

# American Graffiti

(Comedy) (1972)

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## Major Characters

- Curt Henderson**.....**Richard Dreyfuss**  
A high school graduate, who on the night before he is supposed to leave his small California town in order to attend a major university on the east coast, cannot decide if he really wants to go.
- Steve Bolander**.....**Ron Howard**  
Curt's best friend, who is also planning to go back east to school, who tries to convince Curt that they need to leave their homes.
- Laurie Henderson**.....**Cindy Williams**  
Steve's girlfriend and Curt's sister, who still has one more year in high school, and who is sad because Steve is about to leave.
- Terry "the toad" Fields**.....**Charles Martin Smith**  
A good friend of Steve and Curt who is socially awkward ('nerdy') and insecure, but very sweet and nice.
- Debbie**.....**Candy Clark**  
A gentle and sexy girl with whom Terry passes the night.
- John Milner**.....**Paul Le Mat**  
Another friend of those above, who is the "coolest" guy in town, and well known for driving his super fast sports car.
- Carol**.....**McKenzie Phillips**  
A funny 12 year old girl who drives around town with John.
- Joe**.....**Bo Hopkins**  
The leader of a street gang called "The Pharaohs" who Curt meets.
- Bob Falfa**.....**Harrison Ford**  
A guy from out of town who challenges John to a car race.
- Wendy**.....**Deby Celiz**  
Curt's ex-girlfriend who still has feelings for him.
- Wolfman Jack**.....**Wolfman Jack**  
A famous radio disc jockey (who plays himself in the movie).

## Plot Summary

This movie is the story of a single night in the lives of a group of teenage students in a small central California town, in the summer of 1962 (although it's never made exactly clear, the town is in the San Joaquin Valley, and may have been Modesto, a couple hours east of San Francisco). Both Curt and Steve had been planning to take off the following morning for the east coast, for their first year at a major university. However, Curt begins to think he may not want to go, and soon Steve and Laurie are also struggling with what it means to "leave home in order to find home."

*American Graffiti* is a classic rock'n'roll movie that captures the "feel" and relative innocence of the country in the last years of the first rock era (The film features great songs from 1955 to 1962, by such artists as Chuck Berry, Bill Haley and Buddy Holly). It was still a little over a year before events would start to dramatically change the country, music and life in general (John Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, the Beatles arrived in 1964, and the Vietnam War began to dominate headlines in 1965). In 1962, times were still relatively simple, although all the characters in this film have their own serious concerns about love, sex, and relationships in general, concerns that are probably on the minds of most teenagers, no matter when and where they have lived....

## Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

***Curt tries to decide if he is going to leave town, Terry gets a car, and Steve and Laurie prepare for a 'long-distance relationship.'***

Last night in town; You guys gonna have a little bash before you leave?

A "bash" is a small party. Note that "going to" ---->"gonna" in rapid speech.

It's the first scholarship that the moose lodge has given out.

A "scholarship" is a gift of money that is given to students to allow them to go to a university. The "moose lodge" is a men's social group (A moose is an animal like an antelope and a lodge is a house).

She can wait. Make it short and sweet.

A slangy way of telling a person to speak quickly, and to be brief.

I could wait a year....go to city for a while.

A reference to city college, which is a local two year college found in most parts of the United States (as opposed to a four year university).

You chicken fink! After all we went through to get accepted?!

A “chicken” is a slang term for a coward, and a “fink” is a person who tells parents or teachers what others have done wrong, but this term is never used. “To go through” something is to experience or endure it.

We’re finally getting out of this turkey town and now you want to crawl back into your cell.

“This turkey town” is Steve’s way of referring to the small California town they live in. “To crawl” is to move on hands and knees, like a baby, and a “cell” is short for a jail cell or perhaps small room.

Do you want to end up like John?

“To end up like” a person is to slowly become just like them.

Where is the dazzling beauty I’ve been searching for all of my life?

A strong adjective that means beautiful or gorgeous.

The pickings are really getting slim; The whole strip is shrinking.

An old-fashioned but still used expression is “slim pickings,” which means there are few good choices, in this case of girls (slim means thin). A “strip” is an important commercial street in a town.

**Big shot!**

A good term for a person who thinks they are very special or smart.

Where was I? :: How you thought high school romances were goofy and we started going together because I was cute and funny.

“Where was I?” is what you ask when you can’t remember what you were just saying. “Goofy” is a funny adjective that means silly or ridiculous. When two people “go together,” they become a couple.

You were leading up to something kind of big.

“To lead up to” something is to start to talk about it.

You made it sound like I’m giving dictation.

“To give dictation” is to speak the words of a letter so that a secretary can write it down.

I just sort of think it’s juvenile now!

A useful adjective for childish or silly.

I’ll keep it at home; It’s less conspicuous there.

If something is “conspicuous,” it attracts attention or is easily noticed.

I'm not upset; I mean I can't expect you to be a monk while you're away.

A "monk" is a religious man who lives in a monastery in order to pray or meditate, who has little social life and never has sex.

