

Shmanners 518: Animal Idioms

Published on June 12th, 2026

[Listen here on Maximum Fun](#)

["Shmanners Theme" by brentalfloss 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: How are you?

Teresa: I'm all right, yeah. Doing... I be doing.

Travis: Is it the dog days yet?

Teresa: No, not yet.

Travis: [yells out] Ah!

Teresa: I know it's so hot outside, but it's not yet.

Travis: If it goes above 72 degrees, I melt.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Not necessarily physically, but spiritually—

Teresa: Emotionally.

Travis: Emotionally.

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah.

Travis: Mentally.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: I'm like a fall baby, you know what I mean?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: I'm meant to exist in crisp—a little spooky weather.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Anything could happen! Ah! Maybe it's magic, maybe it's ghosts, I don't know. Hot?

Teresa: Is that what the fall is about? Magic?

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: You've lived in fall before, right?

Teresa: [laughs] I guess I was—

Travis: You lived through fall and think, this is a very serious, right down the middle, mundane time.

Teresa: I don't know—

Travis: Because that's summer.

Teresa: If magic—

Travis: Summer, not magical to me.

Teresa: I don't know if magic has a season.

Travis: What are you talking about?

Teresa: [chuckles] Okay, all right.

Travis: I very rarely am awash with the feeling of being so right and you being so wrong—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: That I actually don't know how to handle this.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Because everyone on the internet right now is screaming. *Screaming*. If there—okay... Let's indulge what you said for a moment. If there was a season for magic though, would it be A, spring, B, winter, C, summer, D, fall?

Teresa: All the above, because magic can happen at any time. Let's see, there's Santa Claus in the winter. Spring, the magic of life happens.

Travis: I'm not saying magic couldn't happen in the o—I'm saying if I said what's the most magical season, would it not be fall?

Teresa: No, it'd be winter, because of Christmas.

Travis: Oh my god! Oh my god...

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Is this the end of the podcast?

Teresa: [chuckles] Objectively speaking, the biggest magic happens at Christmas.

Travis: Incorrect! It's fa—okay, listen, it's not important. We'll talk about this in therapy for years to come.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Our children will be like, "Yeah, our parents' marriage was always really solid. There was this one thing, though." [sighs] Hah... it's fine.

Teresa: Hey, you know what?

Travis: Whhat?

Teresa: You know, you're right. You're right.

Travis: That didn't feel true, but I'll take it. I'll pretend like it felt true. Thank you, baby, that means a lot to me. That means a lot to me. But none of that is what we're talking about today.

Teresa: No, we are talking about idioms, and we have a very special idiom episode, animal idioms!

Travis: This is idioms that animals use.

Teresa: No.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: These are idioms about animals.

Travis: Okay. Like a bird in the hand.

Teresa: Yes, but not that one. [chuckles]

Travis: A cat out of the bag.

Teresa: Yes, we've done that one already.

Travis: I know, yes, so I was using examples, but I didn't want to use up—

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: The ones that we have.

Teresa: These are new ones.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: That we haven't done before, but not the bird in hand, two in bush.

Travis: Okay, so what is...

Teresa: Okay, okay. Here's the first one, submitted by Justin M, but probably not Justin McElroy.

Travis: No, probably not. He doesn't use computers.

Teresa: So the saying is cash cow.

Travis: So this is like the thing where you make your most money, right? Or like the idea of like, this is the thing that our business hinges on, or where we... And I think for me, it's always implied like we're kind of milking it.

Teresa: Yes!

Travis: Right? Of like this thing can make money, and we don't really contribute to that in much, but we're not going to let this thing get away as long as we can continue making profit off of it.

Teresa: Indeed. So, like you said, this has to do with the difference between domestic animal raising and agriculture.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So traditionally, if you were like growing fruits and vegetables or whatever, you could get some money, but there was some work involved, right?

Travis: Yeah, you had to like kee—you had to till the land and then plant it and then harvest it, and then do it again.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Not to mention you probably were eating as much as you could grow, right? So there probably wasn't a ton leftover. Or if there was leftover, it was because you were working really hard, right?

