

Clerks

(Comedy) (1994)

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Major Characters

Dante Hicks.....Brian O'Halloran
 A 22 year old collage drop-out who is a clerk in a convenience store (which is a small food store).

Randal Graves.....Jeff Anderson
 Dante's best friend, who works in the video store right next to Dante's store.

Veronica.....Marilyn Ghigliotti
 Dante's good-hearted girlfriend who is trying to get him to go back to school and improve his life.

Caitin.....Lisa Spoonhauer
 Dante's former girlfriend from high school who returns to see him after many years, after he learns that she is going to get married.

Plot Summary

The story of a single day in the life of Dante Hicks, who finds himself forced to work at his job as a convenience store clerk on his only day off. As a 22 year old collage drop out working for low wages at a store in a mall in Ashbury Park, New Jersey, Dante is the classic underachiever whose life is "going nowhere."

There is not that much of a plot, but rather simply a series of things that happen throughout the day: An anti-smoking fanatic disrupts the store for selling cigarettes, Veronica and Dante engage in constant arguments about their relationship, Randal takes Dante to the funeral of an old girlfriend, Veronica returns to ask Dante if she would go out with him, and so on.

Ultimately, this movie is simply a portrait of the type of people that work and use these type of stores. But as such, it is an often very funny window into one of the more mundane aspects of American culture. You should also be aware that the language is often *very* difficult to follow since many of the characters speak extremely colloquial English.

Words and Expressions that You may not Know

Dante awakes to find that instead of going to play hockey, he must work at the store all day.

I'm fucking tired.

A very crude but common intensifier (used like "really").

Do you swear you'll be there by 12?

Here it means to promise, though it can also mean to use obscene words.

Shit!

The quintessential English obscenity.

Vilification.

The act of describing someone as a villain or bad person, even if they aren't.

A new customer has a problem with cigarettes, but it appears that his motives are not completely pure.

Thanks. Have a good one.

A slangy way to say "have a good day."

What in the hell is that?

A colloquial way to add emphasis or emotion to a "Wh question."

You have got to be shitting me!

An interesting way to say "You can't be serious!"

Note that "have got to"----> "gotta" in rapid speech.

Trachea.

Part of the body that carries air to the lungs (a "voice box").

Cruddy lungs.

A colloquial and dated word for bad, or of poor quality.

A cancer-ridden lung.

Something that is "X-ridden" is filled with X (in this case, cancer).

He's kicking ass.

In this case, "he's doing well."

(Though to "kick someone's ass" is to beat them up).

I'm fucking anything that moves. Rip his fucking head off! Pussy!

Very crude uses of "fucking" meaning to have sex in the first case, and simply as an adjective to add emotion or intensity in the second.

"Pussy" is a crude word for female sex organs, as well as for a coward!

What's up, slut?

A vulgar word for women that have sex with lots of men.

"Grizzly Adams."

A TV character from the 70s who lived with bears in the forest.

Hey man, you're going to croak sometime.

"To croak" is a funny colloquial verb meaning to die.

Mr. Merchant of Death!

A political term to describe politicians and businessmen who will sell or do anything to get money or power

(In this case, even sell cigarettes!)

Those hate mongers were called nazis!

"Hate mongers" are those leaders who try to get others to hate a certain group of people.

This is a wake-up call.

A clever expression for "a warning."

You're loitering.

"To loiter" is a legal term which means basically to stand around, and do nothing in particular (And in many cities, it *is* illegal).

Who's leading this mob?

A "mob" is a group of emotional people who may become violent.

Let's see some credentials.

Official documents showing identification, status, job title, etc.

You're a Chewley's Gum representative!

A term that can be used for "salesman."

They're easily-led automatons!

"Automatons" are robots (And it is also a pejorative word for people who don't think for themselves).

***Veronica and Dante discuss their relationship,
and each learns about the other's past.***

You're taking this too hard.

One way of saying "you shouldn't be so upset."

I'm going to play like shit.

Crude, but common. If you do something "like shit," you do it badly.

Open the shudders.

Another word for curtains, though they're often made of metal.

Someone jammed gum in the locks.

"To jam" something is a good verb meaning to wedge tightly, or, to cause to lock or freeze in an unmoveable position.

Shoe polish.

Used to make shoes look like new (or here, to paint the sign on the steel shutters saying that the store is open).

Show some bedroom proficiency!

This is a good word for expertise or competence (Here, referring to sex).

Insert in moist opening, thrust, repeat.

"To thrust" means to push in (a verb with a very sexual connotation).

Getting a guy to make a woman come: That's talent!

"To come" is a common colloquial verb meaning to have an orgasm.

Believe me Don Juan, it takes more than that to get a guy off.

Don Juan is a famous lover in literary history. "To get off" is a slangy way of saying to enjoy something, or possibly, to have an orgasm!

Not a broad generalization, but a generalization about broads.

A clever play on words: "Broad" as an adjective means large, or all-encompassing, but "broads" as a noun is a somewhat dated and uneducated word for women.

