

# Bowling for Columbine

(Documentary) ( 2002)

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## Major Characters

Since this is a documentary, there are no “major characters,” the way other films have. However, there are real people who are seen throughout the movie, including the following:

Michael Moore.....The movie’s writer, director and narrator! He is a liberal political humorist, film maker and writer of many well-known books, including *Stupid White Men*. He has become famous for creating works that criticize American society in general, and powerful people in particular.

John Nichols.....The brother of Terry Nichols, who was convicted and sentenced to life in prison for helping Timothy McVeigh blow up the Oklahoma City Federal Building in April, 1995 (168 people were killed). Randy is a Michigan farmer who, like his brother, is completely obsessed with guns and other weapons, and is convinced that the federal government is going to take away all his rights.

Marilyn Manson.....The “Goth rock” musician whose anti-religious lyrics and songs about evil were seen by many as the reason two teenage boys decided to kill as many students as they could, at Columbine High School, in June 1999. Manson, who named himself after Marilyn Monroe and the mass murderer Charles Manson, was one of the most popular Goth singers of the late 1990s. Goth music is known for its loud and theatrical style, and its song lyrics that deal with death, destruction and the devil.

Charleston Heston.....The world-famous actor who played, among other roles, Moses, in the film *The Ten Commandments*. In the 1990s, Heston became the President of the National Rifle Association, the powerful lobbying group that tries to stop almost all gun control laws. Heston often appeared in pro-gun rallies in cities that had just suffered from terrible gun violence.

While these were the most prominent people featured in the movie, there are also various others, from students who knew Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold (the boys who committed the massacre at Columbine) to members of the Michigan Militia (a group of gun owners who practice shooting in the country), to the spokeswoman for Kmart Stores, where the bullets used at Columbine were sold.

## Plot Summary

Since this film is a documentary, there is no real plot the way there are in most movies. Instead, it simply follows the liberal political humorist Michael Moore as he tries to understand why Americans are so obsessed with guns, and why there

is so much murder and gun violence in the United States. Moore began to ask himself this question after the horrible mass murder at Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colorado (just outside of Denver), on April 20, 1999. On that day, two emotionally disturbed students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, shot and killed 12 students, one teacher and finally themselves. It was the worst high school shooting in US history, but in fact, it was just one of many that happened in the US throughout the 1990s.

In doing his research, Moore interviews members of the Michigan Militia, which is a group of people who spend a lot of time shooting guns in the countryside. From there, he moves on to teenagers who live in the towns of Michigan where he grew up, to survivors of the Columbine Massacre, to various people in Canada, who seem to like guns as much as Americans do, but who still don't murder each other nearly as frequently. In the end, Moore asks a lot of questions about the nature of American society, and while he doesn't always give us answers, he does conclude that the United States is a nation that is filled with both too many guns and way too much fear.

## Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

*The People of Michigan and the Guns They Love.*

Are we a country of gun nuts or just nuts?

A "gun nut" is crazy about or obsessed with guns, and if a person is "nuts" in general, they're just crazy. A fun slang word.

The National Rifle Association has produced a film of great interest.

This is a well known and powerful lobbying group that tries to prevent gun control laws (Groups that lobby politicians try to influence them, and gun control refers to any law that tries to limit the sale of guns).

The farmer did his chores.

A "chore" is a routine job or task, such as cutting the grass.

I'd spotted an ad in the local Michigan paper that said if you open an account at North County Bank, the bank would give you a gun.

"To spot" something is to see or notice it.

You do a CD and we'll hand you a gun.

A "CD" is short for a "certificate of deposit," which is a type of bank account in which you agree to keep your money in the bank for a certain period of time.

We have a whole brochure.

A little booklet with lots of information.

Once we do the background check and everything, it's yours to go.  
 In this context, a "background check" refers to a quick check on a person's past to make sure they don't have a criminal record, in which case they are allowed to buy a gun.

We have a vault...in which we keep at least 500 firearms. :: **Wow!**  
 A "vault" is a well secured and safe room, often found in a bank, for storing valuable things such as jewelry. A "firearm" is any type of gun or weapon. "Wow" is a common way of expressing surprise.

You're a bank, and a licensed firearms dealer?  
 Any business that's been given official permission by the state to sell guns.

What do you put for "race," white or Caucasian?  
 The official term for a white person (as opposed to black or Asian).

"Have you ever been adjudicated mentally defective, or been committed to a mental institution?"  
 In this case, "adjudicated" means legally declared. "Mentally defective" is a cruel way of saying psychologically disturbed or crazy. "To commit" a person to a home is to legally force them to live there, and a "mental institution" is a home for emotionally or psychologically troubled people.

It's a straight shooter, let me tell ya.  
 A "straight shooter" is a gun that shoots accurately.  
 Note that "you" ---> "ya" in rapid speech.

Each gun makes lots of battle sounds! Just press the trigger and listen.  
 A "battle" is an armed encounter or fight, often during a war. The "trigger" of a gun is the metal part that is pressed in order to fire it.

**Those were the days.**  
 A common way of suggesting that life was easier, more fun or just better in the past.

I was such a good shot, I won the National Rifle Association's marksman award.  
 If a person is "a good shot," they know how to fire guns well, with great accuracy. A "marksman" is a person skilled at shooting guns.

One guy had the idea, why don't we sling a rifle on the guy's back to make him a little more interesting?  
 "To sling" something is to throw it with a forceful circular motion.  
 A "rifle" is a type of long gun that is worn over the shoulders.

The one round went through the right part of the victim's shin...and came through the back of his calf.  
 In this context, a "round" is a shot fired from a gun. A person's shin is the front part of their lower leg, and their "calf" is the back part.

Animals aren't some sort of whatever that could commit a crime.

Note that "whatever" can function as a general filler word, like "thing," when the speaker can't find the more precise word they're looking for. "To commit" a crime is to do it.

It was a funny picture to look at...it was kind of neat.

A common way to say good, excellent, or more colloquially, cool.

If a bullet cost \$5,000 dollars, there'd be no more innocent bystanders.

A "bullet" is the tiny metal missiles or projectiles fired from guns. An "innocent bystander" is a person who is injured or killed by a gun or other weapon that was actually fired at, or intended for, somebody else

Man, I would blow your fucking head off, if I could afford it.

"To blow a person's head off" is a colloquial way of saying to kill them, often with a gunshot to their head. Here, "fucking" is a vulgar adverb that shows anger or other emotion. To be able to "afford" something is to have enough money to comfortably pay for it.

You better hope I can't get no bullets on layaway.

A way of buying something by making monthly payments for it.

Not far from where Charleston Heston and I grew up is a training ground for the Michigan militia.

A "training ground" is an open space for practicing, in this case to practice shooting guns. A "militia" is an armed group of private citizens (not in the military), who often practice in the use of weapons.

Why do you use the bowling pins? :: From a self-defense or technical standpoint, it's a small target.

A "bowling pin" is the small object that stands at the end of a bowling lane which bowlers try to knock down with a ball. In this case, a "technical standpoint" is a way of saying from a practical point of view. A "target" is an object that a person with a gun tries to shoot.

It represents the vitals on a human being, should you ever have to shoot at one.

A person's vitals are their important organs, such as their heart and brain.

It's an American responsibility to be armed.

If a person is "armed," they are carrying a gun or other weapon.

Who's going to defend your kids? The cops? The federal government?

A "cop" is a common slang word for a policeman. The "federal government" refers to the national government, as opposed to the 50 individual state governments.

It's your job to defend you and yours.

A poetic way of referring to your family and loved ones.

If you don't do it, you're in dereliction of duty as an American. Period.

"Dereliction of duty" is an official legal way of saying failure to do what you're legally or morally supposed to do. "Period" is a way of stressing or emphasizing what was just said.

We're not the bogeyman we're made out to be.

A "bogeyman" is an evil or bad person, and if a person is "made out to be" a certain way, they're portrayed or described that way by others.

If somebody's in need, you're there to help them.

If a person is "in need," they need financial or other types of help.

I'm a draftsman...: I'm a real estate negotiator.

A "draftsman" makes drawing of machines and buildings, and a "real estate negotiator" tries to get the best price for houses or other property (To negotiate is to bargain or arrive at a deal through compromise).

White collar, all the way.