Travis: Right.

Teresa: But if you got a dairy cow, you could sell fresh milk and other products, and that was a lot more profitable. And you didn't even have to like do much. I mean, cows require upkeep, right? You do have to feed the cow, for sure. But like the cow is doing a lot of the work here, right? You're just kind of reaping the benefits. So like, you are pretty much guaranteed as long as you could keep this cow in good standing, a steady stream of income. That's the phrase, cash cow.

Travis: Cash cow reminds me a lot of like the goose that laid the golden egg.

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Where I don't know how familiar, like I think people know the idea of the goose that laid the golden egg. But the whole story is like there was this goose that was laying golden eggs, and everybody was super excited about it. And they got so eager for the golden eggs they were like, "Why are we waiting for the goose to lay the eggs? We can just kill it and get the gold that's inside of it." So they killed the goose and cut it open, and there was nothing inside of it—

Teresa: No, nothing—

Travis: That was not—

Teresa: There was just goose inside of it.

Travis: And the idea being like, instead of waiting for the continuous comfortable payoff, they were like, "We want to cash in now!" And spoiled it.

Teresa: Yeah. They ruined it.

Travis: What's our next one?

Teresa: Our next one is submitted by Debbie T. The saying is crazy as a loon, or calling someone a loon.

Travis: Well, this is about like you're... it's not necessarily about mental illness.

Teresa: No.

Travis: Right. This is more of like you are silly, you are wild, you are unpredictable, like eccentric almost, right?

Teresa: Sure, yes.

Travis: Like that person? Oh, they're crazy as a loon. They'll be like, oh! You never know what they're going to do. They're, ah, oh, unpredictable.

Teresa: I think that you've really hit it, because not only is it about like a foolish, silly or like erratically acting person, it's about the idea, right? Being silly or erratic.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Yeah. And so, this one has two potential origins. One theory is entomological.

Travis: Is that about loon and lunatic?

Teresa: No.

Travis: Okay. Because I think that my head I've always conflated like, you know, like lunatic, which is—has to do with the Moon and people going wild when the Moon came out. So loon, lunatic, it's right there. That's the connection. But that's not it.

Teresa: That's not it!

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Middle English, the word is spelled with a U, right? And it is a term from the 1400s that meant someone who was a lout or an idler or a rogue.

Travis: Oh?

Teresa: Over time, the connotation got slightly more negative, and the U switched to an O, and the word evolved to mean someone who was being ridiculous.

Travis: But isn't a loon a bird?

Teresa: Yes, that's the other entirely plausible. But probably not as like grounded in language.

Travis: Because I've always thought of the bird, I just assumed that bird was weird.

Teresa: Right. Well, the bird's the loon, is a duck-like bird. It has a black head and it has like a sharper beak. And it has a, like a red, beady eye.

Travis: And it's sillier.

Teresa: Well, no.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: It's native to North America. So the idea that this bird has come into the lexicon and made it so that the word comes to bird, right? Probably not, because the word was in writing before "the new world was discovered," right?

Travis: Do you think it's the other way around?

Teresa: No.

Travis: Where people are like, "Oh, that bird? That bird is a rascal. That bird is a scoundrel. That bird's a loon."

Teresa: I don't know exactly if that would have happened.

Travis: Oh, okay. You can just say no.

Teresa: But the reason—

Travis: I'm comfortable in it. You can just say that's ridiculous.

Teresa: The reason is because of their call, why it's associated.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Because it's a very kind of high-pitched whale. Think mourning dove, but more sinister sounding?

Travis: Oh, boy.

Teresa: In fact, movie studios will often edit in loon calls if they're trying to convey that the forest is haunted.

[clip of a loon call plays]

Teresa: And that's just one of their calls. Some of their calls also have a very staccato feel, in a similar way, that could be sound like maniacal laughter.

Travis: Ah.

[clip of a loon call plays]

Travis: It's spooky.

