

Mr. Smith goes to Washington

(Drama) (1939)

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Major Characters

Jefferson (Jeff) Smith.....James Stewart
 A likeable, innocent and idealistic young man who is well known in his state for promoting boys' summer camps. He is chosen by the Governor to become a Senator after the state's senior Senator dies.

Senator Joe Paine.....Claude Rains
 The other Senator from Jeff's state who has been in the US Senate for the last 20 years, and who, despite his good reputation and decent intentions, is generally controlled by corrupt political forces.

Clarissa Saunders.....Jean Arthur
 A sweet and very smart secretary in Senator Paine's office who tries to help Jeff get used to political life after he arrives in Washington, and who later helps him expose the horrible corruption in his state.

Jim Taylor.....Edward Arnold
 A very rich, powerful and corrupt businessman who runs a horrible "political machine," through which he controls most of the politicians and many of the newspapers and other big businesses in his state.

Governor "Happy" Hopper.....Guy Kibbee
 A weak and pitiful politician who is completely controlled by Taylor, who must appoint one of his state's two Senators after one of them dies.

Diz Moore.....Thomas Mitchell
 A cynical Washington reporter who wants to marry Clarissa Saunders.

President of the Senate.....Harry Carey
 A fair-minded Senator who controls how things are run in the Senate.

Plot Summary

This film, made during the great depression of the 1930s and just before the start of World War 2, is considered one of the true classics in the history of American movies. It is the story of Jefferson Smith, an idealistic young man from an unnamed Western state who is a local hero for having organized various boys' camps while helping run the "Boy Rangers." The Rangers are an educational, outdoors and sports organization that is similar to the Boy Scouts of today (A "ranger" takes care of large forests and parks, and a "scout" is a person sent to obtain information, who is often in the military).

After one of his state's two Senators dies, Jeff is appointed to be the temporary replacement Senator by the state's Governor. Soon, Jeff takes off for Washington in the company of the state's other Senator, Joe Paine, who is a hero of Jeff's and was a friend of his father. Jeff has high hopes, and is just grateful to be able to serve in the city he associates with the democratic ideals of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. Yet soon after arriving, Jeff quickly realizes that Washington is a mean-spirited and often corrupt town, and that in fact, Senator Paine is one of the most corrupt people there.

After trying to write a law that would set aside some land at Wilet Creek for a national boy's camp, Jeff accidentally discovers that this land has been secretly bought by Taylor and his political machine. He does this so that he can make a huge amount of money when he sells the land to the state after convincing it to build a dam there. Yet rather than stay quiet, Jeff decides to fight both Senator Paine and Taylor in order to save the land for his camp and to expose the horrible corruption of his state's politicians. Soon, the entire Taylor machine sets out to destroy Jeff and his reputation, but with the help of Clarissa Saunders, Jeff fights back against long odds. He does so in order to save both his own reputation and to live up to the original ideals of American democracy.

A quick note on the language used in this film: Although this movie is now over 60 years old, most of the language is still current and very useful. Still, there are quite a number of very old-fashioned expressions, and because there is so much vocabulary to learn here, some of the most dated vocabulary is ignored.

Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

A Senator dies, and Jeff Smith, local state hero, is chosen to replace him.

At the bedside was state political sidekick Senator Joseph Paine.

A person's "sidekick" is their partner or associate, but one who is considered less important or subordinate.

What's up, Harry?

A very common and colloquial way to greet a person after you haven't seen them for a while. A way of saying "What's new in your life?"

This is no time for jokes. I've got to appoint a new Senator.

"To appoint" a person to officially name them to an office or position.

I can't put off those howling citizens any longer.

In this case, "to put off" a person is to try and delay them.

If a person is "howling," they are crying loudly like a dog.

Ten to one they've got a man.

This refers to the odds or likelihood that something will happen.

It's high time I told Jim Taylor a thing or two.

To tell a person "a thing or two" is to speak frankly or very honestly to them, probably about something that has made you angry or upset.

If you and Joe gab any longer about this appointment...

"To gab" is to talk in a fast and thoughtless manner.

You'll see those committees when we're finished.

Note the tone!: Taylor is telling the governor "You'll do what I tell you."

That's telling him, Happy, old boy!

A slangy way of saying "You did a good job of expressing your anger."

With this Wiley Creek Dam coming up, the man who takes Foley's place...can't ask questions or talk out of turn.

In this case, to "come up" means to arrive or appear. If a person talks "out of turn," they're interrupting or speaking when it's not appropriate.

Suppose we don't go through with this dam. Suppose we postpone it until the next session of Congress, or drop it all together?

"Suppose" is a way of saying "what if...". Here, "to go through" with a project is to finish or complete it. "To postpone" something is to delay it, and to "drop it" is to cancel it, probably forever.

After all the work we put in on it, getting it buried in this deficiency bill.

"To put in" a lot of work on something is to do a lot of work. In this film, a "deficiency bill" refers to a spending bill or law, which today is called an *appropriations bill*. Note that specific parts of a bill can be "buried" in such a way that nobody notices it is there.

It's rolling along. It's Like taking candy from a baby.

If something is "rolling along," it is moving forward smoothly.

"Taking candy from a baby" refers to anything that is very easy to do.

Look at the campaign I started for you in all my papers.

In this case, a "campaign" is a publicity campaign, designed to promote a Senator's career. Here, "papers" refer to newspapers.

A little obscure, isn't it?

If something is "obscure," it is hard to see or understand.

You're the logical man from the West for the national ticket.

In this case, the "national ticket" refers to the two people that a political party will nominate for President and Vice President of the US.

At the convention, anything can happen.

A "convention" is a large meeting of people for a common purpose. In this case, to name the candidate for President of a political party.

We've been quietly buying up all the land around that dam and holding it in dummy names.
Fake names that are used so that the public will not know who the real buyers are.

The investigation would show that we're going to sell it to the states under phony names.
If a name is "phony," it is fake or not real.

Horace Miller!? :: A born stooge! He'll perform like a trained seal.
A "stooge" is a funny word for a person who is the victim of another's jokes, or perhaps a person who plays a subordinate roll. "To perform" a roll is to play it as if you were an actor, and a "trained seal" is a marine animal that is often used in circuses since it's easy to teach them silly tricks.

If I throw a party man.... :: For reasons I can't go into now, it's got to be Horace Miller, understand?
In this case, a "party man" refers to a person who is a member of a political party (most likely the Democratic or Republican party).
To "go into" something is to explain it or discuss it in detail.

I've got to see those angry committees. :: Work for harmony, Jim!
A "committee" is a small group of people who work on different projects, in this case in the US Senate. "Harmony" is a musical term that also refers to the ability of people to get along well together.

There was one man who shone out like a beacon; The honorable Horace Miller.
Note that "shone" is an old-fashioned way of making the past tense of the verb to shine. A "beacon" is a lighthouse or source of light that acts as a signal or sign. "Honorable" is a used to refer to a person when you want to show great respect.

The New Citizen's Committee won't stand for this.
In this case, "to stand for" something means to accept it.

You won't like him, Jim. :: Come on, who?
The most common and versatile phrasal verb in the English language, here meaning "please" or "be serious."

Harry Hill?! That crackpot?
A good word for a person who acts in a crazy manner or believes totally ridiculous things.

That bunch is out for blood.
If a person is "out for blood," they are extremely angry and are likely to commit an act of revenge or violence.

I won't let you stand there callously and wreck my whole political future.
 If a person is "callous," they are insensitive or have no feeling or compassion for others. "To wreck" something is to destroy it.

I bought it for you, and I can grab it back so fast it will make your head swim.
 "To grab" something is to take it suddenly or with great force.
 If something "makes your head swim," it shocks or stuns you.

You've got a nerve to sit there and worry about your political future when were in a spot like this.
 If a person "has nerve," they are acting in a very presumptuous or possibly offensive way. To be "in a spot" is to be in a difficult situation.

You're in a deuce of a pickle, aren't you, pop?
 To be "in a pickle" is also to be in a difficult situation, but the above expression is no longer used with the word deuce (A deuce is the word for any playing card with the number two). "Pop" is slang for dad.

Looks like Horace Miller or else.
 This is a common way of saying there will be a lot of trouble unless something specific happens (In this case, unless Horace Miller is chosen).

I wouldn't appoint an old twerp like Horace Miller, Taylor or no Taylor.
 A "twerp" is a still popular insult word for a silly or unimportant person.

He's still running the show, ain't he, pop?
 If a person is "running the show," they are the one in charge of what is happening. "Pop" is a common slang word for dad (Note that you should avoid the ungrammatical word "ain't"---In this case, say "isn't").

Forgive my abysmal ignorance, but I don't know this Jefferson Smith from a whole in the ground.
 "Abysmal" is a powerful adjective meaning horribly low or bad. If you don't know a person from a whole in the ground, you don't know anything about them!

