

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

(Drama/Comedy) (1967)

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Major Characters

- John Wade Prentice.....Sidney Portier
A very accomplished and sweet black doctor who works for the United Nations' World Health Organization. John falls in love with Joey, his first relationship since his wife and child were killed in an accident eight years earlier.
- Joey (Joanna) Drayton.....Katherine Houghton
A sweet and innocent young white woman who lives in San Francisco, who meets and falls in love with John while on vacation in Hawaii.
- Matt Drayton.....Spencer Tracy
Joey's father, who is a wealthy and very liberal San Francisco newspaper publisher, and who has spoken out for racial equality and civil rights all of his adult life.
- Christina Drayton.....Katherine Hepburn
Joey's mother, who owns a small art gallery, and who has also been a supporter of civil rights all of her life.
- Monsignor Ryan.....Cecil Kellaway
A Catholic priest, who has been a dear family friend of the Draytons, who is also an extremely liberal and tolerant person (A "monsignor" is a word for an official of the church).
- Tillie (Miss Matilda Banks).....Isabel Sanford
The Drayton's black housekeeper, who has been a part of the family for over 22 years, and who helped raise Joey from when she was a baby.
- Mr. Prentice.....Roy E. Glenn Sr.
John's father, a retired mailman who lives in Los Angeles.
- Mrs. Prentice.....Beah Richards
John's extremely sweet and thoughtful mother.
- Hillary St. George.....Virginia Christine
An assistant to Christina who works in her art gallery.

Plot Summary

This film is the classic story of a Joanna, a young, charming and innocent woman, who falls in love with, and decides to marry, John, a wonderful black doctor. More specifically, it is the story of how the people around them, including their parents, friends and others, react to the news of a possible marriage between a black man and a white woman.

Joanna had been convinced that her parents would have no problem with the situation, because they had always raised her to believe that blacks and whites were equal, and that that any kind of racial intolerance was unacceptable. However, when her mother learns of the marriage plans, she is at first more shocked than happy, and when her father finds out, he finds himself unable to support what his daughter was about to do. Soon after, Mrs. Drayton comes to fully embrace the marriage, but Mr. Drayton must come face to face with the fact that he has trouble accepting his own liberal philosophy when it is applied so dramatically to his own life.

Over the course of the day, various other people face the news with greatly varied reactions, from Monsignor Ryan, who is extremely happy for the young couple, to Tillie, who seems as opposed to the idea of an interracial couple as the most conservative white people. That afternoon, John's parents fly up to San Francisco, and when they discover that Joanna is white, they too must face their own fears and prejudices. Eventually though, it is Mr. Drayton who must emotionally struggle the most, and who must come to realize that a truly liberal and progressive person can't oppose their marriage simply because other people in the world could make their lives difficult.

Some Brief Words on the Legal and Social Situation Concerning Biracial Couples in 1960's America: *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* came out in 1967, which was also the year that the United States Supreme Court ruled in a case called *Loving v. Virginia* that all laws which banned interracial marriages violated the United States Constitution. In fact, until that year, over 15 states still had statutes which prohibited a black and white person from getting married! The *Loving* case reflected the great social changes that were occurring within the United States at the time, most specifically because of the long and often violently opposed Civil Rights Movement. And as this film showed, even among socially liberal people who lived in such cities as San Francisco, the idea of a black and white person getting married was still shocking. Indeed, in many parts of the country, it probably still is....

Some Words and Expressions that You may not Know

John and Joanna return to San Francisco, so that she can introduce him to her wonderful and liberal parents.

You go find your folks.

A somewhat old-fashioned word for parents or people.

It's called a kinetic sculpture.

If something is "kinetic," it is usually in motion. A rarely used word.

Christine's lunching with Mr. Calzent. If you like, I can ring her up.

"To lunch" with someone is a dated verb (better to say to have lunch), and to "ring up" someone is now less common than "to phone."

Do you live in San Francisco, doctor? :: No, I'm just passing through.

If you are "passing through" a town, you're just there a day or two.

It's Hillary who runs the gallery now.

"To run" a store or business is to manage it. A "gallery" is a small business where painting and other art is shown and sold to the public.

Her idea of filling hotel rooms with original art is brilliant.

"Brilliant" is a powerful adjective meaning very smart. It is more common in England, where it also means sensational or great.

The hotel gets free décor.

A word to describe objects such as paintings or vases that help to decorate the inside of a house.

The painter gets a chance to make a sale and mom gets her commission.