If a person is "white collar," they work in an office (if you're "blue collar," you work doing physical labor). In this case, "all the way" is a slangy way of saying totally or completely.

Smith and Wesson, 9 millimeter, with hollow parts.

"Smith and Wesson" is a famous gun maker, and a "9 millimeter" refers to the type or power of a gun. If the parts of a machine are hollow, they're empty or having nothing but air in them. Other types of well known guns referred to in the film are M16s, 44 Magnums, Tec 9s, 32 Caliber, etc.

A picture is worth 1,000 words.

A well known expression which shows how expressive a picture can be.

A, it demonstrates a level of sophistication you wouldn't expect of the militia. B, we're people, too.

Note that when beginning a list, one can refer to the individual points with numbers (1,2,3...) or with letters (A, B, C...). "Sophistication" is another word for complexity or the act of showing education or culture.

It was a fundraiser and it showed we're not so serious.

A "fundraiser" is an event, such as a party, that is held in order to raise money for a particular cause or project.

We're not those conspiracy nuts who wouldn't want our pictures to get out.

A "conspiracy" is a plot or secret plan to commit a crime between two or more people, and thus a "conspiracy nut" is a person who believes the world is filled with conspiracies, such as a belief that Jewish people control the world. Here, if a picture "gets out," it is seen by lots of other people.

Cut out the middle man! Take care of your own family yourself.

A “middle man” is usually a business person who buys something, and then sells it later for a higher price (but here it refers to the police!).

We’re not racist, we’re not extremist, we’re not fundamentalist, we’re not terrorists or militants or other such nonsense...we’re just concerned citizens.

An “extremist” is a person who believes something very extreme or radical that most people would think is crazy. A “fundamentalist” is usually a person who is extremely religious, who believes their own religious beliefs are the absolute truth.

Right now there’s tofu beans, soybeans. No herbicides, pesticides or that stuff.

“Tofu beans” and “soybeans” are increasingly popular crops that are originally from East Asia. “Herbicides” and “pesticides” are chemicals that are used to kill harmful plants and insects.

Certified organic, healthier.

If a food is “certified organic,” it is officially declared to have been grown without insecticides or other chemicals.

US attorneys formally linked the Nichols brothers of Michigan with Oklahoma bomb suspect Timothy McVeigh.

An “attorney” is another word for a lawyer, or in this case, a prosecutor for the federal government. “To link” two people is to show how they are connected to each other. A “suspect” is an important word for a person who the police think committed a crime.

The officers charged James, who was at the hearing, with conspiring to make and possess small bombs.

“To charge” a person with a crime is to officially accuse them of having done it. A “hearing” is a meeting, often before a trial, to discuss the evidence and other legal issues.

Terry Nichols was convicted and received a life sentence. Timothy McVeigh was executed.

If you are “convicted” of a crime, you are found guilty of having done it, in a court of law. A “life sentence” is a punishment in which a judge says the convicted person must spend the rest of their life in prison, and if a person is “executed,” they are put to death, often by being shot or hung.

The feds didn’t have the goods on James, so the charges were dropped.

“The feds” is a slangy way of referring to the FBI or other law enforcement agencies in the federal (national) government. If the police “have the goods” on a person, they have the evidence necessary to convict them of a crime in court. If “charges are dropped” against a person, the official charge of having committed a crime is cancelled.

He was a nice guy. :: **Decent** guy.

If a person is “decent,” they are nice or kind and treat others with respect.

As to what, bomb-making material? :: Any kind of explosives.

An “explosive” is any type of material or bomb that is designed to explode or blow up in order to cause great damage.

Yeah, I had dynamite blasting caps, dynamite fuse, black powder for muzzle loaders.

“Dynamite” is a well known and powerful chemical explosive (The rest of the sentence refers to different types of explosives).

Sure, diesel fuel, fertilizer, but that is normal farm **stuff**.

“Diesel fuel” is a special type of gas for certain big trucks. “Fertilizer” is a substance that is used to make the soil more fertile or productive. “Stuff” is a very common way of saying things or materials in general.

Law enforcement, if you want to call them that, were here, and they were shaking in their shoes.

A way of referring to the police, FBI or other organizations that enforce the law by arresting people who break it.

They were scared to death...they thought this was going to be another Waco.

A reference to a well-known gun battle between the federal government and a religious cult in Waco, Texas, in 1993, in which close to 100 people in the cult died.

Certain people, namely my ex-wife, ...said I’m a radical. I’m a wild man.

In this context, “namely” means especially. A “radical” is a person who has political or religious beliefs most people think are extreme.

If the people find out how they’ve been **ripped off**, and enslaved in this country by the government, by the powers to be, they will revolt...with merciless anger.

If a person has been “ripped off,” they have been stolen from in such a way that they have lost a lot of money, often by being lied to. If a person is “enslaved,” they are oppressed or perhaps even forced to work for free as a slave. The “powers *that be*” refers to powerful people who control the country and its economy. “To revolt” is to fight back against the state, and “merciless” means without mercy or restraint, or with great cruelty.

When a government turns tyrannical, it is your duty to overthrow it. :: Why not use Gandhi’s way?

If a government is “tyrannical,” it brutally and violently represses its citizens. “To overthrow” the government is to violently eliminate or get rid of it. The reference to Gandhi is to Mahatma Gandhi, the non-violent Indian leader who led India to freedom from the British in 1948.

*The Gun-Loving Teens of Oscoda.*

Oscoda has a bad habit of raising psychos.

A “psycho” is a fun slang word for a totally crazy person.

This is Brent, and this is his buddy, DJ

“Buddy” is a colloquial word for friend.

Eric Harris, who would later go on to commit the massacre in Columbine, spent part of his childhood here.

A “massacre” is a violent attack in which many people die.

I never knew him, but I knew of him.

Note that to “know *of*” a person is to have heard of them, but not to have known them directly or personally.

I got kicked out, expelled.

To get “kicked out” or “expelled” from school is to be forced to leave, usually for having done something that’s considered illegal or immoral.

I had a run in with a kid one time and I pulled a weapon on him, a gun.

To have a “run in” with a person is to have a tense or violent encounter or meeting with them. “To pull a gun” on a person is to point the gun at them, without actually firing it.

I could’ve made a mess out of that situation.

In this case, a “mess” is a very difficult, complicated or even dangerous situation. More generally, a mess is great disorder or dirtiness.

As a matter of fact, one of my uncles is a janitor for Columbine school.

A “janitor” is a person who cleans schools and other buildings and makes minor repairs in them.

A list of the suspects. :: A list of students who’d potentially call in a bomb threat after Columbine?

“Potentially” is another word for possibly, or having the potential to do something. A “threat” is the act of expressing a possible intent to do something harmful.

This town really gets people down. :: But why’d they single you out?

If a town “gets people down,” it depresses them or makes them feel bad. To “single out” a person is to focus on them alone, out of a possible list or group of many other people.

I was a troubled kid.

A good adjective for a person with many emotional problems.



I have The Anarchist's Cookbook. It shows you how to make bombs and stuff like that.

A well known book. An "anarchist" is a person who believes that there should be no government.

I made a good five gallon drum of napalm.

A "gallon" is a unit of measurement for liquids, and a drum is a fairly big container. "Napalm" is a horrible chemical herbicide that kills forests and jungles, that was used widely by the US during the Vietnam war.

I know it's kind of silly, but I guess it had been like an ego thing, knowing that I was number one in Oscoda.

A person's "ego" is their sense of self-respect or pride. It is a word associated with the modern psychologist Sigmund Freud.

Why was the building blown up?

Very bad English!; Note that the past participle should be "*blown* up!"

I use the pen because the pen is mightier than the sword, but you must always keep a sword handy for when the pen fails.

"Mighty" means strong or powerful, and a "sword" is a large blade or knife that is used as a deadly weapon (Note that the expression "the pen is mightier than the sword" means that the power of communication and persuasion is often stronger than the power of physical force). To "keep something handy" is to store it in a place where it is easy to get or access.

I sleep with a 44 magnum under my pillow. ::

Come on, that's what everyone says. Is it loaded?

A "44 magnum" is a well known and powerful handgun. "Come on" is the most versatile phrasal verb in the English language, here used to simply express disbelief or doubt (though it's said in a sarcastic or funny manner). If a gun is "loaded," it already has its bullets and is ready to fire.

