

Shmanners 445: Idioms Part 16

Published March 14th, 2025

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[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: It's daylight savings time! Have— is it "daylight saving time"? No, "daylight savings time." It's, uh...

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: We've sprung forward, and I hate it.

Teresa: [laughs] You know, it's funny, because this morning, when I cracked open my eyelid to get up when the dogs started making noise, I was like, "Oh, no. It's gotta be so early."

Nope. It was the time... to get up, because—

Travis: Well, you've tricked the dogs.

Teresa: Right, exactly. The dogs had been getting me up as early as 5:30.

Travis: But you know who else doesn't like daylight savings time? Our five-year-old daughter, Dottie.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And it's time for preschool. It was... ugh.

Teresa: Yeah. We did the best we could try and wear 'em out to get them to bed an hour early...

Travis: Listen, but that's not what this was about.

Teresa: ... but it just wasn't—

Travis: We don't have to brag about what great parents we are; everyone already knows that. Today, it's what's become my favorite series on the show.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Because I'm always surprised. We're doing idioms.

Teresa: Oh, yes. We are.

Travis: Um, so an idiom— if this is your first idiom episode, go back through, 'cause I think we've done like 16 of them.

Teresa: Yes. I believe this is number 16.

Travis: But an idiom, to break it down basically, is a phrase, something that everybody who speaks the language, right...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... understands that this represents a thing, explains the situation. Like, if I say, uh, "They let the cat out of the bag," right? They don't take that literally; they understand that that idiom means they told a secret.

Teresa: Right. I mean, it's by cultural context clues that we learn idioms.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: You don't really get *taught* idioms.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: They just kind of happen around you, and you realize what they mean.

Travis: And to bring it back around to what great parents we are, you learn that really hard when you have children...

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: ... and you say something like "raining cats and dogs" for the first time, and they're like, "Excuse me?"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "Pardon me, what could that *possibly* mean?"

Teresa: Have we done that one? Because it— I don't know.

Travis: Who knows? At this point, we've done hundreds of idioms episodes.

Teresa: No, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about I don't know what that means... in—

Travis: It means it's— baby, it means it's raining really hard.

Teresa: No, I *know*, but *why*?

Travis: Because you might step in a poodle.

Teresa: [breaks into laughter] But what about the cats?

Travis: Uh—

Teresa: Do one now for cats.

Travis: They— because you gotta be kitten me, it's raining so hard.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Okay. So our first one... Give me our first one.

Teresa: Our first one is, "In a pickle." Submitted by BOG.

Travis: This is great because anyone who doesn't watch me on Twitch, you should. I'm charming. It's TheTravisMcElroy on Twitch. My Twitch chat has become the pickle jar...

Teresa: Mm!

Travis: ... because whenever— this was a long time ago. Years and years and years ago, when I started, when there wasn't a mod present, I said, "Everybody be chill pickles."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: They chilled, and they liked it. So it stuck. Um, so "in a pickle" is, like... you're in a tough situa— you're in a sticky, tricky situation.

Teresa: Mm.

Travis: Right? So if it was like, "Aw, man, we're out of gas, and my cell phone's dead. There's no buildings around for miles. We are really in a pickle."

Teresa: Yes. I wouldn't— I think that that's a little more bleak than *I* would associate with being in a pickle. I think my idea of being in a pickle is more kind of like a, "What do we do?" situation, where it's like we have this thing to do, but we have this other thing to do. "What should we do?"

Travis: Yeah. Usually, like, I don't see a clear way to solve this situation.

Teresa: Right. But being all alone without gas or cell phone service seems a little more...

Travis: It's a real dilly of a pickle.

Teresa: [giggles] Okay. Um, there are a few early examples of this phrase, or a similar phrase. Uh, historians have agreed - for the most part - that it comes directly from our main man, The Bard, inventor of the English language. [laughs]

Travis: He's not *my* main man.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I don't own him.

Teresa: Willie Shakes.

Travis: I don't own him. Um, he left his wife his second-best bed. Um, I don't know.

Teresa: Anyway...

Travis: That's a true thing. And people are like, "That's so weird." And I'm like, "This is a man who spent his life, got famous off of 'barbs' and witty retorts and stuff; of course he likes a little jibe in there."

Teresa: Um, he's responsible for lots of our favorite idioms, but he's not... responsible for the way that *he* used them, right? He just uses them in a new way than people at the time were using them.

Travis: And also, it's a thing that we see a lot in idioms, which is... we don't know if he invented it or not.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? He might have just been the first example we can find of it written down, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Popularized.

Teresa: We've got some lines from *The Tempest*: "How camest thou in this pickle? I have been in such a pickle since I saw you last."