An important word in business, referring to the percentage of the selling price that a person gets for selling a product.

Isn't that clever?

A nice little adjective meaning smart, intellectually quick or witty.

Twelve bucks, right?

A very common slang word for dollars.

You still ain't tell me why you come home early.

Note the use of "ain't" where "isn't" should be. This is very incorrect English that you should avoid, although it isn't that uncommon.

We'll have it on the terrace.

Another word for an outdoor patio, or a flat living area next to a house.

That's Dorothy. Isn't she a knockout?

A dated but still fun word to describe a beautiful or very sexy person (Her beauty is so great that, just like a boxer, she knocks you out).

Which days? :: Never mind!

An important expression that you use when you want to imply that what was just said or discussed is actually not important.

Geneva.

A city in Switzerland, and headquarters of the United Nation's World Health Organization.

Los Angeles, please. Area code 213.

This refers to the three numbers that you must dial to get a particular area of the country, before dialing a specific phone number.

The toll and charges.

Two words that refer to the costs of a long-distance telephone call.

I don't like seeing a member of my own race getting above himself.

One of Tillie's more memorable lines. The correct word is "himself."

Come on; just the turtle soup and tournedos.

The greatest and most versatile phrasal verb in English, often taking on the meaning of whatever words that follow it. Here, it means please ("Tournedos" is a cut of beef, but this is never used).

I rang the gallery to tell Hillary that Cazalet agreed to our scheme.

"Scheme" is an interesting word that means a plan of action, but note that it often connotes something secretive or tricky.

I'm so happy, I'm just..... :: Bursting. I can see that.

"To burst" is a powerful verb meaning to explode or break wide open, in this case with happiness.

I think I might, if you would pipe down long enough to tell me.

"Pipe down" is a fun imperative (command) phrasal verb meaning shut up or keep quiet.

Mary, what the hell difference does that make?

This is a common addition to Wh questions, which are used to show added emotion, such as anger or confusion.

You reckon to marry the girl, son?

A very old-fashioned way of saying to think, or consider.

He doesn't have any tensions in him.

An important word referring to degree of nervousness or emotional anxiety. Rarely used as a plural noun, but there it is!

He was married before and had a son. It was so tragic.

If something is "tragic," it is filled with great suffering and sadness.

Isn't that a lovely name?

Another word for pretty. More common in England than the US.

Mrs. Drayton meets John, and soon find herself in shock.

I take it Joanna's already busted out with the big news?

In this case, "to bust out" with the big news is to reveal and talk about it in a quick and excited manner.

She's only known me for 10 days and so she can't tell you when I'm blushing.

"To blush" is to become red in the cheeks from embarrassment (It's obviously harder to see when a black person is blushing).

I hope you won't think it presumptuous if I say that you ought to sit down before you fall down.

If someone is "presumptuous," they are being too forward, confident or even arrogant.

He thinks you're gonna faint because he's a Negro.

"To faint" is to lose consciousness, often because of emotional shock.

"Negro" is the very dated word for a black person, which quickly died out in the years immediately following the release of this movie (Note that in rapid speech, "going to"----->"gonna").

It would be all right if I say "My goodness," wouldn't it?

"My goodness" is a conservative way of expressing surprise or other emotion.

What did they say when you told them that I wasn't a colored girl?

"Colored," like "Negro," is a very dated way to refer to black people.

After all, a lot of people will think were a shocking pair.

Note that a "pair" can refer to two of anything, from socks to people.

John was invited to lecture at Hawaii University and we met at this big party at the Dean's.

The "dean" of a University is the person at the top who manages it.

That's marvelous.

Another good alternative to wonderful, great or fantastic.

And that's the whole situation, in a nutshell.

To tell about something "in a nutshell" is to give a summary, with just the most important details.

I told him 97 times it wouldn't make the slightest bit of difference to you or dad.

If something "doesn't make a difference," it's unimportant.

I told her not to spring all this on you so suddenly.

In this case, to “spring this on” a person is to tell them all at once, without giving them time to absorb the news.

You could give her half an hour to get adjusted.

In this case, “to get adjusted” means to get used to the idea of Joanna being with a black man.

All hell’s done broke loose.

Tillie’s way of saying “All hell has broken loose,” or that there is now lots of trouble in the house.

Is the waste disposal out again?

A “waste disposal,” more commonly called the garbage disposal, is a device in kitchen sinks that dissolves food so that it can be washed down the kitchen pipes. If a machine is “out,” it’s not working.

