

Shmanners 215: Idioms Pt. 1

Published June 20th, 2020

[Listen here on TheMcElroy.family](#)

Travis: Well, we'll hoist that bridge when we kettle it.

Teresa: What?

Travis: I have no idea. It's Shmanners!

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello internet. I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: ... for ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, dear.

Travis: That's maybe the smoothest we've ever done the intro.

Teresa: Yeah?

Travis: Yeah. There was no thought here. I wasn't...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I wasn't thinking at all.

Teresa: You just emptied your mind.

Travis: Yeah, baby. I'm in the moment. I'm just in perfect improvisation mode now.

Teresa: Nice. Is it because of the lack of sleep?

Travis: It is exactly because of the lack of sleep. We're... Bebe—our baby—what? Which kid?

Teresa: Who is it?

Travis: Baby Dot has reached that age where it's like, "Okay. Time to get you on a schedule." And it's bad. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But I've taken it upon myself. I've given you the nights off, because of, as you pointed out—I tried to say something nice and say, "You've been working for five months," and you said, "Uh, 14 months."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Because of pregnancy.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: So, I am taking it upon myself to do it, and it means I sleep about an hour and a half on, and then I'm up for about 45 minutes, and then I'm back. It's great. Anyways.

Teresa: Anyways.

Travis: I had an idea for an episode that I thought would be fun, and it seems like it's going to be fun. And were going to talk about idioms.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Now, let's start here, because we have a bunch of fun ones that people submitted that I'm really excited to talk about, but... for anyone listening who doesn't recognize the word, what is an idiom?

Teresa: Okay. So, it's an expression, alright?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: So, if we're making Venn diagrams, all of idioms are encompassed in expressions, okay?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Expression meaning, a turn of phrase such as a metaphor or a simile.

Travis: It's a grouping of words, if we're going for the biggest header. Grouping of words to convey a meaning beyond the words themselves.

Teresa: Correct.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Correct.

Travis: I just made that up.

Teresa: Oh, good work.

Travis: I told you.

Teresa: Listen, maybe you should be sleep deprived more often.

Travis: Top of mind. Okay.

Teresa: So, and when we talk about idioms, the idioms encompass other things, too. So, regionalisms, which are usually a formal turn of phrase, and then colloquialisms, which are usually more informal turns of phrase.

Travis: So, is a regionalism—does the name... the name would imply that it is, like, specific to a region?

Teresa: Yes, it is specific to a locale, and the people who inhabit that locale know what that means. Whereas people who are from other places may have different idioms that mean the same thing. But they may or may not recognize a regionalism.

Travis: Okay, yes. Okay, got it.

Teresa: Great.

Travis: And then there's also other ones. This is my favorite, because I saw it come up in a thread where we were talking about it. Uh, malaphors. And a malaphor is like a, kind of, like... so if you combine two idioms, you get a malaphor.

Teresa: So, what you did at the beginning.

Travis: Right, correct. So, if you ever heard someone say, "We'll burn that bridge when we come to it." Right? Or, uh, let's see. Here's another one I'm looking at right now. "You hit the nail right on the nose," right? It's anything where you take an idiom and you kinda twist it and make it into something that doesn't quite make as much sense.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: That is a malaphor.

Teresa: So, what I'm interested in as far as these idioms go is the way that they've kind of moved into society, and not only does it show where these come from, it also shows, like, this kind of ladder of idioms through every socio-economic status, right? And I think that that's a big part of etiquette, and you should endeavor to think about not only your own idioms, but how other socio-economic status of idioms can, you know, relate to your own life.

Travis: Well, and not only that. We'll talk about this a bit later on, but I think it's also important... there are things that we say – slang, idioms, colloquialisms, regionalisms – all these things that we kinda say without thinking about.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: And the origin of some of them are very problematic, and some of them are downright offensive. And so, I think it's important, from time to time, to take stock of the language that we use casually every day and really kind of analyze, like, the things that we're saying without thinking about it.

Teresa: I love to be specific about our language.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: And I think that it's important to be specific, so that you can convey your meaning and also convey your feeling. You know what I mean?