I got a really neat record collection.

An adjective that can mean good, excellent, or more colloquially, cool.

He didn't dump on me, you little dip.

"To dump" a person is to break up with them, usually after being romantically involved (though note that 'dump *on*' is no longer used).

A "dip" is an insulting slang word for a small, weak or clumsy person.

I got some really simple instructions for you;

First of all, only 30 weight Castrol R.

"Instructions" are written directions or orders for doing something.

The second sentence refers to a brand of motor oil, which comes in weights, or thickness, of 30, 40, etc.

I've written the tire pressure and stuff on a pad in the glove...

Note that "and stuff" is a common way of saying "and other things."

A "glove compartment" is a small container found in front of the passenger seat of most cars.

I'll love and protect this car until death do us part.

The poetic words that are usually said at a wedding, and not for a car!

This is a super fine machine!

A silly way of referring to a car.

How would you like to go to the drive-in movies? :: You got to be kidding.

"Drive-in movies" were big screen theatres in which people watched movies from their cars (They died out by the 1980s). If a person is "kidding," they are just joking around, or not being serious.

You want to bomb around?; I want to try out my new wheels.

"To bomb around" is to fool around together, but this is no longer used. "Wheels" is a slangy term for a car.

I'm going with Laurie and Steve to the hop. Besides, I'd spoil your luck.

"The hop" is an old-fashioned word for a high school dance (and is still a well known word because of the song "At the hop," played in this film). "Besides" means "in any case," and in this context, "to spoil" something is to destroy or ruin it.

The freshman hop?! **Come on**, that place is for kids.

“Freshman” year in school is the first year (followed by sophomore, junior and senior). “Come on” has more meanings than probably any phrasal verb in English. Here, it is just a way of saying “be serious.”

You two just got your ass out of there!

A slangy way of saying to leave, or here, to have left (Your ass is, of course, your behind, rear end, derriere, butt, etc...)

**Bullshit**, man! Come on, for old time’s sake.

“Bullshit” is one of the truly great obscenities, generally used to refer to lies, nonsense or other untruths or distortions. To do something “for old time’s sake” is to do it in honor of the distant past, and the way things once were. A favorite expression among older people.

I ain’t going off to some goddamn fancy college.

“To go off” to school is to leave home for a distant university.

“Goddamn” is a common but vulgar filler word that is used to express anger, frustration or other emotion. In this case, “fancy” is expensive or perhaps exclusive or elitist.

***Curt sees the perfect girl, John finds himself with Carol, and Steve and Laurie try to work it out.***

Hey man, what happened to your flat head? :: Ah, your mother!

“Your mother” is a curious way to insult a person after they’ve insulted you, but in any case, is much less vulgar than “fuck you.”

There’s a very wicked ’55 Chevy looking for you.

“Wicked” is an interesting adjective that means evil or perhaps dangerous. A “Chevy” is a brand of car, in this case, built in 1955.

Watch out for the cop in Jerry’s Cherry.

A “cop” is a very common word for a policeman (Jerry’s Cherry is the name of a fast food restaurant in town).

Toad, is that you in that beautiful car? Jeez, what a waste of machinery.

A funny little filler word used at the beginning of sentences to express surprise, frustration or other emotion.

Here we go with another call out of the station. Can you dig it?

A very slangy and never used way of asking “Do you like it?”

The little bitsy spaceman.

A child's way of saying very small.

You must have the wrong number, partner.

An interesting word that can mean a business partner, a lover, a friend, or in this case, just another person.

Quick, hang a right! Cut over to G street!

"To hang" a right is a slangy way of saying to turn right, and to "cut over" to a street is to cross other streets or lanes to get to it.

I just saw a vision! I just saw a goddess.

In this case, a "vision" is a sight of something amazing or beautiful. A "goddess" is, of course, a female God, or perhaps a beautiful woman.

This was the most perfect, dazzling creature I've ever seen.

An interesting word for any kind of animal, human or living being.

You have no romance, no soul?

A person's "soul" is their non-physical spirit, though as here, it can be used to mean a sense of romance or great emotion.

Someone roaming the street wants me!

"To roam" the streets is to wander or travel aimlessly.

He goes to JC now.

An abbreviation for junior college, which is a local city college.

He's so boss.

A common adjective in this film which means great, good, or more colloquially "cool," but this usage is extremely old-fashioned.

How'd you like to ride around with me? Sorry, I'm going steady.

"To ride around" with a person is to drive with them, but with no particular destination. If a person is "going steady," they are dating or romantically involved. An old-fashioned but fun expression.

You've got nothing to fear; I'm as harmless as a baby kitten.

"To fear" something is to be scared of it. A "harmless" person is not dangerous in any way.

If you ever get tired of going steady with someone who ain't around, I'm up for grabs!

If a person is "up for grabs," they are available and not yet taken. Note the use of 'ain't;' You should say 'isn't' instead.

You throw me out and I'll scream! :: Stay cool.

In this context, a way of telling a person to stay calm or quiet.