Nichols has cocked the gun and put it to his temple. [written]

"To cock" a gun is to pull the trigger so that it is just about ready to fire.

A person's "temple" is the part of their skull on the side of their forehead.

You've got to pull the trigger, pull the hammer, and shoot it.

"The trigger" of a gun is the part you move in order to shoot it.

It says arms. :: Do you think you should have the right to weapons grade plutonium on the farm?

"Arms" can be an alternative word for any type of weapon. "Plutonium" is a dangerous radioactive material used to make nuclear weapons.

So you do believe in some restrictions.

A "restriction" is anything that restricts, restrains or holds back, or in this case, a legal limit beyond which a person cannot pass.

There's wackos out there.

An excellent slang word for a person who is crazy or perhaps obsessed with just one thing (Its use here is particularly funny, given who says it).

*The Tragedy of Columbine.*

I'm most comfortable with assault rifles.

A powerful type of rifle (To assault a person is to physically attack them).

Very close-knit community we have here. Everybody looks out for everybody.

If a community is "close-knit," people feel close and connected to each other (knitting is a type of sewing). If one person "looks out" for another, they are always making sure that they are safe and doing ok.

Two young people made very bad decisions , and there has been international notoriety as a result of it.

"Notoriety" is the state of being well known or famous, but only for having done something bad or horrible.

South metro Denver has about the same amount of sunshine and precipitation as Southern California.

"Metro" is short for "metropolitan," which is an adjective that refers to all the urban areas, including suburbs, that surround a big city. "Precipitation" is one way of referring to rain fall.

The burglar or the rapist is still here in the neighborhood, somewhere.

A "burglar" breaks into people's houses in order to steal things.

If I was to try and stab you through this, you're gonna have to be really close.

"To stab" a person is to push a knife into them (usually to try and kill them). Note that "going to" ----> "gonna" in rapid speech.

Here's the bottom line on this... :: What if I had a spear?

"The bottom line" is an excellent expression that means the most important or basic point about a particular conversation or subject. A "spear" is a pointed weapon with a long shaft or pole, that is often thrown at an enemy.

The criminal has to break through the door, so you've created another barrier. :: An ax would do it.

A "barrier" is any material or physical object that blocks passage or moving forward. An "ax" is large hammer with a sharp edge that is used for cutting trees.

There's something **overwhelming** about that kind of viciousness, that kind of predatory action. That kind of indiscriminate killing.

If something is "overwhelming" it is so extreme or powerful that it is hard to accept or deal with. "Viciousness" is extreme cruelty. If an action is "predatory," it is designed to cause great damage or harm, often just for personal profit. If killing is "indiscriminate," it is random or arbitrary, with no rational reason for why one person is killed and another left alone.

The other major facilities where our employees work are here in Littleton.

"Facilities" refer to a group of buildings that are designed for a particular purpose related to work, such as a hospital, school or office building.

I suppose you can say that what happened at Columbine high school is a microcosm of what happens throughout the world.

A very small or tiny example, reflection or symbol of a larger world.

I think we embody that spirit, that were all members of this community, and it behooves us to help out one another and reach out and assist one another.

"To embody" the spirit of something is to have that spirit within you. If it "behooves" you to do something, it is advisable, necessary or proper that you do it because it will help you in the long run.

No one in Littleton, including the executives at Lockheed, could **figure out** why the boys at Columbine had resorted to violence.

An "executive" is a high level businessman in a company, such as a Vice-President. "To figure out" a mystery is to solve or understand it. "To resort to" something is to decide to do it, often after hesitating to do it because one would prefer not to.

We became aware of a program that provides anger-management training.

A class or educational process in which people are taught how to control their anger, especially so they will not resort to violence.

They don't say to themselves, "Gee, dad goes off to the factory everyday and he builds missiles. These are weapons of mass destruction"?

"Gee" is a gentle way of expressing surprise or other emotion. "Weapons of mass destruction" refers to those that can kill thousands of people in minutes, such as nuclear bombs or chemical and biological weapons.

Governments do things that **annoy** one another, but we have to learn to deal with that annoyance, or anger or frustration, in appropriate ways.

"To annoy" a person is to bother, irritate or anger them (Note that the noun is annoyance). "Appropriate" is an important adjective meaning especially suitable, proper or reasonable, given the situation.

1953: US installs Shah as dictator.

"To install" a dictator is to put them in power.

1973: US stages coup in Chile.

“To stage” an event is to plan it and carry it out. A coup (short for coup d’etat) is a French word for the overthrowing of a government.

Oh, my word.

One way of expressing great emotion, such as anger or shock.

There sits an actual B-52 bomber. The plaque underneath it proudly proclaims that this plane killed Vietnamese people on Christmas Eve, 1972.

A “B-52 Bomber” is a fighter plane that is well known for being able to drop lots of bombs. A “plaque” is a flat, thin piece of metal that usually has something written on it. “To proclaim” is to declare or say publicly. The “eve” of any holiday is the evening on the day before it (Thus, New Years Eve is the evening of December 31st).

It was the largest bombing campaign of the Vietnam War.

In this context, a “campaign” is a connected series of military actions that mark a certain phase or part of a war.

And now, a massive radioactive dump.

“Massive” means extremely big or huge, “radioactive” means filled with radioactivity, which is the type of atom that makes atomic or nuclear weapons so dangerous. A “dump” is a large place where huge amounts of trash and other material is buried.

A few miles away, buried inside a mountain, is NORAD, which oversees our nuclear weapons, many of which dot the Colorado landscape.

NORAD, which stands for the North American Aerospace Defense Command, is responsible for making sure no nuclear weapons are fired at the US and Canada. “To oversee” a job or project is to be responsible for it. “To dot” an area is to be present in many different places within that area (In this case, there are many nuclear missiles throughout Colorado).

Deadly cargo was dropped on the residential part of the village.

“Cargo” refers to any product that is transported in a truck, plane or other vehicle, such as food, furniture and, yes, bombs. The “residential” part of a village is where people live in their house (as opposed to the industrial part, where products are made, or the business part, where people work in offices).

We’re striking hard at Serbia’s machinery of repression, while making a deliberate effort to minimize harm to innocent people.

“To strike” is to hit forcefully. “Repression” refers to the act of taking away people’s freedom, as is done by a government led by a dictator. “Deliberate” means intentionally, or done with great care.

We’ll wait for events to unfold, and they’ll be more to say.

If events “unfold,” they continue to take place over time.

They've got pipe bombs, Uzis, you name it.

A "pipe bomb" is a small explosive placed in a metal pipe, and an Uzi is famous type of powerful machine gun. "You name it" is a slangy way of saying "anything you can think of."

You're shitting me! :: I'm not.

"To shit" a person is a very slangy and somewhat vulgar way of saying to lie to them. Fun, but rare.

We have automatic weapons, OK?

A type of gun that can fire hundreds of bullets in just a few seconds, without having to stop and reload the gun.

Can you guys send lots of paramedics?

A person who is trained to deal with medical emergencies, who often drives an ambulance.

Jefferson County, 9-11.

A "county" is an administrative division of government that is bigger than a city (There are many counties in every state). Note that 9-11 ("nine-eleven") is the phone number to call for emergencies, though today, people also think of the 9-11 terrorist attack.

I could patch you through... You can tell us on the air?

"To patch a person through" on a phone is to try and connect them to somebody else. If you say something "on the air," it is said live, not recorded, on radio or TV.

I was on hall duty, I saw a gun, I said "what's going on out there?"

The job of walking down the halls and corridors of a school, to make sure the kids are not causing trouble.

He's firing shots from the library!

A shot is a bullet or a loud blast from a gun.

I called four times to find out where to go and they put me on hold forever.

If a person puts you "on hold," they are making you wait on the phone.

Calm down! :: I think we're entitled to the information on where are children are!

If a person is "entitled to" something, they have a right to it or deserve it.

We have a lot of units out there, right now.

A "unit" is a particular quantity, or a single thing or person, or in this case, it is a reference to the number of policemen.

I don't have any information. :: Why the hell not?

This is added to Wh questions to show emotion such as anger.

He's a member of what they call "The Trench-Coat Mafia."

