

Harold and Maude

(Comedy) (1971)

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Major Characters

Harold Chasen.....Bud Court

A depressed 20 year old man who lives with his mother, who is obsessed with death, and whose favorite hobby is going to funerals.

Maude.....Ruth Gordon

A very spirited 80 year old woman who also loves to go to funerals, who meets Harold and teaches him that there are in fact many wonderful things in life, if you learn how to appreciate them.

Mrs. Chasen.....Vivian Pickles

Harold's rich and superficial mother who seems completely unaware of Harold's true unhappiness, and who feels that she can solve all his problems by buying him things and arranging social dates with various girls his age.

Uncle Victor.....Charles Tyner

Harold's uncle, who is a general in the US army, and who is convinced all of Harold's problems could be solved if he goes into the military.

Plot Summary

This film is probably the funniest movie you'll ever see about the subject of suicide. It is the story of Harold Chasen, a sensitive and emotionally disturbed 20 year old man who lives in Northern California with his wealthy mother. Harold is psychologically depressed, and actually spends much of his time attending funerals and pretending to kill himself in various violent and ridiculous ways. His mother is so out of touch with Harold's real emotions that she believes that if she can only find Harold a nice girl to marry, his problems would be solved.

One day Harold meets Maude at a funeral. Maude is 80 and also obsessed with death, but unlike Harold, she is also very much in love with life, and is certainly the most lively and different person that Harold has ever met. Over the next few months, they become close friends, and then despite the difference in their ages, Harold actually falls in love with her. Maude teaches Harold many things, including the circular nature of life, death and rebirth. She also shows him that even with all the problems of the world, life is very much worth living, at least for a man like Harold, who is still so young...

Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

Harold shows us his passion for death, as his mom, uncle and psychologist try to figure out the best way to respond.

Darling, be a dear and cancel my appointment with Renee this afternoon.
 “Be a dear” is a silly and rich person’s way of telling somebody to be nice and do what they say.

I’ll know he’ll be furiosus, but I’ve had such a frightful day.
 If a person is “furiosus,” they are extremely angry.
 If something is frightful, it is very scary.

Do try and be a little more vivacious.
 If a person is “vivacious, they are full of life and have lots of energy.

Harold’s father had a similar sense of the absurd.
 In this case, an appreciation or liking of totally foolish or even insane behavior (If something is “absurd,” it is clearly ridiculous).

He was arrested by the police for floating nude down the Seine, experimenting in river currents with rubber water wings.
 The Seine is the famous river that divides Paris, France.
 A “current” is a wave, or the direction that water moves.

Mauve ones.
 “Mauve” is a color similar to purple.

That cost quite a bit of influence et d’argent to hush up.
 Mrs. Chasen loves to show off her French, and thus the first underlined words mean “and money” in French. “To hush up” something is to try and keep it quiet so others don’t find out about it.

Harold’s always been a very delicate child.
 In this case, “delicate” means fragile or easily hurt.

He seemed totally prone to every possible kind of illness.
 If a person is “prone to” something, they are likely to be effected by it (In this case, Harold became easily sick as a child).

I can’t stand much more of this. I can’t take it anymore.
 If a person “can’t stand” something, they hate it. If they “can’t take it,” they can not accept or endure it, and thus try to avoid it.

That's very interesting, and I think illuminating.
If a piece of information is "illuminating,"
it helps you clarify or understand something.

There seems to be a definite pattern emerging.
In this case, a "pattern" is a type of behavior that occurs over and over
again. "To emerge" is to come, appear or become more noticeable.

This pattern, once isolated, can be coped with.
If a pattern is "isolated," it is separated from other things in order to be
clearly recognized. "To cope with" a problem is to learn to accept or live
with it, with as little suffering as possible.

What do you find fulfilling?
If something is "fulfilling," it is satisfying or makes you content.

What activity gives you a different sense of enjoyment?
A complicated way of asking "What do you like to do?"

Sometimes you have to moan when nothing seems to suit you [Song]
"To moan" is to make a low sound of pain or suffering (or sexual
pleasure). If something "suits you," you like it or enjoy it.

Thou dost anoint my head with oil. [Sermon]
"You have rubbed my head with oil."

Kindness and grace shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord. [Sermon]
"Grace" is kindness or natural beauty. "To dwell" in a house is to live
there, but this is very old fashioned. "The Lord" is another way of
referring to God.

Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord
or who shall stand in his place? [Sermon]
"To ascend" is to go up or climb.

The pure of heart, who has not turned his mind
to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully to his neighbor. [Sermon]
"Vanity" is ego, or too much concern with how you look or appear to
others, especially in terms of physical beauty. "To swear" at a person is
to scream at them using dirty words, and if something is done
"deceitfully," it is done dishonestly or with an intent to lie or cheat.

He shall recite the blessing from the Lord. [Sermon]
"To recite" a prayer is to say it out loud.