Mr. Drayton meets John, and soon finds himself emotionally overwhelmed.

Doctor, where are you practicing?

Note that a doctor “practices” medicine, just like a lawyer practices law.

I’m in tropical medicine, mostly in Africa.

The area of medicine that deals with diseases like malaria and cholera.

I must not keep the Monsignor waiting; I’m late as it is.

An interesting grammatical construction which in this case simply means “already.”

What the hell is going on here?

Note that “the hell” is added to Wh questions to show strong emotion such as anger or confusion.

I can explain it! :: Well, let’s have it.

This is Matt’s way of saying “go ahead.”

We flew back...to see if you or Mrs. Drayton would have any objections if we got married.

An “objection” is a statement of disapproval, or a reservation.

I had the stupid idea that there was some way to break this gently.

“To break” a piece of news is to disclose or reveal it.

It never occurred to me that I might fall in love with a Negro, but I did, and nothing in the world is going to change that.

This is another way of saying that “I never thought that....”

I wouldn't leave him go now, even if you were the governor of Alabama.

A reference to George Wallace, the racist governor of Alabama in the 1960s who was nationally known for opposing black civil rights.

If you're expecting any sensible statements from me, you'll have to give me some more time.

A useful word meaning reasonable or rational.

What the hell is all the rush?!

“Why are you in such a hurry?!”

We want you to state that when we do get married, we'll have your blessing.

A formal word that means official approval or encouragement.

Are you going to play golf? :: No, I'll just call it off.

“To call off” something is to cancel it.

When he puts on his American Eagle face, nobody can tell what he's thinking.

The American Eagle, the national bird of the United States, has a very serious and proud look. This is Joanna's way of saying that when her father looks very serious, you never know what he is thinking.

Tell him something has come up, something personal at home.

If something “comes up,” it unexpectedly happens.

Mr. And Mrs. Drayton learn more about John, and soon discover that there will be no marriage without their approval.

Call the library and see if they got any dope on a John Wayne Prentice.

In this case, “dope” is a way of referring to general information, particularly negative information about a person. “Dope” is more commonly used to refer to illegal drugs such as marijuana.

How do you feel about it? :: I was shaken at first. I still am, I suppose.

To be “shaken” is to be greatly surprised or upset.

If I'm not intruding...

“To intrude” means to enter a room or conversation when not wanted. It strongly connotes the violation of other people's privacy.

Joanna thinks that she is committed, and that our whole future is settled.
If something is “settled,” it means that everyone is in agreement about what should happen, in this case about their lives together.

Joanna said that you’re going to be married
no matter what we might think about it.
A grammatically interesting alternative to “whatever.”

Unless you two approve, and without any
restrictions at all, there won’t be any marriage.
Another word for limitations, or perhaps set conditions.

I’m just as startled as you must be.
A good word meaning scared or stunned, usually by a sudden surprise.

Two weeks ago I would have said such a thing was inconceivable.
An interesting way of saying not possible.

It’s almost in the form of an ultimatum.
An “ultimatum” is a powerful word meaning a demand that is made under the threat of force or violence.

Well, that’s where it’s at. Thank you for this opportunity to speak my piece.
“That’s where it’s at” is a slangy way of saying “that’s the situation.”
If a person gets the chance “to speak his piece,” he is given the opportunity to say what he is really feeling.

She’s 23...and she is exactly the way we brought her up to be.
“To bring up” a child is to take care of them until they are an adult.

We told her that it was wrong to believe that the
white people were essentially superior to black people.
“Essentially” is a useful word meaning basically.

He’s an important guy...graduated Maxima Cum Laude, Johns Hopkins ’54.
This is a Latin term meaning with excellent grades and class standing.
(Johns Hopkins is a major University, as it was back in 1954).

Two text books and a list of medical society honors as long as your arm.
One way of saying how accomplished John is in his profession.

He made a call to Los Angeles; I guess he doesn’t bum free phone calls either.
“To bum” is a British slang term meaning to borrow,
with no real intention of ever paying back.

He loves me, he loves me not.
This is exactly what a person says when picking the petals of a flower,
while trying to find out if an object of their affection really loves them.

I've been nervous, not about what they'd ultimately feel, but just their first reaction.

This is an important word meaning in the end, or when all is done.

I thought it was possible that they might let me down for the first half hour.

"To let down" someone is to disappoint them.

You're a big phony!

A "phony" is a person who is not what they claim to be, or perhaps a liar, imposter or hypocrite. A phony piece of art is fake, or not genuine.