Travis: Yes, exactly. So, this is the first one. This is one that I was curious about. Because while we were thinking about these, I think I was, like, in preparation for this, said it, and then was like, "Oh, I have no idea what it—" because this is so out of left field for me. "Up to snuff." Like, you would say, like, [English accent] "I just don't think that that suit is up to snuff, me lad." I don't know why I did the—[laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And like, you know, it's not up to the standard of excellence. Or it is up to snuff, it is up to the standard of excellence.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Why "snuff"?

Teresa: Well, so, it first appears in writing in an 1811 parody of Shakespeare's Hamlet, by English playwright John Poole. He wrote Hamlet Travestie.

Travis: Okay. Hate that word. For obvious reasons, I do not like the word travesty.

Teresa: Yep. So, there are two theories and, I mean, both of them make sense.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, when you think about chewing tobacco, right? Snuff was often a name for chewing tobacco, and if you were "up to snuff," it meant that you would like to take some snuff, and it meant that you—

Travis: "Oh, hey, are you up to snuff?"

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: Like, "Are you down to snuff, my dude?"

Teresa: But it was kind of a showy thing, right? Because you would talk about being up to snuff and it was kind of like a flashy habit.

Travis: Oh yeah, because you had like, the fancy snuff boxes and whatnot. Okay, gotcha.

Teresa: And over time this evolved into "up to snuff" being a particular standard, instead of condemnation.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, it moved from, "Ooh, look at my bad habit," and now it's like, "I can do this with the rest of them."

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: The second theory is that snuff is actually a play on the word sniff.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And it's a reference to the way animals catch scents of each other, and you must be "up to snuff" or "up to sniff" if you are to survive in the wild.

Travis: That one makes a little more sense to me. Like, that idea of, you needed to be "up to sniff" or, you know, you won't survive in the wild. That kinda, that makes more sense to me than talking about how fancy a snuff box is, I think.

Teresa: You know what makes the most sense to me?

Travis: What's that?

Teresa: Is that John Poole just wanted to write word sniff, but modified it to make it rhyme with "enough."

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That also—I guess that also makes sense. So, another one that I wanted to know about is “hoisted by your own petard,” or “their own petard,” if you’re referring to someone else. And I’ve always heard this used as, like, somebody kinda caught in their own joke, or somebody kind of caught in their own trap.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: You know, if you will, where like, for example, to apply it to the modern day, if someone was attempting to call someone—ah, I’ve got it.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: There was a great example of this where a dude like, called out a woman who was talking about astronomy, I believe. Talking about, you know, the universe, the heavens, space, and told her she was wrong. And then she came back and said, “Uh, I work at NASA and like, have a PhD in this and I’m an expert in it.” And that gentleman was hoisted on his own petard. Because he was attempting—

Teresa: Okay. So, he was attempting to trip her up?

Travis: Yes, correct.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: So, I think anything like that, where you’re attempting to trip somebody up, you’re attempting to catch them in something, and you get caught in it yourself, you have hoisted yourself on your own petard. But, what does that mean?

Teresa: Well, it seems that you picked two that are probably linked to Shakespeare.

Travis: Well, it’s easy to pick ones that are linked to Shakespeare.

Teresa: Because a lot of them are linked to Shakespeare. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah! Man, if you wanna blow your mind, look it up. Cause there are some that you would assume are like, modern day—like, “green-eyed monster”? Shakespeare. Like, there’s a bunch of them.

Teresa: There is a bunch of them. So, petard was a small, homemade bomb.

Travis: What?!

Teresa: That was used in the 1600s to blow up gates and walls where you’re trying to break in. So, if you were hoisted—

Travis: I would not—can I tell you?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I worked in a Shakespeare company for five years. Would not have guessed that. I thought a petard was like a hook, or something like that.

Teresa: So, if you were hoisted by your own petard, it was meaning that you were a bomb maker who blew up by his own bomb.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: This was used in Hamlet, by the way.

Travis: Hey, real quick: some Shakespeare idioms. Heart of gold, kill with kindness, laughing stock, wild goose chase, green-eyed monster, lie low, faint-hearted, apple of my eye, wear your heart on your sleeve, break the ice. And that’s just, like, some! Ugh, okay.