God, his savior. [Sermon]

In this case, a “savior” is a religious figure who saves the person’s life by saving their soul for life after death.

Why you purchased that monstrosity, I have no idea!

A monstrosity is a great word for something that is horribly ugly or impractical or just easy to hate.

That ugly black horror is an eyesore.

If something is an “eyesore,” it is so ugly it is unpleasant to look at it.

It is time you settled down and stopped flitting away your talents on these amateur theatrics...these divertissements...

“To settle down” means to get married, get a job and raise a family.

“To flit away” talent is to waste it or not take advantage of it over a long period of time. “Amateur theatrics” are acts or scenes performed by a person who is not a professional actor, and “divertissements” is a French word for games or silly activities (it is not used in English).

...no matter how psychologically purging they may be.

“To purge” is to throw up, or perhaps to expel or get rid of something from the body.

Uncle Victor---Perhaps he can fathom you.

“To fathom” a person is to truly understand them.

After all, he was General MacArthur’s right-hand man.

A “right-hand man” is a valued assistant who takes care of different types of jobs, errands and other assignments for one particular person.

There are plenty of slant-eyed girls.

A totally ridiculous and racist way of referring to the eyes of Asian people (A slant is an angle).

I’ll make a man out of you!

“To make a man out of” a person is to teach them how to be strong and brave or courageous. A silly but still used expression.

You’ll walk tall, with a glint in your eye, and a spring in your step.

A “glint” in your eye is a small flash of light, and a “spring” in your step is a small burst of speed or energy when walking.

That’s what this country needs. More Nathan Hales!

Nathan Hale was a famous soldier during the American Revolutionary War who was killed by the British.

How many of these suicides have you performed?

Note that usually a person “*commits* suicide,” but Harold sees suicide as part of a theatre performance, and thus he *performs* them.

An accurate number would be difficult to gauge. :: A rough estimate.

“To gauge” a number is to guess or estimate it.

A “rough estimate” is a general or approximate guess.

Were they all done for your mother’s benefit?

To do something for a person’s “benefit” is to do it for their enjoyment or advantage.

You have led a very carefree, idle, happy life up to the present.

If a person is “carefree,” they have few problems, worries or responsibilities. If a person has an “idle” life, they have lots of free time but do little with it but lazily pass the time away.

We have our obligations, our duties, principles.

An “obligation” is a job or responsibility that a person is required to take care of. A “duty” is a serious word for a responsibility or requirement, and a person’s principles are those beliefs or ways of behavior that are considered fundamental and must be followed.

We pray...that he may bless and deliver the souls of all the faithful departed, from the pain of hell and the bottomless pit. [Sermon]

Some not-so-cheerful words that summarize the Christian belief that those who do not become Christians will go to hell after they die (Here, hell is seen as a “bottomless pit,” which is a horrible black hole through which one will fall forever).

Bring them to the blessing of light, holy life and eternal rest. [Sermon]

A “blessing” is a gift from God. If something is “holy,” it is sacred or associated with God. If something is “eternal,” it lasts forever.

No man becomes holy in your sight unless you grant him forgiveness of all sins. [Sermon]

“To grant a person forgiveness” is a very official way of saying to forgive them for what they have done. A “sin” is an act that is considered a crime against God (such as sex outside of marriage).

We implore you, therefore, do not let the verdict of your judgement against him...who the Christian faith commends to mercy. [Sermon]

“To implore” is to beg, a “verdict” is a legal or official pronouncement, and “to commend” is a very old way of saying to recommend. “Mercy” is the act of treating a person gently after they have done something wrong. All of this is the minister’s way of asking God to forgive people.

He was signed with the seal of the holy trinity. [Sermon]

A “seal” is an official mark or stamp, and the “holy trinity” refers to the Christian belief in Jesus Christ as the human form of God.

You, who live and reign, forever and ever. Amen. [Sermon]

“To reign” is an old but still used word meaning to rule.

“Amen” is a religious word that ends most Christian prayers.

Harold meets Maude at a funeral, and the two soon become friends.

Good time to move on, don't you think?

In this case, “to move on” means to enter a new phase or part of life.

75 is too early, but at 85, you're just marking time.

If a person is “marking time,” they are passing time with no particular goal or plan of action.

You may as well go over the horizon.

Maude's poetic way of saying that at a certain point, a person should agree that it is best to die and move on to another stage of existence.

I'll never understand this mania for black.

A “mania” is wild obsession or extreme interest in something.

Who sends black flowers to a funeral? :: It's **absurd!**

A great little word meaning totally ridiculous.

Can I give you a lift?

“Can I give you a ride?” is more common, but both are very practical ways of asking a person if you can drive them somewhere in your car.

Well, I must be off. We shall have to meet again.

If a person must “be off,” they have to leave.

“Shall” is a British way of saying should.