Is this what they call coping a feel? :: No, get up! Jesus.

"To cop a feel" is a funny slang expression used by boys when they get to touch or feel their partner's breasts or other sexual body parts.

"Jesus" is a very common way of expressing anger or other emotion.

What's your name? :: Mud, if anybody sees you.

If a person says that their name is "mud," they have been caught doing something very bad or embarrassing (Mud, is of course, wet dirt).

What do you got in there? More than you can handle.

"To handle" something means to be able to deal or work with it.

I won't report you this time, but next time, just watch it.

"Watch it" is a very common way of telling a person to be careful.

I'm not going to give you a whole line.

"To give a person a line" is to tell them a generally untrue or distorted version of a story in order to convince them of something.

How would you like to be the owner of this practically new vette?

Short for Corvette, a very fast sports car that is still made.

I'm going to knock 10% off the top! How about that?!

When a salesman says they are going to "knock 10% off the top," they are reducing the price of an object by 10%.

That's \$98 down, \$98 a month.

In this context, a reference to the "down payment," or the first payment you make when buying a car before beginning to pay monthly.

My boss wants to get rid of the sporty cars.

"To get rid" of something is a very useful and common way of saying to eliminate it, or perhaps throw it out. "Sports cars" are small and fast.

Leave me alone, for god's sake.

A common filler expression that shows emotion such as anger or frustration. Note that many of these expressions are based in religion!

After you're elected senior queen, you'll have so many boys after your bod.

High school classes often elect kings, queens, presidents, etc... The "senior" year of school is the last one, after freshman, sophomore and junior. "Bod" is a very slangy way to say body, and if all the boys are "after your bod," this means they want to have sex with you.

Laurie, I know it's a drag, but....

If something “is a drag,” it’s unpleasant or unfortunate. Very common.

When Mike went into the marines, she was acting so wacky, she got run over by a bus.

“The marines” are the division of the US military that is best known for fighting on beaches or near a coast. “Wacky” is a funny little adjective that means totally crazy or ridiculously irrational.

Hey, zit make-up. :: Just cool it!

A “zit” is a slang word for a pimple, and “zit make-up” is cream that is designed to hide or eliminate pimples. If a person tells you to “cool it,” they’re telling you to calm down or stop what you’re doing.

You and Laurie engaged yet? :: No, we got it all worked out.

If a person is “engaged,” they have officially agreed to get married. If a situation is “all worked out,” the people involved have agreed on how to deal with it.

We can date other people. :: And screw around, I know.

“To date” a person is to go out with them, usually with romantic intentions. “To screw around” with a person is to have fun with them, though depending on the context, it can mean to have sex with them.

I hear college girls really put out.

If a girl “puts out,” she easily agrees to have sex or engage in various sexual activities.

***As Curt, Steve and Laurie head for the dance, John cruises the town with Carol, and then soon hears of a challenge to race.***

Come on! ‘Come on,’ what?

Note that when you don’t understand a person, you can quote their exact words, and then add a “what?” to ask what they’re trying to say!

How sentimental of you; You’ll be back at Christmas.

If a person is being “sentimental,” they are acting in an emotional way, particularly as related to love, romance or feelings for the past.

Get your cooties off me!

A funny slang word for germs, used most often by young children.

Don't make a scene! :: Go ahead, slug me, scary face!

"To make a scene" is to act in a way that is so loud or perhaps angry that everyone nearby notices. "To slug" a person is to hit them with a fist (closed hand), usually with great force. "Scary face" is never used.

I wouldn't dance with you if you were the last guy left in this gym!

Short for "gymnasium," a large building for athletic events that usually has basketball courts.

Joe College strikes out.

"Joe College" is the name a person who is not going to school might use to describe one who is going to a university. If a guy "strikes out" with a girl, he is unable to do anything sexual with her.

If Mr. Simpson came in here and saw me dancing with one of you .....young ladies, he'd have my rear end.

A way of saying "he would seriously punish me"  
(Your "rear end" is your ass or butt).

I got drunk as hell the night I went off.

Note that "as hell" is a way of adding intensity (i.e.... 'I got very drunk').  
To "go off" is to leave, in this case to school.

I barfed on the train the next day, too. :: Very cute.

"To barf" is a colloquial word meaning to vomit or throw up.

Only stayed one semester.

A period of 15-20 weeks in which classes are held at school.

Why did you come back? :: I decided I wasn't the competitive type.

In this case, a "competitive" person is one who is motivated enough to compete against other smart students for good grades, but note the same grammatical construction can be used with many adjectives (silent, talkative, athletic, nervous, etc...).

The Beach Boys; I predict they'll go a long way.

"To predict" something is to guess or claim to know what will happen in the future. If an artist "will go a long way," this means that they will go on to have a successful career (and The Beach Boys did in fact do so).

The next night we found out where they were parked and we went out with ammunition.

Things that are fired from a weapon, such as bullets and bombs.

Do you have homework or something to do? :: No sweat, my mother does it.

"No sweat" is a common alternative to saying no problem!