A "trench-coat" is a large water-proof jacket, and the "Mafia" refers to any type of organized crime, especially Italian crime families.

Have they picked up anyone yet?

In this case, "to pick up" a suspect or possible criminal is to arrest them so that the police can question them.

I just heard that term on TV.

Another word for a word or expression.

Dozens of others were wounded by the 900 rounds of ammo that were fired.

A "dozen" is twelve. If a person is "wounded," they are injured or physically hurt. A "round" of gunfire is a series of gunshots, and "ammo" is another word for bullets.

Some may characterize that as too lazy.

"To characterize" a person is to describe them in a certain way.

In the end, they turned the guns on themselves.

One way of saying that they shot themselves, or committed suicide.

Despite the pleas of a community in mourning, Charleston Heston came to Denver and held a large, pro-gun rally for the National Rifle Association.

A "plea" is a desperate appeal or request, or perhaps the act of begging for something. "Mourning" is the act of going through great sadness or loss, often because somebody close has just died.

As Americans, we're free to travel wherever we want in our broad land.

Another word for large or wide.

Something is wrong in this country when a child can grab a gun so easily and shoot a bullet in the middle of a child's face, as my child experienced.

"To grab" something is to quickly or forcefully take it.

We have work to do, hearts to heal...and a country to unite.

"To heal" a person's heart is to take away their anger, and to heal in general means to get better or healthier after having been hurt.

"We the people...secure in our land of the free and home of the brave."

"We the People" is how the US Constitution begins. To be "secure" is to feel safe. The rest of the words are from the National Anthem (official song) of the United States.

They had the convention a week after Columbine in Colorado. :: The NRA?

A "convention" is a large assembly or meeting between people who come together to discuss a particular subject.

*The Aftermath of Columbine.*

He grew up in Littleton and had fond memories of Columbine.

“Fond memories” are those that are warm or make a person feel good (To be fond of a person is to like them quite a lot).

Columbine is a crappy school in the middle of a bunch of crappy houses.

“Crappy” is a somewhat crude adjective meaning bad, of poor quality, or more colloquially, shitty (Crap is another word for shit).

They found a way to take out their anger at being different in Littleton, and turn it not into carnage, but into a cartoon.

If you “take out your anger” on a person, you blame them and direct your negative emotions at them. “Carnage” is great violence and bloodshed in which lots of people are killed.

“It’s Sunday morning in our great little white-bread, redneck mountain town.”

If a town is “white-bread,” it is populated mainly by white people, and generally conservative white people. “Redneck” is a negative insult word for a conservative and uneducated white person, often from a small town in one of the Southern states in the US.

I had to take the math test to get into honors math in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

An “honors” class is one in which all the students are thought to be very smart or academically advanced, at least compared to others in the school.

They’re like, “Don’t screw this up...or you won’t get into honors math in 7<sup>th</sup> grade...and you’ll just die poor and lonely.”

Note the use of the filler word “like,” which has no grammatical value but is common among young people. “To screw up” something is to do it very badly or even in a way that it causes a lot of damage or problems.

The teachers, counselors and principals don’t help things.

A “counselor” is an advisor, or in this case, a person who helps guide students. A “principal” is the person in charge of running a school.

They scare you into conforming and doing good in school, by saying if you’re a loser now, you’re going to be a loser forever.

“To conform” is to try and do things just like everyone else is, so that others will be more likely to accept you. In this case, a “loser” is a student who is seen as socially awkward, different, or more colloquially, the opposite of “cool.”

Eric and Dylan, people called them ‘fag.’

A strong insult word for a homosexual or gay person. Avoid using it.

You wish someone could have grabbed them and said “Dude, high school is not the end of...”

“Dude” has become a very common way for young people to address each other. An interesting word, but very slangy.

They just beat it in your head as early as 6<sup>th</sup> grade, “don’t fuck up...”

“To beat something into a person’s head” is to try and convince them of something by saying the same thing, over and over again. “To fuck up” something is a very vulgar version of screw up, meaning to do it very badly, often to the point of causing great damage or harm.

Of course all the dorks in high school go on to do great things and the really cool guys are back in Littleton as insurance agents.

A “dork” is a slang word for a socially awkward, shy or unpopular person. “Cool” is a common slang word for good or excellent, and if used to describe a person, it means someone who’s much liked and popular.

It still sucks being a teenager and it really sucks going to school.

If something “sucks,” it is bad or awful. Crude, colloquial and common.

I got picked on by bastards who hate me, and the principal is a dick.

If people “pick on” a person, they try to harass or even threaten them, and generally make them feel bad. A “bastard” is a crude word for a mean or abusive man. The “principal” of a school is the administrative person who runs it. A “dick” is a common slang word for a jerk, idiot, ass, etc. (and in other contexts, it’s a slang word for a penis).

Schools nation-wide have extended zero-tolerance policies, suspending and expelling students for all kinds of behavior....

“To extend” something is to spread it, stretch it, or make it larger. A “zero-tolerance policy” is a decision to not allow the slightest violation of a law (so, for example, if a student is caught with just one marijuana cigarette, they are kicked out of school). To “suspend” a student is to not allow them to go to school for a certain period of time, and to “expel” a student is to kick them out of school so that they can never attend again.

...considered unruly or warning signs of violence to come.

If a student’s behavior is “unruly,” it is defiant, undisciplined or hard to control. A “warning sign” is some event or act that seems to suggest that there may be something dangerous or bad that will happen in the future.

This 8 year old was fooling around with a friend when he pointed a breaded chicken finger at a teacher and said ‘pow-wow.’

If two people are “fooling around,” they are playing or acting in a not serious way. “To point” a stick at a person is to aim it at them, or put the head of the stick in their direction. If a food is “breaded,” it is often cooked in oil and bread crumbs (tiny pieces of bread). “Pow wow” is a child’s way of making the sound a gun makes.



This student...spent a month out of classes, sent home for dying his hair blue.  
 "To dye" your hair is to turn into a different color.

A Michigan high school honors student may be expelled late today at a high school board hearing.

An "honors student" is a student who has received among the best grades of his class. A "board hearing" is an official meeting, in this case involving staff, teachers and students, to decide if a student should be expelled.

17 year old Jeremy Hicks wore a Scottish bagpiper's outfit to his Junior prom that included a plaid kilt, a feathered hat and a knife known as a Skein dhu.

The "Junior prom" is a formal end-of-the-year dance for Juniors in a high school (A junior is one year younger than a Senior). Note that the rest of the vocabulary has to do with Scottish clothes and customs; A bagpipe is a musical instrument, a kilt is a skirt for men, and a Skein dhu is a knife.

There are little time bombs out there, ticking, waiting to go off.

If a bomb ticks, it makes a tick-tock sound like a clock, and if it "goes off," it explodes.

Students have been arrested for talking about or planning **plots** of their own.

A plot is a secret plan to do something illegal, immoral or dangerous.

It's almost like guerilla warfare.

A type of war in which there is no front where armies face each other, but instead where soldiers hide among the civilian population and strike quickly before running away.

Having a well conceived and strictly enforced dress code can dramatically improve the safety of a school.

If a plan is "well-conceived," the original idea is considered good and possible. If a law is "strictly enforced," people who break it are always punished for having done so. A "dress code" is a set of rules that tell people what they are allowed to wear in a particular place, such as in a school or restaurant.

Having a lax policy about dress makes it easy for a student to conceal a weapon and makes it difficult to identify intruders on campus.

If a policy is "lax," it is casual, or not very strict or severe. "To conceal" something is to hide it, often under one's clothes. "To identify" a person is to find out exactly who they are and an "intruder" is a person who enters a place where they are not allowed to be.

A dress code can reduce weapons violations, relieve tension between gangs, reduce disciplinary infractions and improve the atmosphere of a school.

"To relieve tension" is to reduce the anger or hostility between two or more people. A "gang" is a group of people who often commit crimes together or cause lots of trouble. "Disciplinary infractions" are violations of school rules or laws.

Our policy requires that students tuck in their shirts.

“To tuck in” a shirt is to put the bottom of the shirt behind and underneath the top of your pants (Note that you can tuck in the sheets of a bed).

Our students may not wear baggy pants or colors or insignia associated with gang activity.