Travis: Now, I know this, and I am looking at the copy. [chuckling] A little pull-back of the curtain here, but I knew it before I looked, people.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: That oftentimes, like, I know that Shakespeare has used that to be like "drunk," right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: That somebody's pickled, or something like that.

Teresa: At the time, that is what it meant. And so, like, this is how we use it *now*, to not just mean— because in the context of the show, not only is this person drunk; they also have problems.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? [laughs]

Travis: But usually, like, you're drunk as we might see, like, in a hardboiled detective kind of movie. That it's like, they're getting drunk to forget their problems...

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: ... or because they're so upset about a thing that they've pickled themselves, you know, with drink. That kind of thing.

Teresa: Right. Um, and I mean, I definitely think that it evokes a kind of imagery of being stuck in a pickle jar. [laughs]

Travis: Yeah, definitely. 'Cause that's the thing, right? If you're gonna pickle something...

Teresa: [amusedly] Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... it has to be submerged in a thing, and trapped in a vessel.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Right? You can't free-range pickle something.

Teresa: [giggles] Can't just leave it out and let it pickle; that's not how it works.

Travis: Yeah. So by its very nature, a pickle *is* trapped in a brine, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: A unwelcoming kind of scenario, you know, where it's like, "This is gonna make you salty, and change your very nature."

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: I mean, it just makes sense, is what I'm saying.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Think about it.

Teresa: [annoyed] Alright.

Travis: Okay. Hey. Not in front— [shouting] not in front of the kids!

Teresa: [giggles] Doesn't have to be salty. You can pickle things in vinegar.

Travis: Okay. But you know what I mean.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: It's going to— not unwelcoming, but you know what I mean. Inhospitable, almost? Like...

Teresa: Sure, okay! Alright, next is "in for a penny, in for a pound," submitted by Jessica H.

Travis: Okay. So this is like, "Listen, if you're gonna do it, do it all the way," right?

Teresa: Yeah. You might as well finish what you've already started.

Travis: Yeah. I think of it as a commitment thing, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Of, "If you're gonna *do* the thing... go all-out," right? If you're gonna commit to it, commit to— my mom used to say this when she was teaching me how to drive, right? And I would creep out to turn...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... and she would say, "If you're gonna go, go," right? Because being halfway into the intersection...

Teresa: You're gon' get hit.

Travis: ... is more dangerous.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Like, if you're gonna go, *go*, right? And so this, though— I've just always assumed, right, of like— I don't know if it's investing or spending something or whatever, but if you're gonna spend— if you're in for a penny, why not commit all the way, and just buy the whole thing?

Teresa: Okay. I can see how that would apply to this, for sure. Especially because the origins are monetary, right?

Travis: Yeah. I mean, obviously, right? Penny, pound...

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So in England, the pound... the pound ster—

Travis: [in a British accent] The pound sterling!

Teresa: Exactly. Was the currency of the UK.

Travis: I don't even think that was a British accent. I think I just said it higher and louder.

Teresa: Nah, I mean, it was a little British.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Just a little bit British.

Travis: [in a British accent] Just a little British? How British am I?

Teresa: [laughs] Um, so if you were being lent money in the UK, the penalties for not paying back your loan were pretty much identical no matter what you owed, okay?

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: So the idea here was if you were gonna borrow money at all, you might as well get the most use out of borrowing that money, right? And if the money lender was kind of a jerk, this was also a reference to the fact that you could go to them for a penny, but end up owing them a pound.

Right? So no matter what, you had to pay them back, even if you thought you were just borrowing a small amount.

Travis: Oh, this is interesting, because I guess the idiom could apply two different ways.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: 'Cause it could apply of like, "Hey, if you're gonna do it, do it all the way." But it also is kind of like, "Give them an inch, they take a mile" kind of thing of like, "Listen. If you're in for a penny, they're gonna take you for a pound." Like, you're overcommitted to this thing.

Teresa: Right. I mean, like if you are sent to the principal's office. If you're being sent there for running in the hallway, you might as well skip class too, right? Because...

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: ... if you're in for a penny, you're in for a pound.

Travis: But it also could be used the other way, where it's like, the penalty is the same, and you're gonna go in owing a penny, and they're gonna take a pound from you, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, here's one. "Right up your alley." Submitted by Bill P.

Travis: Okay. So this is like, "You're definitely gonna love this," right? Like, if somebody says to me, "Hey, I've been reading a cozy detective mystery that reminds me a lot of Agatha Christie," that's right up my alley.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It's something I'm definitely gonna like. I don't know that I've considered this an idio— guess it is, right? It's just so... common...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... and pervasive that I've heard it almost literally in my brain of like, "That's *your* alley. That's where you keep all the stuff you like."