Come on, don't give me any grief. I'm warning ya. :: Spare me, killer.

"Don't give me grief" is a way of telling a person to not give you any problems (grief is great sadness). "Spare me" is a colloquial way of telling a person to stop saying nonsense and be serious.

I don't like that surfing shit. Rock'n'roll has been going down hill ever since Buddy Holly died.

"That surfing shit" is John's reference to the Beach Boys, who sang songs about surfing, and who were just starting to get popular in 1962. Buddy Holly was a great rock singer who died in a plane crash in 1959.

Don't you think the Beach Boys are boss? ::

You would, you grungy little twerp.

"Grungy" means dirty or in very poor condition. A "twerp" is a funny insult word used to describe a small or weak person.

You big weenie. If I had a boyfriend, he'd pound you.

A "weenie" is a silly word for a hot dog or possibly a penis, and thus "you big weenie" is a very silly insult (though note the use of the pronoun 'you' is very common in insults). "To pound" is to hit hard.

I'm going to tell them you tried to rape me. :: Boy, are you up a creek!

"Boy" at the beginning of sentence is often used to express excitement or other emotion. "To be up *shit* creek" is a vulgar but fun expression which means to be in deep trouble. The phrase above is a gentler though less common alternative version.

If you say "Carol's not grungy, she's bitchin."

A very dated colloquial adjective when means great, neat, or cool.

The light on your license plate is out; I'm gonna have to cite for you that.

When a police officer "cites" a person, he officially charges them with violation of a law. In this case, for violating a car regulation.

The front end of this thing looks a little low. ::

No, sir, its 12 1/2 inches, regulation size.

"Regulation size" is that size which is required by law (A regulation is an official rule, often made by a state agency).

You can't fool with the law.

"You cannot break the law without being caught and punished."

I could run you in right now and I could make it stick.

The police officer's way of telling John he could arrest him, and make sure that he is convicted in court for breaking the law.

I want to catch you in the act, and when I do, I'm going to nail you, but good.  
 In this context, "to nail" a person means to cause them great trouble.  
 "But good" is an interesting way of saying with great force.

Thank you, asshole.  
 One of the truly great, crude and classic insult nouns.

CS; what's that stand for? Chicken shit, that's what it is.  
 "What's that stand for?" is the question to ask when you want to know what letters represent in an abbreviation. "Chicken shit" is a rarer alternative to bullshit, and also means lies, or in this case, nonsense.

You know a guy around here with a piss-yellow deuce coupe.  
 "Piss-yellow" is a crude way of referring to the color of urine (piss).  
 A "deuce couple" was a popular type of car in the 1950s.

He's supposed to be hot stuff?  
 If a person is "hot stuff," they are very talented, strong, or impressive in some other way.

Ain't nobody can beat him. :: I ain't nobody, dork.  
 "I ain't nobody" is a grammatically horrible sentence, but in this context, an interesting way of saying "it doesn't matter that no one else can beat him, because I can." A "dork" is a silly insult word for fool, jerk, etc.

Tell him I aim to blow his ass right off the road.  
 "To aim" to do something is to intend to do it, though this usage is very old-fashioned. "To blow somebody's ass off the road" is a crude way of saying to beat them, in this case in a car race.

***Terry meets Carol, Steve and Laurie enjoy the dance,  
 and Curt and Wendy talk of the past and future.***

What a babe! What a bitchin babe!  
 A slangy word for a sexy girl or woman. Widely used among teenagers.

You sure you don't need a lift somewhere?  
 A "lift" is a ride in an automobile

Anybody ever tell you that you look just like just like Connie Stevens? :: For real?

A good way of asking a person if they are telling the truth (Connie Stevens was a well known actress in the early 1960s).

Yeah, no shit. I'm not just feeding you a line.

"No shit" is a vulgar but common way of saying that what was just said is the truth. "To feed a line" to a person is to tell them something that is insincere, exaggerated or not true, much like some advertising.

Is this your car? It's really tough looking.

If a *person* is "tough looking," they look strong, mean or perhaps hard to beat or defeat. Rarely used for a car, but there it is!

Can it lay rubber?

A slangy and dated way of referring to the act of accelerating a car very quickly in order to make rubber tire marks on the street.

It's bitchin tuck and roll. I love the feel of tuck and roll upholstery.

"Upholstery" is the soft material used to make a covering for a seat. Here, "tuck and roll" refers to the car seat, which can be lifted and rolled back to make room for storage behind the front seats.

Peel out! I just love it when guys peel out.

A dated phrasal verb meaning to accelerate a car very quickly, usually in such a way that the car makes a high shrieking sound.

Last year's class president, Steve Bolander, and this years head cheerleader, Laurie Henderson!

Note that each high school year class has a president. "Cheerleaders" are the girls who lead cheers (applause and screaming) for school sports teams, and the head cheerleader is their official leader.

You think I care if you go off? You think I'm gonna crack up?

"To crack up" is to go crazy, or perhaps have a nervous breakdown.