If pants are “baggy,” they are too big and hang down off a person’s body. An “insignia” is any kind of drawing or symbol that could be associated with another person, group or organization.

This policy was a collaborative effort.

To “collaborate” on a project is to work with another person on it, and thus a collaborative effort is one made with two or more people.

Heavy-metal subculture...South Park, video games...Satan.

Heavy-metal is a type of loud rock music and a subculture is a group of people whose ethnic background, religious beliefs or strong interests put them apart from the rest of society. South Park is a popular TV cartoon for adults. Satan is another name for the devil.

This is...the sickest group ever produced by a mainstream record company.

If a company is “mainstream,” its behavior is considered normal or acceptable by the majority in society.

The entire focus on why the shooting occurred was because the killers listened to Marilyn Manson.

The “focus” of a conversation or debate is the part or precise issue that is most discussed or debated.

There were protests from the religious right.

In the US, the “religious right” refers to conservative Christians who are against, among other things, homosexuality, abortion and pornography.

Some will be so brash to ask if we believe those who listen to Marilyn Manson will go out and commit violent acts.

If a person is “brash,” they are very assertive or forward, and not interested in being diplomatic or overly polite.

In the end, I’m sort of a poster boy for fear.

If a person is a “poster boy” for a particular political cause or topic, their life has become so connected to that issue in the public mind that they have become a symbol of it.

I think that’s really ironic that nobody said that maybe the President had an influence on this violent behavior.

In this case, if a situation is “ironic,” there is a big difference between the actual results of a series of events and the normal or expected results.

That's not the way the media want to take it and spin it.

If a person or the media "spin" an issue, they try to present it in such a way that will influence people to think they want them to.

You're being pumped full of fear.

In this case, "pumped" is another word for filled.

Cut to commercial, buy the Acura, buy the Colgate.

A well known brand of car and a well known brand of toothpaste.

If you got pimples, the girl's not going to fuck you.

A "pimple" is a small reddish bump on the skin, often filled with pus.

Pimples are the enemy of teenagers around the world. "To fuck" someone is to have sex with them. Extremely crude, and common.

It's a campaign of fear and consumption. That's what I think it's all based on.

In this case, a "campaign" is a series of planned events that are designed to sell a product or an idea. "Consumption" is the act of consuming, using or buying various products. If a plan is "based on" an idea, that idea is the foundation for the plan.

That's really as simple as it can be boiled down to.

If a complicated idea is "boiled down to" something simple, it has been reduced to that in order to present it to others as clearly as possible.

*Why did they do it? Exploring the roots of American Violence.*

What's bowling class? :: An elective you can take for a gym credit.

An "elective" is a class that students can take but are not required to take.

"Gym" is one way of referring to any high school class involving sports or physical education, such as tennis or swimming.

What were Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold like? :: Weird. Not very social.

"Weird" is an excellent word meaning strange, odd or bizarre. If a person is not very "social," they are shy and don't like to talk to others.

Did they just chuck the balls down the lane?

"To chuck" a ball is to throw it, often with great force.

Why wasn't anyone blaming bowling for warping the minds of Eric and Dylan to commit the evil deeds?

"To warp" a person's mind is to bend or twist it in a harmful or destructive way. "Evil deeds" are individual acts that cause others great harm and suffering.

Was it not just as plausible as blaming Marilyn Manson?

If something is “plausible,” it is possible or deserving of belief.

The home of sinister Goth music.

“Sinister” is an excellent and powerful adjective meaning evil, or perhaps horribly dangerous or destructive. “Goth music” is a type of loud rock music in which the song lyrics often are about magic and death.

Many people believe it’s the break-up of the family unit that caused so many wayward youth to turn to violence.

The “break-up of the family unit” refers to the fact many American families have split apart because of divorce and other social problems.

A “wayward youth” is a young person who is constantly getting into trouble because they refuse to be restrained or disciplined and recklessly do whatever they want.

Are we homicidal in nature?

A “homicidal” person is one who is likely to commit a lot of murders.

They don’t have people who snap and go on murderous rampages.

If a person “snaps” psychologically, they suddenly become extremely angry and violent. A “rampage” is a course of reckless or violent behavior for a certain period of time.

How about a British soccer riot? Those aren’t Quakers there.

A “riot” is a violent act of disorder by many people, often in the form of a physical fight between protesters and the police. “Quakers” are a small group of Christians who practice a strictly non-violent life.

They have alienated youth.

If a person feels “alienated,” they feel disliked and separated from others in society.

What is so radically different?

In a political or social context, “radically” means extremely.

They were afraid of being persecuted.

“To persecute” a person is to harm or even physically attack or imprison them, often because of their political beliefs or ethnic background.

They were greeted by savages and they got scared again.

A “savage” is a wild, violent or uncivilized person.

You’d think that wiping out a race of people would calm them down.

Instead they got frightened of each other, so they burned witches.

“To wipe out” a group of people is to completely destroy them.

“Frightened” is another word for scared, and a “witch” is a mythical, ugly old woman with magical powers who often flies on a broom handle.

They passed a 2nd Amendment that said every white man could keep his gun.  
The Second Amendment of the US Constitution (An Amendment is an official addition to a document) says that the people have “the right to bear arms,” which is an 18<sup>th</sup> century way of saying the right to have guns.

I mean zero dollars. Nothing, nada, zip.  
“Nada” is a well known Spanish word that means nothing, and in this context, “zip” also means nothing.

The slaves started rebelling, there were uprisings, ‘ol master’s head got chopped off.  
“To rebel” against something is to fight back against it. An “uprising” is a violent rebellion of one group of people against another, or against the state. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, slaves had to call their owners “master.”  
“To chop off” a person’s head is to cut it off with a knife.

When white people heard of this, they were freaking out.  
A slangy phrasal verb meaning to get very scared, upset or emotional.

Just in the nick of time came Samuel Colt invented the first weapon ever that could be fired over and over without having to reload.  
“In the nick of time” is an old interesting expression which means “just in time.” When you “reload” a gun, you open it up to put bullets in it.

The freed slaves took no revenge.  
“To take revenge” against a person is to hurt or harm them in some way after they have mistreated you.

In 1871, the same year that the Ku Klux Klan became an illegal terrorist organization, another group was founded, the NRA.  
A racist and horrible group that terrorized black people.  
They were infamous for wearing sheets over their heads.

Of course they had nothing to do with each other and this is just a coincidence.  
A “coincidence” is the occurrence of events that happen at the same time that seem to have some connection to each other, but in fact do not.

The other group shot and lynched black people.  
“To lynch” a person is to kill them by mob or group violence, often by hanging, without a trial or legal protections.

All hell broke loose, and white people had a major freaking fear meltdown.  
If “all hell breaks loose,” disorder and chaos occur. “Freaking” is a less vulgar alternative to “fucking.” If a person has a “meltdown,” they lose control of themselves emotionally and often start to panic.

Finally, they were safe and secure and snug as a bug.  
If a person is “snug as a bug,” they are happy and comfortable, perhaps lying under a warm blanket on a cold night.

And everyone lived happily after.

The three words that end lots and lots of children's stories.

What's he up to? What are you trying to pull?

"What are you up to?" is a common and slangy way of asking "what are you doing?" In this context, "to pull" something is to try and accomplish or achieve it. Very slangy, and not that common.

Remember all the Y2K scares...or the Africanized bees?

Y2K refers to the "Year 2000 problem" that was supposed to shut down all the world's computers at the end of the last century. "Africanized killer bees" are a type of very aggressive bee.

Remember when someone hid a razor in an apple for Halloween?

A "razor" is a sharp blade that is used for shaving. "Halloween" is the October 31<sup>st</sup> holiday in which children dress in costumes and go to neighbor's houses asking for candy.

Kids were no longer to go trick or treating in a stranger's home.

To go "trick or treating" is to go asking for candy during Halloween (A "trick" is something that is made to fool or deceive a person, in this case perhaps, a piece of wood that only looks like candy. A "treat" is anything that gives great joy or happiness, especially candy).

A fox darted out of the woods and attacked his riding mower.

If an animal "darts out" from somewhere, it suddenly appears, running very quickly. A lawn "mower" is a machine that cuts grass.

A warning about a popular weight-loss supplement; what you don't know may kill you.