After dropping a **bombshell**, you owe me one, **big**.
 A good word for a huge piece of news, or gossip
 (i.e...."I told you something huge, now you have to tell me").

A scholastic program after a **lapse** in enrollment.
 A "lapse" is a pause, or break in time.

Seter Hall.
 Name of a School within the University where Veronica studies.

That's beautiful, **man**.
 Ending sentences with "man" is common among
 teenagers (basically used for emotional emphasis).

We still **hang out**.
 If two people "hang out," they do things together,
 or just sit around and do nothing in particular.

You two **love birds**, take it easy.
 "Love birds" is very dated term for a couple in love.
 "Take it easy" is an overused cliché that can mean relax,
 goodbye, or have a nice time, depending on the context.

It's a **blow job**. He likes to have it spit back into his mouth.
 Common slang for "oral sex" (on a man). Here, an
 explicit description of one person's sexual desires.

You sucked his dick?! :: We just **fooled around**.
 In this context, to "fool around" means to do various
 sexual things, but not actual intercourse.

Something like 36 **in a row**.
 "One after the other, with no time in between."

Yeah, I **went down** on a few guys.
 "To go down" on someone is slang for giving them oral sex
 (used to describe oral sex on both men and women).

Don't look at me like a town **whore**!
 A somewhat crude but widely used word for prostitute.

Going down is **no big deal**.
 A common expression meaning not that interesting or important.

Randal and Dante discuss women and life.

That son of a bitch was sleeping, like some traffic controller.

A "son-of-a-bitch" is a crude word for a bad person, asshole, jerk, etc..

A wise guy, too.

An interesting term used sarcastically to mean an unpleasant person who thinks he knows everything, or thinks he is funny.

I've got no time to bullshit around waiting for that son of a bitch.

In this context, "to bullshit around" means to talk aimlessly and waste money.

I'll go to "Big Choice Video" instead.

The name of the video store where Randall rents, since his own video store has such a bad selection!

Syntax.

Linguistic term referring to the order of words in a sentence.

A shocking abuse of authority.

A political expression, here used sarcastically.

I'm a firm believer in the rule of a ruling class.

A "firm believer" is one who feels very strongly about something.

With Veronica, one fight is all I can stomach.

As a verb, "to stomach" something means to accept it, without getting sick.

She's nuts about you

To be "nuts" about someone is to love or like them very much.

Chicks say crazy things during sex.

A very colloquial word meaning girls.

It takes different strokes to move the world.

"A sudden action or process having a big effect."

She was vile to you.

A strong and funny word for disgusting, or morally depraved.

In light of this lurid tale, how can you romanticize this relationship?

Educated words that mean a "shocking story."

Deviant lifestyles.

"Ways of living considered outside what is morally acceptable."

Algebra, bad lunches, infidelity.

---Dante's clever list of what makes a high school relationship.

"Put it where it doesn't belong. Cum clean, Naked sluts. Cock, etc."

[These are the various titles of pornographic films that Randal is ordering for the store: You've seen most of this before though note "come" is often spelled "cum" when referring to ejaculate.

"Cock" is crude for "penis."]

Dante discovers that Caitlin is going to get married, but has trouble truly believing it.

Caitlin to wed Asian design major. Is that a misprint?

A mistake, often found in a newspaper.

A vindictive printer was shot down, and his revenge was this bogus article.

"To be shot down in love" is to be badly hurt emotionally. Something that is "bogus" is counterfeit, or fake.

Scum bag, what are you doing?

A very strong and crude term for a jerk, immoral person, ass, etc. (Literally, "scum" is the filth on your shower walls after you haven't washed it for a few weeks).

He wants to be a metal singer

Here, refers to "heavy metal" rock music.

Did he say "making fuck?"

This is completely ungrammatical, even for the characters in this movie!: Here, it was said by the Russian, who probably thought it was a slang way of saying "making love."

Suck my cock!

A sexual act, of course, but sometimes used by these type of characters to mean "fuck you."

I'll throw this out as a precautionary measure.

"An action taken to prevent harm in the future."

The Empire Strikes back. Return of the Jedi.
The name of two famous movies that
Dante and Randall are arguing over.

Something never sat right with me.
It something doesn't "sit right," it doesn't feel right or correct.

Independent contractors. And they're all killed,
casualties of a war they had nothing to do with.
Businessmen who hire electricians, roofers and
so on to work on the construction of a house.

Vagary.
An educated word for a ridiculous or over ambitious action or idea.

I find it best to stay out of other people's affairs.
Here, meaning other people's private or personal lives.

These two? Oh, they suck.
"That sucks" is a common way for teenagers to say something is bad.

I don't appreciate your ruse.
An educated word for a trick, or manipulation.

There is nothing so exhilarating as
pointing out the shortcomings of others.
"It is very exciting to show the weaknesses of other people."

Screw you!
A less crude way to say "fuck you."