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: You know? "That's my alley where I go, where all my good stuff is."

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: It's like my mind pa— it's my *mind* alley. Which does— if you have ADHD, it *does* feel like that.

Teresa: Does it?

Travis: That you don't have a mind palace; you just have, like, an alley full of stuff all loosely. And you're like, "Man, I hope no one turns down this alley."

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: "This is where I keep my piles of boxes and bags of stuff."

Teresa: Oh, boy. Uh, this seems to be a little bit debated as to the origin. There's the consensu— there's the idea that the phrase was originally "Right up your street," meaning something was as close to you and your interests as your home would be.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Just the street where you live.

Travis: Which kinda makes more sense. Like, you would say "Hit them where they live," right...

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: ... is a thing of— but like, that idea of “Oh, that’s right up my street. That’s right where I live. That’s right in my house.” That kind of makes sense.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Um, but the first recorded usage of the phrase shows up in 1931 from a crime journalist and author, Mildred Gilman. And they wrote, “It’s about time a good murder broke, and this one is right up your alley.”

Travis: [gasps]

Teresa: Which—

Travis: So it all comes back to murder mysteries!

Teresa: It comes back to murder mysteries, right.

Travis: That’s right up my alley!

Teresa: *And* not only does it invoke this kind of, “The thing that you already like is like this,” but also it makes people who read crime dramas feel like the danger could occur on their very street.

Travis: That’s so interesting. Because I guess that when I think of the phrase “right up your alley,” it does kind of feel... almost like— I could see a correlation between saying, like, “It’s so specific to your interests or specific to you that it is kind of like a back alley.” Like, *everyone’s* on this street, right? This is a very common thing that anyone would like. But *your* alley, this kind of much more private, dark back alley of like...

Teresa: Hmm!

Travis: ... “This is where you are, and it’s specific to *you*,” right?

Teresa: Yeah, sure.

Travis: I could see that.

Teresa: But I also like the idea of it being, like, central to “Close to you,” right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: In the case of this crime drama, like, heightening the drama for it to be like, [spooky tone of voice] “And it could happen to you!”

Travis: Yeah. In your very alley, where you keep your piles of memories...

Teresa: [laughing]

Travis: ... and boxes of junk that seem important, but definitely aren’t. But you know what is important?

Teresa: What?

Travis: A word from another Max Fun show!

Teresa: Let’s go.

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Travis: Now, this next one I really like, but not for a normal reason.

Teresa: Okay...

Travis: What's the next one?

Teresa: Uh, "One fell swoop," submitted by Sarah P.

Travis: So I don't think we started— we made this up. I think we got it from something, but me and my brothers and my family, when we were younger, used to say, "One swell foop."

Teresa: [giggles] Because pobody's nerfect?

Travis: 'Cause pobody's nerfect.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: This is another fun McElroyism that has just popped in my head: when we used to play, like, Clue, where you had to reveal a card to somebody, and you didn't want anyone else to see it, when Griffin was really little - like seven or eight, very young - he at one point said, "Alright, everybody. Convert your eyes."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And then that was— instead of "avert your eyes." And then that was a running joke in our family for a long time of like, when you had to show someone— like, "Convert your eyes," and then we'd be like, "Ah, forgive me Father, for—" right? And that kind of thing.

Teresa: [laughing] Yeah.

Travis: Anyways, one swell foop.

Teresa: Yes. Um, it means doing a large task in one big go, all at once, in a single action. For example, "We made three dozen cupcakes in one fell swoop last night."

Travis: So when I think of this, right, my image is a bird - like a falcon or something - of like, it would swoop down, right? And you would get everything in one go instead of swooping down, coming back, coming back—right?

That you would get it, and a bird would be like, "They picked up like three field mice in one fell swoop."

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Travis: That's what I've always pictured when I think of it.

Teresa: I don't know how you would— I mean, unless all—

Travis: It's a really good bird!

Teresa: Unless all the mice were in the exact same place, in order to get all three of them, you would have to... let go of the other ones.

Travis: That's why it's impressive! That's why it's impre— no, it has two claws and a beak.

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: It's going out, "Fwoom!" Right? 'Cause if everybody could—

Teresa: It cannot use the beak and then fly. It has to— it would—

Travis: Hey!

Teresa: [wheezing laughter]

Travis: That's why it's an impressive bird!

Teresa: [through growing laughter] Doesn't mean—

Travis: Because if every bird could do it, you wouldn't talk about what a fell swoop it was, right? It has to— the bird could do it in one fell swoop, that's amazing!