A "supplement" is a pill that is taken to complete what you need in your normal diet, when you are not getting all you need from food.

An escalator can mangle you or a loved one.

An "escalator" is a moving staircase (often found in big stores with lots of floors), and "to mangle" is a violent verb meaning to seriously hurt by cutting, crushing, tearing or pulling parts of a person's body.

Keep a low profile.

This means to behave in a quiet and restrained way, so that people will not notice you.

One in five Americans suffers some sort of mental disorder;

The Surgeon General pleads with people to seek help now.

A "mental disorder" is an emotional or psychological problem.

The "Surgeon General" is the government's highest ranking doctor.

"To plead" is to request or ask for something with great passion.

"To seek" something is to look for it.

The Justice Department did issue a blanket alert...  
it was in recognition of a general threat we received.

The "Justice Department" is the division of the federal government that deals with law enforcement. "To issue" a statement is to release it to the press or people. A "blanket alert" is a general warning with few actual details, and "in recognition of" means because of, or due to.

Given the attitude of the evildoers, it may not be.

A funny little word, used constantly by President Bush, to refer to people who do evil or horrible things.

*Black Men and White America.*

"Tonight in South Central, a drive-by shooting."

South Central is an African-American section of Los Angeles that is known for its high crime rate. A "drive-by shooting" is the act of firing a gun at a person from a moving car.

This, that or whatever. :: They're not making that up, are they?

In this case, "whatever" is a general filler word for "anything else one can think of." "To make something up" is to tell a story that is a complete lie.

She tells everyone a black guy stole the car...and at first everyone bought it.

Here, "to buy" something means to believe it even though it's not true.

And I hollered, "I love them."

"To holler" is to yell.

The anonymous, urban...which usually means black...

If a person is "anonymous," they are not named or identified. "Urban" is an adjective that refers to big cities.

Chuck and Carol were robbed at gunpoint as they left a Lamaze class.

A class that teaches pregnant women how to give birth to a baby.

Whether you're a psychotic killer or running for President of the US, the one thing you can always count on is white America's fear of the black man.

If a person is "psychotic," they are very emotionally troubled, or psychologically disturbed.

She never expected a nest of Africanized killer bees to shack up across the street from her.

A "nest" is a home for birds or bees. "To shack up" is a very slangy way of saying to live in a particular place.

He...tried to mate them with the European bee.

"To mate" is the scientific verb that means to get two animals to have sex in order to get them to have babies.

The main difference...is their aggressiveness. If I were to do this to a African bee's hives, I'd have several hundred stings in a matter of minutes.

"Aggressiveness" is a behavior marked by too much energy or desire, occasionally with the threat of violence. When a bee "stings," it physically attacks you with a small stinger that it pushes into your body.

That becomes the perception and image of an entire people.

A person's "perception" is how they see things, and a person's "image" is how others see them.

You'll find most African Americans are quite adverse to gun possession.

If a person is "adverse to" something, they want to avoid or stay away from it.

In suburbia, there's some notion that there's going to be an invading horde...to savage their suburban community.

"Suburbia" refers to the generally upper middle class neighborhoods that are found immediately outside of big cities. A "notion" is an idea. A "horde" is a large and usually aggressive group, and "to savage" a city is to brutally attack it (though this is a rare verb).

It's not only **bizarre**, it's totally unfounded.

"Bizarre" is an excellent adjective meaning very strange, and if a belief is "unfounded," it is not true, or at least not supported by evidence.

These pistols, curiously enough, were being taken off of kids in the suburban communities.

"Pistols" are a type of small gun. "Curiously enough" is a poetic way of referring to something that is interesting, but surprising or not expected.

The biggest problem has been gun possession by these adolescents in suburbia.

An "adolescent" is a young teen between the ages of about 12 and 16.

Gangs in the city of Detroit. Black? :: Predominantly.

A more official way of saying mostly or primarily.

Too much **hassle**.

"Hassle" is a widely used colloquial word for anything that leads to problems, troubles or annoying concerns.

The American people are conditioned by network TV...to believe that their communities are much more dangerous than they actually are.

If people are "conditioned" to believe something, they are led to believe it after being constantly exposed to a particular belief or point of view.

"Network TV" refers to the big national TV stations.



This...was kind of ground zero for the LA riots.

"Ground zero" is the exact location where a horrible event, such as an earthquake or riot, takes place.

The odds that something is going to happen to me are really slight. :: Miniscule.

"Odds" is another word for chances or risk. If the chances of something happening are "slight," they are very small, and if they are "miniscule," they are so small it is almost for sure not going to happen.

The Hollywood sign means glamour....

A popular word associated with romantic attractiveness and excitement.

A Sergeant told me it's a guy with a gun.

A high-level police officer.

I saw the chopper....It's a near-drowning.

"Chopper" is a shortened word for a helicopter (The plane that can fly up and down). If a person "drowns," he dies from lack of air in the water.

There is one show that has consistently brought black and white people together to reduce our fears and celebrate our diversity. That show is *Cops*.

"Diversity" is a popular word to refer to the differences people have with each other in race, religion, sexual orientation (straight or gay), etc.

An executive director of the world's wildest police videos.

In Hollywood, an "executive director" is responsible for the money and business side of creating movies. Here, "wild" generally means crazy.

Look "liberal" up in the dictionary and I think my picture is there somewhere.

This is the speaker's way of saying he is a very liberal person.

Why not be compelled to do a show on what's causing the crime instead of just chasing the criminals down?

If a person is "compelled" to do something, they are being forced to do it or feel they have to do it for moral or ethical reasons.

Tolerance and understanding does less well. :: Less well in the ratings?

"Tolerance and understanding" refers to a welcoming and open attitude toward people who are considered different from most others (gays, immigrants, etc). "Ratings" refer to the estimated number of people who watch TV shows (TV networks are always trying to get high ratings, so that they can charge more for TV ads).

We tend to demonize black and Hispanic people.

If you "tend to" do something, you generally do it quite a bit over time.

"To demonize" a person is to see or describe them as bad or evil.

"Hispanics" are people who are of Mexican or Latin American origin.

I'll pitch you one. Do a show called "Corporate Cops."

"To pitch" a show or idea is to present it as an official proposal, to see if a TV network or film studio would like to produce it.

I don't think it would make interesting reality TV unless we could get these people to get in their SUVs and drive fast down the road, away from the police.

"Reality TV" is a type of television show that either has real people (not actors) trying to do ridiculous things in order to make money, or famous people who let the audience see their real lives. An SUV, or sport utility vehicle, is a large type of car that's well known for wasting lots of gas.

If I could find a police outfit that would prosecute corporate criminals appropriately and would go after them appropriately.

"To prosecute" a person is to officially put them on trial for a crime.

"To go after" a person is to try and stop, arrest or punish them, and if it's "appropriate," it is done in a way that is reasonable, fit or correct.

You need an appropriate response to a man who's just stolen \$88 million dollars from indigent people.

People who are "indigent" are very poor and have almost nothing to survive on.

If you could get the guy to throw his cellular phone as the police come through the door, then we'd have a show.

A small wireless telephone that can be carried around.

Tease them....make fun of them, ridicule them.

"To tease" a person is to gently make fun of them, and "to ridicule" them is to also make fun of them, but in a mocking or mean spirited way.

### *Comparing the US and Canada.*

I hit the streets of New York to find out what the average American thought about our friendly neighbors to the North.

A colloquial way of saying to use, or in this case, walk on.

Hordes of young boys all throughout Canada eagerly await the next Hollywood bloodbath.

A "horde" is a large group of loud or perhaps aggressive people.

To do something "eagerly" is to do it with great passion or enthusiasm.

A lot of girls showing cleavage.

The sexy area of a female body between her two breasts.

There's no poverty in Canada.

An important word for the state of being poor or indigent.

The best estimate is somewhere in the region of 7,000,000 guns.  
A complicated way of saying “about.”

Canada was one gun-loving, gun-toting, gun crazy country.  
“To tote” a gun is to carry it, but this verb is rarely used.

They broke in, stole some booze, some cigarettes and they left.  
I figured it must have been some teenagers out to have a little fun.  
“To break in” to a house is to forcefully enter it, usually with the intention of stealing something. “Booze” is another word for liquor or alcohol.  
In this case, “to figure” is to think or guess.