Teresa: I mean, these are some really great idioms and expressions, and I guess this Shakespeare guy... he’s going places.

Travis: Yeah. Now, Sam wanted to know about “have our work cut out for us,” and it means that the task that lies ahead is about to be very difficult. Now, Sam also mentioned that it’s confusing because having something cut out for you seems like that would make it easier. So, what does it mean? Why is it “have our work cut out for us”?

Teresa: Well, this phrase first appeared in 1843, in A Christmas Carol. And it meant to have at least as much as one can handle, right? It's accepted that this phrase probably comes from tailoring, meaning that it was originally to mean to prepare a plan, an activity, like cut out your work before you get to work. Which is one of those sewing things, right, so if you're gonna build an outfit or something like that, you need to cut out all the pattern pieces, and then you can actually start to put it together.

Travis: Yes. So, this is to "have your work cut out for you," it's like, it's all cut out, look at all this work we have to do, kinda?

Teresa: Yes, but also it evolved into the description of when your assistant is cutting out patterns so that it's so quickly done that the tailor himself is unable to keep up.

Travis: Okay. Okay. Now, Jam and Toast... [laughs] Which I'm betting is not so much a name as a fun Twitter handle, wanted to know about "Bob's your uncle." Now, this is a British idiom, and usually the other person responds with "Fanny's your aunt," which I've never heard that part, maybe that's the official one. But "Bob's your uncle" I've heard, and it means, like, there it is, there you have it...

Teresa: Voila!

Travis: That is it, you know? So, you would say, like, you know, "We go to the store, we pick up the ingredients, we mix them up, Bob's your uncle."

Teresa: And it usually means that it's that easy. It's a piece of cake. Which is another idiom, by the way. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah. It's all idioms. Idioms all the way down!

Teresa: It's so fun to describe an idiom with another idiom.

Travis: Yeah, this is why, by the way, English is such an incredibly hard language to learn.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because so much of our language is built off of slang and idioms and colloquialisms and regionalisms, these things where it's like, "What do you mean?" Because words don't always mean what they seem to mean, and some words mean 26 things.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Like, it can be very difficult for English as a second language learning for people, because it's like, "What are you talking..." [laughs] "What does that mean?"

Teresa: That's why it's so important that you know what it is the phrase that you're saying really means.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: So, when someone asks you, "Uh, what?" You can explain it in a literal sense.

Travis: Cause this has happened a lot with Bebe, where Bebe will be like, "What?" and it's like, "Oh. Uh..." [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "I've always just said that, I don't know." So, what is "Bob's your uncle"?

Teresa: Okay. So, it probably came to popularity around 1887, and this was when there was a conservative prime minister of England named Robert... mm... [struggles with pronunciation] Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury.

Travis: Yep.

Teresa: Yep?

Travis: Yep, nailed it. [laughs] Got it.

Teresa: They called him Bob for short.

Travis: That makes a lot of sense.

Teresa: Sure does. And he appointed his nephew, Arthur Balfour, as Chief Secretary for Ireland. This was uh... you know, surprising and unpopular.

Travis: Nepotism?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So, "Bob's your uncle" was a way to say this should be easy, right? Or, there you go, and you didn't have to work for it.

Travis: Oh! So literally because Bob was his uncle, he got it without having to work for it.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Okay, that makes complete sense. Okay. Learning is fun.

Teresa: So, this "Fanny's your aunt" thing...

Travis: Uh huh.

Teresa: Okay, is a way of calling the "Bob's your uncle" to be not true, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, the term "my aunt Fanny" in Britain—

Travis: See, now that I have heard.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Is a common exclamation for the term "BS."

Travis: BS, yes. Or "bull poop."

Teresa: Yes, yes. So, when you respond with “my aunt Fanny” when someone says “Bob’s your uncle,” it means, like, they say...

Travis: It’s gonna be easy, you know, a piece of cake, and you’re like, “It will not. You are wrong.”

Teresa: Exactly. “You are wrong.”