I feel glad that Joey is Joey.

A useful alternative to happy.

Having a streak fry, huh?

A very dated way of referring to a barbecue.

You want to give me a lift to Market Street? Save me a cab.

A slightly more British way of saying a ride (in a car).

You know it, doll!

A very 1960s way of saying "You're right."

I hope this is better than the last one we had, hotshot.

A "hotshot" is a slangy way of referring to a person who thinks they are very talented, accomplished or cool.

I deliver it; I don't rustle the cattle.

"To rustle cattle" is simply to steal cows. Not particularly useful!

Civil rights is one thing, but this here is something else.

A reference to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, in which people fought for the rights of blacks to be equal members of US society.

I think he thought I was, you know, attractive.

Still a great adjective for saying pretty or handsome, or just pleasant.

Do you mean have we been to bed together?

Today, when speaking of sex, one is more likely say "slept together."

Are you saying they don't have any sense of rhythm?

This refers to the regular, repeated sounds of music or speech.

You can do the Watusi, but we are the Watusi.

A type of dance that was popular in the 1960s.

Willy Mays could be elected mayor of San Francisco.

A great baseball star who played with the San Francisco Giants.

I own a newspaper, but I couldn't be elected dog catcher.

A dog catcher is what you think he is, but for some reason, this is said whenever a person wants to express how unpopular someone is.

Frankly, I think your daughter is a bit optimistic.

A good way for the speaker to warn that he's about to give a completely honest opinion, even if it might be offensive or uncomfortable.

I'd settle for Secretary of State.

In the US, this is the equivalent of a Foreign Minister.

Would you think it some kind of cowardice that no matter how confident you two are, I'm just a little bit scared.

An educated word for fear or lack of courage.

She said "My dad is a lifelong fighting liberal who loathes race prejudice."

In the 1960s, those who were politically liberal were the ones who worked for civil rights. "To loath" is to hate or detest, and "race prejudice" is a dated way of referring to racism.

Hi dad, what's up, man?

A slangy and still common way of greeting, or saying hi to someone.

Stop butting in!

"To butt into" a person's business or life is to start investigating it, when they would prefer to keep it private.

Your mother says she is pleased.

A slightly dated and weak word for satisfied, or perhaps happy.

Why do you keep trying to dramatize everything?

"To dramatize" something is to make it seem dramatic, tense, or highly emotional.

It's the damndest thing you ever heard of.

In this context, a funny little adjective meaning amazing or curious.

They pick up the brightest native kids and they put them through courses, just like they do in the US Army corpsman.

"Brightest" is smartest, "courses" are classes (in this case, in medicine).

They are all specialists trained to do one special task, like sewing up a wound or delivering a baby, or what have you.

A "task" is another word for a job or assignment. A "wound" is an injury, and often a hole or tear in the skin.

For every thousand kids they train, they can save a million lives a year.

"To train" a person is to teach them a particular skill.

He got the best breaks because everybody he met didn't want him to think that they were prejudiced against him.

In this case, "breaks" are little opportunities or advantages.
In this context, a "prejudiced" person is racist or biased.

I wouldn't know how to fault him.

"To fault" a person is to blame them, or in this case, to find something negative about them.

We're being pressurized! You know that, don't you?

Here, Matt creatively uses this word as a way of meaning to put under extreme social pressure to conform, though it's never used like this.

[Doorbell Ring]-----> I'll get it, Tillie.

Placed here to remind you that when answering a door or phone, the only correct verb tense is the immediate "pronoun + ll" future, contraction, so stop saying "I will get it"!

Monsignor Ryan meets John, and then forces Matt Drayton to face the meaning of being true to one's principles.

What is the problem that caused your father to chicken out on golf?

"To chicken out" on something is to become too scared to do it.

You're a remarkable fellow, John.

"Remarkable" is a strong adjective meaning greatly noticeable or amazing. A "fellow" is a British alternative to guy.

Little Joey is nothing less than radiant.

If someone is radiant, they are shining with love or happiness.

You do have beautiful thoughts! :: That's my trade, you know.

A "trade" can be an alternative word for business or profession.

You know, this man is quite a famous fellow in his own right.

An interesting way of saying "himself."

He's done incredible work in Asia and some awful place in Africa.

"Awful" is a powerful adjective meaning horrible or terrible.

Express some more beautiful thoughts to the lad there.

A British word for boy or guy.

I hope you won't think that I'm prying, doctor.

"To pry" is to try and learn about things that other people might think should remain private.