He puts it out by himself. And Stuff has the swellest stuff in it.
 "To put out" a magazine is to publish or produce it. Here, "Stuff" is the name of Jeff's magazine, but it usually means things in general. "Swell" is an old fashioned way of saying good, excellent, or more colloquially, cool.

I'm in no mood to listen to childish prattle.
 "Prattle" refers to the act of making meaningless sounds like children.

That settles it! I will not be belittled by my own children in my own home!
 "That settles it" is a way of saying "It is now decided."
 "To belittle" a person is to talk about them in a condescending way, or in a way that makes them feel less important than they are.

All my nerves are strained to the breaking point.

In this case, if a nerve is “strained,” it is pulled apart or exhausted.

Heads Hill, tails Miller.

“Heads and tails” are the two sides of a coin, which is often flipped (thrown in the air) to decide who wins a bet or contest.

A boy ranger and squirrel chaser to the United States Senate?

A type of cute but wild and small animal seen often in city parks.

The simpleton of all times? A big-eyed patriot?

A “simpleton” is a person who is very naïve, ignorant or stupid.

He even collects stray boys and cats.

A “stray cat” is one who wanders city streets, who does not have an owner or anyone to take care of them.

Happy may have hit on something tremendous here.

“To hit on something” is to think of something that may be very useful or important. “Tremendous” is another word for very big or important.

Do you really think you can handle this ‘what-you-may-call-him in Washington?

“To handle” a person is to be able to control them or deal with them. Note that “what-you-may-call-him” is dated. Today, when you don’t know a person’s name, you say “*what’s-his(her)-name.*”

A young patriot recites Lincoln and Jefferson

....turned loose in our nation’s capital.

“To recite” a famous person’s words is to say them out loud. If a person is “turned loose,” they are set free to do whatever they want.

A star-spangled banquet!

If something is “star-spangled,” it is covered with stars (The “Star-spangled Banner” is the US national Anthem). A “banquet” is a fancy dinner or meal held in honor of a special occasion.

How did he confer that honor? Did he give it to some wealthy citizen merely to curry favor?

“To confer” an honor is to officially give it to a person. “To curry favor” is a literary way of saying to do something that others will appreciate, so that they will do something for you in return.

Did he give it to some unworthy political hireling?

If a person is “unworthy,” they do not deserve what is being given to them. A “hireling” is a rare word for a person who is hired to do a job.

He went down among the people....and there he found a nugget.

A “nugget” is a small, valuable lump of rock that is often made of gold.

We gather here tonight...to acclaim and
wish God speed to Senator Jefferson Smith!

“To acclaim” a person is to publicly applaud or praise them for their greatness. To “wish a person God speed” is a religious way of wishing them good luck.

Come on, get up. Take a bow.

To accept the applause of an audience by bending the head or body in a show of respect.

I’ll do nothing to disgrace this office of United States Senator.

“To disgrace” an office is to do something so bad or horrible that it reflects poorly even on the position of the person who does the act.

We are happy to take this opportunity to present this small token of our affection and esteem.

A “small token” is a little gesture, gift or sign, often to show appreciation. “Esteem” is the quality of holding somebody in high regard or respect.

Aw, heck, it’s a briefcase, Jeff. We all pitched in, Jeff.

“Heck” is an old-fashioned and gentle way of expressing emotion such as frustration. A “briefcase” is a flat case for carrying papers or books. “To pitch in” to buy something is to contribute money to its purchase.

Jeff arrives in Washington, city of his American heroes.

“Boy’s Stuff.” Why, printer’s ink runs in your veins!

“Printer’s ink” is the ink that is used to print newspapers. A person’s “veins” are the small narrow tubes in your body that carry blood. If something “runs in your veins,” it is a big part of you.

Clayton Smith, editor and publisher, champion of lost causes.

A “champion of lost causes” is a person who works hard for a political cause that has little chance of being accepted by most people.

We were a team. Struggling editor and struggling lawyer.

A person who is “struggling” is one who works very hard to accomplish something despite great difficulties or obstacles.

He and his little four-page paper...against that mining syndicate.

In this case, “the mining syndicate” refers to powerful coal mining companies that fought against the rights of the coal miners.

All to defend the rights of one small miner who stuck to his claim.

In this case, a miner who “stuck to his claim” continued to insist he had a right to some property that the coal mining company claimed was theirs.

Bribery, intimidation... :: Ma found him slumped over his desk that morning.

“Bribery” is the act of illegally paying somebody for a favor (it often involves a corrupt politician). “Intimidation” is the act of threatening a person or making them feel insecure. If a person is “slumped over” a desk, their head is lying on the desk, as if they were dead or asleep.

I better see about my pigeons. :: The porter has them.

A “pigeon” is a disgusting type of bird, some of which have been trained to carry written messages to distant places. A “porter” is a person who takes care of the luggage on a train.

He’s marvelous! :: He’s wonderful.

Another word for wonderful, excellent or great.

The one that makes it back home in the best time, I’m going to enter into the nationals.

Here, Jeff is talking about a national contest of pigeons, to see which one can fly the fastest between two locations.

The wildlife around here is a little different from what you’re used to. They wear high heels.

“Wildlife” refers to wild animals, such as lions and bears. “High heels” are the sexy but stupid and uncomfortable shoes that some women wear to make them appear taller than they really are.

Things happen fast around here. :: Yeah, you’ll have to get yourself out of low gear.

In a car with a stick-shift, a “low gear” is the first or second level compared to the faster, higher gears, which are third or fourth. If a person is in low gear, they are moving slowly.

Let’s get these bags and livestock.

Farm animals such as cows and pigs.

Look, the Capital Dome!

The top of the famous building that is home to the US Congress.

I’ll have a light in the belfry, one if by land, two if by sea.

A “belfry” is a rare and old word for a tower with a large bell in it. “One if by land, two if by sea” is a poetic way of saying that the bell will ring once if enemy troops arrive on land, twice if they arrive by sea.

If you’re boyfriend’s going to blaze trails, I’m going to the press club.

A “trailblazer” is a person who is ahead of the times, who leads the way in a profession, the arts or politics (but the expression to blaze trails is rarely used today). A “press club” is a place where important people hold news conferences for reporters.

He'll show up. He must have a compass with him.

“To show up” is a very common phrasal verb meaning to arrive, and a “compass” is a small device that allows a person to know in which direction they are going (North, south, east or west).

In this temple, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever.

A “temple” is a church, or in this case, a memorial building. “To enshrine” something is to preserve it or make sure it lasts, because it is considered sacred or extremely important. Lincoln, of course, was the 16th President of the US, who was in office during the American Civil War (1861-1865).

...And we resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.

“To resolve” to do something is to make a definitive decision about it. If a person “died in vain,” they died for no particular purpose, as opposed to those who perhaps died heroically while saving another person’s life.

That government, for the people, by the people...shall not perish from the earth.

“To perish” is to disappear or be eliminated.

Eight to five that little boy blue is plastered.

“Eight to five” refers to the odds or chances of something happening.

“Little boy blue” is a silly nickname for an innocent man or boy, and if a person is “plastered,” they are completely drunk. A still useful adjective.

When Foley died, why didn't I clear out?

“To clear out” from an office or other place is to leave it.

I'm fed up with politics, and I let them talk me into staying.

If a person is “fed up with” something, they are extremely tired of it.

“To talk a person into” doing something is to convince them to do it.

Security to a leader of little squirts.

A “squirt” is a slang word for a disagreeable kid.

Would you settle for a husband? :: You know my old standing offer.

“To settle for” something is to accept, even though you might want something better. A “standing offer” is a useful expression for an offer to do something that is good forever, or at least until it is officially ended.

I'd cherish you and I'd stay sober. :: Oh, Diz, you're a wonderful egg.

“To cherish” a person is to love them or have great affection for them.

If a person is “sober,” they are not drunk, but rational, calm or intelligible.

Honorary appointment? :: You scratch this thing and you'll find they need a dope here for a couple months.

An “honorary appointment” is the appointment of a person to a position as an award for past achievements, but not because they are qualified for that particular job. A “dope” is good word for an idiot, moron or jerk.

They sure must have picked the prize dummy.

In this case, the most well known idiot or moron.

My dear Senator, it may be customary out on the prairie to take leave of people and not show up for five hours....

If something is “customary,” it is normal or done all the time. “Out on the prairie” refers to flat grasslands that are away from big cities. “To take leave” of a person is a poetic but dated way of saying to leave them.

I’ve never been called absent-minded before.

An excellent adjective for a person who is always forgetting to do what they’re supposed to, or forgetting where they put things (such as keys).

As big as life, sparkling away under the old sun.

If something is “sparkling,” it throws out sparks or little bits of light.

I don’t think I’ve ever been so thrilled in my whole life.