I have here the forms sent out by the National Computer Dating Service.

A “form” is a piece of paper that is filled out in order to provide basic information such as identity, income level, etc. It's interesting to note here that as early as 1971, computers were being used to match people for potential romantic relationships.

They screen out the fat and the ugly, so it's obviously a firm of high standards.

"To screen out" some people from a larger group is to eliminate them, or decide not to even consider them. A "firm" is a company, and here, "high standards" refers to the high quality of the people they let place ads on their service.

Do you remember jokes and take pleasure in relating them to others?

If you "relate jokes to others," they make you think of those people.

Is the subject of sex being over exploited by our mass media?

If a subject is being "over exploited," it is being paid too much attention, often because people have an intense interest in it.

The "mass media" refers to media such as TV, film and radio, as well as the larger newspapers and magazines.

Do you believe in capital punishment for murder? Oh yes, I do indeed.

"Capital punishment" refers to the death penalty, which is used for such crimes as murder. "Indeed" is a very British word of emphasis which means "absolutely" or "to be sure."

Are social affairs a waste of time? Oh, heaven's no!

In this case, "social affairs" simply refers to the conversations and other interactions of people. "Heaven's no" is a dramatic way of saying "absolutely not!"

Do you think the sexual revolution has gone too far?

If a social or political movement has "gone too far," many people think it has become too extreme or become counter productive.

Do you find the idea of wife swapping distasteful?

"Wife swapping" is the act of exchanging wives for sexual purposes, which became somewhat popular during the sexual revolution of the 1960s. If something is "distasteful," it is in poor taste.

Do you have ups and downs without obvious reason?

In this case, a reference to moods or emotions that go up and down.

Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. [Sermon]

Very Christian words used to directly address God.

The kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. [Sermon]

"God, may your desires be carried out here on earth..."

Forgive us our trespasses. [Sermon]

A curious use of this word to mean crimes or sins (Usually, "to trespass" is to go on private property without approval).

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen. [Sermon]
 A way of asking God to keep you good and pure, and not tempted or attracted to evil.

Were you not the lady who drove my car off yesterday?
 “To drive off” in a car is to leave in it.

With the St. Christopher medal on the dashboard?
 A “medal” is a small piece of metal with words or pictures that is used to honor a person for their great accomplishments. The “dashboard” of a car is the instrument board or panel located in front of the driver.

Were you the one who painted the saint?
 A “saint” is a person who is recognized by the Catholic Church after they die as having led a great or holy life of good works.

For aesthetic appreciation, always a little time!
 “Aesthetic” refers to physical beauty.

Don't be discouraged!
 If a person is “discouraged,” they are sad because they have begun to lose hope that something will turn out well.

What a delight it is to bump into you again!
 A “delight” is a great or unexpected pleasure, and if you “bump into” a person, you see them by chance, without having planned to meet.

It's all change, all revolving, burials and birth, one linked to the other.
 If something is “revolving,” it is turning around and around.
 A “burial” is a funeral, or the act of burying a dead body.

The great circle of life.
 Maude's poetic way of describing the process in which people are born, grow old and then die.

Hey, this little thing handles well.
 If a car “handles well,” it is easy or fun to drive.

Ever drive a hearse, Harold?
 A long car that is made for transporting coffins (The boxes in which the bodies of dead people are buried).

Good on curves.
 A “curve” is a bend in the road (the opposite of a straight line).

Just before he left for the monastery in Tibet, he gave me his keys.
A building where Buddhist monks or other very religious people pass the time in prayer and service to God.

Once you have your basic set, it's only a question of variation.
In this case, a "basic set" refers to a basic set of keys that serve as the core or most important part of Maude's key collection.

You hop in any car you want and just drive off?
To "hop in" a car is to jump in or get in quickly.

Nevertheless, I think you're upsetting people.
"To upset" a person is to make them angry, sad or unhappy.

I'm merely acting as a gentle reminder; Here today, gone tomorrow.
"Merely" is a nice little word that means only. "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow" is well known expression which says that people should not expect things to be around forever (In this case, their cars).

So don't get attached to things, and now, with that in mind, I'm not against collecting stuff.
If you become "attached" to something, you want to hold on to it and keep it. "Stuff" is a very useful word that refers to things in general.

This is all memorabilia, but it's incidental, not integral, if you know what I mean.
"Memorabilia" is various small objects that remind people of other people or places from their past. If something is "incidental," it is an unimportant part of a greater whole, while if it is "integral," it is seen as a critical or core part of that greater whole.

They're the only wildlife I get to see anymore.
Animals in the wild, such as lions or bears.

Me? Free as a bird.
A cliché to refer to a person who has no responsibilities or obligations.