Teresa: I think that the bird swooping to pick up prey is impressive. Doesn't really—

Travis: But every bird does that!

Teresa: It doesn't—

Travis: Why can't you acknowledge how impressive my imaginary bird is?

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: Maybe it has really big claws. Maybe it's got a field mouse on each talon. Impressive, no? That's one swell foop right there.

Teresa: I suppose so. Here we go: Bill "The Bard" strikes again. And this is from...

Travis: Don't say Bill "The Bard." It sounds like "Build-A-Bear."

Teresa: ... the Scottish Play. [laughs]

Travis: His name is *William* Shakespeare.

Teresa: [laughs] Billy Shakes.

Travis: You can go— that works.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay.

Travis: You can do that one.

Teresa: Okay. Um, the Scottish Play.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: The term was invented by him, but this one first appeared in *Macbeth*. And this occurs during the description of Lady Macduff and her children, right?

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: I mean, it's super old by now...

Travis: Spoilers.

Teresa: [laughs] Spoilers.

Travis: I don't think you can— I don't think you have to worry about spoiling Shakespeare shows.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Because hey, if you're listening to this podcast and you haven't checked it out yet, what are you waiting for?

Teresa: Yeah. Sorry. Well, the— they all die.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so— yes.

Travis: And have I got news for you about *The Titanic*...

Teresa: Oh, no! Uh, and so yes, the imagery is meant to convey the killing of a hawking, right? You said swooping owl, hawk...

Travis: Yes!

Teresa: ... things like that. Um—

Travis: Swooping of a child.

Teresa: But it originally was only used in that context of, like— because “fell” meant cruel or ruthless, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And now, it is used in a lot of different contexts. It’s about completing a task, almost, and so we’re referring now to it being all kind of suddenly together...

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: ... instead of violence.

Travis: Because “fell,” I think, in my extensive history of fantasy and stuff, I think of as like, almost— not demonic, but like a fallen angel kind of deal?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Right, where it’s like, [grim tone] “A fell wind,” right? It would be, like, an evil darkness kind of deal, yeah.

Teresa: Right. And the idiom does not occur that anymore.

Travis: Yeah, because you wouldn’t say, like...

Teresa: [correcting herself] *Incur*. *Incur*.

Travis: ... “Yeah, I finished all these reports in *one dark swoop*.”

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: “What? Sorry, Bob, what was that?”

“Yeah, no, I finished all of these in *a demonic swoop*.”

Teresa: [growing laughter]

Travis: "Oof!"

Teresa: "Eugh!"

Travis: "Okay, eugh!"

Teresa: "No!"

Travis: "Hey, let's go talk to HR real quick, bud."

Teresa: [laughs] Uh, next one? Yeah?

Travis: Yeah, let's do it.

Teresa: Uh, "Like gangbusters."

Travis: Okay. So...

Teresa: Submitted by Anne P.

Travis: To do something like gangbusters is, like, to go all in to be, like, "Ah, yeah, man, we were totally there, doing everything... we went to the fair like gangbu—" you know, like— or, uh...

Teresa: Well, I— first of all, you described an idiom with another idiom. To "go all in."

Travis: To "go all in."

Teresa: Is another idiom. Um—

Travis: Like Poker.

Teresa: Like Poker, yes, exactly. Or a bet, or something like that.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Um, but it's more about the way that you do it: with great energy, speed, or even success, right?

Travis: So I have to imagine that "gangbusters" is like, you know, when... uh, your Eliot Nesses, right? Your Eliots Ness would bust up, like, a speakeasy or something, or a crime goings on, and they bust into the doors, and they grab everybody like a raid, right?

Teresa: Sure, yeah. That could be described "like gangbusters," but that's not where it's from.

Travis: Get out of the town. So what about, like, *MythBusters*?

Teresa: No, not at all. [chuckles]

Travis: Oh, okay. It's a different one.

Teresa: Uh, so, in the 1940s, we are at the height of radio drama, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: And one of the hottest new shows on the airways was a program called *Gang Busters*.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, which was billed at the time to be a true crime show, but was much more... crime than true. [giggles]

Travis: So a lot like— oh, what was it, *Dragnet*, right?

Teresa: Sure!

Travis: Where it's like, "These stories are real," and it's like, [skeptically] "There's— okay..." Maybe in, uh, these crimes *have been* committed at some point by someone.

Teresa: [amused] Yeah.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yeah. And so it was more entertainment than information...

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: ... and I think that it was very clear about that, because of the way that they grabbed attention on the airwaves. And the way that they did that was they would open the show with a barrage of ear-splitting foley.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Okay? So you could tell it was starting—

Travis: Foley as in house-made sounds, right?