Teresa: Yeah, it's spooky. So, maybe? Here's the next one, submitted by Linda R. The saying of crocodile tears.

Travis: Oh? I've never even thought about this! So crocodile tears is like you're faking being sad or sorry. Like I hear it used a lot in like dramas where it's like a rich relative dies and the people are very eager to get the inheritance, but they're like, "Oh, I'm so sad. How much did he leave though?" Right, and it's like, you're just shedding crocodile tears. This isn't real.

Teresa: Right—

Travis: You're not really sad.

Teresa: It has to do with insincerity.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: Right?

Travis: But I've never thought about... is it because crocodiles don't cry?

Teresa: No, actually crocodiles do cry, but not because they're sad.

Travis: Go on?

Teresa: So, crocodiles really like to live in the water, right? They like to be in kind of like sweltering, swampy places.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: So they have a biological mechanism that will trigger their tear ducts to produce fluid when their eyes are dry, like tears, because—

Travis: I almost said I wish I had that, but we—

Teresa: But you—

Travis: We do—

Teresa: You do—

Travis: They're called tears, yes, okay.

Teresa: But it's a very mechanical process, right? So, it does look like they are crying, but not because they've had a horrible day or whatever, right?

Travis: So this is legitimate. This is not like, oh, a fun turn of phrase. It's like somebody found out crocodiles cry mechanically, not emotionally. And they were like, "That's just like my Aunt Linda."

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: "She has crocodile tears," right? Like...

Teresa: Yes, but here's the reason. They often activate when their jaws are busy. So like while they're eating, they will cry. So they're obviously not upset—

Travis: *What?*

Teresa: Right? It's kind of like when people yawn, right? And you might—

Travis: Now, do we know they're not upset? Do we know that the crocodile is not like, "I hate that this is how I have to live. I feel terrible. I—"

Teresa: No, I don't think so.

Travis: "If I... Oh! I could be a pacifist if I didn't have to feed."

Teresa: I don't understand animal capacity for emotion, but I don't think so.

Travis: Have we done a CAT scan on these crocodiles while they're eating to see if they're feeling emotions? This is the science we need.

Teresa: Well—

Travis: Stop wasting money on AI research.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: That's garbage. Put money into finding out if crocodiles regret having to eat things.

Teresa: The tears are insincere, so that's where they come from. But humans also cry insincere tears, right? If you are—your eyes are irritated, or like I said, you have a large yawn, right? You may also have insincere, just kind of mechanical tears that happen. But when you put on airs that you might actually be sad, those are crocodile tears.

Travis: This is also, you don't have to literally make yourself cry to be shedding crocodile tears.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: It's used basically of like, you are faking being upset about this. You're faking sadness or grief or whatever.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: You don't have to have tears rolling down your face. Unless you're like an Oscar-winning actor, then you could probably do it.

Teresa: Probably.

Travis: If I'm trying to fake it, I'm like, "Give me a second, let me look at the light for a minute. Hold on, don't—"

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: "Do you have any like minty eye drops or something? Give me a second. *Uuh...*"

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Hey, we're going to take a quick break for a thank you note from our sponsors, and a thank you note to a Jumbotron!

Teresa: 'Ey!

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hey, this week, we've got a message for Brent, from Michelle. Happy birthday, Brent! In Reston, Virginia. "Since gifts are getting harder to figure out, I got you something money can't usually buy, a chance to have some of your favorite podcasters give you a shout out for your birthday. Love, your awesome wife, Michelle."

Teresa: Aw! Happy birthday, Brent!

Travis: I'm also going to now do a second read of that last line as a command. Love your awesome wife, Michelle!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Love her! She deserves it, Brent. Can't you see how much she cares for you? That she paid for us to say happy—love her!

Teresa: Yes. And love you, Brent. Thanks. I hope you enjoyed your birthday shout out.

Travis: Sure. But also, you treat Michelle with respect, you hear me?!

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: We also have a message this week from Storyworth! Storyworth. What is a story worth to you?