At one time I used to break into pet shops to liberate the canaries, but I decided that was an idea way ahead of its time.
"To break into" a store is to enter it secretly, often by breaking a lock or a window. "To liberate" an animal is to free it. A "canary" is a type of big bird, and "an idea ahead of its time" is an idea that is considered too extreme in the present, but may later become generally accepted.

Prisons are overflowing.
If a prison is "overflowing," it is too crowded with prisoners.

How the world dearly loves a cage.

Maude's poetic way of saying there are too many prisons and pet stores.

I'll put the kettle on.

A metal pot with a lid used for boiling water.

My door's always open.

One way of saying "You are always welcome to come and visit me."

You're an interesting case, but this reluctance on your part is detrimental to the psychoanalytical process.

If a person shows "reluctance" to do something, they are hesitant or not sure they want to do it. If something is "detrimental," it is harmful or damaging. The "psychoanalytical process" refers to the process of a psychologist exploring a person's childhood in order to find the roots of an adult's current psychological problems.

Harold has his first "date" arranged by his mom, but his mind is with Maude, who shows him her passion for life and nature.

She's arranging several dates for you with some young ladies.

"To arrange" something is to organize or create it. A "date" is a social outing between two people who may be romantically interested in each other (A typical American date involves a movie and dinner).

What are you studying? :: PolySci with a minor in HomEc.

"PolySci" is short for political science, or the study of politics and government. A "minor" is a secondary area of study for college students (A "major" is the primary area). "HomEc" is short for home economics, which is the study of practical tasks such as cooking and raising kids.

Some of the other girls in my sorority decided somebody ought to try it, and so we drew straws and I lost.

A "sorority" is a club of female students who live together while going to college (A male version is called a fraternity).

"To draw straws" is to choose one of several small sticks, with the person who chooses the shortest stick being forced to do something the others don't want to do (In this case, join the computer dating service).

Harold does have his little eccentric moments.

"Eccentric" is a great word which means strange or bizarre.

I have a brother who's a real cut-up, too.

A “cut-up” is a person who is very funny (An interesting noun in the form of a phrasal verb, but it's not particularly common).

My, Harold, I'm glad to see you again.

A common alternative to happy or content.

Poor Glacous occasionally needs his memory refreshed as to the contours of the female form.

“To refresh a person's memory” is to do something that reminds them of something in the past. The “contours” of an object is its outline or shape (This is Maude's way of saying that Glacous has forgotten what female bodies look like).

Do you often model for Glacous?

In this case, “to model” means to stand or sit still in front of somebody so that they can draw or photograph you.

Over in the corner is “Leida and the Swan,” a self-portrait.

A “swan” is a beautiful white bird that is known for floating on water.

A “self-portrait” is a painting that the artist does of themselves.

I then became infatuated with these---my odorifics.

If a person becomes “infatuated” with something, they become obsessed with it or extremely interested in it. “Odorifics” are objects that give off a certain smell.

I have a kind of olfactory banquet.

“Olfactory” is an adjective that refers to odors or smells, and a “banquet” is a giant meal with many different types of foods.

Roast beef, old books, mown grass. Snowfall on 42nd street.

If grass is “mown,” it has been cut short by a lawn mower.

But then I decided to switch to the tactile.

“To switch” is to change from one thing to another.

“Tactile” refers to a person's sense of touch (not smell).

Stroke, palm, caress, explore.

These are different ways to physically touch a person. To “stroke” or “caress” a person means to touch them while gently moving your hands over them. “To palm” a person is to touch them with the palm of your hands, but this verb is rarely if ever used.

Oak straw tea and ginger pie.

“Straw” is a type of dried grain and “ginger” is a strongly flavored root.

Excuse the mismatched saucers.

If two things are “mismatched,” they don’t go together well.

A “saucer” is a small plate for holding a cup.

Greet the dawn with the breath of fire.

“To greet” someone is to meet them or perhaps express good wishes.

For Maude, the “breath of fire” is a type of heavy, dramatic breathing.

My body is giving out. I’m well into autumn.

If your body starts to “give out,” it loses its energy and vitality.

This is Maude’s way of saying that she knows she’s growing old.

Yes, there is certainly a certain attraction.

A gentle way of saying two people (or things) seem to like each other.

They grow and bloom and fade and die and change into something else.

If a flower “blooms,” its petals become big and develop bright colors. If a plant or flower “fades,” it grows weak and old.

All kinds of observable differences. Some have even lost some petals.

If something is “observable,” it can be seen with the eyes. The “petals” of a flower are its brightly colored leaves that are found in the center.

I feel that much of the world’s sorrow comes from people who are this...yet allow themselves to be twisted as that.

“Sorrow” is a powerful word meaning great sadness. “To twist” something is to turn it or wind it, around and around.

Taking a ride on a cosmic train...switch on summer from a slot machine...for your lorry roads, pumping petrol gas....[Song]

“Cosmic” refers to outer space or the universe. A “slot machine” is a gambling machine that people put money into (popular in casinos).