Joey tells me congratulations are in order, and that you don't even know.
A formal way of saying that there is great news to celebrate.

I knew something was up when I came to the gallery.
If "something is up," this means that something strange, odd or mysterious is happening. Very common colloquial speech.

It's so unlike Joey to do anything so appallingly stupid!
"Appalling" is a powerful adjective meaning shocking or terrible
(Though note here that it is used as an adverb).

Go into the office and make out a check for cash for the sum of \$5,000.
Note that if you write "cash" in the "Pay to the order of" line on a check, that check is considered just like cash.

Then remove anything that might subsequently remind me that you had ever been there...
"Subsequently" means later in time.

.... including the yellow thing with the blue bulbs that you have such an affection for.
"Bulbs" are a shortened way of referring to light bulbs.

Then take that \$5,000 and get permanently lost.
"Get lost" is a harsh and very direct way of telling someone to leave.

We're not really the sort of people that you can afford to be associated with.
Christina's way of saying that Hillary would be embarrassed, if she were seen with people whose daughter was involved with a black man.

If he had played his cards right, you would never even had met me, but he fell for some girl from Pomona.
"To play one's cards right" is to make the most of an opportunity or situation, in this case concerning a possible romance. "To fall" for somebody is to become greatly attracted to them.

That will teach him!
A common expression which means that hopefully this person will learn from their stupid mistake.

She has a quite ruthless streak.
"Ruthless" is a powerful word meaning very cruel or brutal, and if a person has a "ruthless streak," they can on occasion act very cruelly.

No, don't budge, please.
"To budge" is to move or to cause to move just a little.

If they know what lies in store for them....

Another way of saying “what the future will bring....”

You’re really thrashing about.

“To thrash about” is to greatly struggle, like a fish out of water.

It’s amazing to see a broken down phony old liberal come face to face with his principles.

A person who is “broken down” is emotionally or physically exhausted, or wiped out. This is Ryan’s way of telling Matt that he is not acting as if he really believed all the talk he has made over the years about the importance of racial equality.

I’ve always known that behind that fighting liberal façade there must be some sort of reactionary bigot trying to get out.

A “façade” is a face, or perhaps surface. A “reactionary bigot” is generally a politically conservative or right wing racist.

Oh, go to hell! You and your group are still preaching hell, aren’t you?

“Go to hell” is one of the classic religiously oriented insults, both less common and less vulgar than “fuck you.” This is Matt’s reference to the fact that many Christians still talk of heaven and hell after death (“To preach” is to give a religious talk or sermon, usually in a church).

Well, I’m off.

A very common way of saying “I’m leaving.”

I may be able to save a few souls before supper.

A “soul” is the spiritual or non-physical part of a person that many think survives after death. “Supper” is a dated word for dinner.

What was that Beatles song? “We can work it out!”

“To work out” a problem is to agree how to solve it (“We can work it out” is also a famous Beatles song).

It looks a little grim, doesn’t it?

“Grim” is an excellent word meaning unhappy or perhaps threatening, severe or uninviting.

I hope you don’t mind, but I just wrangled an invitation to dinner.

In this case, “to wrangle” means to win by persuasion or argument.

Marvelous; I’m delighted you’re coming.

“Marvelous” is a nice alternative to wonderful or great.

“Delighted” is a sweet way of saying very happy.

I’ll tell Tillie. If you listen, you’ll hear her go through the roof.

If somebody “goes through the roof,” they are probably very angry.

I brought you the latest bulletin.

A “bulletin” is an official announcement or declaration of news.

***Matt and Christina struggle with the world and race,
as Tillie makes clear what she thinks of John.***

Whatever happened to what’s-his-name?

A common way to refer to a person whose name you have forgotten.

It was only last Christmas that she said that Homer had the inside track.

If a person has “the inside track” in a race (in this case for the love of a girl), they are the most likely to win.

Daiquiri ice? Honeycomb candy? Coca coconut? Jamoca almond fudge?
Peanut Butter and Jelly? Cinnamon Banana mint?

These are all types of ice cream flavors. None of them are that important, though you should know that Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwiches are a great contribution to American cuisine.

Fresh Oregon Boysenberry sherbet.

“Sherbet” is a healthier, less fattening dessert than ice cream (Oregon is a Northwestern State, and boysenberry is a great fruit).

I got something to say to you, boy.

Just what exactly are you trying to pull here?

“To pull” is to do something so discretely or quietly that you hope nobody will object or try to prevent you from doing it (Note that “to pull off” something is simply to accomplish it).