Teresa: A thousand words!

Travis: More! A billion—all the... the wor—yes!

Teresa: All the words.

Travis: All the words!

Teresa: Is that what it's from? Is that—

Travis: I think so, yeah—

Teresa: *Ooh!*

Travis: I assume?

Teresa: Mind blown.

Travis: Like a sto—or it's like a story wor—like... "What's this book?" "Well, it's a story worth. It's about one story's worth."

Teresa: One story worth. [chuckles] It weighs about one story worth.

Travis: "This? It's about one story worth of book right there."

Teresa: Perfect.

Travis: Most Father's Day gifts end up in a drawer! Unless they are a set of drawers. At which point, then you're going to get like some kind of interdimensional portal happening.

Teresa: But tell us about this one.

Travis: Sure, right. Storyworth doesn't. It gives your dad a year-long experience and gives your family a book full of stories he'd probably never

think to tell on his own. I will say my father, in his 70s now, has lived an absolutely ridiculous life.

Teresa: He has several stories worth.

Travis: *Ah!* And the things that he has done and seen, and also as I've gotten older, the appreciation of being like, this is a dude who like lived through and remembers like the '60s and '70s and '80s in a way that I simply don't have that kind of awareness. And to be—like he and my grandmother lived in Las Vegas for a while like in the '60s and '70s, right? And to be able to say like—

Teresa: And isn't it great to hear about that?

Travis: Hey, man, what was that like?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And that's what Storyworth does for you. Each week, Storyworth sends a question about the person you're giving it to's life. They respond however they want, writing back over emails or web, voice recording, or new this year, a guided phone call. There's no apps, no login, no tech hassles, which especially if you're getting this for an older relative, I'm sure you appreciate.

Teresa: That would work out better, I think.

Travis: And you get each story as they tell it. And after a year, Storyworth compiles everything into a beautiful hardcover book. And new this year is Storyworth's unlimited plan. Buy it once, and you can give Storyworth memoirs to friends and families all—

Teresa: Oh!

Travis: Year. It's incredible. So this year, give dad a gift, or anybody a gift in your life, frankly, that captures who he really is before the stories get harder to remember. Father's Day is Sunday, June 21st. Order right now and save up to \$20 at storyworth.com/shmanners. Save up to \$20 at

storyworth.com/shmanners. One more time, that's
storyworth.com/shmanners.

[break]

Maddy: Hey, are you playing a video game right now?

Kirk: Maybe you put on a podcast while grinding in an RPG.

Jason: Or maybe you just don't want to hear that boss fight music one more time.

Maddy: Been there. I'm Maddy Myers.

Jason: I'm Jason Schreier.

Kirk: And I'm Kirk Hamilton.

Jason: We're the hosts of TripleClick! A video game podcast.

Maddy: A podcast you can listen to while you do other things!

Kirk: Like driving or cooking or playing video games!

Maddy: On TripleClick, we share our thoughts on the latest games.

Jason: And breaking news out of the video game industry.

Kirk: And we also talk about other stuff besides games.

Jason: So while you're doing something else, make sure to check out TripleClick.

Kirk: Listen on maximumfun.org, or wherever you find your podcasts.

[break]

Dan: The Flop House is a podcast where we watch a bad movie, and then we talk about it.

Elliott: Robert Shaw in Jaws, and they're trying to figure out how to get rid of the Ghoulies. And he scratches his nails and he says, "I'll get you, ghoulie."

Dan: He's just standing above the toilet with a harpoon. [chuckles]

Elliott: [chuckles]

Dan: No, I was just looking forward to you going through the other ways in which Wild Wild West is historically inaccurate.

Stuart: You know how much movies cost nowadays, when you add in your popped corn and your bagel bites, and your cheese fritters?

Elliott: You can't go wrong with a Henry Cavil mustache. Here at Henry Cavil Mustaches, the only supplier!

Stuart: [laughs]

Dan: The Flop House. New episodes every Saturday. Find it at maximumfun.org.