A “lorry” is a truck, and “to pump” gas is to fill a car with it.

“Petrol” is short for petroleum (gas), but this is rarely used.

Power steering.

An electronic feature on some cars that makes it easier to steer.

That tree is in trouble! Come on.

The most versatile phrasal verb in English, here meaning “Let’s go!”

It’s suffocating. It’s the smog.

If a person (or tree) is suffocating, they are unable to breathe.

It gives them asthma.

A disease which can make it very difficult to breath.

We'll transplant it to the forest.

"To transplant" a tree is to remove it from one place in order to plant it in another.

Yes, that's a tricky turn.

If a turn in the road is "tricky," it is dangerous or hard to drive around.

An after dinner liqueur.

A sweet type of alcoholic drink often sipped like a dessert.

I don't drink. :: It's all right. It's organic.

Note that if a person says they don't drink, they are referring to alcoholic drinks! If a food is "organic," it is completely natural and made without man-made chemical ingredients.

It has no traditional value, but consistency is not really a human trait.

In this case, "consistency" refers to the state of always acting in a similar manner. A "trait" is a characteristic or fundamental feature.

That's just a relic. I found it when packing it to come to America.

A "relic" is an old object that represent a distant time in the past (Here, Maude is referring to her umbrella).

It used to be my defense on picket lines and rallies and political meetings...being dragged off by the police....

A "picket line" is a place where workers on strike carry signs making demands of their employers, usually just outside where they work. If a person is "dragged off," they are forcefully taken away, perhaps by being pulled away on the ground, against their will.

....and attacked by the thugs of the opposition.

A "thug" is a brutal person who attacks or beats up other people. Here, "the opposition" refers to people in power who are fighting against the things that Maude is fighting for.

What were you fighting for? :: Big issues. Liberty, rights, justice.

"Issues" are topics of conversation. "Justice" is an important word in law and philosophy that basically means fairness.

I don't request the kingdom. What sense in borders and nations and patriotism? But I miss the kings.

"To request" something is to ask for it.

"Patriotism" is love of one's own country.

A palace in Vienna.

A large castle, often for a king.

The parasols, the flashing uniforms of the young officers.

A “parasol” is an umbrella, but this word is rarely used. If something is “flashing,” it is giving off light in small bursts of energy.

Later on, Frederick would chide me about it.

“To chide” a person is to make fun of them for doing something silly.

You didn’t use the umbrella anymore? No more revolts?

A “revolt” is an organized act of resistance against a government or other powerful institution which usually is violent.

I don’t need the defense anymore. I embrace.

“To embrace” something is to hold it close to you (The verb usually takes a direct object, though here, Maude uses it alone).

Everybody should be able to make some music; That’s the cosmic dance.

A 1960ish way of describing nature or the ways of the universe.

Just be impulsive. Be fanciful. Let the music flow out of you.

If a person is “impulsive,” they do things suddenly without thinking about what the results or consequences will be. If they are “fanciful,” they have wild or unrealistic dreams or desires.

You’ve got to make some chords.

A “chord” is a note played on a guitar or other musical instrument.

Maude gets in trouble with the law, Harold has another ridiculous date, and Harold’s mom decides that only the army can save him.

I had them take away that monster thing of yours and had them send them send this one instead.

Mrs. Chasen’s way of referring to something that is horribly ugly. In this case, Harold’s car.

It’s so much more appropriate for you, don’t you think?

If something is “appropriate” for a person, it goes well with them, or it is perhaps suitable or compatible with them.

It’s not mine, but we would like to get it into the soil as soon as possible.

Another word for ground, dirt or earth.

Let me get this straight, lady. :: All right then, we'll be off.

“Let me get this straight” is a common and slangy way of saying “Let me make sure I understand.” In this context, if a person is “off,” they are about to leave.

Nice chatting with you.

“To chat” is to talk about things that usually aren't too serious.

Is the little tree alright?! :: **Terrific**.

A good alternative to very good or excellent.

There is a family resemblance.

A “family resemblance” is the way to describe the similarity when two people from the same family look alike.

Get out, buster!

A fun but somewhat old-fashioned way of addressing a person who is often behaving rudely or impolitely.

I got you down here for several offenses, including possession of a stolen vehicle, resisting arrest and possession of a stolen tree.

In this case, “to have a person down” is to have them written down in a booklet, or in this case, a police report. “Offenses” are official acts of breaking the law. A “vehicle” is a car, and “resisting arrest” is refusing to cooperate when a police officer tries to take you into custody in order to be officially charged with a crime.

You're not yourself when your officious.

That is the curse of a government job.

“Officious” is an educated adjective that refers to a person who acts very officially or formally, especially when carrying out a job. A “curse” is a great word to describe a horrible condition of bad fortune or luck, perhaps caused by a witch or other evil person.