Oh, you make with witticisms and all, huh?

A “witticism” is a fancy word for a joke (A “witty” person is funny).

You’re one of them smooth talking smart ass niggers, just out for all you can get with your black power, and all that trouble making nonsense.

The first expression is Tillie’s way of referring to educated black people who should not be trusted (And note that “nigger” is an extremely racist word for a black person, though some blacks will often use it among themselves). “Black Power” refers to the movement among some blacks in the 1960s who demanded radical political change, but in fact John was probably not the type of person who would have been involved in the Black Power movement.

I brought up that child from a baby in her cradle and ain’t nobody going to harm her none while I’m watching.

A “cradle” is a little bed for babies. Try to avoid the ‘ain’t’ and double negatives that Tillie often uses.

Do you read me boy?

“To read” someone is a colloquial way of saying to understand them.

And furthermore, you ain’t even all that good looking!

“Furthermore” is an alternative way of saying “in addition.”

“Good looking” is a common way of saying pretty or handsome

You stupid idiot!

A widely used insult noun, meaning a very stupid or dumb person.

Who cares about your lousy insurance?

“Lousy” is a good word for bad or useless.

You ought to be put away in a home or something.

In this context, “a home” refers to a sanitarium or old person’s home, where senior citizens often live together.

Some of these old guys, they’re senile.

A person who is “senile” has lost much of their ability to remember.

[Song]---That’s the glory of love.

A powerful word meaning great honor, fame or success.

Matt Drayton really stands for something in this town.

“To stand for” something is to be a symbol of it. In this case, Matt is a symbol of liberal thinking, and the courage to say what he thinks.

There’s never been a single public issue on which Matt didn’t take a stand.

“To take a stand” on an issue is to declare a specific opinion.

It’s the silliest thing I’ve ever heard of.

“Silly” is a nice little word meaning ridiculous or unimportant.

I’m thinking only of Joey’s welfare.

In this case, another word for well being, or perhaps happiness.

I happen to know that they’ll both get their brains knocked out.

To “knock out” a person is to hit them so hard they lose consciousness.

This is Matt’s way of saying that he’s worried that society will not accept a black man married to a white woman.

You’re so wrapped up in Joey’s excitement over the whole thing that you’re not behaving in her best interest.

“To be wrapped up” in something is to be obsessed by, or completely focused on. To do something in a person’s “best interest” is to do what will be best for their future.

***Mr. And Mrs. Ward arrive from Los Angeles,
and soon discover the shocking news that Joanna isn't black,
as Matt Drayton still struggles with the logic of Father Ryan.***

They look like awfully nice people.

Note that “awful” means horrible, but as an adverb, “awfully” means only “very.”

You have bags?

A clever and subtle play on words; “Bags” are, of course, one way to refer to luggage or suitcases, but be aware that a person carrying a lot of “baggage” has certain psychological problems. In this case, perhaps related to race relations.

That's out of the question!

A common expression meaning that something is simply not possible.

I think you're going to regret it with more bitterness for as long as you live.

A powerful noun referring to anger and resentment.

The most obvious mistake you're making is in underestimating your own daughter.

“To underestimate” a person is to not realize how much that person can do or accomplish.

For what it may be worth, I'm going to be on her side.

An expression that means “to the extent that you think this is important.” Often used when it's unclear what the listener is thinking.

They were shaken, all right.

If a person is “shaken,” they are upset or greatly disturbed.

I can't blame them for being stunned by it all.

Another word that means shocked or perhaps overwhelmed.

The two of you are behaving like a couple of escaped lunatics.

A lunatic is a great and somewhat funny word for a crazy person.

You know, there is a kind of envy that is in no way sinful.

“Envy” can be a strong desire to have what somebody else has. If something is “sinful,” it is shameful, wrong, or literally, something of which God would disapprove.

Scotch.

A popular type of hard liquor.

What's the matter?

A very common way to ask somebody what is wrong.

Where is Matt? :: He is upstairs changing.

Note that he's changing clothes, but "to change" does not require the direct object.

Are you gonna put a stop to this damn nonsense foolishness?

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

In this case, "foolishness" is ridiculous or stupid behavior.

"Nobody understands nothing no more."

Tillie's charming way of speaking, filled with double negatives that You should definitely avoid.

They've boxed me into a hell of a corner here.

"To box someone into a corner" is to trap them so that they have no good choices in a difficult situation.

Oh, for god's sake!