Teresa: Right, yeah.

Travis: Yeah. So like, if you wanted to sound like you were punching someone, you might hit a side of beef or something? Slapstick, it's that kind of thing?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Where you'd have that stick that you have to make it sound like you're slapping somebody.

Teresa: Right. So it would have police whistles, machine gunfire, tires squealing; all kinds of stuff, right? Like, all of these different sounds that were— it was a barrage, like...

Travis: Yeah. That really— it would lock you in, right? There's a lot today—

Teresa: And you could always find it while you were changing the channels.

Travis: There's a lot today about people talking about something being "second-screen," right, where it's like, "Oh, yeah, while the TV's going, and you're looking at your phone," right? So we repeat things a bunch, because of that second screen, right?

But this was a time where there was no second screen, so you wanted somebody, when they turned the radio on, that they're *in* it. So it'd be like, [narrator voice] "Tonight, on *Gang Busters*, we're bringing..."

And then a [makes nonsense noises]— no, that's my bad Donald Duck impression, but you get it.

Teresa: [laughs] Right, so you would start the program with this. Then, they would do their announcement: like you said, "Tonight, *Gang Busters* presents the case of the... 'blank,'" right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And then *more*—

Travis: "The case of the blank!"

Teresa: [giggles] And then more police whistles, and more screaming, and more tire squeals, and all this kind of stuff, right? So that's when these over-the-top sound effects began the phrase "came on like *Gang Busters*."

Travis: Because it came on with such, like, a rack— raucous...?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Racket, yeah.

Teresa: Yeah, very loudly, right. So for example, if you and your friends slammed open the door to your house, talking and laughing and hooting and hollering, your mom might say, "Gosh, you guys, why'd you have to come on in like *Gang Busters*?"

Travis: So liter— so not like— oh, my gosh. So not like you came in like it was a raid, and you're breaking in and you're slamming the door, but literally like the show *Gang Busters* that started with a ton of noise?

Teresa: Yeah, totes!

Travis: Oh, my God.

Teresa: And so, what happened was this show was a *massive* hit. It ran from January 1936 to November 1957.

Travis: Oh, wow. 21 years!

Teresa: That's longer than the run of *Seinfeld* and *Will & Grace* combined.

Travis: And those shows both started with *huge* sound effects things in the beginning.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: I mean, *Seinfeld*, kinda. [imitates bass line]

Teresa: Kinda! Yeah. And so it featured...

Travis: [continues a few notes of bass line]

Teresa: ... a lot of prominent names and broadcasting, and also showcased the talents of a lot of people who would go on to be big Hollywood stars. Graduates from the program often went on to large roles in television and films.

Um, so if you were going over like *Gang Busters*, it meant that you were loud and intrusive...

Travis: And coming in with a bang.

Teresa: Right, which *evolved* into you were popular and respected, right? *Because* of the longevity of the show...

Travis: Of the show!

Teresa: ... so that's why we say, when something goes well, like "The run of the show has sold out like gangbusters..." that's because it's an homage to the amazing success of the radio program.

Travis: That's so interesting to me, because I can also see where there's kind of a Venn diagram overlap...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... where it's like, not only was it popular, but it was like a splash, right? That it came in, and made a big deal. Like, "Oh, man. Not only was it popu—"

Like, because if something slowly grew in popularity over time, and by the *end* of the run was sold out...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... you wouldn't necessarily say...

Teresa: "Selling like gangbusters"?

Travis: Right, if it was like, "Man, from the first day on, it was sold out every time. It went over like gangbusters." Because it both came in with a big kind of— made some noise, as they would say, *and* was popular the whole time.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: 'Cause something could come *in* with a big noise, and then everyone would be like, "Oh, this is actually really bad."

Teresa: "All sound and fury. Signifying *nothing*!" That's more Shakespeare.

Travis: Did you just come up with— oh, okay.

Teresa: That's more Shakespeare.

Travis: I was blown away for a second.

Teresa: [giggles] Okay.

Travis: You know what they *don't* talk about in that show?

Teresa: What?

Travis: There's that great phrase— and then shortly after that, a soldier comes in and says, "They are 10,000, sir." And MacB turns and goes, what, "Geese, villain?"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: What? No, man! An *army*, dude!

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: There's an army— why would it be *geese*!? What are you *talking* about? There's an *army* coming!

Teresa: He's out of his mind by then.

Travis: I guess, but...

Teresa: He doesn't know anything.

Travis: ... *geese*!? *Geese*!?

Teresa: He's— he is tormented and wrecked by guilt.

Travis: I mean, to be fair, the trees were coming.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: So he's pretty freaked out...