I sure am picking up on vices. :: Life, virtue. It's best not to be too moral.

“Vices” are acts of bad behavior that are often quite fun, such as smoking, drinking or sex outside of marriage. “Virtue” refers to goodness, purity or highly moral behavior or character.

Aim above morality. If you apply that to life, you're bound to live it fully.

“To aim” for something is to try and reach, hit or obtain it (A person aims a gun at a target). In this case, “to apply” a principle or belief is to try and follow it or live by it. If you are “bound to” do something, you are very likely to do it.

The first time was when I was at a boarding school in the chemistry lab.

A “boarding school” is a school where students both study and live.

A “lab” is a laboratory, where scientific experiments are done.

So I get all this stuff out and I begin mixing it up.

“Stuff” is an excellent word for things in general. “To mix up” a lot of things is to put them together in a disorganized or random way.

There was this massive explosion.

A powerful adjective which means extremely big or huge.

There were boards and bricks and flames leaping up.

A “board” is a big flat piece of wood. A “flame” is burning gas or oil, that is usually blue or yellow. If something “leaps up,” it climbs quickly higher toward the sky.

I figured, you know, time to leave.

A common colloquial way of saying to think or believe

(Note that the “it’s” is dropped in this elliptical sentence).

I went out to the banister and these two policemen came in.

A “banister” is a balcony or other area with a secure railing.

She put one hand up to her forehead, and with the other she reached out as if groping for support, and with this big sigh, she collapsed into their arms.

“To grope for” something is to reach out for it in a desperate or disorganized fashion. A “sigh” is loud breathing out sound, often expressing satisfaction. If a person “collapses,” they fall dramatically toward the ground.

They’re not dead really. They’re just backing away from life.

“To back away” from something is to retreat or move away from it.

Reach out! Take a chance. Get hurt, even!

In this case, “to reach out” means to actively try and experience many different things or perhaps make genuine contact with lots of different types of people. This is Maude’s general philosophy of life.

L-I-V-E. Live! Otherwise, you got nothing to talk about in the locker room.

A “locker room” is a room where athletes go after a ball game to shower (A locker is a locked box where things can be stored).

He has a new car. He’s been tuning it up. He’s very mechanical.

“To tune up” a car is to work on various parts of the engine so that it will run well. If a person is “mechanical,” they are talented at fixing machines such as cars, electrical objects and perhaps even computers.

It's very nice. Compact.

If a car is "compact," it is small and fits in small parking spaces.

Very pleased to make your acquaintance.

A very formal way of saying "nice to meet you."

I'm a file clerk...I'm in charge of all the invoices for the Southwest.

A "file clerk" organizes paper records in an office (this term is less common since much of this type of work is now computerized). An "invoice" is a record of a business contract or transaction. In the US, the "Southwest" refers to states such as Arizona and New Mexico.

I type up the schedule for the trucking fleet.

A "fleet" of trucks is a group that all belong to the same company or owner, and are usually travelling for the same purpose.

She supplies the whole Southwest with chickenfeed.

Grain or other food that is fed to chickens.

Barely was big last week. 1,500 bushels.

"Barley" is a type of grain such as wheat or corn. A "bushel" is a unit of measurement for crops such as wheat or apples.

In view of your recent actions, Harold, I find that you have left me with no recourse but to listen to the solution proposed by your uncle.

"In view of" is a formal way of saying "Given..." A "recourse" is a means of help or assistance, or possibly a backup plan. "To propose" something is to suggest it as a plan.

Consequently, I have instructed him forthwith to induct you into the service, and for your own good, to take up active duty with the United States army.

"Consequently" means therefore. "Forthwith" is a very dated word meaning immediately. "The service" refers to the military, and to "take up active duty" means to begin serving in the military as a fulltime job.

Maude, they're going to draft me.

"To draft" a person is to force them to serve in the military.

They'll put me in jail. :: Historically, you'd be in good company.

"To be in good company" is to be part of a group of admirable or good people (Maude is saying that many good people have gone to jail because they fought for their principles or beliefs).

I think we can come up with something.

In this case, to "come up" with a plan is to create or think of one.

Uncle Victor prepares Harold for the army, and then realizes that it's probably not such a good idea.

Look at me! Chauffeur, respect, money in the bank.

A “chauffeur” is a person who drives a limousine or other large car, usually for rich people.

Oh, it has its drawbacks like anything else, I suppose.

A “drawback” is another word for a disadvantage.

You’ve got a buddy for life.

“Buddy” is another word for friend or pal.

It’s a lonely spot.

In this case, a “spot” is another word for place.

I say this country’s been too harsh in its outright condemnation of war.

If criticism is “harsh,” it is very strong or severe. “Outright” means entirely or without reservation. “Condemnation” is severe criticism.

You can point to the many material advantages brought about by a crisis in conflict policy.