Travis: Okay! Okay. Now, this is from, uh, Clinky Penguin. “Break a leg,” which is a common theatre expression meaning “good luck,” you know, this is what people—now, the theatres I worked for, I think even in college, we stopped saying “break a leg,” because it sounds so violent, I think?

Teresa: It’s kinda morbid, isn’t it?

Travis: Yeah, I think we just said “good show.” Good show, good show.

Teresa: Yes, Good show, good show.

Travis: But you don’t say—I know, like, part of it comes from you don’t say “good luck,” because “good luck” is, like, contrary to obvious... bad luck in theatre to say? Something like that, right?

Teresa: It has to do, I think, with the evil eye.

Travis: Oh my good—if you wanna get, if you wanna go on a deep rabbit hole, just look at all the different ways you can bad luck in a theatre. [laughs] There’s so many. It’s—we’re a superstitious lot, the acting folk. Because you always wanna blame mistakes on anything other than yourself.

Teresa: Anything else. [laughs]

Travis: So, it’s not that you forgot a prop or a line or whatever, it’s because somebody whistled. You know?

Teresa: Right, right. So, when you say “good luck” in a theatre, you are inviting the evil eye to, you know, to mess you up, basically.

Travis: It’s kinda like saying, “What could go wrong?” Right?

Teresa: Yes. That's it.

Travis: Yeah. Or "it could be worse," right? Like, these things are like, well now that you've said it, that's gonna happen.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. So, there are a couple of legends about "break a leg." One of which I had actually heard, another Shakespearean deal, right? "Make you break your leg," meaning your performance would be so grand and marvelous that the actor would have to bend their knee in a very deep bow.

Travis: Oh! See, this makes complete sense to me.

Teresa: That's the one that I knew about. But also, another legend about this, which I think it probably moved into the vernacular before this, but... that "break a leg" comes from the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Travis: Okay... oh!

Teresa: Because... yeah, John Wilkes Booth.

Travis: When he jumped off the stage, broke his leg.

Teresa: Exactly. And now, people think that that means that they hope your performance is as memorable as the assassination of Lincoln.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Like I said, I think it happened before then. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah. I like the first one better. [laughs] I like the, "I hope your performance is so good that you have to, like, go to a knee with all the applause," and not, "I hope your performance is so memorable it's like you murdered somebody."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Baby Dot has moved from her playpen thing to now next to the microphone. So, if you hear what sounds like a tiny hand grabbing the microphone...

Teresa: [laughs] It is!

Travis: Yeah! Okay, so, let's see, what's the next one? The next one here is from AJ, and AJ wants to know about "go cold turkey." Now, this people have probably heard in relation to, like, quitting smoking or something. It means, to like—

Teresa: Or other addictive substances.

Travis: Yeah, so quitting something without, like, slowly weaning off it. Just, like, stopping. Cold turkey.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Okay, why "cold turkey"?

Teresa: Uh, I mean, this is kinda sad, right?

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: It probably started in the 1920s when a Dr. Carlton Simon said that many who go through an abrupt stop of the their addictions cause them to go through withdraw, to make them look like turkey carcasses left in the cold. Clammy, pale, and covered in goosebumps.

Travis: Oh boy. Okay. Oh, you know what I've never thought of? Goosebumps. To get goosebumps is probably from, like, pulling feathers out of a goose and it leaves those little, like, you know, little... bumps.

Teresa: Bumps, yeah. [laughs]

Travis: When you pull the feathers out. See, these are the things you put together. We're got lots more idioms to talk about, but first, we're gonna send a thank you note to a sponsor. This week, the money from our ads is gonna go the Marsha P. Johnson Institute. They are an organization that focuses on supporting black transgender people. You can find out more about them at MarshaP.org.

[theme music plays]

Teresa: Shmanners is supported in part by Billie. Billie has recreated everyday essentials by delivering premium razors and high-performing body care directly to you. Not pink tax, no visit to the drug store, no breaking the bank. So, you can go to billie.com and you can get a starter kit for just nine dollars. We received a starter kit, and let me tell you: this, for just nine dollars, is an amazing value. You get a razor, two refillable blades and a magnetic holder that keeps the razor safe and dry between uses.