[break]

Travis: Okay, what's our next one?

Teresa: Our next one is from Bill B. And the saying is one trick pony.

Travis: So this is about usually a person, but I guess it could apply to anything that works like this. Where it's like, yeah, they can do that one thing really well. But like, you can't rely on them to take care of everything, right?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Like, I'm trying to think of a good example. Like if you had somebody who like worked in sales with you, right? And it's like, that guy is so good at getting customers who were like, "I don't need this product." And they're like shutting a—like closing the phone to get them to stay on the line and buy the thing. And it's like, yeah, that's amazing. But he cannot do cold calls.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: He cannot follow leads. He cannot close on dea—right? It's like, yeah, that's an amazing thing that seems really impressive. But he can't do anything else.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: He's a one trick pony.

Teresa: We owe this to a very literal, I would say, trend in the 18th century of traveling circuses.

Travis: Okay. I was actually just talking about this the other day that this might be about, well, not specifically, but an example of this, where there was a famous performing horse named Clever Hans.

Teresa: Yup.

Travis: And Clever Hans, they trained him to like stamp out when asked certain questions, so it seemed like he was doing math.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Right? But the horse did not know math, he was just very well trained. But his name was Clever Hans. And that made me so happy. And then it was first a DnD stream where it was like, find a Wikipedia page and then base a character off of it. So I made a horse wizard who was a horse—

Teresa: Perfect.

Travis: Named Clever Hans. And he was a wizard, and I love him.

Teresa: Yes. I mean, it is—it do be like that, because the traveling circuses had menageries of animals, right? And one of the big draws was you could see these animals perform tricks. Now, if you were a well-funded, popular circus, you might have like elephants to do these things. And, you know, if you weren't, you might have a horse or a pony.

Travis: And this was not like a super well-trained performing horse who like you might see at like a rodeo show or something where it's like, "Watch as they do this and this and this!" It was like, "We've trained them to do this one often weird thing."

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And you're like—

Teresa: Or—

Travis: "Well, that horse can really draw!" Or—

Teresa: Or something that maybe a regular horse could do, but this one does it like fancy, like dressed up or something. The point is it could do one thing.

Travis: They used to do a thing where they would make horses and divers jump off of diving boards into pools.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Don't do that!

Teresa: That's very—

Travis: Horses weren't meant to dive? People can do it, sure! But not the horse.

Teresa: So during the days of traveling circuses, the phrase one trick pony was literal. It meant the animal actor watching only had one interesting thing it could do. And after that, the rest of the things it did was really boring.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Right? Like normal stuff.

Travis: But they were probably promoting that one weird thing it could do.

Teresa: Right. Yes. Yes.

Travis: They weren't like, "Come watch this horse eat hay!"

Teresa: And they did find some really like weird stuff that they could get horses to do. Pull off their own saddles, stand on their hind legs or pull off the trainer's shirt or hat, or whatever, right? Do something you wouldn't think a horse could do that was necessarily, you know, very dexterous or whatever.

Travis: Like taxes.

Teresa: I don't think that they'd have any horses that did taxes. But by the 1950s, the idiom was stuck in the lexicon as slang for a person or tool that only performed one function.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: The next one is from Randy Q. The saying is, you can't kill a fly with an elephant gun.

Travis: I've never heard that before!

Teresa: You know, neither had Alexx, and I haven't either. But—

Travis: Did Randy make this one up?

Teresa: That is something that Alexxx thought for a moment—

Travis: Uh-huh!

Teresa: But then upon further research found that no, this was not made up by Randy and his family. This is something that has to do with scale. Right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: So, if someone is doing something kind of in an overblown way for a small thing, you might say this. Right? But it has to do with kind of like the way that you should really think about doing the thing before you even start doing the thing. Let me explain—

Travis: Like if I said I saw a mouse in the house, so I'm going to burn my house down.

Teresa: Exactly. Yes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: But that would be very detrimental to your house.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Right? There are several other versions of this slang that originate from different North and Central African proverbs.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So there's a version from Cameroon, is you don't use a sledgehammer to kill a fly that lands on your privates.