This is Uncle Victor’s ridiculous way of saying that there are many advantages to war (“Conflict policy” is a never used way of referring to government policies that try to avoid war).

The ball point pen.

The most popular type of writing pen, invented in the 1940s.

Why in hell did we give up on the Germans? Just the damn politicians chalked them up on our side.

“In hell” is a much less used alternative to “the hell,” which is added to WH questions in order to express emotion such as anger. “Damn” is a filler adjective also used to express anger and other emotions. “To chalk up” something to a person is to credit them with having done it.

The wars ever since have been a national disgrace.

“A national disgrace” is a great embarrassment to the entire country.

Get the krauts on the other side of the fence where they belong.

“Kraut” is a ridiculous and racist word to describe a German person. (This is Victor’s way of saying that Germany should still be considered an enemy of the US, despite the end of World War 2).

That's pretty scary stuff, Sir. :: I've always been a man who speaks his piece.
 Note that in this case, "stuff" refers to general ideas, not physical things.
 If a person "speaks their piece," they say exactly what they're thinking,
 even if it is controversial.

I do have friends in high places.

"Friends in high places" are those friends who have a lot of
 power or influence and can therefore often be very helpful.

Only one thing kept going through my mind---kill, kill, kill!

If something is "going through your mind," you are thinking about it.

And then there was a blinding flash, and then I woke up on a stretcher.

A "blinding flash" is a burst of light that is so bright that it can blind
 you. A "stretcher" is a portable cot in which a sick person is carried.

"Did we hold?" I asked the medic. And then I slipped into unconsciousness.

A "medic" is a person engaged in medical work, especially helping
 people get to a doctor. "To slip into unconsciousness" is to lose
 consciousness after being injured, or perhaps just fall asleep.

To pit your own life against another!

If two lives are "pitted" against each other, they
 face each other in some type of battle or competition.

Will they really teach me to shoot?! To use a bayonet?!

"To shoot" a gun is to fire it. A "bayonet" is a rifle with
 a large sword attached to it (rarely used in modern warfare!).

How about hand to hand combat? To strangle someone,
choke him, squeeze out his life in your own bare hands?!

"Hand to hand combat" is when two people fight, without the use of
 guns or other weapons. "To strangle" a person is to cut off their air
 supply so they can't breathe, and to "choke" them is to do the same
 thing, though perhaps more directly by squeezing on their neck. If a
 person's hands are "bare," they are uncovered by gloves.

I think you're getting carried away, Harold. :: How about to slit his throat?

If a person gets "carried away," by an idea, they become too excited or
 emotional about it. "To slit" a throat is cut it open with a sharp knife.

How about souvenirs of your kill? Eyes, ears, nose, privates?!

A "souvenir" is a small gift or object that is representative of a
 particular place, often sold in gift shops where tourists shop. In this
 case, "privates" refers to private parts, or specifically, sexual organs.

Harold, that's disgusting!

A great adjective meaning extremely unpleasant, nasty or obscene.

I am petitioning for peace. :: Parasite!

"To petition" for something is to officially ask for or demand it, often in the form of a signed letter. A "parasite" is any small insect or animal that lives off the work or body of another (or, a very lazy person).

Commie bastard! Get out of here!

"Commie" is a ridiculous slang word for a communist, and "bastard" is a very insulting word for any mean or abusive man.

Don't talk to me like that, you little foul-mouthed degenerate!

If a person is "foul-mouthed," they are always using vulgar or dirty words. A "degenerate" is a sexually perverted or very immoral person.

Traitor. Benedict Arnold! Remember Nathan Hale!

A "traitor" is a person who joins the enemy to fight their own country. "Benedict Arnold" is a very famous American General and traitor who joined the British during the American Revolution.

She's a commie pig! You'll all end up like this.

"To end up" in a certain way is to finish that way (perhaps by being dead, poor, etc).

Let's have no trouble! Madam, give back the head!

"Let's have no trouble" is a silly way of saying "stop causing problems" or more specifically, "stop what you're doing."

Harold has his third and last ridiculous date, and then Maude teaches him some important lessons about the nature of life.

It makes me want to do somersaults.

A rolling motion in which the feet go briefly above the head.

Everyone has the right to make an ass out of themselves.

If a person "makes an ass of themselves," they are making a fool of themselves. An ass is a fool, jerk, moron or perhaps even a bastard.

Do you care to join me in a little cartwheel?

A cartwheel is also a rolling motion in which a person places their hands on the ground in order to roll their bodies like a wheel.

I feel more like yelling!

A good alternative word to screaming or shouting.

He would see the most glorious birds. Many years later, he realized that they had only been seagulls.

If an animal is “glorious,” it is exceptionally beautiful or graceful.

A “seagull” is a common bird that is rarely considered glorious.

I cannot impress upon you too strongly the importance of this meeting.

“To impress upon” a person is to convince them of something.