A common way of letting out anger and frustration.

Christina has more respect for Joey's judgement. :: Oh, come off it!

An excellent expression that people use when they think that the listener is saying lies or nonsense. "Stop saying such ridiculous things."

When were you so angry? When you took 9 shots on the 7th green!

A reference to Golf, of which I know little.

You're angry with yourself! :: You're a pontificating old poop.

A funny insult. "To pontificate" is to preach with great authority, like a Pope. "Poop" is a relatively good and gentle word for shit.

In a single day, you've been thrown. You're off balance.

To be "thrown off" is to be made greatly confused, though note here that Ryan drops the preposition. If a person is "off balance," they are confused and unsure of how to act or move forward.

They wouldn't have a dog's chance, not in the whole stinking world.

A funny way to describe a world that is filled with racism and violence and so on. "To stink" is to smell horrible.

If I were 10 years younger, I would wrestle you to the floor.

Note the beginning of the sentence, with the honorable subjunctive verb tense (and not "If I was..."). "To wrestle" someone is to engage them in hand to hand fighting, just as in the sport of wrestling.

*The Prentices arrive for dinner, and soon it is clear
that the mothers accept what the fathers still cannot.*

May I have some sherry please?

A popular type of sweet wine.

John, would you be a good bartender.

The person who serves the drinks while working behind a bar.

You have such a magnificent view.

A good word for fantastic, wonderful or even fabulous.

The view of the sunset was brehtaking.

Another word meaning beautiful, magnificent or perhaps gorgeous.

Coming Up!

What a bartender or waiter says when they're about to bring a drink.

It's only when you're eloping that you keep it a secret.

"To elope" is a curious verb meaning to run away secretly in order to get married.

Forgive my being so abrupt and so direct....

"Abrupt" means sudden, impolite and perhaps too assertive.

If you'll excuse me, I'll go up and throw a few things together.

Another way to say pack one's bags, or possibly organize them.

I wouldn't want to offend you, but are you some kind of a nut?

A funny and common slang word for a crazy person.

I'm nothing but a pensioned-off mailman, but you are right out of your mind.

A "pension" is a retirement account that your employer pays you after you are no longer working. If someone is "out of their mind," they are crazy or greatly disturbed.

I was sorry to hear that you intend to withdraw from the situation if you encounter any opposition.

"To withdraw" is to pull back or retreat, in this case from a commitment to get married. "To encounter" is to meet or face.

This is a mess; Where's Joey?

A "mess" is a state of physical disorder or untidiness (such as in a messy room), but as in this case, it also refers to ridiculously complex and difficult situations.

I set the terms, mama.

In this case, the conditions or requirements.

You know that you're nothing but a source of pride for me and your mother.

What parents think of their children when they grow up to make them proud.

In 16 of 17 states, you'd be breaking the law!

This is a reference to the fact that at the time, many states outlawed marriages between blacks and whites (See plot summary above).

For a man who never put a wrong foot anywhere, you're way out of line.

"To get off on the wrong foot" is to start off the day badly, or perhaps to make a lot of mistakes, but I've never heard the wording used above. If someone is "out of line," they are saying or doing something that is inappropriate or unacceptable. Common and useful.

You know I've worked my ass off to buy you all the chances you had.

"To work your ass off" is a crude but widely used way of saying that you have worked very seriously, often over a long period of time.

Mowing lawns in the dark so you wouldn't have to be stoking furnaces, and you could bear down on the books.

"To mow lawns" is to cut grass with a lawn mower, which is a machine that is found in the homes of all American suburbs. "To stoke a furnace" is to feed the fire within the furnace, which is a type of home heater. "To bear down on the books" is to study seriously.

Not fancy things, a decent coat. A lousy coat.

"Decent" is a good adjective meaning acceptable or of fairly good quality. "Lousy" means of poor condition, but as in this case, is used to mean unimportant or simple.

You and my husband, you might as well be blind men.

A grammatically interesting way of saying "You behave as if you were blind men."

They forget what true passion is.

An important word meaning a deep and strong emotion, often related to love, sex and even anger.

I don't care what your mother says; Maybe she's gone haywire too.

"Haywire" is a dated word that means violently crazy or insane.

This is between you and me. :: That's exactly where it's at!

"You are exactly right."

I owe you nothing, if you carried that bag a million miles. You did what you were supposed to do because you brought me into this world.

John's philosophy of the responsibilities of being a parent.

And not unit your whole generation has lain down and died will the dead weight of you be off our backs.