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. Okay—

Travis: It's a weird show. The trees attack him, but it's people holding branches.

Teresa: But isn't— the "fury" line, that's from, um... that's not from the Scottish Play.

Travis: Isn't it?

Teresa: I thought that that was from, um, *King Lear*.

Travis: Hold on. You can go in.

Teresa: Oh— ohp! Okay. Anyway, here's one: "Hot take," sent in by Dave P.

Travis: Wait, this is an idiom?

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Okay. So a hot take is like, "I have an opinion everyone else isn't gonna agree with," right? Or something that's gonna get me in trouble for saying, right? Like if you said, "I think that the best Disney movie in the last 30 years is *Wish*." That's a pretty hot take, right?

Teresa: Yes. In one sense. Okay, so yes, it is an unpopular or controversial opinion. But the origin of it has a little bit more to do with journalism than opinionism.

Travis: Okay. To jump back: it *is* *MacB*. "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no

more; it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Which is after - once again, spoilers - Lady MacB’s death.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And he’s talking about— yeah. Okay.

Teresa: Alright!

Travis: To be fair, though, Shakespeare reused a lot.

Teresa: What was I thinking about?

Travis: Were you thinking about the stages of man? `Cause that’s from— that’s not *Tempest*. That’s—

Teresa: Mm... No, I was thinking about... the storm. King Lear faces the storm.

Travis: I don’t know. I— I’m a dilettante.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I only know a little bit.

Teresa: Okay, anyway. So, like I said, it originates from journalism. Um, and it is used as a pejorative, okay? So its origin, as described by *Merriam-Webster*: loosely speaking, “hot take” is a published reaction or analysis of a recent news event. Often, because of its time-sensitive nature, doesn’t offer much in the way of deep reflection.

Travis: So like, kind of “hot” in, like, hot out-of-the-oven, or hot...

Teresa: Yes. Exactly.

Travis: Like, coming in hot.

Teresa: Yes, exactly. So they define “take”—

Travis: Is “coming in hot”— “coming in hot” is another idiom, isn’t it?

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: They define “take” as: a distinct or personal point of view, outlook, or assessment. And then “hot,” meaning: of intense or immediate interest. Opinions about hot takes are almost as prevalent as hot takes themselves, right?

So it could be also meant to mean that it is an increasingly popular way to dismiss the value of a piece of writing, right?

Travis: Oh! So both a hot take as “This is my hot take, an opinion that’s gonna get me in trouble,” *and* a hot take is like, “You came up with that so fast, there’s no way that you know what you’re talking about.”

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Which is interesting.

Teresa: Or that, uh, I think that this piece that you wrote is a hot take, and so I cannot be ordained to read it, or whatever.

Travis: I think— and I’ve used “interesting” a lot, but I find idioms very interesting, because in the media landscape that we live in today...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... where it is *more* about, like— it’s gone before a 24-hour news cycle to, like, a 10-second news cycle of— I’ve talked about this a lot with people, of like, when you’re on social media - especially when Twitter, eh,

was a bigger deal, right - the whole deal was if you talked about something three days after it happened, who cares, right?

So everyone felt, one, that they *had* to have an opinion to stay relevant, and two, that opinion *had* to happen...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... when the thing happened. And so, one, your opinion had to stand out from everyone else's and be a hot take, and two, you couldn't wait... for it— to think about it and process your feelings, so it had to be a "hot take."

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And those two things have kind of become one idea...

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: ... because of that.

Teresa: I think that TikTok has really made it so that that kind of, like... conglomeration of things is a way to drive views, right?

Travis: But it also is interesting, because now it has become back around to what I think it was here, which was a way to mock somebody who, it seems like, is purposefully trying to jump into the conversation *and* say something...

Teresa: And this may be not as informed as they should be, and say, well, "That's a real hot take."

Travis: Yeah, and say something divisive. "Oh, hot take there, bro," right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Of— it's like, [sarcastically] "Okay, cool, man. Great."

Teresa: Alright. Here's one. "One swallow doesn't make a summer."
Submitted by Cricket.

Travis: Now, this— I *have* heard this before...

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: ... but I think it's a fairly older one. I don't think that this is something that "the kids" are saying.

Teresa: Right. Uh, Cricket wrote in that specifically, they saw this on *Downton Abbey*.

Travis: Ah. So this is, like... a way of saying, "Just because this thing happens, it's not an indication..."

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: "... of a bigger trend."

Teresa: Exactly. Um, so—

Travis: Like if you said, "My friend, I text them all the time, and they never text back." And then you text them, and they text back. And you'll be like, "Okay, great. They've gotten into texting people back."