Boy, are you conceited!

A person who is "conceited" thinks very highly of themselves. Note the inversion of the verb and pronoun for stylistic effect.

I asked you out! Backwards day, remember?

In general, boys ask girls out on dates, but some high schools used to have an annual "backwards day," in which girls asked out the boys.

I even asked my father why you didn't kiss me. He said he thought you were bright enough and that you'd probably get around to it after a while.

"Bright" is another word for intelligent. "To get around to" something means to eventually do it, but after waiting or doing other things.

I had to practically throw myself at you.

This is Laurie's way of telling Steve that she had to be very forward or assertive before Steve finally got the courage to kiss her.

What's wrong? :: Go to hell!

Gentler than "fuck you," but still a strong showing of anger.

What are you doing? Stealing hubcaps?

The coverings that are placed at the center of car wheels.

Same old Curt! All the time we were going together, you never knew what you were doing.

"Same old" is a way of saying that some things never change (in this case, Curt). A common expression is "the same old story."

I said why don't you go kiss a duck, marblehead?

A cute insult, but neither "kiss a duck" nor "marblehead" is still used (though you should know a marble is a tiny and round stone ball).

OK, Bolander, you're suspended! Krout, I graduated last semester, remember?

If a student is "suspended," they are officially prohibited from attending classes. "To graduate" is to finish going to a school.

Come on, beat it, Vic. I'm not your baby.

A slangy and common way of telling a person to leave.

If brains were dynamite, you couldn't blow your nose. :: **Look who's talking!**

"Dynamite" is a powerful explosive, and thus is a silly way of telling a person they have no brains, since "to blow" in this case means to blow up. "Look who's talking" is a good way of responding to an insult by implying that the person speaking is even worse (stupider, uglier, etc.) than you are.

Who's the wimp you're hanging out with now, Einstein?

A "wimp" is an insulting word for a physically weak or small person. "To hang out" with a person is to pass time with them.

I know everything your dirty little mind is thinking. It shows.

A person who has a "dirty mind" most likely thinks a lot about sex.

Look buddy, you want a knuckle sandwich?

“Buddy” is a common word for friend, but note it is often used sarcastically, as here. A “knuckle sandwich” is a silly way of referring to fist (knuckles are the part of the finger that bend), and thus, this is a way of threatening to hit somebody.

Keep your smart-ass mouth shut.

“Smart-ass” is a strong insult which means overly confident and cocky, and is both an adjective and a noun.

I’ll call you some night when I’m hard-up.

If a person is “hard-up,” they are sexually frustrated or perhaps just lonely.

You seem to know a lot of weird guys.

A good word for strange, odd or bizarre.

That creep is not a friend of mine. He’s just horny.

A “creep” is a very unpleasant, mean or obnoxious person. If a person is “horny,” they have a strong desire to have sex.

I bet you’re smart enough to get us some brew.

“I bet” is a common way of saying ‘I think,’ or ‘I’m sure.’ “Brew” is a slang word for alcohol or liquor.

That’s his wife. :: Get out of here!!

A classic colloquial expression which actually means “I don’t believe you!” Commonly used when something that is hard to believe has just been said, and note that on occasion, it’s reduced to simply “get out!”

That girl is young and beautiful and she was cruising 10<sup>th</sup> street.

“To cruise” a street is to drive slowly down it, often looking for girls.

My ex is going to become a Presidential aide.

A short way of referring to a former boyfriend, girlfriend or spouse.

How do you suppose you’re going to do that, wishy-washy, at a JC?

A person who is “wishy-washy” has trouble making up their mind, or deciding between many choices. The local “JC” is a junior college.

Uh, to the opera, James. :: Drop dead!

The first sentence is the way a rich person would talk to their chauffeur if they want to be driven to the opera (James is a common name for chauffeurs). “Drop dead,” like “go to hell,” is gentler than “fuck you.”

Unless you want to go to the Gallo dam and have a little orgy. :: You wish!  
 An “orgy” is a party where many people have sex with each other.  
 “You wish” is a way of telling a person that they will not likely get what they probably want (in this case, to go to an orgy).

I could pick up some Oleo margarine and roll around in it for a while.  
 “Margarine” is a food that is similar to butter, and perhaps a good product for an orgy. “To roll around in” something is to roll one’s body around and around, in order to become covered by it.

Hey Henderson, long time no see. What you been doing?  
 A common expression that you would say to a person that you have not seen in a long time.

I just want to tell you that Bobbie here is madly in love with you and trembles at the sight of your rippling biceps.  
 “To tremble” is to shake, usually from cold or fear. “Rippling biceps” are well shaped, muscles on the upper arm.

Out of my car! :: Temper, temper!  
 A person’s temper is the general tendency they have to get angry.

***As Terry tries to find liquor for Debbie, John and Carol visit a junkyard.***

Oh rats, I thought some of my friends would be here.  
 A dated and silly way of saying damn it or darn it.

Why don’t you grow up, for Christ’s sake.  
 Another “religious expression” which shows anger, frustration, etc.