Note the use of the present perfect of the verb "to lay down."

In reality, few people say "lain down," since they prefer *laid* down.

You've got to talk John's parents into flying over with you.

"To talk someone into" doing something

is to try and convince them to do it.

Isn't this thrilling?

A good little word that means very exciting.

There are a hundred cliché phrases of comfort for every human condition.

A "cliché" is a an expression that is repeated so often that everyone knows it, such as "If you've got your health, you've got everything."

In the midst of this heartbreaking distress, I'm completely stumped.

To be "in the midst of" something is to be in the middle of it, or completely surrounded by it. "Distress" is great pain or suffering. If you are "stumped," you are confused, baffled, or unable to find a solution to a difficult problem.

I'll be a son-of-a-bitch.

A curious expression that people will say when they suddenly realize the answer to a difficult problem. A "son-of-a-bitch" is crude term for a mean, cruel or abusive person.

You didn't have the guts to tell me face to face.

"The guts" is a common slang term for courage (as well as the medical term for intestines, found in the human stomach).

Joanna, you know I'm completely sympathetic, don't you?

In this case, a somewhat dated word for emotionally supportive, or perhaps showing sympathy and compassion.

Matt comes to realize the importance of following what you believe....

At some preliminary guessing, at which I was never very good...

"Preliminary" is another word for preparatory, or perhaps initial.

In a word, I was flabbergasted.

An interesting adjective which means amazed, shocked or baffled.

Then, the next rather startling development occurred when you walked in.
If something is “startling,” it is stunning or shocking.

My wife decided to ignore every practical aspect of the situation,
and was carried away in some kind of romantic haze...

“Haze” is a light smoke or mist that
makes things difficult to see clearly.

...which made her inaccessible to anything in the way of reason.

“Reason” is an important word meaning logic.

I have not referred to his reverence, who began forcing his
way into the situation by mouthing 300 platitudes.

“His reverence” is a very formal way to refer to a priest or other religious
figure. “Platitudes” are statements that are true, but so overused that they
are not original or helpful.

And Mrs. Prentice says that like her husband,
I’m a burnt-out old shell of a man.

“Burnt-out” is a common colloquial adjective to describe
a person who is exhausted of all energy and vitality.

Strange as it seems, that is the first statement made
all day with which I am prepared to take issue.

“To take issue” with a statement is to argue against it.

The memories are still there; Clear, intact and indestructible.

If something is “intact,” it is still whole, with no parts missing.
Anything that is “indestructible” can not be destroyed.

In the final analysis, it doesn’t matter a damn what we think.

“It is completely unimportant...”

When Christina and I and your mother have some time
to work on him, you’ll have no problem with your father.

In this context, “to work on” somebody is to try and convince
them to change their mind about an important issue.

They’ll be 100,000,000 people right here in this country
who will be shocked, offended and appalled at the two of you.

A powerful adjective meaning deeply upset and angry.

And the two of you will just have to ride that out.

“To ride out” an unpleasant situation is to
learn to survive and deal with it over time.

You'll just have to cling tight to each other, and say screw all those people.

"To cling tight" to a person is to hold them tightly. If you tell a person to "screw them," you're telling them to ignore what they think or say.

Anybody can make a case against your getting married.

"To make a case" against something is to present logical arguments against it.

You two wonderful people, who happened to fall in love, and happen to have a pigmentation problem.

"Pigmentation" is a medical word relating to the color of human skin.

No matter what case some bastard can make against you getting married..... there would only be one thing worse, and that's if you didn't get married.

A "bastard" is a crude slang term for a mean, cruel or abusive man.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

Some Potential Questions for ESL Class Discussion

1. How much have things changed since 1967? Would a marriage between a black and a white person still be shocking in the United States? What about your country?
2. Matt Drayton wasn't personally racist, but he was very concerned about how difficult it would be for John and Joanna, given how many racist people there were in the world; Is this a legitimate concern? Enough to be opposed to the marriage, on those grounds alone?
3. Is the gay desire to have society accept their marriages today similar to what biracial couples went through 40 years ago? Do you think it's the same? How? How is it different?
4. Was it surprising to you that various black characters were as opposed to the marriage as some of the whites?
5. Were there other reasons to be opposed to the marriage that had nothing to do with race?
- 6.. Was John right to tell Joanna's parents that he wouldn't marry her unless they completely approved? Isn't that a little too conservative?
7. Would Joanna and John make a good couple?
8. Has this film aged well? Why or why not?