Billie is out to change more than the way you shave. They have just released three completely clean must-have products to add to your routine. You can have their lip balm, they have dry shampoo, and they have face wipes. Like I said, I received a Billie razor, and I really enjoyed it, but let me tell you what I enjoyed the most. I loved their shaving lotion. It was so, like... it feels luxurious.

Travis: Ooh!

Teresa: I have, on occasion, used conditioner to help me shave, and it feels like that. It's got a high viscosity that I really enjoy. So, you can check out their shaving lotion, too. You can get started by going to MyBillie.com/Shmanners and you'll get this really great razor, and the best part is the starter kit is just nine dollars plus free shipping.

So, go to Billie.com/Shmanners. That's spelled—sorry, MyBillie.com/Shmanners. Spelled my B-I-L-L-I-E .com/Shmanners.

--

[music plays]

Jarrett: Hey, I'm Jarrett Hill, co-host of the brand new Maximum Fun podcast, FANTI.

Tre'vell: And I'm Tre'vell Anderson, I'm the other, more fabulous co-host and the reason you really should be tuning in.

Jarrett: I feel the nausea rising.

Tre'vell: To be FANTI is to be a big fan of something, but also have some challenging or anti feelings toward it.

Jarrett: Kinda like Kanye.

Tre'vell: We're all fans of Kanye, he's a musical genius, but like, you know...

Jarrett: He thinks slavery is a choice.

Tre'vell: Or like The Real Housewives of Atlanta. Like, I love the drama, but do I wanna see black women fighting each other on screen?

Audio Clip: [sings] Hell to the naw, to the naw naw naw.

Jarrett: We're tackling all of those complex and complicated conversations about the people, places and things that we love.

Tre'vell: Even though they may not love us back.

Jarrett: FANTI. Maximum Fun. Podcast.

Tre'vell: Yeah!

[music ends]

Travis: Okay, we've got some more idioms to do, but first I said that we would go through some idioms that you should stop using. So, first, and listen – there are some very offensive ones. I encourage everyone, just do some quick Googling of, like, idioms with offensive origins, and you'll find a bunch that I am not comfortable even discussing here on the show. But for example, one that I think I see people use a lot is like, "off the reservation."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Do not do that. Do not use this. It has to do with, like, Native Americans, messages and telegrams and stuff that were sent out by local authorities that said, "Indians are off the reservation without authority," and it's not great. Don't use that one.

Teresa: Here's a good replacement – say "off the rails."

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: Because when a train goes off the track, it indicates that something happened that's unplanned.

Travis: Yes. This is another one – so, people with often say that they feel “gypped.” Do not do this. Do not do this. It comes from the offensive term “gypsy,” which is an offensive term to describe Romani people. Do not do this, it has to do with, like, saying that the Romani are ripping you off. It's not good. Don't say that. Don't use that one.

So, for example, another one is “paddy wagon.”

Teresa: Mm hmm.

Travis: Which is derived from, so, the very common Irish name Patrick, which is—

Teresa: Your middle name.

Travis: My middle name. So, this either has to do with, like, sending a big, you know, police van to round up a bunch of Irish folk, or the fact that there were a lot of Irish cops. So, either way, not great. Don't use that one.

Um, let's see... If you ever hear, like, “sold down the river,” it's really bad. So, this comes from a practice of when, you know, slavers in America selling, quote, “troublesome slaves” down the Mississippi River to plantations with harsher conditions. So, if you ever say, like, “Aw, you sold me down the river,” “You sold me over the—”, whatever. That's also not great.

There's a lot of these that you should not use. There's, like, words we should not use that people say all the time. It's not great. Um, yeah. So, let's get back to some more fun idioms that we *can* use.

Teresa: Okie-doke.

Travis: So, this is from Carol, and maybe this isn't an example of a fun one.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Blood is thicker than water." Now, usually I've heard it to mean you prioritize family over other affiliations. Friends, work, whatever. "Blood is thicker than water."

Teresa: Right, exactly.