“Thrilled” means very excited, or to have a wave of joyful emotion.

Just sitting there like he was waiting for someone to come along. :: Yeah, well he’s got nothing on me.

If a person “has nothing on you,” this means you are experiencing whatever is being discussed much more than that person (In this case, Clarissa is saying she finds herself constantly forced to wait for people).

You better relax. You’ll get yourself plum wore out.

“Plum” is a fun but dated adverb meaning totally. If a person is “worn out,” they are extremely tired or exhausted.

What time does the Senate....convene?

“To convene” means to cause to assemble or begin a meeting.

I better go out and visit Mount Vernon.

The home of George Washington, outside of Washington DC, in Virginia.

I keep asking myself “What is he? Animal, vegetable or mineral?”

A “mineral” is non-living substance such as coal or rock. It is common to ask if a very strange person is actually an animal, vegetable or mineral.

When I think of myself playing straight for that phony, patriotic chatter. Me!...carry bibs for an infant with little flags in his fists.

“To play straight” is to pretend to be someone you’re not in order to be part of a plan or plot. A “phony” is a person who acts in a way that is fake or not real. “Patriotic chatter” is mindless talk about how great the country is. A “bib” is a large napkin that babies wear to prevent their clothes from spilled food, and a “fist” is a hand with fingers closed in.

Simmer down, here.

An old-fashioned but still used way of saying calm down.

Who's your boss, a **nut**? I knew there was a story.

A "nut" is a very common way of referring to a crazy person.

World Series, a pass. In a month, it will be worth 15 **bucks**.

The "World Series" refers to the championship games of professional baseball. A "buck" is a widely used slang word for a dollar.

What did you say? :: Nothing, **beat it!**

A common and slangy way to tell a person to leave.

How would your **pals** like to **get in on** this.

A "pal" is a friend. "To get in on" a group project or plan is to join it.

Hey, I want a **scoop**.

For a reporter, a "scoop," is a piece of information that allows them to report an important story to the public before anybody else is able to.

Do you have any special **ax to grind**?

A curious expression that means a great deal of anger or emotion against a particular person or thing (An ax is a tool used to chop down trees, and to grind something is to reduce it into small bits by rubbing it down).

You know, save the **buffaloes**, **pension bill**?

A "buffalo" is an animal that was common in the American West before most were killed off. A "pension bill" is a proposed law about pensions, which are financial accounts that are used for when people retire.

Let them learn about nature, American **ideals**.

A key word in this film; "Ideals" are standards of perfection, beauty or excellence, or perhaps a person's most important values or beliefs.

What do you think this would **set the government back**?

If something "sets you back" \$20, it costs that much.

The government just lends us the money for the camp, and then the boys pay it back by sending **pennies**, **nickels**, nothing more than a **dime**.

A "penny, nickel" and "dime" are coins worth one, five and ten cents.

The government's putting too much **dough** into too many places now.

A slang word for money.

Can you **handle** some **sign language**?

Here, "to handle" means to understand or deal with. "Sign language" is the system of hand communications used by the deaf or hard-of-hearing.

I **merely** took him home. I didn't **tuck him in** and give him his bottle.

"Merely" is a useful word which means only. "To tuck in" a person is to put them to bed, making sure the blankets are securely covering them.

Finish this job properly and you'll get a handsome bonus.

In this case, "properly" means done well, and "handsome" means generous or large. A "bonus" is an extra amount of money beyond a worker's salary, often given at the end of the year for a job well done.

I mean, keep Smith away from anything that smacks of politics...including Wilet Creek Dam.

If something "smacks of" politics, it is completely involved in politics.

Jeff is sworn in to office, the press wonders if he's qualified, and Clarissa explains the hard reality of getting a bill passed.

So that's the boy wonder. :: I don't know what the Senate is coming to.

"Boy wonder" is a gentle term of affection for an amazing or very accomplished young man. If a person complains about what the world "is coming to," they are expressing amazement at how bad it has become.

Nice job you and the ambulance chasers did in the papers this morning.

Immoral lawyers are often called "ambulance chasers" because they follow ambulances, hoping to get injured people to file lawsuits.

Daniel Webster sat here? Holy mackerel!

"Holy mackerel" is a fun but very dated way of expressing excitement (A mackerel is a fish and Webster was a famous 19th century Senator).

[It will] give you something to shoot at, if you figure on doing any talking.

In this context, "something to shoot at" is a standard of excellence that serves as a goal. "To figure on doing" something is to think about doing it ("To figure *on*" is dated, but "to figure" is still widely used for "to think").

Anything else you want, just snap for a page.

"To snap" your fingers is to rub your thumb and middle finger together to make a calling sound. Here, a "page" is a young boy who serves as an assistant in formal settings, such as the Senate.

The majority leader right over there. Senator Agnew.

The leader of the party that is in the majority (in this case, in the Senate).

Where's the press gallery?

Those seats that are reserved for reporters.

That corner is reserved for guides and sightseers, who come in for five minutes at a time to rest their feet.

A clever line that suggests the daily business of the Senate is actually quite boring. "Sightseers" are people who visit local tourist attractions.

I'll take your hat to the cloakroom.

A room in public places where hats and coats are stored for guests.

I'd like to give you a Boy Ranger button. :: Swell!

A fun but very old-fashioned way of saying great or excellent!

I see you had a little publicity. Have you got your credentials?

In this case, "publicity" is coverage in the newspapers, and "credentials" are official identification that allow entry into a particular office or place.

The Senate will come to order. The chaplain will pray.

If a group "comes to order," everyone stops talking so that official business can begin. A "chaplain" is a clergyman or a figure chosen to conduct religious exercises at a meeting.

Oh God, heavenly father, while our country labors with such grave and disturbing problems...give us the light and strength to be just and merciful.

The words of a Christian prayer. "To labor" is to work, "grave" is serious or dangerous, and "disturbing" is troublesome or annoying. If a solution is "just," it's fair, and if it's "merciful," it shows compassion or kindness.

I ask unanimous consent that the reading be dispensed with. :: Is there objection?

"Unanimous consent" is agreement by all people present. "Objection" is official disagreement or refusal to accept what has been proposed.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. Clerk will call a roll.

A "quorum" is the minimum number of people needed to have a vote.

"A roll call" is an official calling of names to see who is there at the time.

The Senate-designate is present and I ask that the oath of office be administered at this time.

A "senate-designate" is a person who has been elected or appointed a Senator, but has not yet become one. The "oath of office" is the official words a person says to take the office. "To administer" an oath is to officially give it, by first saying the words that the designate must repeat.

I ask a question of order. I seek to ascertain if the gentleman about to be sworn in is fully aware of the responsibilities of his office.

A "question of order" asks about official procedures or rules. "To ascertain" information is to try and find it, and when a person is "sworn in," they say out loud the official words that allow them to take office.

A versatile performance, I grant you, and one his party will no doubt applaud, but one that brings his rank down to the level of a side-show entertainer...

"Versatile" means varied, or with many sides. "I grant you" is a way of saying "I admit that..." A person's "rank" is their level of position, and a "side-show entertainer" is an unimportant performer, perhaps in a circus.

...that reflects the sincerity, if not the sanity,
of the highest body of lawmakers in the land.

“Sincerity” is honesty and “sanity” is a good word for emotional stability, or more specifically, the quality of not being crazy.

My colleague was incorrect. He was completely misquoted!

A “colleague” is a fellow worker or friend, usually in the same profession.

“To misquote” a person is to say they said words they did not really say.

I know Jefferson Smith, and I will personally vouch for him.

“To vouch” for a person is to guarantee their honesty or integrity.

“Do you solemnly swear to defend the Constitution of the
United States, against all enemies, foreign and domestic...

The words that every political office holder in the US must say in order to take their office. “To solemnly swear” is to promise to tell the truth.

.... and that you will bear true faith and allegiance to the same.

“Allegiance” is another word for loyalty.

That you take this obligation freely, without
mental reservation or purpose of evasion?”

In this case, “mental reservation” is hesitation, and “evasion” is the act of misleading, lying or perhaps avoiding the truth.

The public and government agencies are in desperate need of the funds.

“Public agencies” are organizations like non-profit groups or social clubs.

“Government agencies” are divisions within the government, such as the Defense or Education Department.

Smith is punching everybody he meets.... Uh oh, Tarzan!

“To punch” a person is to hit them with your fist. “Tarzan” is a well-known fictional character who lives in the jungle.

This morning they read that an incompetent clown had
arrived in Washington, parading like a member of the Senate.

“Incompetent” is unskilled, clumsy or awkward.

In this case, “to parade” means to perform or act.

We tell them when phonies and crackpots come here to make their laws.

A “phony” is a fake or dishonest person, and a

“crackpot” is a person with crazy or ridiculous ideas.