Travis: Listen, wise.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Wise on so many levels.

Teresa: The Ghanian and Kenyan version is, it's only when a mosquito lands on your testicles that you realize there is always a way to solve problems without violence.

Travis: Brilliant. I noticed so far there hasn't been don't shoot your privates with an elephant gun to kill a fly.

Teresa: Well, I think that that's the given.

Travis: Oh, okay. Can I just say, I'm loving—I don't even know if it's like the literalness of those, but like visceral. That's it.

Teresa: Yes, visceral.

Travis: The visceralness of that of like—

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Hey, listen, I don't even know if I agree with like the—you know, if someone said that to me about something and I'd be like, okay, listen, forgetting whatever situation you were talking about, say that saying again? Yeah, you win.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Yeah, okay, you've convinced me.

Teresa: So the heart of the matter is, it's a saying that urges people to choose nonviolent or more level-headed forms of dealing with a problem. Because an elephant gun or a sledgehammer, they are quite large things that are unwieldy and they produce a lot of mayhem, right?

Travis: Collateral damage.

Teresa: Exactly. Collateral damage.

Travis: So this is about proportional response.

Teresa: Yes, exactly.

Travis: Especially, it sounds like collateral, like self-reflective—

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Collateral damage too, of like—

Teresa: Yeah, for the ones involving testicles, I think definitely that's about self-reflecting.

Travis: Well, that's what I love the implication of it, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Of like, oh, you have an issue with this person at work, right? Rather than start like a whisper campaign against them where you're like bad-mouthing them to everybody. And then almost certainly people will find out—

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: You will get in trouble, it will reflect back on—just go to HR and get it figured out.

Teresa: Proportional response I think is very important here. And so like, these idioms I think really hit home that the violence you inflict is probably going to come right back to you.

Travis: Yeah. Right to the heart of the matter.

Teresa: Here's one. Allison R submits, the world is your oyster!

Travis: Oh, I love this one!

Teresa: You love a different saying.

Travis: Yes. Okay. So, well, I like to say the world is your ostrich—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But that's because I think it's funny. I like—

Teresa: Because people are expecting oyster, but you say ostrich.

Travis: I like—subversion jokes are good. So the thing is, this is used wrong now.

Teresa: Okay?

Travis: Because people use it like somebody graduated from Harvard with honors, the world is their oyster. Like it's all there before them, it's laid bare. Right? Like it's yours, just grab it. Right? But the full phrase is supposed to be, the world is your oyster, shuck it. Right? Like if you're willing—it's supposed to mean like it's there, if you're willing to do the hard work to reach the pearl.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Right? But we've stopped saying the like go out and chuck it part. And just stop at the world's your oyster. As though oysters are known for being wide, open and accessible at all times.

Teresa: Right. There is a literary origin in William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, where the character Pistol says to Falstaff, "Why then the world's mine oyster, which I with sword will open."

Travis: Right.

Teresa: Right?

Travis: So—

Teresa: So he's going to work hard to open the oyster that he wants to get things.

Travis: I'm going to fight! I will take it—

Teresa: I'm gonna get it.

Travis: With the point of my sword. Yes.

Teresa: Right. And I think that where people like try and make this idiom something different from what it is, is when they talk about the pearls. Right? The world sitting before you is like a fresh oyster, not only does it provide a delicacy, there's also the chance that you might find a pearl inside. Right? Which would add value to your life. And, you know, that kind of thing.

Travis: And I assume that people think about it like you might see in a cartoon or something.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Where like the shell is sitting open like a jewelry box almost—

Teresa: That's usually a clam, isn't it?

Travis: But like in a pearl—

Teresa: Right, yeah, with a pearl.

Travis: A pearl floating in it. And it's like, I just have to reach out and grab it. It's right there. I don't have to mine for it. I don't have to smelt anything. The pearl's right there. But it's supposed to be about like it's sealed and you're going to work to open it.