Travis: I get the blood part of that, because you're talking about, like, family. What's the water part? What is this?

Teresa: This is actually—

Travis: Are friends water?

Teresa: No—

Travis: Is it because we're made of 75% water?

Teresa: Well, everyone is made out of a lot of water.

Travis: That's true.

Teresa: So, if your family isn't made out of water, they're dehydrated. You should get 'em some water.

Travis: That's true.

Teresa: Okay, so this is actually a shortened version of a saying that comes from medieval German in about 1180. It's from a fable called Renard the Fox, and it has a line that said, "I also hear it said, kin-blood is not spoiled by water."

Travis: Okay...

Teresa: So, it meant that your ties to your family will never change, no matter the distance between you.

Travis: Oh!

Teresa: So, you could move across oceans, and it would never change how much you love your family.

Travis: That makes complete sense!

Teresa: But this phrase is actually ancient, and it goes back to ancient Arabic, roughly translated to “the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb.” Which almost reverses the meaning, doesn’t it? I mean, so it’s like, you can’t choose who you’re born from, so therefore the blood, or choice, of a person to bond with yourself is more than binding than the place you come from.

Travis: Oh! Okay, I dig that. I like that one.

Teresa: Yeah. So, it was meant to guilt you—so, if “blood is thicker than water” makes you feel guilty about cutting off your family members, think about the ancient phrase that actually means it wants you to go find your chosen family.

Travis: Nice. Okay, this one is from @NotYourMemily. “Close, but no cigar,” which I have always used as like, “Oh, that was a good try, but it was not successful.” Often, I’ve heard it used sarcastically, where like, you completely whiffed it, you know?

Teresa: Yeah. So, this probably only comes from the 20th century in the U.S., because cigars were a common prize in game stalls for, like, festivals and fairgrounds and stuff. So it was, you know, you almost won the prize, but you didn’t. So, you didn’t get a cigar.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: That one seems pretty straight-forward.

Travis: Yeah. Close...

Teresa: But no cigar.

Travis: But not cigar. Um, uh, now this one comes from @Nerpitude, “go bananas.” Meaning, like, you know, go wild, or it could be a lot of things. They’re going, you know, bonkers, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Travis: Now, I assume that this has to do with, like, “monkey business” or, you know, it’s just like, the monkeys going bananas.

Teresa: Maybe. Maybe... the thing is, what we can really trace it to at this point is actually the psychedelic ‘60s.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Because there was a rumor that went through American hippie groups...

Travis: Yes, I’ve heard of them.

Teresa: ... that roasted banana peels have psychedelic properties.

Travis: Huh. Okay. Huh. So... huh.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So, it’s bananas as drugs?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: So, it might be older than that. It’s contested.

Travis: No, I like this one best.

Teresa: I do too.

Travis: This is the way to go. Okay, Katie wants to know about “nip it in the bud,” which I’ve always heard in connection to like, to stop a problem before it starts?

Teresa: Yes. And I had a friend in... I think college, friend in college, that thought this expression was “nip in the butt.”

Travis: Now, that is a malaphor.

Teresa: Which I— [laughs]

Travis: But it is a very fun—that's like a little dog, I picture a little dog trying to bite someone's butt there. "Oh no, that dog is gonna nip you in the butt!"

Teresa: [laughs] But, it still kind of makes sense.

Travis: Sure?

Teresa: If you're gonna stop something before it starts.

Travis: Okay...

Teresa: This comes from gardening, which I think it pretty obvious. So, growers frequently snip off or pinch off new buds on plants or trees so the plant's energy can be used more productively. So, the idea is, let's say you're growing fruit on a tree and you want some good produce. Some good produce is what I should say, not a lot of mediocre produce.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: So, you nip off some of the buds, to keep the energy going to a few good fruits.

Travis: Okay. This makes sense. Okay. Let's see, this is from Horatio. The "up and up," which I have always heard said like, "Oh, that salesperson, they're on the up and up." Like you can trust them, they are sincere, they are above board. Which is another one. I'm gonna write that one down. "Above board."

Teresa: "Above board." [laughs]

Travis: You know, they're sincere, they're legitimate.