You’re an honorary stooge. You ought to be shown up.

A “stooge” is person who is the victim of another’s jokes, or a person who plays a subordinate roll. Here, to be “shown up” means to be exposed as a phony, but this phrasal verb is rarely used like this today.

If I'm going to vote, I ought to at least study the bills that are coming up.
In this context, a "bill" is a proposed law that will be voted on.

You were in earnest about that, weren't you?
To be "earnest" about something is to be honest or sincere about it.

Senator Paine, I've been aching to mention it to you.
If a person is "aching" to do something, they want to do it so much they are in pain about it (To ache is to suffer pain, especially in the muscles).

I'm sort of anxious to get back to the office.
To be "anxious to" do something is to be eager or determined to do it (But if you *are* anxious, you are probably nervous or worried).

I released one with a letter and he flew
right straight up in the air to get his bearings.
"To get your bearings" is to try and get a sense of direction or orientation.

He headed west just like a bat out of...just like a rifle shot.
To leave like a "bat out of *hell*" is to leave very quickly.
A "rifle" is a large gun, and a "rifle shot" is the act of firing it.

And with Honest Abe's ideals.
"Honest Abe" is a nickname for President Lincoln.

Have you the faintest idea what it takes to get a bill passed?
"Faintest" is an interesting adjective meaning weakest possible.

Senator, do you mind if I give you a rough idea what you're up against?
"A rough idea" is a very general idea or explanation. To be "up against" a group of people is to have to fight or struggle against them.

Simple, and I'm helping, so we knock it off in three or four days.
In this case, to "knock off" a bill is to write and complete it.

In all civilized countries, there's an institution called dinner.
"Civilized" refers to any society with modern institutions such as laws and governments. This is Clarissa's way of saying she doesn't want to work all night without eating.

You get to your feet....take a long breath and start spouting.
"To spout" is to speak, usually for a long time and in a dramatic fashion.

Committees. Small groups of Senators have to sift a bill down.
A "committee" is a group of people who usually work on a particular project, and "to sift a bill down" is to reduce it in size so that everybody will be able to understand it.

You can't take a bill that nobody's heard of and discuss it among 96 men.
 Note that in 1939, the US Senate only had 96 members (all men!). This is because there were only 48 states (There are two Senators per state, and Alaska and Hawaii did not become states until 1959).

It goes over to the House of Representatives.
 The other branch of the US Congress, apart from the Senate.

Your bill has to stand way back in line unless the steering committee thinks it's important.
 A committee in the House of Representatives (usually just called "The House") that decides the general priorities or goals of the two parties.

More amendments, more changes, and the bill goes back to the Senate.
 An "amendment" to a bill or law is a change that is added to it after it has already been written, voted on, or even enacted into law.

The House doesn't like these changes? Stymied!
 If a person (or bill) is "stymied," they can no longer move forward because obstacles or blockages have been put in their way.

They go into a huddle, called a conference, and then battle it out.
 A "huddle" is a small group of people who come together to discuss an issue. If two sides "battle it out," they fight or argue.

If your bill is still alive after all of this vivisection, it comes to a vote.
 A unpleasant word to describe the cutting up of a living animal for scientific purposes (This is Clarissa's way of saying that getting a bill passed is both hard work and not enjoyable to look at).

Yes, the big day finally arrives and Congress adjourns. Catching on, Senator?
 If a meeting "adjourns," it officially stops until called back at a later date.
 "To catch on" is a useful phrasal verb meaning to begin to understand.

How many boys will it accommodate?
 Here, "to accommodate" boys means to house or fit them (in a camp).

Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books.
 "Liberty" is another word for freedom, and if something is "precious," it is very valuable or rare.

Let's get on with this.
 To get on with" something is to begin it or start it again.

The prairies, and the wind leaning on the tall grass, lazy streams down in the meadows,....and water up in the mountains.
 "Prairies" are open grasslands, "streams" are tiny rivers, and "meadows" are open spaces filled with grass or flowers.

He had it all worked out.

If a person has their life “all worked out,” they know exactly what they want to do.

Baltimore. Pure city dweller.

A “city dweller” is a person who lives in a big city, and in this case, a person who has little experience with the country.

Father was a doctor. He thought more of ethics than he did of collections. Speaks well for father, but...

“Ethics” is the study or practice of moral behavior. Here, “collections” refers to the collection of money, but this is no longer used. If something “speaks well for” a person, it makes them look good.

I’ve never known anyone as capable and intelligent.

A good word meaning competent, or having the ability to do things that require certain skills or talents.

All right. I’ve got the “Saunders business” straightened out.

To “straighten out” a problem is to take care of it.

The location of this camp, about 200 acres, situated in Abore County, in Terry Canyon....running about a quarter mile of either side of Wilet Creek.

An “acre” is a small unit of land, about the size of a small city block.

A “county” is the biggest administrative division within a state.

The show’s about to commence. There’s the principal actor in our little play. “Don Quixote” Smith; Man with bill.

“To commence” is to begin. “The principal actor” in a play is the most important or main actor. “Don Quixote” is the name of a famous character in Spanish literature who is known for being too idealistic and not realistic (A *quixotic* person is overly romantic or idealistic).

One of the supporting characters. The guerilla in man’s clothing, McGann.

A “supporting character” in a play is one of the secondary characters who is not as important as the principal character. A “guerilla” is a type of animal that is similar to an ape or monkey.

You mean puss’n’boots. :: Yeah, mostly “puss.”

A nickname for a cat, but a “sourpuss” is an angry or upset person.

Another prominent character....guest of honor on a tight rope.

If a character is “prominent,” it is important or very noticeable.

A “guest of honor” at a dinner is the person people come to see or pay their respects to. A “tight rope” is a rope hung in the air that certain circus performers try to walk across.

You wouldn’t be a little bit goofy, would you?

A funny and perhaps gentle word for odd, bizarre or strange.

It is so ordered. Introduction of joint new bills and joint resolutions.

This first sentence is an official way of declaring something has been ordered. Here, a “joint resolution” is an official declaration passed by both the Senate and House of Representatives.

Clarissa grows fond of Jeff, and considers how to protect him from the corruption all around him.

The chair recognizes the rather strong-lunged junior Senator. You may proceed.

“The chair” refers to the person who is directing the conversation.
 “Rather” is a widely used adverb meaning somewhat, or kind of. If a person is “strong-lunged,” they can shout loudly (though this is rarely used---note that person’s lungs are the organs that allow them to breath).
 A state’s “junior Senator” has served less time than its Senior Senator.
 “To proceed” is to begin, continue or move forward.

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives that there be appropriated as a loan, a sum sufficient to create a national boy’s camp...

“To enact” a law is to pass it. If money is “appropriated,” it is approved for spending by a vote. A “sum” is an amount or number, and if it is “sufficient,” it is just enough.

Boys of all creeds, kinds and positions. To educate them in American ideals and promote mutual understanding.

A person’s “creed” is their religious belief, and “mutual understanding” is the idea that two or more people or groups can understand or at least respect each other’s beliefs, viewpoints and differences.

Our young Senator will make a good orator when his voice stops changing.

An “orator” is a person who is known for their skill as a public speaker.

I’m getting leery of this guy. We keep calling him dumb and he keeps getting in our hair.

If you are “leery” of a person, you’re suspicious or don’t trust them.
 If a person gets “in your hair,” they cause you lots of problems.

When he finds out a dam’s going up where he wants a boys camp, he’s going to start asking questions six ways from Sunday.

A “dam” is a extremely large structure for holding water
 (“Six ways from Sunday” is an interesting but dead expression!)

Tomorrow, I’m taking him out to see monuments.

A “monument” is a large stone building, usually built in honor of a famous dead person (In Washington DC, the best known monuments are for Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln).

My daughter is not here to carry out assignments like that for anybody.

“To carry out” a job is to do it, and “an assignment” is a specific job or project that a person is given to complete.

Washington phonies, office seekers, cranks.

A “crank” is a slang word for a crazy person who believes in completely ridiculous ideas, or who is trying to manipulate or steal from others.

“Get my son in or out of West Point.”

A very well known military school in New York state.

A woman out there has composed a song to replace The Star-Spangled Banner.

“To compose” is to write music. “The Star-Spangled Banner” is the national anthem or official song of the United States (If something is “spangled,” it is covered or sprinkled, and a banner is a large sign).

What do you think Senator Paine thought? :: Oh, he was tickled pink.

If a person is “tickled pink” about something, they’re very happy about it.

Do you want to dictate them? :: No, ...I’ll sit here and scratch them down.

“To dictate” a letter is to write it down as it’s being read out loud (Note that a secretary will *write* it down, but not ever scratch it down!)

If I tell it right, you’ll get the best jar of preserves you’ve ever tasted.

A type of fruit jelly or jam.

I’m elected to snatch Mr. Smith from the Senate tomorrow.