Teresa: Right. But this is the funny thing about idioms, right? Because even though the full idiom says something completely different, people don't use it that way.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: People use it in the way of, I can just reach out and grab what I—what I'm after. Right? Because the world is my oyster, I'm just going to get it. But that's not the original meaning of the idiom. You know what I mean?

Travis: I do.

Teresa: Yeah. All right. Here's another one. Damien H submits puppy love.

Travis: Puppy love? Oh, okay! So this is... I usually associate this with either it is literally or likened to someone's like first like love. You know where it's like you see like two 14 year olds who are just swooning all over each other and, you know, like constantly texting each other and like, "Oh my god, no, you're the best."

"No, you're the best." Right? And it's not just like, oh, these two people are in love with each other, but like that like they're so innocent, it's so cute. You know like they seem to be so into it, but like we're looking at them like you're 12 years old! You're not—it's not like you're going to get married or whatever, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: There is an implied youth to it, inexperience.

Teresa: Inexperience, definitely. It's supposed to be kind of like an intense, exaggerated, clumsy over-affection.

Travis: Mm-hm.

Teresa: Right? And that is quite literally the way that puppies greet people, right?

Travis: Because puppies have not fully figured out—

Teresa: No.

Travis: The connection between front legs and back legs.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: And some never do. Lily cannot seem to get the motion of wagging her tail separate from whatever her head's doing. It's great.

Teresa: It's as—It is great.

Travis: One day she's going to figure out how to swing her tail back and forth and not in like she's slicing and dicing a melon.

Teresa: [chuckles] We see this in print in the 1820s. And it is about—

Travis: It's that old?

Teresa: Yeah! It is about dating. Right? Describing two people—

Travis: I would have guessed like 1940s, 1950s. That seems like something from those like informational black and white things of like, "A young man's fancy!" That kind of thing of like, "And now it's the summer of puppy love." You know?

Teresa: No, it's much older than that. It would be like young people experience the love our puppies in their own right, like you said. But also the second layer of it being kind of a clumsy or irrational first love.

Travis: I think maybe another reason I associate with, isn't there like a song that's like, [sings] "And they call it puppy love!" Something like that, right?

Teresa: Yeah, something like that.

Travis: So I just assumed. I didn't think he made that up. But like, I think I associate it with that like sock hop, two straws kind of deal, you know?

Teresa: Yeah, I get it.

Travis: Archie. More Archie and... oh, Betty.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Not Archie and Veronica. That doesn't seem like puppy love to me.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Archie and Betty seemed like a puppy love thing to me.

Teresa: Here's one from Zach R, who happens to be Alexx's husband. But appar—

Travis: Don't say it happens to be like it was an accident? We just found out!

Teresa: [laughs] But—

Travis: Who is purposefully Alexx's husband.

Teresa: [chuckles] Apparently says this a lot. Like a fox.

Travis: Okay. This is another one. Usually what it means, if somebody says you're crazy, crazy like a fox, it's about like a fox is very wily. And I assume it has something to do with like fox hunts, right? Where you're like watching this fox make erratic movements or whatever. But it also, I think, at least for me, has come to be used a lot of different ways thanks to like cartoons and comedies and stuff.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Where someone will say like, "You're crazy!" And like, "Ha-ha-ha, crazy like a fox!" And it's like, no, just crazy, right?

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Like that idea of it's almost facetious.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: In that sense.

Teresa: I think—I think you could use it that way. And I apologize, it wasn't that Zach uses it a lot, it's that the phrase kept coming up and he kept going, what does that actually mean?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: So here it is—

Travis: It's also fun to use it after other words.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Right? Where if somebody's like, "You're late." And I'm like, "Yeah, late like a fox!" Right? Or like, "This house is so messy!" "Messy like a fox!"

Teresa: Yeah—

Travis: It works—

Teresa: But—

Travis: It's not, actually, it's funny for you to say that.

Teresa: That's trolling people, is what that is. [chuckles]

Travis: Hey, it should be done in a way that is consensual and makes the other person laugh.