Please try to be serious. If not for your sake, at least for hers.

If a person does something “for your sake,” they do it because it will benefit or be helpful to you.

How do you do? :: Oh, I can't complain.

One alternative way of responding to the first question, if you no longer want to say OK or “fine, thank you.”

Would you like a cigarette? :: No thank you. They stain my fingers.

“To stain” a surface is to change its color, usually in a way that is not wanted (For example, spilled coffee may stain a white shirt).

He was such an influence on the development of my instrument. That means “my body” in theatre talk.

An “instrument” is usually a musical device, such a guitar. “Theatre talk” refers to the type of words used by people in the theatre.

I am leaving the harmonica.

A small musical instrument that fits in the hands and is blown with the mouth (They are very popular with folk singers).

It's a hari kari blade. :: What's hare kari?

A type of knife that is used to commit suicide in Japan.

Oh, that was marvelous. It had a ring of truth.

If something is “marvelous,” it is wonderful. If a statement has a “ring of truth,” it appears that it may be true although it's not clear if its true.

I played Juliet in the Sunshine Playhouse.

Louis thought it was my very best performance.

Here, Juliet is referring to Shakespeare's character in the play *Romeo and Juliet*. For an actor, a “performance” is the actual act of performing or acting in a play or movie.

Oh happy dagger! This is the sheath.

Words from the English of Shakespeare's time. A dagger is a small knife, and a "sheath" is a container for such a knife.

It had nothing on this afternoon.

If one thing has "nothing on" another, it means that the second thing is much more impressive, interesting, etc. than the first.

You sure have a way with people! :: Well, they're my species.

If a person has "a way with people," they are very good at talking with or charming them. "Species" is a scientific word for a group of animals or plants that are of the same general type, and who can reproduce.

I know Renee would be furious, but if he knew what I had to put up with in the last few days.

If a person is "furious," they are extremely angry. If you have to "put up with" something unpleasant, you have to experience or deal with it even though you would much rather not.

A very common neurosis, particularly in this society, whereby the male subconsciously wishes to sleep with his mother.

A "neurosis" is a serious psychological problem, often marked by extreme nervousness or odd behavior. If you do something "subconsciously," you are not even aware that you are doing it. "To sleep with" a person often means to have sex with them.

Of course, what puzzles me, Harold, is that you wish to sleep with your grandmother.

"To puzzle" a person is to confuse them.

I would be remiss in my duty if I did not tell you that the idea of intercourse...the fact of your firm young body commingling with...

If a person is "remiss," they are irresponsible or negligent. In most contexts, "intercourse" refers to sexual intercourse. If a body is "firm," it is hard, strong or solid. If two things "commingle," they mix or interact closely together.

...the withered flesh and sagging...breasts and flabby...buttocks...makes me want to vomit.

"Withered" means old and wrinkled. "Flesh" is another word for the fat and muscle just under the skin. If breasts "sag," they fall or sink down. "Flabby" is fatty or the opposite of firm, and your "buttocks" is your ass, behind, derriere, etc. "To vomit" is to get sick and throw up.

Oh Harold, it's dazzling.

If something is "dazzling," it is amazing, beautiful or wonderful.

Champagne? :: It's all right. It's organic.
 If something is "organic," it is made naturally,
 without man-made ingredients.

I couldn't imagine a lovelier farewell.
 "Lovely" is a British word for pretty or beautiful.
 A "farewell" is the act of saying goodbye.

I took the tablets an hour ago.
 Another word for pill.

What a fuss this is. So unnecessary!
 If a person makes "a fuss" about something,
 they complain or talk about it a lot.

For Christ's sake.
 A filler expression that is used to show great emotion such as
 anger or frustration (It has nothing to do with religion or Jesus!).

Don't upset yourself so.
 If a person "upsets themselves," they get
 themselves very angry or frustrated.

You're eating my heart away and there's nothing much left of me [Song].
 This is the singer's way of saying that he has become so hurt by the
 person he's singing about that he can barely continue in life.

Trouble, you have made me a wreck...now
 won't you leave me in my misery...[Song]
 If a person is a "wreck," they are completely exhausted or worn out,
 either physically or emotionally. "Misery" is extreme unhappiness.

....I am beat, torn, shattered, tossed and worn. [Song]
 If a person is "torn," they are emotionally hurt or conflicted, and if
 they're "shattered," they've been blown into little pieces, usually in an
 emotional sense. "Worn" is another way of saying tired or worn out.

Harold and Maude

Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion

1. Maude seems to say that 75 is too early to die but that 85 is too late; Does that seem about right?
2. What is Maude able to show Harold that he may not have seen before he met her?
3. Are Harold and Maude a good couple?
4. Ultimately, is this movie happy or sad? Or both?
5. What do you think about assisted suicide? Should it be legal? Should doctors be able to help old patients die if they want to?
6. What did you like and not like about this movie?