“To snatch” something is to take it forcefully, often without permission.

I’m to turn my glamour on for him. You sympathize, don’t you?

“Glamour” is charm or romantic attractiveness. “To sympathize” with a person is to agree with, or understand why they’re doing something.

Awkward, isn’t it?

An important word to describe any behavior that lacks social grace or causes embarrassment.

A manicure and a haircut wouldn’t do any harm.

The treatment or even painting of the fingernails.

Escort you? Yes, I’d be delighted.

“To escort” a person is to accompany them in order to serve as a guide or perhaps to protect them.

Where are your bitters? :: In the thing there, behind the thing.

A type of alcoholic drink. The second sentence is a classic example of a person who needs to think more about the language they use!

I don't mind who gets licked in a fair fight.

If a person is "licked" in a fight, they are badly beaten.

It's these clouts below the belt I can't take.

A "clout" is a strike or hit, but this is rarely ever used. To hit a person "below the belt" is to fight unfairly or in a dirty fashion.

Sicking that horrible dame on him when he's goofy about her.

"To sick" a person on another is to have the first attack the second (or in this case, to seduce the second). A "dame" is a very dated word for a woman, and to be "goofy about" a person is to like them in an excited and romantic way, though this is also somewhat old-fashioned.

Imagine reading "My Day" by Susan Paine in the neck.

A silly play on words about Senator Paine's daughter;
A *pain* in the neck is a person who is always causing problems.

She has to twist a knife in him, too. The regal jackass.

"To twist" a knife into a person is to slowly insert it while turning it.
"Regal" means royal (as in a king's family), and a "jackass" is an excellent insult noun meaning a jerk, idiot, moron, etc.

What's it to you?

A common way of saying "Why do you care (about this)?"

The dopes are going to inherit the earth anyway.

A "dope" is an idiot or jerk or fool.

I wonder if this Don Quixote hasn't got the jump on all of us.

Don Quixote is the idealistic character from Spanish literature, and if a person "has the jump" on somebody, they are intelligently thinking ahead of the other person in order to get what they want.

I wonder if it isn't a curse to go through life wised up like you and me.

A "curse" is evil or misfortune that comes to a person, perhaps because of the wishes of a God or witch. If a person is "wise," they are smart or thoughtful, and thus you can tell a person to "wise up," though it's never used in the passive tense as it is here.

Come on, snap out of it! Drink up!

A way to tell a depressed person to force themselves to feel better.

Watching the little fellow toddling off in his best bib and tucker, hoping he can stand up to the other kids.

A "fellow" is another word for guy, to "toddle off" is to walk like a baby or small child, though this is no longer used. A "bib" is a cloth that a baby wears to protect their clothes from spilled food, and a "tucker" is a piece of cloth, but this is never used. "To stand up to" another person is to resist them, or to refuse to let them do something bad to you or others.

Cut it out!

An excellent colloquial expression which means “Stop it!”

I’m squeamish, see.

If a person is “squeamish,” they become easily nervous or sick when seeing things like blood, needles and snakes.

I won’t be party to no murder. I’m going to quit. I’m through.

If a person is “party to” a murder, they are involved in committing it.

I’d cherish you. :: You’re a good egg, Diz.

“To cherish” a person is to hold them dear or with great affection (A “good egg” is Clarissa’s way of saying a good person, but this, unfortunately, is no longer used).

Maybe we could clear out of this town. Get to feel like people.

“To clear out of” a city is slangy way of saying to leave it (Note that when discussing a city negatively, people will often use the word town!).

Do we have to? :: No, I can’t think of anything more sappy.

A good little word to describe something so overly romantic that it’s silly.

I want to give you a chance to back out if you don’t like it.

“To back out” of a plan or promise is to decide to not do it after all.

You don’t know any name offhand you like better, do you?

“Offhand” is a way of saying “without really thinking about it.”

Steering a poor dope up blind alleys for that Taylor mob is low enough, but helping that dame cut him in little bits...

“To steer” a person is to lead them in a certain direction. A “blind alley” is a small narrow roadway with no lights, where it’s easy to get lost, hurt or mislead. A “dame” is an old slang word for a woman, and “to cut a person into little bits” is a way of saying to hurt, destroy or kill them.

It was a wonderful party and your suit went over big.

If something “goes over” big, it is much liked by the public.

It was the way she said it. You nearly fell through the floor.

A fun but dated way of saying to be amazed, or here, totally charmed.

Horseradish!

This is a type of bitter herb, and a very old-fashioned way to say bullshit!

A lady wouldn’t work for this outfit. I can’t take it anymore.

An “outfit” can be an office, business or organization.

This is no place for you. You're half-way **decent**.

A "decent" person has good morals and treats others fairly.

They read all about it in the Senate today, but you weren't supposed to be here. That's why that **ritzy** dame **took you in tow**.

If a woman is "ritzy," she is very fashionable or perhaps a bit snobby.

"To take a person in tow" is to take them with you, but this is rare (A tow-truck pulls disabled cars behind it to the mechanic's shop).

Go ahead...try and **mess up** Mr. Taylor's little **graft**.

To "mess up" something is to harm, damage or destroy it. "Graft" is the obtaining of money by corrupt or dishonest means, although today, this word has generally been replaced by the word corruption.

Come on kid, we'll **dig up** a **preacher**.

"To dig up" a person is to look for and find them, and a "preacher" is a minister or similar religious figure in the Christian church.

Jeff discovers the horrible power of the Taylor machine, and that Senator Paine is not the honest man that he had always believed he was.

Now **dog gone** it! There's something wrong here!

A very old-fashioned way to express anger or excitement.

Jeff, you're fighting windmills! :: I am?

This expression is a way of telling a person they're not being realistic in trying to change the world (It comes from the story "Don Quixote").

You're trying to understand in a minute everything about a project that took two years to **set up**. The reasons, the **benefits**.

"To set up" a project is to organize or create it. "Benefits" are the advantages that come with a job or project.

You're accusing me of **framing** a bill for the benefit of one individual, of helping to put through a **scheme** for graft.

"To frame" a bill is to write it in a certain way, and a "scheme" is a secret plot or plan of action that often involves something immoral.

Boy Ranger, answer to a prayer, **manna from heaven**?!

An old expression for gold or money.

He's about to **blow the whole machine to smithereens** and you with it!

"To blow something to smithereens" is to completely destroy it, perhaps literally by exploding it (Here, the machine is Taylor's political machine).

Listen to me, Mr. Ten-thumbs!

If a person is said to have *two thumbs*, he is physically clumsy or not very skilled, but this expression is no longer used.

Now he's been on our take, Jim. You've got to keep this guy off of us.

"To be on the take" is to be paid by someone to help do something illegal.

"To keep a person off" someone else is to prevent them from causing that other person any problems.

Ever since he found out that we represent the Wilmut Creek District, he's been running us ragged.

A "district" refers to an area of administrative or political control.

"To run a person ragged" is to cause them to become totally exhausted.

I told you I'd handle him.

"To handle" a person is take care of them, or here, to control them.

All right Jim, you can count me out.

"To count out" a person who was going to be part of

a plan is to accept that they will no longer participate in it.

You can't come here and pull that steamroller stuff!

A "steamroller" is a large truck or vehicle with a large round wheel that crushes or flattens everything in it's path, or more generally, as here, any overwhelming force used to crush any opposition.

He thinks the world of me.

"To think the world of" a person is to admire or respect them greatly.

What do you want me to do? Stand around like chumps and let that drooling infant wrap that Wilet Creek Dam appropriation around my neck?

A "chump" is a slang word for a fool who is easily used or manipulated.

"To drool" is to let saliva run down from your mouth, like a baby.

An "appropriation" is the voting of money for a particular purpose.

"To wrap something around their neck" is to try to strangle or kill them.

Either he falls in line with us...or I'll break him so wide open they'll never be able to find the pieces.

"To fall in line" with a group is to agree to go along with their plans.

Jim, I won't stand for it...I don't want any part of crucifying this boy.

To refuse to "stand for" something is to refuse to accept it.

"To crucify" a person is to nail them on a cross, like Jesus.

Our steamroller methods are too hard for your sensitive soul?

"Methods" is another word for tactics, behavior or way of doing things, and "steamroller methods" crush any opposition or obstacles. A person's "soul" is the spiritual part of them that lives on after death (in theory!).

My methods have been alright for the past 20 years,
since I picked you out of a flyspecked hole in the wall.

A rare but interesting word for a wall or surface covered with fly shit, or anything insignificant. This is Taylor's way of telling Joe that he (Taylor) was responsible for making possible Joe's entire political career.

Seems a shame though, to part company after all these years,
especially now with a national campaign coming up.

When two people "part company," they decide to no longer see each other. Here, a "national campaign" involves running for President.