Teresa: [chuckles]

Travis: Don't do it if the other person's not laughing. But I think I could get away with it with you if I was reading the situation correctly, and I deployed it with surgical precision, I think I could make you bust a gut.

Teresa: So, someone who seems foolish, but is actually extremely cunning.

Travis: Jack Sparrow in the first Pirates of the Caribbean is a great example of this.

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: Of this idea of like giving off the air of like, they have no idea what they're doing. And then you see like the plan...

Teresa: Right, when—

Travis: Kind of come together at the end.

Teresa: I'm reminded of like when they're stealing the boat, right?

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: And they go and they steal the big boat. And everybody's like, "Hey!" And then they use the faster boat to catch the big boat, and then they switch boats.

Travis: Yes, correct.

Teresa: You would think that it means that someone seems to be doing something foolish, but actually has a smart thing up their sleeve. But also, foxes are written off for their small size and adorable faces—

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: Right? But they're—

Travis: They are cute.

Teresa: Extremely intelligent. Zoologists say they might even be smarter than most dogs breeds.

Travis: I... listen. If there—if we lived in a world where the idea of like, hey, don't... like wild animals aren't pets, I would have a fox. I've wanted one

since I was a kid and I watched David the Gnome, and he rides around on Swift the Fox.

Teresa: He does.

Travis: And since then I've been like, it's my dream. It's all I want. All I want is a pet fox!

Teresa: Mm-hm.

Travis: I know I should not have one, and I will not have one, but I would want to have one.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: And I would call him Rouge.

Teresa: But also, like you said, this saying has been used in a wider way, right? So like not just the literal meaning of like a fox, right? But also like you said, where it's kind of like used to be like a kind of catch all of, is it really the thing that we said it was kind of way?

Travis: Yeah! That's a good way of putting it.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: That it's used of like, that person's crazy. Crazy like a fox, right? Of like inverting the expectation of the air they were putting on. Yeah.

Teresa: Exactly. Yeah. So it's another one of those like doubly ones.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: So it depends on how you're using it for what it actually means. You can mean—

Travis: Not because a fox is known to be crazy.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right, okay.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: You're not saying like, that person's crazy like a fox. You're inverting the crazy. Yeah! Crazy like a fox, like what you mean is clever.

Teresa: Right, yes.

Travis: Right, but you said crazy, so I'm going to play on it.

Teresa: Yes. But also like you mean, like you said earlier, where people kind of interjected into things that really aren't that like clever. Or they subvert the way that they use the idiom because it might not be something that's actually clever, it might be something that is actually just kind of silly.

Travis: Yeah. Like how that's what they would want me to think.

Teresa: Yeah. Yeah.

Travis: Or too quiet, right?

Teresa: That's exactly what you would say.

Travis: It's been used so much that it becomes like a self-referential joke.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: You know? Where it's like, oh, I don't have to explain the setup in order to use the punchline, right?

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Hey, everybody! Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you to everybody who sent in idioms.

Teresa: Yeah, we love gettin' 'em!

Travis: Thank you to Alexx, our researcher, without whom we could not make the show. Thank you to our editors, Rachel and Gino, without whom we could not make the show. And thank you to you for listening. You're... as cute as a fox.

Teresa: Aw!

Travis: Adorable like a fox!

Teresa: And instrumental to these specific topics. The idioms.

Travis: I guess we couldn't make it without you, yeah.

Teresa: We really couldn't.

Travis: Yeah. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We also want to say thank you to Brent 'brentalfloss' Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pin-Up 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.

We also are always taking topic submissions. Don't wait for the idiom episode, you can send those in any time. If you have a biography you'd like us to take a look at, a cultural event, any of those things, send them to shmannerscast@gmail.com, and say hi to Alexx, because she reads every single one.

Travis: And that's going to 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.

["Shmanners Theme" by brentalfloss plays]

Maximum Fun.

A worker-owned network...

Of artists-owned shows...

Supported directly by you.