You spastic creep!  
 A “spastic” person cannot control the movement of their muscles and a “creep” is a very unpleasant person, or in this case, a jerk.

I lost my I.D. in a flood.  
 A common way to say identification (driver’s license, passport, etc).

Could you pick me up some Old Harper’s hard stuff?  
 “Old Harpers” is a brand name of well known whiskey, and like vodka, is considered hard liquor (unlike beer and wine).

Let me have a three musketeers, a ball point pen, one of those combs, a pint of Old Harpers, a couple of flash light batteries, and some beef jerky.

“Three musketeers” is a well known chocolate candy bar. A “pint” is a quantity equal to about 1/4<sup>th</sup> gallon, and “beef jerky” is a type of dried beef that is popular as a snack.

Oh, nuts, I left it in the car.

Like “oh, rats,” another silly way of saying damn it or darn it, or more specifically, of expressing frustration.

Can you loan me a dollar? :: Are you for real? Girls don’t pay, guys pay.

“Are you being serious?” Note that in 1962, it was expected that men would pay for everything on a date, including food and drinks.

Could you... :: Buy you a bottle of booze?

A common slang word for liquor.

He had a head-on collision with a drunk. **Boom!**

A “head-on collision” occurs when two cars run directly into each other. “Boom” is the sound of a violent collision or explosion.

It’s pretty grim when a guy gets it and it’s not even his own fault.

“Grim” is an interesting little adjective that means unhappy, depressing or cheerless. In this case, a person who “gets it” has been killed (which shows how versatile the verb to get can be!).

He got his in 1955, in about the hairiest crash we ever had here.

In this case, a way to say violent and bloody, but this usage is rare. John is describing an awful car crash in which a person he knew died.

Now they show it in driver’s education classes.

Note that most students take classes which teach them how to drive.

You never had an accident. :: Yeah, well I came mighty close. I almost rolled it a couple times.

Note the use of “mighty” as an adverb, which, like awfully, means very. “To roll” a car is to lose control of it so that it rolls over on itself.

But I’ve been just quick enough to stay out of this grave yard.

A “grave yard” is where dead bodies are buried, though here, John is referring to a junk yard, where used car parts are found.

Oh, this is gonna strike a raw nerve!

If something “strikes a raw nerve,” with somebody, it greatly upsets or angers them. “Nerves” are the internal part of the body that feel pain and pleasure.

***Curt gets to know the Pharaohs, and  
John and Carol continue to cruise the town.***

He's a friend of ours, and that's his car you got your butt parked on.

A funny way of saying "you are sitting on." Remember, your butt is your ass, rear end, derriere and, for a little variety, your tush!

You scratched it, man!

"To scratch" a car is to damage the surface, or make a small mark in it.

Where do you get off sitting on Gil's car, man?

"Where do you get off" doing something is a grammatically interesting question which is equivalent to saying "what you're doing is extremely rude," or more colloquially, "you have a lot of nerve doing that."

It ain't the size in question, here; It's the principle.

The principle is the moral or general rule, law or point, as opposed to the specific facts; "The size of the scratch is unimportant; It's simply unacceptable that you scratched the car at all..."

Tie him to the car and drag him!

"To drag" something is to pull it while it slides on the ground (If a car dragged you on the street, you'd probably die).

You better come with us, take a ride with the Pharaohs.

Note the use of "better," which is the only word in English to function as both an adverb and a modal verb (meaning 'should')!  
"The Pharaohs" are Joe's gang (A pharaoh is an ancient Egyptian king).

Shot gun!

For some strange reason, the words you scream when you want to sit in the front seat of the car, as opposed to the backseat.

Get in the back, punk!

A word that is used to describe a mean or violent young person, though it is now often associated with the "punk rock" of the 1970s.

This is a collect call for Wolfman Jack.

A long distance phone call in which the person who receives the call pays for it.

My mom won't let me at home...because he's a negro.

A very dated word for a black person.

Do you know that he broadcasts from a place that flies around in a circle all the time?

“To broadcast” is to send out a TV or radio program over the airwaves.

You tell him, Wolfman! He’s my man!

A very colloquial way of saying that you like this person.

He blasts that thing all the way around the world. It’s against the law, man.

“To blast” a TV or radio show is to play it very loudly, or in this case, to send it out with great force in all directions.

They’ll never catch the Wolfman. No way.

A very common way of saying “that is not even possible.”

Who cut the cheese? :: He who smelt it dealt it.

Two ridiculous lines; The first is asking who was the person who farted (or passed gas). The second is a silly expression which says that the person who smelled it first is probably the person who did it.

Milner ain’t going to beat that. His time had come.

If a person’s “time has come,” something very important is about to happen to them (either good or bad).

Sweetheart, if the prize is you, I’m a ready-teddy.

John’s ridiculous way of saying that he is ready and available.

Catch them at the light. Then you jump out and flatten their tires.

“To flatten” a person’s tires is to let the air out of them.

Those were good ponies. Had to train them special, myself.