I don't want to see you get too rough on him.

In this case, "rough" means mentally abusive or perhaps even violent.

I'm glad to see you come to your senses.

"Glad" is a very common word for pleased or happy, and if a person "comes to their senses," they start to think logically or rationally.

They tell me you've been right on your toes ever since you got here.

If a person is "on their toes," they are busy, smart and productive.

Anything that benefits the state is mighty important to me,
owning a lot of its industry, newspapers, odds and ends.

"Mighty" is a funny little adverb meaning very.

"Odds and ends" is a way of saying miscellaneous things.

If I felt you had the welfare of the state at heart,
like I have, I'd say you were a man to watch.

A person's (or state's) "welfare" is their well being, health or happiness. Here, a "man to watch" is one with a potentially great career in politics.

I was hoping you'd be spared all this.

If a person is "spared" unpleasant details or facts, they are not exposed to them because it would hurt them to see such unpleasant things.

You've been living in a boy's world. For heaven's sake, stay there.

A still common way of expressing emotion such as concern or anger.

It's a brutal world, Jeff, and you have no place in it.

A serious adjective meaning cruel, violent and abusive.

You've got to check your ideals outside the door, like you do your rubbers.

A person's "ideals" are their highest moral values. A person's "rubbers" are their rubber boots or shoes (and in other context, their condoms!).

I compromised, yes, so all these years I could sit in
the Senate and serve the people in 1,000 honest ways.

If a politician "compromises" his ideals, he agrees to be corrupt or vote in certain ways just to advance his political career.

You've got to face facts, Jeff.

If a person must "face facts," they have to learn to accept things in the real world that may be ugly or very unpleasant.

We have the lowest unemployment and the highest federal grants.

A reference to money that is given by the federal government, in this case to the individual 50 states.

You can take my word for it. That's how things are.

"Take my word for it" is a way of saying "trust me."

I've grown very fond of you, almost like a son.

To be "fond of" a person is to like them or have emotional feelings toward them.

For your own sake....please don't say a word.

To do something "for your own sake" is to do it for your own good.

Section 40: An appropriation for diverting and impounding the headwaters of Wilet Creek to the natural basin of Terry Canyon, \$5,000,000.

"To divert" water is to force it to go in a different direction, and "to impound" water is to collect and store it (though to impound a car is to legally seize it). "Headwaters" refer to the place where a river or stream starts, and a "basin" is an area of land surrounded by mountains or rivers.

Does Senator Smith wish to yield to his colleague?

"To yield" to another person is to give them control, in this case to speak in your place. A "colleague" is a friend or person who works in the same office or profession.

The bill for deficiency appropriations for the fiscal year, Section 1: For emergency relief, ...

A "fiscal year" is a year in which appropriated money is spent (For the US government, it usually runs from October 1st to September 30th).

.....to create and erect public improvements on rivers, harbors and roadways; \$150,000,000,000.

"To erect" a building or structure is to build or raise it. (Note that the figure above---150 billion---seems very high for the 1930s!).

I have risen to a difficult task, to say that...evidence has come to my attention....I consider Senator Smith unworthy to address this body.

A "task" is a specific job or assignment. "Evidence" is anything that could help to prove the guilt or innocence of a person in a court of law (from a person's testimony to fingerprints on a gun). If a person is "unworthy" of doing something, they do not deserve to do it.

He named a certain portion of land to be bought for that purpose and to be bought by contributors from all over America.

A “portion” of land is a certain amount or part. A “contributor” to a purchase of land is a person who gives money in order to help buy it.

Senators, I have conclusive evidence to prove that my colleague owns the very land described in this bill!

“Conclusive evidence” is anything that can completely prove a claimed fact (or in court, the guilt or innocence of a person). A “bill” is a proposed law that must be voted on and approved before it can become a law.

Boy Ranger has a wreck?...This doesn't make sense.

A “wreck” is the total destruction that often is a result of an accident.

Accordingly, I offer a resolution for immediate inquiry as to the fitness of my colleague...to sit in this chamber.

“Accordingly” means therefore. A “resolution” is an official declaration or request, and an “inquiry” is an investigation. In this context, a person’s “fitness” is the quality of their moral or ethical behavior, or their worthiness. A “chamber” is a large room, in this case for the Senate.

Mr. Chairman, clear the galleries unless order is restored.

A “gallery” is a section of seats for observing. Here, “order” is the state of calm or peace needed to do business, and if something is “restored,” it is brought back to its original state or condition.

Flash! Ranger Senator branded by colleague!
Senator Smith brings charges to expel Smith!

“Flash” was a reporter’s way of announcing brand new and important news, but this is not used today. Here, “to brand” a person is to describe them in a certain negative way (To brand a cow is to burn writing into its skin). “To expel” a person from a group is to kick them out.

Where’s Saunders? Yeah, she ought to have the lowdown on this.

The “lowdown” is a slangy word for the latest news or secret information.

She left town in that jalopy of hers.

An old but fun word for a broken down or old and ugly car.

The morning that Mr. Allen burst into my office bringing proof that Jefferson Smith had the deed to that campsite, I was dumbfounded.

“To burst into” an office is to enter with great force and speed.

A “deed” to a property is an official paper showing who is the legal owner. If a person is “dumbfounded,” they are amazed and confused.

I consulted at once with the head of the department of records.

“To consult” with a person is to talk with them in detail about something important. The “department of records” for a city keeps important official records such as who owns what properties.

Yes, on the date set forth here, Mr. Allen came before me to record this deed, setting over 200 acres in the name of Jefferson Smith.

“Set forth” is a legal way of saying written or recorded.

An “acre” is a unit of land, about the size of a small city block.

One day he made a proposition.

Another word for a proposal or official suggestion or offer.

Mind you, now, the whole thing sounded fishy at the time.

“Mind you” is a way of saying, “of course, it’s important to consider...”

If a situation is “fishy,” it’s suspicious, or it looks like there could be hidden problems.

Have you got that contract? Yes, signed and delivered.

If a contract has been “signed and delivered,” it’s effective and in force.

I’d say the name Jefferson Smith on this contract has been forged.

If a signature is “forged,” it is fake or counterfeit and not genuine.

I would stake my whole 20 year professional career on the fact that this is not a forgery.

“To stake” a career on the truthfulness of a fact is to risk losing the career if that fact is false. A “forgery” is a fake signature.

I sponsored him in the Senate. I helped him frame his bill.

“To sponsor” a person is to support them,

and to “frame” a bill is to help write it.

There are 100 equally good campsites and so I suggested he choose another. He became furious.

If a person is “furious,” they are extremely angry or upset.

He owned those 20 acres, and had carefully laid plans to make an enormous profit...out of the nickels & dimes scraped together by the boys of this country.

“Enormous” means extremely big or huge. If people “scrape together” money, they look everywhere for whatever little bit they can find.

That ranger never knew what struck him when Jim Taylor opened up on him.

Here, “to open up on” a person is to begin to violently attack them.

You know, I had a hunch I’d find you here.

A “hunch” is an excellent word for an intuitive feeling or guess.

You had the right idea about me, Saunders. You told me to go back home and keep filling those kids full of hooey.

An old but fun word for silliness or nonsense.

Just a simple guy, you said, still wet behind the ears, with a lot of junk about American ideals.

If a person is “wet behind the ears,” they are innocent and naïve.
“Junk” is useless old stuff or trash, or in this case, nonsense.

A man I’ve admired and worshiped all my life.

“To worship” a person is to view them with great respect, almost as if they were a God.

A lot of fancy words around this town. Some of them are carved in stone.

In this case, “fancy” means idealistic or speaking of important things.
“To carve” words is to cut or engrave them into stone, like is done at some of the Washington DC monuments.

The Taylors and Paines put them up there so suckers like me can read them.

A “sucker” is a good word for a person who is easily fooled or cheated.

I’m getting away so fast...from all the words and the monuments and the whole rotten show.

If something is “rotten,” it is of poor quality, corrupt or smells horrible.

That kind just throws big shadows, that’s all.

This is Clarissa’s way of saying that corrupt people like Taylor look powerful, but they in fact can be beaten.

You had plain, decent everyday common rightness, and this country could use some of that. :: So could the whole cockeyed world.

Here, “rightness” is decency or moral behavior. “Cockeyed” is an old slang word for askew, not quite correct or slightly crazy.

A man who could tear into the Taylors and root them out, into the open.

“To tear into” a person is to violently attack them, and to “root out” a person is to dig them out, or in this case, to expose their evil to the public.

Where can we get a drink? :: Now you’re talking!

A fun little expression to use when you happily agree with a proposal or suggestion that somebody has just made.

They’re going to expel Smith, huh? Where are the drums, the guillotine?

“To expel” a person is to kick them out of a group or place. A “guillotine” is a device with a large blade used to chop the head off of criminals.