I’ve had people try and vandalize my home and steal from me.  
To “vandalize” is to intentionally damage or even destroy property.

I went unannounced to a neighborhood in Toronto to see if the unlocked door thing is true.  
To go to a place “unannounced” is to go there without telling anybody ahead of time.

Sorry about the intrusion. :: No problem.  
An “intrusion” is the act of entering into a place without permission, or perhaps the act of bothering a person who would prefer to be alone.

And thank you for not shooting me.  
One of the great lines of this film; “To shoot” a person is to fire at them with a gun.

We’ll certainly listen to them courteously and carefully.  
To do something “courteously” is to do it with respect and kindness.

They have assistance for their parents when they’re elderly and need to be in an old-age home.  
“Elderly” is another word for old (over 65?), or for a senior citizen.

You don’t win by beating up on people who can’t defend themselves. That’s the approach spreading in some right-wing governments across America.  
“To beat up on” a person is to attack them or treat them very poorly.  
In this case, an “approach” is an attitude or policy, and if it’s “spreading,” it is expanding or growing over more and more areas. If a government is “right-wing,” it is very conservative.

They pick on people who can’t defend themselves. They’re giving financial support and tax benefits and tax breaks to people who don’t need them.  
“To pick on” a person is to either physically or psychologically threaten them or make them feel weak or vulnerable. A “tax break” is a rule or law that allows a person or business to pay less taxes than they normally would have to.

I asked him "Can you at least take me to a Canadian slum?"...This is what a ghetto looks like in Canada.

A "slum" is an area of very poor housing and people, and a "ghetto" is the same thing, though it can also refer to an area where people of the same minority group live, even if not poor.

Is that the same mentality...that says if somebody gets sick, they should be able to have health care?

"Mentality" is an excellent word that means a way of thinking.

The segregation is definitely much more intensified in the States.

"Segregation" is the act of separating people from one another, especially people of different races (blacks, whites, etc.). "Intense" means marked by extreme energy, determination or degree (*Intensified* is not really a word, but it may be one day!)

That's how they resolve everything.

"To resolve" a problem is to solve it.

Canada is more like "Let's negotiate, let's work something out, where the States is like "We'll just kill you."

Note the use of the filler word "like," which is meaningless, but much loved by young people. "To negotiate" is to bargain, or argue over prices. "To work something out" is to come to an agreement. Outside of the US, the US is often just called "the States."

*Another School, Another tragedy.*

I have a student at Buell school who has been downed.

A horrible colloquial word that means shot, or perhaps even killed.

Please, Lord.

Another word for God that people will use when very emotional.

A six year old, 6th grade boy at Buell Elementary had found a gun at his uncle's house , where he was staying because his mother was being evicted.

An "Elementary school" is for students up to about 12 years old.

If a renter is "evicted" from their house, they are physically forced out by the landlord.

As if the city had not been through enough horror and tragedy in the last two decades, it was now home to a new record.

"To go through" a lot of tragedy is to experience it. Here, a "record" is a fact or statistic that has never been equaled anywhere else (In this case, the youngest school shooter in the country, at six years old).

It only took the news helicopters and satellite trucks half an hour to **show up** on the scene.

A “satellite truck” is a news truck that broadcasts through satellites, which are communication devices that float in space. “To show up” somewhere is to arrive there, and the “scene” of an event is the actual location where it took place.

Leave your mike on.

A “mike” is short for a microphone, which allows a person to speak loudly to a large audience.

A public memorial service....we’re expecting hundreds of people. They will mourn the loss of Little Kayla.

If an event is “public,” it is open to the public or people in general (whereas if it is *private*, it is open to only those specifically invited).

A “memorial service” is an informal type of funeral to honor the person who has died. “To mourn” a person is to take the time to feel great sadness or loss after they have died.

A tiny little girl who loved pizza, teddy bears.

“Tiny” means very small (and is often used in the expression “tiny little”).

A “teddy bear” is a much loved, soft and cute toy bear for children.

We’re having technical problems.

Any problem related to technology, such as computers and telephones.

Some are too choked up to even speak about it.

If a person is “choked up” about something, they are too emotional to talk about it.

I have hurricane-proof hair spray.

If something is “hurricane-proof,” it is strong enough to survive a hurricane (which is a huge and very powerful storm). “Hair spray” is a type of cosmetic that is used by spraying tiny drops of perfumed water on people’s hair.

Today we’re feeding CNN and Fox.

When a local TV station “feeds” a national network, it allows the networks to broadcast their own news coverage (CNN and Fox News are two well known national cable news networks).

If they had ventured just a block away from the school or funeral home, they might have seen a different kind of tragedy that would contain some answers...

“To venture” to a place is to go there, often as an adventure to see what it is like. A “city block” is the section of houses or other buildings that are found between two streets.

This impoverished area in the hometown of the world's largest corporation had been ignored as completely as it had been destroyed.

If an area is "impoverished," it is extremely poor. Here, the corporation that Moore is talking about is GM, or General Motors, which is the biggest American car company, and its hometown is Detroit, Michigan.

With 87% of students living below the official poverty line...Flint did not fit in the accepted and widely circulated story line put forth by the nation's media.

The "official poverty line" is the amount of money a person or family has to make in order to not be considered poor (In the US, for a family of four, it's now close to \$17,000). Flint is a struggling industrial town about an hour North of Detroit. If a story is "widely circulated," it is known or heard in many places. A "story line" is a general description of a situation, in this case of the wealth of the average American. If a story is "put forth" by the media, it is created and distributed by them.

That being the one about America and its invincible economy.

It something is "invincible," it is impossible to defeat.

They had never won a track meet.

A sporting event in which many schools or athletes compete in such things as short and long-distance running.

Someone named the streets....after all the Ivy League schools.

A group of excellent universities on the East Coast, including Harvard and Yale (Named after the ivy plants that grow on their buildings).

Faculty and staff are doing well, but we don't forget.

In a school, the "faculty" refers to its teachers and the "staff" refers to the other employees who work in offices and help run the school.

Freedom has never seen greater peril nor needed you more urgently to come to her defense, then now.

"Peril" is a powerful word for great risk or danger. If something is needed "urgently," it is needed as quickly as possibly.

To me, it's like they're rubbing our nose in it.

"To rub a person's nose" in a situation is to force them to look at something that is extremely uncomfortable for them, or more generally, to show great insensitivity (As in the case here, when the NRA held loud pro-gun rallies in the towns of students who had been murdered).

I was shocked and appalled that they were coming.

To be "appalled" by something is to be shocked and disgusted by it.

And then Moses himself showed up, right here in the city of Flint.

A reference to the fact that the actor Charleston Heston played the biblical figure Moses in the film *The Ten Commandments*.

Those people who wanted to try this child...even as an adult.

"To try" a person is to put them on trial for a crime, and if you try a child "as an adult," they are considered adults in the eyes of the law, and thus could face adult punishment if convicted of the crime.

People I call gun nuts, writing me what a horrible thing that I had admonished homeowners...to be careful about bringing weapons into their home.

A "gun nut" is a person who is crazy about guns. "To admonish" a person to do something is to give strongly felt, sincere or earnest advice.

They wanted this little boy hung from the highest tree.

There was such an undercurrent of racism and hate and anger.

If a person is "hung" for a crime, they are killed by putting a rope around their neck and letting them hang. An "undercurrent" is a public feeling, belief or tendency that is just below the surface.

I gave him some crayons and stuff to occupy him a little bit.

"Crayons" are colored markers for children. "Stuff" is a widely used word for things in general. In this case, "to occupy" a person is to entertain or distract them so they have something to do while passing the time.

Why did you decide to hang on to it? :: Because of the gravity of the situation and what had occurred.

"To hang on to" something is to keep it. The "gravity" of a situation is its seriousness or importance.

Tamalas was forced to work as part of Michigan's welfare-to-work program.

A government policy designed to force people who receive welfare or public assistance money to start working for the money they receive.

The program was so successful in tossing poor people off welfare, that its founder was soon hired by the #1 firm in the country that states turn to...

"To toss a person off" of welfare is to force them off. The "founder" of a program is the person who created it. In this context a "firm" is a company, and "to turn to" a company is to ask for their help.

...to prioritize their welfare systems.