A “pony” is a baby horse. “To train” an animal is to teach it how to behave, or to do special tricks or acts.

I got a jeep pickup with your four wheel drive. It’s got a gun rack.

A “jeep pickup” is a type of car, and four wheel drive is a type of stick shift (for shifting gears when increasing speed). A “gun rack” is metal bars for holding guns, usually placed on the roof of a car.

I figure with bears, it’s me or them.

“To figure” means to think. This is Terry’s way of saying that he has to shoot the bears he hunts, since they will kill him if he doesn’t.

Jesus, it’s like Grand Central Station around here.

The central train station in New York City, and a very crowded and busy place.

You had me nervous there for a second.  
One way of saying “you made me nervous.”

He brought your name up at the Moose Hall.  
“To bring up” a person’s name is to talk about them.

He means we’re all done having loads of fun out here.  
One way of saying a lot of fun (A load is a large amount).

I hope you’ll be taking along with you a little piece of this place.  
Note the play on words; This can refer to a memory of the place,  
or more literally, a physical piece of the place, such as the money in it!

What he said goes for me too.  
“I also agree with what he says.”

Something Curt said. :: Oh, figures.  
“It figures” is a common way of saying “I’m not surprised.”

***Steve and Laurie break up (for a while), as John and Carol  
and Terry and Debbie continue with their adventures.***

You must have talked his ear off trying to get him to stay.  
“To talk somebody’s ear off” is to talk to them for a very long time,  
often in hopes of convincing them to do something.

Curt just said at dinner that he didn’t see what the big hurry was.  
Note that “hurry” can be either a verb or noun.

He said that he ought to stick around and go to the JC for a while.  
“To stick around” is a common colloquial way of saying to stay.

Laurie, you know what I want out of life, and it’s just not in this town.  
A classic belief that many film characters have expressed  
about the limits of staying in a small town.

You want it and you know it! Don’t be so damn self-righteous  
with me! After all that stuff about watching your brother.  
A Person who is “self-righteous” acts as if they are being  
more moral and noble than other people around them.

You’re disgusting! Get out of my car!  
An important word meaning horribly unpleasant, revolting or gross.

Whenever he strikes, he leaves a bloody goat head next to the victim. Isn't that creepy?

In this case, "to strike" is to physically attack. "Creepy" is an excellent adjective that means horribly unpleasant and scary.

They found the bodies....right here at the canal, all hacked to pieces.

If a body has been "hacked to pieces," it's been cut up in small bits.

Who do you think will take the regionals there?

A reference to regional (geographic) divisions in college football.

How do I get into these things?

"How did I become involved in all of this?"

I put it in the garage for safekeeping.

To store something "for safekeeping" is to hold it in a place where it will not be harmed or damaged.

I guess we broke up. :: Broke up? Bull.

A couple that "breaks up" separates and ends their romantic relationship. "Bull" is short for bullshit.

You're an ogre, just like my father.

A scary and cruel man.

The night is young, and I'm not hitting the rack until I get a little action.

"To hit the rack" is Carol's way of saying to go to sleep, though this is never used. "A little action" usually has a sexual connotation, though here it probably just means a little excitement.

Grab on to something.

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

That must be your mama's car.

"Mama" is an old-fashioned word for mother, and when used in this context, it is a way of insulting a person (or more specifically, their car).

A field car runs through the field, and drops cow shit all over the place to make the lettuce grow.

A "field" is a an area of land where farmers often grow food.

I like the color of your car; Sort of a cross between piss-yellow and puke-green, ain't it?

"A cross between" two colors is a mix of the two.

"Puke" is a vulgar word for vomit or throw-up.

Your car is uglier than I am! That didn't come out right.

One way of saying "that isn't what I meant to really say."

What are you doing? Trying to pick up a few extra bucks baby sitting?

To "pick up" some extra money is to earn it working at a temporary job. A "buck" is a very common colloquial word for a dollar.

Anybody know a blonde in a white T-bird?

A very sporty type of car.

She's out of your price range.

This is Joe's way of saying that she is a very expensive prostitute.

My brother's been out with her. He clued me in.

"To clue in" a person is to tell them something interesting that they did not previously know (A clue is a small piece of information).

30 bucks for that broad?

A still used but ridiculous slang word for a woman.

***Curt almost becomes a Pharaoh, Terry confesses to Debbie, and John's date with Carol comes to an end.***

You have three possibilities: One, you chicken out. In that case, I let Ants tie you to the car and drag you around a bit.

"To chicken out" is to refuse to do something because you're too scared.

Two, you foul up and Holstein hears you.

"To foul up" is to fail, or do something very badly, though you should know to *screw-up* is much more common (Holstein is the cop).

Three, you are successful and you join the Pharaohs with a car coat and a blood initiation and all of that.

A "blood initiation" is some type of ceremony to join a group or gang in which blood is involved (A car coat is the paint that is put on a car, in this case to show that the driver is a member of a gang).

You sure you got enough slack?