That guy’s batty.

An old but fun slang word for crazy or nuts.

Is this some of your shenanigans?

An interesting word for tricky or questionable practices or mischievous behavior that causes problems for others.

Quorum is present.

A “quorum” is the minimum number of representatives required to vote.

It appears to the satisfaction of the committee after hearing a number of witnesses, that Justice of the Senate requires that...

A “witness” is a person who testifies or speaks in a courtroom about the evidence or arguments in a case.

I move for the immediate adoption of the resolution.

“To adopt” a resolution or official declaration is to vote to accept it.

Jeff decides to fight for the ideals of American Democracy, directly on the Senate floor.

Senator Smith is still a member of this body, and as such, he has an equal claim on the attention of this chair.

In this case, a “claim” is a right, and a “chair” is the person who occupies an official position, in this case President of the Senate.

The way the evidence is piled up against me, I can’t say I blame them.

If evidence is “piled up” against a person, there is so much of it or it is stacked or gathered so high that it looks like it presents a very strong case against that person.

We might as well all get together on this yielding business, right off the bat.

“Might as well” is a way of saying should. If something is done “right off the bat,” it is done immediately, without discussing it first.

If I yield for a question or a point of order or a privilege, I can hold this floor almost until doomsday.

A “point of order” is the discussion of a rule, and in this case, a “privilege” is a right guaranteed to all Senators. “To hold” the floor is to have the right to speak, and “doomsday” is believed to be the last day on the earth before everyone is killed (If you’re doomed, you may soon die).

I’ve got a piece to speak, and blow hot or cold, I’m going to speak it.

This is Jeff’s way of saying he is going to say what he really believes, no matter how many people don’t want to hear it.

I would ask my distinguished colleague, has he any scrap of evidence to add now...to the defense he did not give and could not give at that same hearing?

If a person is “distinguished,” they are marked by a reputation of excellence or importance. A “scrap” is a small piece of paper, or more generally, the smallest possible amount. A “hearing” is a meeting before a committee in which witnesses testify and give their opinions.

I have no defense against forged papers! :: The Committee ruled otherwise!
 “Forged papers” are fake or not authentic, often signed by people who are not who they claim them to be. “Otherwise” means “something else.”

The gentleman stands guilty as charged...
 A way of saying that a person is viewed as guilty of the crime he was accused of having committed.

...and no one cares to hear what a man of his considered character has to say about any section of any legislation before this house.
 “A man of his considered character” is Paine’s way of saying “a man with his horrible reputation.” “Legislation” is the act of making laws, and in this case, this “house” is actually the Senate.

Mr. President, I stand guilty as framed because section 40 is graft!
 If a person has been “framed,” they have been made to look like they committed a crime when in fact they did not. “Graft” is bribery and corruption.

And he offered me a seat in this Senate for the next 20 years if he voted for a dam he knew I knew was a fraud.
 “Fraud” is an important legal word that refers to anything that is based on a lie, deceit or trickery, or in this case, corruption and bribery.

The long and powerful arm of Mr. James Taylor reached into this sacred chamber and grabbed me by the scruff of the neck.
 If a room or chamber is “sacred,” it is considered holy or blessed by God. “To grab” a person is to take or seize them quickly and forcefully. The “scruff” is the back part of a person’s neck.

He’s saying that I was carrying out criminal orders on falsified evidence.
 To “carry out” a plan is to actively do it. “Falsified evidence” refers to documents that have been forged or other misleading things which have been produced in order to prove something that is not true.

He has imputed to me conduct unworthy of a Senator and I deemed that he might yield the floor.
 “To impute” a person’s behavior is to accuse them of having done something bad or illegal. “Conduct” is another word for behavior. “To deem” is a dated verb for to consider or believe, and in this context, “to yield the floor” is to allow another person to speak.

I accuse this man, by his tone, by his careful denials...He is deliberately trying to plant damaging impressions of my conduct.
 “To accuse” a person of bad behavior is to officially claim they have done it. A person’s tone is their way or manner of speaking (aggressive, friendly, etc). “To plant” evidence (or here, impressions), is to try and make it look like a person is guilty of something they did not do.

Mr. Taylor had brought the evidence against this man, and we were urging him to resign.

“To urge” a person to do something is to strongly encourage them to do it. “To resign” is to officially quit or leave a job or office.

Mr. President, he is trying to blackmail this Senate as he tried to blackmail me.

“To blackmail” a person is to threaten to harm them unless they do what you want.

Without his expulsion, he’ll even try to hold up this deficiency bill, vital to the whole country.

An “expulsion” is the act of kicking a person out of a group. “To hold up” a bill is to delay or stall it, and a “deficiency bill” is a dated expression for an appropriations bill, in which the spending of money is voted on. If a law is “vital,” it is extremely important or necessary.

I have lost all patience with this brazen character!

A great adjective to describe a person who is too forward, aggressive or presumptuous, or who has a lot of nerve.

I’m sick and tired of this contemptible young man and I refuse to stay here and listen to him any longer.

A good word to describe a person who’s awful, horrible or despicable.

When they hear my story, they’ll rise up and they’ll kick Taylor’s machine to Kingdom Come.

In this context, to “rise up” is to grow angry and revolt against the powers that are holding people back. “Kingdom Come” is an expression from the bible referring to the last days of earth.

Has the gentleman the effrontery to stand, convicted and in disgrace, and try to force postponement of the deficiency bill?

“Effrontery” is shameless behavior or nerve. “Disgrace” is a key word for the state of being seen as a source of shame or awful or pitiful behavior. A “postponement” is the act of delaying something until later.

Millions will be without food and shelter! Public works will be at a standstill!

“Public works” are government funded projects, such as roads and dams. If a project is at a “standstill,” it is blocked or is not moving forward.

People of my state need permanent relief from crooked men riding their backs!

If a politician is “crooked,” they are corrupt and dishonest.

If the Senate yields to this sort of blackmail at this time, it will become a laughing stock!

In this case, “to yield” means to give or surrender to, and “blackmail” is the act of threatening a person with harm if they refuse to do something. A “laughing stock” is a person whose behavior is so pitiful that everyone likes to laugh at, or make fun of them.

I'll have to speak to the people of my state from right here...and wild horses won't drag me off this floor 'til those people have heard everything I have to say.

Note that "wild horses" are often used in expressions that deal with how determined people are to resist a great force. "To drag" something is to pull it on the ground. Note that "until"----> "'til" in rapid speech.

Filibuster!

A key word in this film, that refers to a bizarre rule in the Senate which allows any Senator, under certain conditions, to speak for as long as they want in order to block the Senate from voting on a bill.

I call the Chair's attention to Rule 5 of the Rules of the Senate....

A "rule" is a law or specific guide for conduct that organizations, sports and games are required to follow.

...may direct the Sergeant-at-Arms to request, and if necessary to compel, the attendance of the absent Senators.

The "Sergeant-at arms" of the Senate is a person with various duties to make sure everything runs well while the Senate is in session.

A filibuster! This is the miracle I wanted! What a yarn!

A good word for a story or interesting tale.

Kick it up! Get on his side! Fight for him, understand?!

"To kick up" the level of excitement is to increase it. This is Clarissa's way of telling Diz to create sympathy or excitement for Jeff in the newspapers.

This is the most titanic battle of modern times.

If a battle is "titanic," it is extremely big, historic or important.

A David without even a sling-shot rises to battle against the mighty Goliath, the Taylor machine, allegedly crooked inside and out.

David and Goliath is a famous story in the bible about a very determined but relatively small person (David) who battles against a much bigger and powerful enemy (Goliath). A "sling-shot" is a device that is used to throw rocks with great force. "Allegedly" refers to anything that may be or is supposed to be true, but which has not yet been proven.

For my money, you can drop the "allegedly."

This is Clarissa's way of saying that she *knows* the Taylor political machine is corrupt and crooked.

I'll blacken this punk so... You leave public opinion to me.

Here, "to blacken" a person is to harm or injure them, but this is not used. A "punk" is a negative word for a small, weak or much hated person. "Public opinion" is an important phrase that refers to what the general public thinks about various people, issues or events in the news.

Go back into the Senate and keep those Senators lined up.

In this case, to keep people “lined up” is to make sure that they continue to think or vote in a favorable or desired way.

I haven't got the stomach for it anymore.

If you no longer “have the stomach for” something, you no longer have the desire to do it, often because it makes you sick or unhappy.

If he convinces those Senators, you might as well blow your brains out.

“To convince” a person to do something is to persuade them to do it.

“Might as well” is a colloquial way of saying should, and “to blow your brains out” is a violent expression meaning to shoot yourself in the head.

We can't stop at anything until we smash this yokel!

“To smash” a person is to crush or destroy them, and a “yokel” is a negative word for a naïve uneducated person, usually from a small town.

The chips are down.