Teresa: Right. Again, probably the late 19th century in the US, because horse racing and betting on horses started to gain legitimacy, right? And in order to make sure that your bet was legal, you wanted it on the "up and up," and whatever athlete you were betting on was also rising up in their career.

Travis: Okay, okay. Got it. Now, this one comes from Francis. "Under the weather," which I've always heard to apply to, like, you know, feeling sick or unwell in some way.

Teresa: Yeah. And it does, it does mean that, especially from its origins in the sailing community, because sailors and passengers aboard ship became seasick when their boat came literally under poor weather. So, the tossing and turning of the ship from a storm would make people sick.

Travis: Okay. Now, this one, I always thought I knew what this meant until Shelby brought it up, and Shelby asked about, "I've got your number," which I've always heard to say like, you know, somebody has some mal... malintent for you, that they have bad plans for you.

"Oh, they've got your number," right? Like, something bad. Like, if you were getting audited, right? You might say "The IRS has got your number. They're out for you." But what does it mean?

Teresa: Okay. So, again, the origins are a little murky, but probably in the 1870s, you were... okay, let's back up just a little bit.

Travis: Okay. [imitates a tape rewinding]

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, back when telephones first became popular, you had a telephone operator who you would say, "Hello operator, I'd like to speak to—"

Travis: [old fashioned accent] "Operator?"

Teresa: [posh voice] "Operator?"

Travis: "Get me..." The only thing I can think of is Brooklyn 99. That's not it.

Teresa: That's not it.

Travis: That's nothing. That's nothing.

Teresa: [laughs] But you would ask for Mrs. Jones, or something like that, right? You would ask for the person. And the operator knew where to plug in the connection to connect you with them

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: But, at this point in time, in a town in Massachusetts, there was a measles outbreak, and there was the worry that any replacement operators would have to re-learn where the people—where the connections for the people were. So, the telephone number was born, so that a specific person would have their own number, so if you had someone's number, you knew exactly where they were, you had specialized access to them.

Travis: Oh, so like, they know... they got you. They know where you are, they know about you.

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: You can't just say, like, "Hey, I met someone named this and this and this" and the operator would be like, "I know exactly who you're talking about."

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Can you imagine? Can you imagine right now in Cincinnati, like, calling up an operator and saying, like, "Can you connect me to Ron Jones?" Then it'd be like "Uhh..."

Teresa: "Uhh..."

Travis: [laughs] "Uhh..." So, listen. We've got a lot more, but I think we're gonna turn this into a two-parter.

Teresa: I think that sounds great. Let's make it almost like a recurring one. There really are so many.

Travis: There are so many. So, if you're listening to this and you're like, "What about this and this and this?" I want you to—you can email us, ShmannersCast@gmail.com, or you can tweet at us @ShmannersCast and say, "Hey, I've always wondered about this idiom," or, "I've always

wondered what this means, I've heard this all my life and I've never thought about it."

Or, if there's another one where you're like, "Hey, here's a phrase everyone should stop using," share that with us too. Let's get the word out on those. So, like I said, email us, ShmannersCast@gmail.com. You can also email us if you have an idea for a topic, and you can tweet at us [@ShmannersCast](https://twitter.com/ShmannersCast) with your suggestions for idioms to talk about. And we'll be back next week.

We wanna say thank you to Alex, of course, without whom we would not have been able to get all this research together. Thank you all for submitting your suggestions for idioms to cover. Go check out all the other amazing shows on MaximumFun.org. Like we said before, you can check out the Marsha P. Johnson Institute. You can go to MarshaP.org. Let's see, what else, Teresa?

Teresa: Well, we always thank Brent "Brental Floss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. Thank you to Bruja Betty Pin Up Photography for our cover picture of the fan-run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners. That is a fan-run group that you can join if you love to give and get excellent advice from other Shmanners Fanners. Get it? [giggles]

Travis: Nice. And that's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week!

Teresa: No RSVP required.

Travis: You've been listening to Shmanners.

Teresa: Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

MaximumFun.org
Comedy and culture.
Artist owned.
Listener supported.