"Slack" is extra rope or string that hangs loose which allows for flexibility ("To give a person some slack" is to be flexible with them).

Yeah, it's been building up inside of me like a volcano all night!  
A dramatic way to describe a strong emotion or desire. In this case, John's way of describing his growing sexual desire.

We broke up. It's no big deal.  
A very common way of saying that something is not important.

All right, all right, you old fart! Relax!  
A vulgar and very mean insult! A "fart" is the act of passing gas.

Buddha, I got to get up early, and I just don't think it would work out.  
If something doesn't "work out," there isn't a good result or outcome.

What do you mean "I guess so"?  
Note how a person can quote the exact words of another.

Rome wasn't burned in a night.  
Joe's funny variation to the expression "Rome wasn't *built* in a day," which means that important things often take a long time to do.

Don't say anything and we'll get along just fine.  
"To get along fine" describes when two people are friendly or cordial with each other, but it's not as warm as to get along *well*.

Wait a minute! Don't go overboard with this thing.  
"To go overboard" about something is to over react, usually in a very excited manner.

Aren't you the one who told me that you have to leave the nest sometime?  
A home for birds, usually found in trees, and sometimes used to refer to the security of a person's home.

You're just mentally playing with yourself.  
A word that refers to the mind or intellect (but not physical body).

Where are you going? It's awfully early in the morning.  
A widely used adverb that means very.

We can hot-wire it!  
To "hot-wire" a car is to start it without a key, just by using the electrical system.

Why the hell do they bother? You've been #1 as long as I can remember.  
If a person asks "Why bother?," they are implying that something can't be done, or that it isn't important enough to do.

I've been sick recently and this kind of activity can be really hard on a guy.  
If something is "hard on" a person, it is very difficult for them.

Wow, you're just like the lone ranger.  
A well-know film and TV character who rode horses in the Old West.

Just bring the ice, pronto.  
An Italian word that means immediately.

I had a good time; You picked me up....and saw a hold-up...  
"To pick up" a person is a very common way of saying to romantically attract them. A "hold-up" is a robbery, usually done with a gun.

I got a little vespa that I play around with.  
A well known moped, which is a type of very small motorcycle.

***Wolfman Jack gives Curt the courage he needs, John teaches Bob a lesson....and Steve makes a choice between Laurie and school.***

Push the red switch down.  
A "switch" is the small device used to turn lights on and off.

I'm looking for a girl. :: Aren't we all?  
A poetic and clever way of responding to the first sentence!

Have a popsicle. The icebox just broke down  
and they're melting all over the place.  
A "popsicle" is an ice cream dessert on a small wooden stick.

That's just a dedication; What I can do is relay it.  
A "dedication" is a small note of respect or admiration for somebody, usually spoken or written before a song, book or other artistic work.  
"To relay" a message is to send it from place to another.

If the Wolfman were here, he'd say "Get your ass in gear."  
A slangy way of saying "Start getting things done in your life!"

He comes in here occasionally bringing  
tapes, to check up on me, and what not.  
"To check up" on a person is to make sure they are OK, or are doing their job well. "And what not" is a way of saying "and other things."

Sticky little mothers, aren't they?  
A very slangy way of referring to things in general, and even people.

You're a weird broad.

A ridiculous way of saying a strange woman.

You're going to be hanging on for all mercy when I get this sucker rolling.

"To hang on for all mercy" is Joe's way of saying to physically hold on to something tight (because the car will be going so fast). "Sucker" is another silly slang word that refers to objects or things in general.

Some guy named Falfa is going up against Milner.

"To go up" against a person is to challenge them, in this case to an auto race.

Mind your own business! You take care of yourself.

A very common way of telling someone to stop trying to find out personal or intimate information about somebody else.

Steven, please don't leave me. I couldn't bear it.

If a person can't "bear it," they can't accept that situation.

He had me, man. He was pulling away just before we crashed.

John's way of saying that Joe was actually winning the race.

You creamed him from right off the line.

"To cream a person" is to badly beat them in a competition  
"Right off the line" means from the starting line of the race.

You got the bitchinist car in the valley.

A very dated slang word for 'cool' that sounds truly horrible!

Stay cool and don't do anything I wouldn't do.

General advice that many people love to give.

You're probably think you're a big shot going off like this, but you're still a punk.

A "big shot" is a person who is very important or accomplished

**So long.**

A very common way of saying goodbye.

Missing in action, near An Loc in December 1965.

The official military expression for when a soldier cannot be found during a war. An Loc is a village in Vietnam.

Insurance agent.

A person who sells insurance.

# **American Graffiti**

## **Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion**

1. Do you remember the first time you left home for a long time? What were your feeling?
2. If you were Curt, would you have stayed or left? What if you were Steve?
3. Was Steve being selfish or just realistic when he told Laurie that they should date other people when he went away to college?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of growing up in a smaller town like the one in this movie?
5. Why was it important to set this in film in 1962, as opposed to, say, 1967?
6. Did you like the music?
7. Who was your favorite character?
8. What did you like and not like about this movie?