A colloquial expression meaning things do not look good for the future.

Those broken-down opposition papers, those cockeyed crusading papers who don't want to play ball with us, I want you to tie them up for 24 hours.

“Cockeyed” means a bit crazy. If a newspaper is “crusading,” it is covering stories about corrupt and powerful forces that it thinks is important for the public to know (To be on a crusade is to work toward a great and just goal). In this case, “to play ball” means to cooperate or go along with, and to “tie up” a business is to force it to stop or shut down.

Stall their deliveries, Push them off the street! I don't care.

“To stall” something is to delay it or slow it down, and here, “deliveries” are the distribution of newspapers to newsstands and home subscribers.

Hendrix, get the Hoi Polloi excited! Have them send protest letters, wires, anything you like.

“Hoi polloi” is a negative term for the general population or masses of people, and in this case, a “wire” is a telegram or wired message.

This filibuster is a cowardly attempt to turn your attention from the true facts, which are beyond question.

If something is “cowardly,” is done without any courage or bravery. If something is “beyond question,” it is considered true, without a doubt.

Jefferson Smith was caught red handed, stealing from boys.

If a person is “caught red-handed,” they are caught in the very act of committing the crime.

No man who wasn't sincere could stage a fight like that against these odds.

“Sincere” means honest and genuine, and “to stage” a fight is to cause it to happen in front of the public.

I'm very glad to know that you'd take his word against mine.
A person's "word" is their promise or guarantee.

Joe, can't we work out some deal to pull that
Wilet Dam out and let the deficiency bill through?
"To work out a deal" is to come to an agreement.

It's a question of the integrity of the Senate itself.
"It's a question of..." is a common way of saying "This is about..."
"Integrity" is the state of being honest, moral and not corrupt.

They're endowed with their creator with certain inalienable rights.
These are words from the American Declaration of Independence (1776).
If a person is "endowed" with a certain skill, they are given it freely,
from birth. If a right is "inalienable," it cannot be taken away from you.

Well, it looks like the night shift is coming on.
At a work place, the "night shift" refers to those people
who work at night, perhaps from midnight to 8AM.

The right to talk your head off, the American
privilege of free speech in its most dramatic form.
If a person 'talks their head off," they talk and talk without stopping
(Diz is describing the way a filibuster works in the Senate).

The galleries are packed. In the diplomatic
gallery are the envoys of two dictator powers.
A "gallery" is a section of seats in a theatre or chamber, and if they are
"packed," they are filled with people. An "envoy" is a low-level diplomat.

With Clarissa's help, Jeff Smith becomes a hero...

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
These are the three things that the Declaration of Independence says are
the inalienable rights of every man. The "pursuit" of happiness is the act
of seeking it or trying to find it.

Whenever any form of government becomes destructive
to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it.
If something is "destructive," it is damaging or harmful. The "ends"
of a plan are its final goals (the "means" are how one reaches the ends).
"To alter" a form of government is to change or modify it, and "to
abolish" it is destroy or eliminate it.

Quick stalling and move!

“To stall” is to delay or bring to a standstill.

We’ve got to keep hammering at this man until we smash him.

“To hammer” a person is to strike them very hard. “To smash” a person is to violently crush, flatten or destroy them.

I always get a great kick out of that part of the Declaration of Independence.

To get a “kick out of” something is to think it’s funny or enjoy it.

Let them find out what makes different people tick.

“To tick” is to make a short mechanical sound like a clock, but to know what makes people tick is to know why they behave the way they do.

I wouldn’t give you two cents for all your fancy rules if behind them they didn’t have a little ordinary everyday kindness....

This is Jeff’s way of saying that simple kindness is more important than money and power and the laws that run society.

....and a little looking out for the other fellow, too.

Note outside the first and last word above, the entire sentence actually functions as a noun which means concern for others.

It’s just the blood and bone and sinew of this democracy.

A rare word that means tendons, guts, or more generally here, the main supporting force.

All this stuff I’ve been telling you about this land you live in a lot of hooey.

“Stuff” refers to things in general, or in this case, to opinions.

“Hooey” is a fun but dated word for nonsense or bullshit.

Anybody who thinks I’m going to do that, they’ve got another thing coming.

A slangy way of saying “they are completely wrong.”

Would he permit a motion to recess until the morning, at which time he may be able to continue with his profound babblings?

“A motion” is an official proposal or request during a meeting.

“To recess” a meeting is to stop or discontinue it until a later time.

“Profound” means philosophically deep, and “to babble” means to talk endlessly about a lot of nonsense (the plural noun, though, is rarely used).

Barry’s column, too? Holy smokes!

A “column” is a regularly appearing newspaper or magazine article written by the same author. “Holy smokes” is an interesting but very old-fashioned way to express surprise, shock or other emotion.

You got to call him off! Not one word of what he says is being printed in that state!

“To call off” a person is to stop them from continuing what they’re doing.

Taylor has practically every paper in the state lined up and he's feeding them doctored-up junk.

This is Diz' way of referring to made up lies or propaganda.

One man muzzling a whole state? :: And how!

"To muzzle" a dog is to put a device over their mouth that prevents them from barking or biting, and thus in this case, to muzzle a state is to prevent the papers in that state from reporting. "And how!" is an excited way of expressing approval.

Can you print it out and spread a billion copies of it? :: Swell!

In this case, "to spread" newspapers is to distribute them. "Swell" is an old-fashioned way of saying excellent, or more colloquially, cool.

Wilet Dam is a fraud to line the pockets of the Taylor Machine!

"To line the pockets" of a politician is to pay them money for their help in allowing a corrupt plan to succeed.

She said rush! Get cracking now!

"Get cracking" is a very slangy way of telling a person to hurry up.

Are we going to let a man like Jeff throw mud at a man like Joe Paine?!

In this context, "to throw mud" at a person is to publicly accuse them of having done horrible things.

It's the most unusual and spectacular thing in the Senate annuls.

"Spectacular" is another word for amazing or fantastic. "Annuls" are official records or papers that reveal the history of an organization.

What he lacked in experience, he's made up for in fight.

"To lack" something is to not have enough of it, and "to make up for" something that you don't have much of is to have a lot of something else that can replace it.

These tired boy ranger legs are buckling, bleary eyed, voice gone.

If a person's legs are "buckling," they begin to bend from pressure or exhaustion or fatigue. If a person is "bleary eyed," they can't see well because their eyes are so tired.

You'll see the whole parade of what man's carved out for himself after centuries of fighting.

"To carve out" a message is to cut it into a tree, stone or other material, though more generally, as in here, it simply means to produce or create.

No matter what his race, color or creed!

A person's "creed" is their religious belief.

If that's what the grown ups have done with this world, then we better get those boy's camps started fast and see what the kids can do.

"Grown ups" are another way of referring to adults (as opposed to kids).

Great principles don't get lost once they come to light.

A "principle" is a key word for a basic rule of behavior, law or moral belief that people feel it is important to follow.

He has been waiting, as he so fancily puts it, for them to come marching here in droves.

"To put" an opinion in a certain way is to express it that way.

If people arrive "in droves," this means a huge amount of people.

Yes, Sir, you bet I would.

"You bet" is a slangy way of saying "You better believe..."

Public opinion made to order. Taylor-made.

If something is "made to order," it is made for a specific occasion or purpose (In this case, to destroy Jeff's reputation).

Telegrams! 50,000 of them, demanding he yield the floor!

A "telegram" is a wired message that is typed out (They are no longer very important given faxes, email and telephones).

I guess this is just another lost cause, Mr. Paine.

A "lost cause" is an idealistic political goal that probably can't be achieved because there are powerful forces against it.

Because of just one plain stupid rule: Love thy neighbor.

One of the most famous laws in the bible ("Thy" is "your" in the Middle English of Shakespeare's time).

You think I'm licked!

In this context, to be "licked" is to be beaten or defeated.

He's okay. He just fainted.

"To faint" is to lose consciousness because of shock or exhaustion.

I'm not fit for any place of honor or trust.

If a person is not "fit" to be in an organization, they are not morally qualified to be there because they do not have high enough standards.

Yippee!

A very dated but fun word that is used to express happiness or delight.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington

Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion

1. What is this film trying to say about American democracy?
2. Over 60 years later, is corruption in government as big a problem as it seems to have been back then? What about in your country?
3. Do similar things happen today that are not called corruption because they're perfectly legal? And in your country?
4. Was the movie itself, and especially the way it ends, as naïve as Jeff?
5. How is this film reflective of the situation America found itself in back in the late 1930s?
6. How would you describe Jeff? Are there lots of naïve and idealistic people like him around today?
7. Is patriotism a good thing?
8. Is Joe Paine a fundamentally bad person, or just weak?
9. Would Jeff and Clarissa be a good couple?
10. What did you like and not like about this movie?