And you'd say, "Mm, one swallow doesn't make a summer," right? It doesn't indicate a pattern if there's only one thing.

Teresa: Exactly. Uh, in the UK, swallows return during the summer months...

Travis: From Capistrano— or *to* Capistrano. I can't remember which one it is, if that's...

Teresa: From— from warmer places, they come back from whence they came.

Travis: Capistrano sounds pretty warm, doesn't it?

Teresa: I guess.

Travis: It sounds like a spicy sausage.

Teresa: [through laughter] I don't know where that is. What is that?

Travis: I don't know. Sounds like a cured meat, but I...

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: ... think it's maybe Italian? I don't know; sounds like a warm place where birds go.

Teresa: But they are also known to come back as early as April, when you could still have cold snaps and thunderstorms and things like that. So when the weather is not *actually* summer...

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And so, you know, while *seeing* one is great news of summer being on the way, you can't just jump into the pool and decide it's summer because you saw one swallow.

Travis: Like, you could say "One bloom doesn't make a spring."

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Right? Because we here in Ohio, because of the fluctuating temperatures, it'll be like a week of 60s and then we're back to 30s, right? You'll often get— like, your bulb plants will start sending up blooms and shoots and stuff. And it's like, "Eh, that's a false thaw."

Teresa: Luckily, daffodils come back pretty early, but they're pretty hardy...

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: ... so it's okay. How about this next one? "Fly in the ointment," submitted by Amanda.

Travis: This always makes me think of that, [singing] "Flies in the Vaseline, we are... [mumbling incoherently]"

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: [singing with confidence again] "... without fail. [mumbles lyrics]"

Teresa: [continues giggling]

Travis: Um, so a fly in the ointment is also uh— and I know this is another idiom, but someone might say, like, "A wrench in the works," or something, where it's like, a little thing that would ruin the experience.

Teresa: Yeah! Yeah. A flaw or imperfection that distracts from the overall positivity of something, right?

Travis: Yeah, like if you are picturing, like, "You're a fancy person. You've gone to a fancy—" you know, a pharmacist— not pharmacist, but you know what I mean. And you're buying some fancy face cream, and you open it up, and then there's a little fly in it.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: And you're like, "Ugh! What? I'm supposed to take this?" And it's like, it's just a little fly in a big thing of face cream, and you're like, "This little fly has ruined the whole thing."

Teresa: Uh, it does come actually in that context, directly from the book of *Ecclesiastes* in the Bible.

Travis: Oh, really?

Teresa: Where it is said—

Travis: You know, there's a famous quote from the musical *Footloose*...

Teresa: Mm-hmm?

Travis: "Dancing doesn't always make you do nasties; look at the book of *Ecclesiastes*."

Teresa: Oh, okay! [giggles]

Travis: Just— it's right up there with Shakespeare, I would say.

Teresa: Uh, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor."

Travis: "Apothecary" was the word I was looking for.

Teresa: Oh, yeah?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So in ancient times, different ointments were used as medicine, and they could be quite expensive, so if you spent your money on a medicine you really needed, only to find a fly in it, that was *super* annoying.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: You could still *use* the ointment, so it didn't ruin it completely - right - but a fly stuck inside the bottle would feel like something valuable had been tainted.

Travis: Okay... so we have some here - from people who sent them in to us - this is from Jessica H.

"So I moved to the Netherlands nine years ago, and bit by bit I learned local idioms. What's fun is sometimes, I'm stuck on expressing myself, and just use an English idiom, and my Dutch friends are like, 'Oh, that's the same!' For example, 'With a grain of salt' is... [struggling to pronounce] 'Met een korreltje zout'?" I'm guessing. I'm sorry.

"There's a few others, but I just thought it might be fun to mention that sometimes, idioms get translated almost literally across languages. Not sure who started the salt one."

Uh, "grain of salt" is like if you said, "You shouldn't just trust that person's—what they tell you..."

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: "... without question. You should listen, but take it with a grain of salt. Question it a little bit, not just assume it's true."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It says, "By the way, just for fun, there's an idiom in Dutch that means 'I'll keep that in mind,' or 'I'll try to remember that.' It's 'Ik zal het in de gaten,' and directly translates to 'I'll keep it in the holes.'"

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: [bursts into laughter]

Teresa: I like it.

Travis: "Ah, yeah, I'll keep it in the holes."

Teresa: I like it.

Travis: "You know, my face holes? I'll keep that in there."

Teresa: "My brain holes?"

Travis: "Yeah, I'll keep it in there."

What's the next one?

Teresa: Um, this is from Josh B., who sent us a collection of idioms from Japan.