"To prioritize" a project is to make it a top priority or subject of concern, so that you will put the time and effort needed to effectively deal with it.

With the Cold War over and no enemy left to frighten the public, Lockheed had found the perfect way to diversify.

The "Cold War" was the period of great competition between the US and the Soviet Union (Russia), from about 1945-1990. "To frighten" is to scare, and to "to diversify," in this case, is to enter into a variety of businesses.

What's the point in doing that?

"Why would you want to do that?"

Everybody I know personally works out here in the mall.

A giant building that contains a large number of individual stores.

She worked two jobs; She was trying to make ends meet.

If a person is “trying to make ends meet,” they are desperately trying to make just enough money to be able to survive.

She worked as a fountain person, making drinks, shakes, desserts.

In certain fast food restaurants, the “fountain” is where drink made of ice cream are made. A “shake” is a common way to refer to a milk shake.

Dick Clark is an American icon.

An “icon” is a well known symbol of a culture (Dick Clark is a famous media personality who helped promote rock music on TV in the 1950s).

As Dick says, it’s the soundtrack of our lives.

A “soundtrack” is the music that is used in a movie.

She was on a state bus to go serve drinks and make fudge for rich people.

A delicious type of soft, creamy candy, often made of chocolate.

### *The Selling of Fear.*

Correcting America’s social problems took a back seat to fear, panic and a new set of priorities.

If X “takes a back seat to” Y, it is decided that X is not as important as Y, and therefore less energy and effort is put on X. A “priority” is something that is considered important and worth spending energy or time on.

They’ve been stocking up on supplies...weapons, ammunition.

To “stock up” on something is to buy or obtain a lot of it, in order to have it stored close by. “Supplies” can refer to any product that is stored or housed that is necessary for survival, from food to medicine.

Wall Mart says that after September 11, gun sales surged 70%.

If sales of a product “surge,” they go up dramatically.

In Dallas, they’re already taking potshots at Osama Bin Laden.

A “potshot” is a gunshot from behind a bush, or more generally, very critical comments or remarks (Bin Laden, of course, is the bozo behind the September 11 terrorist attacks).

We Americans were gripped in a state of fear.

“To be gripped” is to be held tightly.



It's probably a little **paranoia**, but I'm not going to take chances.

An important word from psychology that refers to the irrational belief that somebody (or everybody!) is trying to hurt or harm you.

And so there's a **vested interest**... a lot of activity to keep us afraid.

If a person has "vested interest" in something, they could benefit or profit from it if things turn out well.

Everyone felt safer....with the army doing **garbage detail** on **Park Avenue**.

"Garbage detail" is a way of referring to the job of collecting the trash. Park Avenue is one of the richest streets in the United States.

The corporate and political leaders can **get away with** just about anything.

"To get away with" something illegal is to be able to do it without being caught or punished.

Richard is **paralyzed** for life and in a wheelchair.

If a person is "paralyzed," they are unable to move a part of their body.

Mark and Richard were **disabled** and suffering from the 17 cent Kmart bullets still **embedded** in their bodies.

If a person is "disabled," they have a physical limitation, such as the inability to walk or see.

I asked the boys if they'd like to go to **Kmart** to return the **merchandise**.

Kmart is a well known department store. "Merchandise" is another word for goods or products that are sold at a store, from food to furniture.

One request is you **get rid of** the bullets and you don't sell them in this store.

"To get rid of" something is to eliminate it or throw it away.

We only carry sporting **firearms** and **accessories** that go with the hunting sports.

A "firearm" is any type of gun or weapon, and "accessories" are those things that are often used with a product (For a gun, accessories could include bullets, a gun lock or a gun holder).

We'll certainly take your message to our **chairman** and **CEO**, Chuck Conoway.

The "chairman" of a company is the head of the company's board of directors, who makes general company policy. A "CEO" is the Chief Executive Officer, who is the most powerful person in a company and the person who is responsible for running it day by day.

Let me **blunt**....Mark has a Kmart bullet just an inch away, from....your **aorta** and **spine**?

If a person is "blunt," they speak very directly, without worrying about hurting other people's feelings. A person's "aorta" is a large part of the human heart. A person's "spine" is their backbone.

Somebody here should take their request seriously,  
not just a PR person, but somebody who has some authority.

A “request” is the formal act of asking for something. A “PR” person handles public relations for a company, which means they try to make the company look as positive as possible to the public. In this case, “authority” is another word for power.

Take care.

One way of saying “see you later.”

As we left the building, Mark came up with an idea.

“To come up” with an idea is to think of it.

Mark pretty much cleared them out of their ammunition.

If you “clear a store out” of a particular product, you buy the store’s entire supply of it.

Kmart is phasing out the sale of handgun ammunition.

“To phase out” an action is to gradually reduce it until it is no longer done at all.

Wow, that blows my mind.

“Wow” is a common way of expressing surprise or amazement. “That blows my mind” is a very slangy way of saying “I think that is totally amazing (or incredible).”

*Charleston Heston and the American Disease.*

All I needed was a star map.

A map that is sold on the streets of Hollywood which shows where famous movie stars live.

He took me out to his pool....so we could have a chat.

A casual or informal conversation.

I assume you have guns. :: Indeed, I do.

A favorite British word meaning “in fact,” or in this case, “absolutely.”

Have you ever been assaulted? :: No

If a person has been “assaulted” they’ve been physically attacked. Note that Heston taps his fingers on some furniture when answering, since “to knock on wood” is a way of hoping for continued good luck.

Let’s say it’s a comfort factor.

“Doing this is what makes me feel comfortable (or at ease).”

I'm exercising one of the rights passed on down to me from those, wise, old, dead white guys that invented this country.

"To exercise a right" is to use it or take advantage of it. If a person is "wise," they're intelligent, prudent, and have a good understanding of the world. Heston is referring to the founding fathers of the US, including Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin.

Hear me out!

"Listen to what I'm saying!"

American history has a lot of blood on its hands.

One way of saying American history is filled with violence and bloodshed.

The Brits? They ruled the world for 300 years at the barrel of a gun.

"Brit" is a slangy word for a British person. "To rule from the barrel of a gun" is to control people with the use of total force.

You're going to explore it at great length, but that is all I have to say on it.

"To explore something at great length" is to investigate or research it with great care and energy, perhaps over a long period of time.

We have a more mixed ethnicity than other countries.... :: It's an ethnic thing?

If a country has a "mixed ethnicity," its population is made of many ethnic groups, such as black, white, Asian, Jewish, Indian, etc..

I left the Heston estate atop Beverly Hills and walked back into the real world, an America living and breathing in fear.

In this case, an "estate" is an very large house, often surrounded by large gardens. "Atop" is another way of saying on top of, and Beverly Hills is an extremely rich part of Los Angeles where many movie stars live.

Imagine somebody might break into your house, to harm you or your family.

"To break into" a house is to forcefully and secretly enter it, usually for the purpose of stealing something inside. "To harm" a person is to physically or emotionally hurt them.

It all comes back to bowling for Columbine.

If a particular subject or topic "all comes back to" one thing, this means that no matter how that topic is discussed, that discussion will ultimately be about that one thing (For Moore, a discussion of guns in America will always come back to the question of fear).

Yes, it was a glorious time to be an American.

A powerful adjective meaning wonderful, splendid or delightful, though here, of course, it is said with humor and sarcasm.

# Bowling for Columbine

## Some Potential Questions for ESL Class Discussion

1. Who is to blame for the Columbine massacre? The two kids? Their parents? Easy access to guns? Marilyn Manson? The school? The other students who teased and made fun of them? Poverty? Injustice? Kmart? American society?....
2. Do you believe in gun control? Would it work? Is there some kind of gun control in the country you're from?
3. Do you agree with Michael Moore that the United States, unlike Canada, is a country dominated by fear? What are we afraid of?
4. Do you think Moore's way of interviewing people such as Charleston Heston, John Nichols and the spokespeople for Lockheed and Kmart was a little unfair?
5. Why do you think there is so much violence in the United States? What can we do about it?
6. Are people in the Michigan militia just patriotic, or crazy, or both?
7. Was this movie disturbing? Funny? Both? Neither?
8. Do you own a gun? Would you?
9. Were you scared to come to the US because of the violence?
10. What did you like and not like about this movie?