the blood. "To pass away" is a very common way of saying to die.

Better times.

A sweet way to toast the future when things have gone badly in the recent past (A "toast" is the group act of raising wine glasses).

***Carl arrives in Minneapolis to collect his money,  
but there is soon another terrible turn of events.***

Just in town on business. Just in and out; The old in and out.

A silly but still used way to refer to sexual intercourse.

So, how long have you worked for the escort service?

A business that supplies “escorts,” which are generally not guards or companions (the meaning of the word), but expensive prostitutes.

Shef, what the hell are you doing? I’m banging that girl!

“To bang” a girl is a silly slang word meaning to have sex with her.

Go back to Stillwater, you fucking little shithead!

A classic and very vulgar insult.

Get the fuck out of here!

A grammatically noteworthy sentence! The generic all purpose verb ‘get’ + the definite article ‘the’ + ‘fuck’ used as a noun + the adverbial phrasal verb ‘out of here,’ ALL to simply mean.....leave!

Hey, smoke a fucking peace pipe!

A “peace pipe” is a long smoking pipe that has been used in Native American cultures to signify the end of a war between tribes.

You fucking little shit, fucking motherfucker!

Perhaps the most vulgar insult in English. Best to avoid it.

You goddman punk!

A “punk” is generally a young, rough and aggressive or violent person.

Who the fuck are you?

A classic vulgar alternative to Who are you?

I am through fucking around; Drop that fucking briefcase!

“To be through” doing something is to finished doing it. “To fuck around” is a crude way of saying to fool around, or to do something in a way that isn’t serious. A “briefcase” is a flat container for carrying papers, which is very popular among businessmen.

No Jean, no money!

Wade’s way of saying he won’t give the money until Carl frees Jean.

What is up with you people?! You fucking imbeciles!

The first sentence is a colloquial way of expressing frustration, though “What’s up?” generally just means “What’s happening?” An “imbecile” is a strong and fun insult word for a very stupid person.

So I’m tending bar down there and this little guy is drinking and says “where can a guy find some action?”

“To tend bar” is to serve drinks at a bar. Note the use of the historical present verb tense in telling this story.

He says “woman action, what do I look like?”, and  
I say “what do I look like?; I don’t arrange that kind thing.”

“What do I look like?” is a funny way of showing a person you are  
insulted by what the other person seems to be suggesting about you.

He says “do you think I’m some kind of **jerk**  
for asking?,” except he don’t use the word jerk.

A “jerk” is a great word for a stupid, irresponsible or abusive person,  
but not as vulgar as asshole, which is probably the word Carl had used!

Well then, I said that don’t sound like it’s  
too good a deal for him. ∴ You got that right!

A popular way in Minnesota to say “I agree with you!”

Mrs. Maura heard about the homicide and she  
thought that I should call it in, so I called it in.

To “call in” any kind of suspicious or odd  
behavior is to report it to the police.

A front is coming in

Short for a “weather front,” or generally speaking, a storm.

***Marge discovers the connection between Jerry and  
the murders, but it’s too late to save the last two victims....***

It seemed like it all hit him really hard.

In this context, to be “hit” is to be emotionally hurt.

No, he was bothering her for over a year,  
really pestering her. Wouldn’t leave her alone.

“To pester” a person is to continually bother or harass them.

He’s been struggling. He’s been living with his parents now.

“To struggle” emotionally is to try and survive despite great problems.

The crime I’m investigating...the perpetrators  
are driving a car with dealer plates.

A “perpetrator” is a person who commits a crime.

And they called someone who works here, so it would be  
quite a coincidence if they weren’t, ya know, connected.

A “coincidence” is a key word referring to two or more events that  
happen by chance, but in a way that it appears as if they were planned.

Have you done any inventory recently?

“Inventory” is the counting of goods available, and in this case, the number of cars at Jerry’s car dealership.

We run a pretty tight ship around here.

When a business “runs a tight ship,” it follows all the rules and keeps very good records.

Are the cars counted daily, or what kind of routine here?

A “routine” is the fixed and ordinary way of doing things, day after day.

Sir, you have no call to get snippy with me. I’m just doing my job here.

To say a person has “no call” to do something is a rare way of saying no right or justification. “Snippy” means quick and impolite, or rude.

Oh heck, if you want to play games, I’ll do a damn lot count.

“To play games” can mean to harass or bother people by forcing them to do things that have no purpose or value. In this context, a “lot count” is a counting of the number of cars at the car lot.

Yeah, right now? :: You’re darned tooting!

A silly expression which means “You’re damned right.”

For pete’s sake, he’s fleeing the interview!

“For pete’s sake” is used to show frustration or anger. “To flee” is a dramatic verb meaning to run away from, though usually one flees the scene of a crime, and not just an interview!

What the fuck happened to her?! :: She started shrieking, ya know.

“To shriek” is to cry out with a high, piercing sound.

Well, I got the money. All of it, all 80 grand.

A “grand” is a slang term for \$1,000 dollars.

How the fuck do you split a fucking car, with a chainsaw?

“To split” something is to divide it into two. A “chainsaw” is a type of electric saw that is used to cut down trees.

Hold it!..... I got the fucking money, I was there for 36 fucking hours.

Another way of saying wait a minute.

I’ve been listening to your fucking bullshit all week! Are we square?

“Bullshit” is the classic obscenity to refer to lies, distortions, nonsense, etc. If two people are “square,” then they agree with each other.

Yeah, you fucking mute! And if you see your friend Shef Proudfoot, tell him I'm going to nail his fucking ass!

A "mute" is a person who is not able to talk. "To nail his fucking ass" is Carl's way of saying he is going to physically attack him.

Lundengard's father in law's accountant. :: Gunderson's accountant?

Note one can use two or more possessive apostrophes in a single noun phrase!

Sorry, didn't copy, Lou.

A police officer's way of saying hear, or understand.

I'm taking a drive around Moose Lake. Yeah, the loud mouth.

A "loud mouth" is a person who speaks too much and too loudly.

So that was Mrs. Lundergaard on the floor in there, and

I guess that was your accomplice in the woodchipper.

An "accomplice" is a person who helps another commit a crime.

A "woodchipper" is a machine that cuts wood into tiny pieces.

Mr. Anderson, is this your Burgundy '98 out here? Yeah, just a sec.

"Just a sec" is the most common way of asking someone to wait just a little time, or literally, a second (A Burgundy '98 is a type of car).

Whenever they raise the postage, they need the little three cent stamps. When they're stuck with the old ones.

"To raise the postage" is to raise the price of mailing stamps. To be "stuck with" something is to have to keep it, even if you don't want to.

Heck Norm, were doing pretty good.

Marge's way of saying that their lives are going well despite various problems.

# **Fargo**

## **Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion**

1. Are there regions of your own country where the local accent or dialect is considered particularly funny by people in other parts of the country?
2. Are there really people around who are as immoral and unfeeling as Carl and Gaear? Do you know any of them?
3. Should Jerry be charged with murder?  
What would the law be in your country?
4. How would you describe Jerry to a friend?  
Which adjectives are the most obvious?
5. Was the graphic violence unnecessary and offensive,  
or was it a critical part of the movie?
6. Did you like this movie? Why or why not?