I am not going to try and speak Japanese, but there's one that translates: "Even monkeys fall from trees," and they say, "I really like this one, because it speaks to something that happens to all of us; everybody makes mistakes. Even someone who's really great at what they do can make mistakes."

So, you know, for example, in D&D terms, there's always a chance that you roll a 1, but that doesn't mean that you're bad at it. You get up, and you keep going.

Travis: This reminds me of one of my favorite dumb, dumb jokes from *Friends*, and it's a lie. No spoilers here, but they're talking to a zookeeper about a monkey that just died, and he says, "You know, we have a saying here at the zoo. Sometimes, monkeys die."

Teresa: [giggling]

Travis: "It's not a very good saying." It's such a good— dumb joke.

Teresa: Uh, here's another one that they sent in that translates to "After victory, tighten your helmet cords."

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Meaning to stay vigilant, even if you think you've won because, it says, "Back in the olden days, samurai would ride into battle in armor, and the helmet was held on by two cords, which helped keep everything together. In the course of the battle, the cords could become loose, so if there was a lull in the fighting, you might tighten them back up again, because the last thing you want is for your helmet to fall down to cover your eyes or, worse, open up and let an arrow in.

"But after a battle, you might decide to relax. But there are just as many stories of how, just as you thought you had won, the enemy's reinforcements would come in, or the enemy you didn't see would suddenly be there, and if they caught you unprepared, then your victory might become defeat."

Travis: Um, which— there's another concept similar to that here; xiao xin, which translates to something like "Remaining heart or mind," which is like... being aware of your surroundings, being mindful. Um, we might say it, in an English idiom, "Keep your head on a swivel," right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Like, "Take in your surroundings, be aware of everything."

Teresa: Let's move on to a couple from Dorothy F...

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: ... who wanted to send in some Polish idioms.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, again, I don't speak Polish, so let's— I'm just gonna say the translations. There's one that, uh, has the literal translation of: "Not my circus, not my monkey." So that's where this one comes from.

Travis: Yeah. I've heard *you* say that one before!

Teresa: I— yes. Yes. Meaning "That is not my problem." [giggles]

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Another one is, um, "You can steal horses with him," meaning that they are a trustworthy friend.

Travis: I like that one.

Teresa: And then here's one that translates, "Don't call the wolf from the forest," meaning, "Don't start any trouble."

Travis: Okay. I wanna do, like, two from Saoirse. Saoirse D. sent in some Irish idioms.

“Acting the maggot,’ which is acting silly or messing around.” I *love* that.

Teresa: [giggles]

Travis: Um, “Stall the ball,” slow down for a minute.

Teresa: That makes a lot of sense.

Travis: And “We’re sucking diesel,” which is you’re on the right track, you’re making progress.

Teresa: Okay! Alright!

Travis: Which I guess is, you know, if you’re “trucking along,” right, as we might say?

Teresa: Uh-huh.

Travis: You know? You’re sucking diesel! You’re using the gas; you’re on the gas, you’re on the right track?

Teresa: Yeah! I love it.

Travis: Love those.

Thank you, everybody who sent those in. Thank you to our editor, Rachel, without whom we could not make this show. Thank you to our researcher, Alexx. I love doing these idiom shows, and we couldn’t do them without Alexx.

And thank you to *you* for listening, *and* for sending them in; we literally couldn’t do...

Teresa: Could not do this one without you!

Travis: We couldn’t do *these* episodes without you.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Um, if you're listening to this on Friday, currently I am doing a short run of Twenty-Sided Tavern in New York City, my Off-Broadway rebut. Um...

Teresa: [holding back laughter] That's not a word.

Travis: Yeah, it is! 'Cause I've already made my debut, and now I'm but-ing again!

Teresa: [unsure] Mm...

Travis: [silly tone] Come on.

[normally] No, I guess *the* but is when I'm leaving, debut is when I get there, rebut is when I come back...?

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: Okay. But it's Twenty-Sided Tavern; I'm doing shows, uh, tonight - Friday night - and Saturday matinee, Saturday night; Sunday matinee, Sunday night. Come see me, go to thetwentsidedtavern.com to get tickets.

Let's see. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty pinup photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, "*Shmanners Fanners*." If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, go ahead and join that group today.

As always, we are taking your topic submissions, and your idioms! We have a large folder full of those idioms; keep sending them in. I know that maybe you don't— you don't hear it right away. That's because we do get *so many*, but we are going to get to them. This is number 16, so we're gonna keep going.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: As long as we keep getting idioms, we're gonna keep doing these shows, so keep sending them in, shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alex, because she reads every single one.

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

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: Manners, *Shmanners*! Get it?

[theme song plays]

[acoustic guitar sting]

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