This unruly customer.
Someone who is "unruly" is difficult to control.

The quest isn't going well.
A "quest" is a search, or pursuit of something.

I kid you not!
A funny (grammatically old-English) way to say
"I'm not kidding" (ie...I am being serious).

Shell shocked, with guidance counselors.
"Shell shocked" is a military term meaning in shock. "Guidance
counselors" help students with class schedules and career choices.

You can't have a worthless job. That's why I manually masturbate caged animals for artificial insemination.

Scientific term for getting a female pregnant without sexual intercourse.

Did you ever notice that all the prices end in 9? Damn, that's eerie.

A great little word meaning very strange and scary.

Jizm mopper.

A funny term: "Jizm" is crude for ejaculate (or semen).

A "mop" is used to wash a floor.

He cleans the nudie booths after the guy jerks off.

"To jerk off" is the most common way to say masturbate.

The weirdest shit you'd want chicks to do.

Here, meaning "the most perverted thing."

That guy is an asshole.

Crude and common for jerk, son of a bitch, creep, etc.

People who come in here are way too uptight.

An excellent adjective meaning rigidly conventional in behavior, or much too nervous or tense.

They ignore the piss out of you.

Ungrammatical and ridiculous even by "Clerks" standards: "They completely ignore you."

Who pisses you off?

"To piss off" someone is a very common slang expression meaning to anger or annoy them.

My 6 year old chronically wets his bed.

If a child "wets his bed," he pisses in it while urinating.

A good reason not to have children!

An IQ less than his shoe size.

"Intelligence Quotient" (An IQ test is the standard test to measure intelligence).

If you vent it, don't you feel better?

"To vent" is to yell and scream and get rid of your anger.

What happened to "there by 12"?

Note how one can directly quote another person's promise.

Peanut butter and jelly with the crust cut off.

The classic American sandwich for school lunches.

I'm not happy, but I'll be able to deal.

"To deal" simply means to handle the situation, or, to do OK.

The ostrich syndrome: if you don't see it, it isn't happening.

A famous bird that buries its head in the ground. This refers to the fact many people prefer to not know about really bad news or problems.

Dante learns that he'll be working for more than just the morning, and thus decides to play hockey after all.

Bummer.

A funny little colloquial word that means "darn it", or when used as a noun, means a bad or disappointing thing.

Vermont.

A small state in New England.

Malaise.

A feeling of sadness.

He said he'd be here. I can't fucking believe this.

Again, note the common use of "fucking" as an intensifying adverb.

That slippery shit.

In this case, "slippery" implies dishonest or tricky.

Here, "shit" is used as a noun (referring to a bad person).

The motif in your life is that you **back down**, you buckle.

A "motif" is a theme or pattern. If you "back down," you surrender, or agree to the demands of others (this is very common).

"To buckle" is to bend, or crumble (as in to back down).

Feeling limber?

A good word for physically capable of bending, or moving.

One of the ballsiest moves.

Very colloquial for "courageous" (in this case, "balls" are testicles).

Blatant insubordination.

A military expression meaning complete disrespect for authority.

Grab the Gatorade.

Used as an imperative verb, "grab" means get or take.
 "Gatorade" is the brand name of a famous drink for athletes.

Come on pussy shit, let us have the Gatorade!
 Very crude insult even by "Clerks" standards
 (I had never heard it before).

A semblance of managerial control.

A "semblance" means a slight amount.

What are you, shitting me?

"To shit" somebody is to lie to them or try to manipulate them, but in fact, "shit" is rarely used this way.

Man, you suck.

"You are very bad at this."

Who are you to make assessments?

"Who are you to judge me?" Note the phrase "who are you to..." implies the speaker feels the listener has no authority to do whatever the verb is that follows (in this case, to judge).

Come on pal, I'll kick your ass.

"To kick someone's ass" is to beat them up.

Harbinger.

Something that indicates what will occur in the future
 (used often in the expression "A harbinger of things to come").

<i>A very strange customer arrives at the store.</i>

I'm not so young anymore. A little incontinent.

If someone is "incontinent," they have trouble controlling their excretory functions (when they go to the bathroom).

Rough or cottony?

Two ways to describe toilet paper (harsh, or soft like cotton).

It will knock the hell out of my hemorrhoids.

Another medical word; Painful veins or swelling in anal tissue.

The porno mags?

Short for Pornographic magazines.

The biggest titties you ever saw!

Very old fashioned slang for breasts (Tits and boobs are still used, but it's safer to just say a woman has a big chest or big breasts).

All you do is bitch bitch bitch.

As a verb, "to bitch" means to complain.

An old girlfriend dies, and Dante and Randall go to the funeral.

She got an embolism in her brain and died in mid backstroke.

An embolism is a dangerous obstruction of blood. "Backstroke" refers to a type of swimming pattern (like the breaststroke).

I'm going to her wake.

Another word for funeral.

I'm also bereaved.

To be "bereaved" is to be suffering the death of a loved one.

You hate people! :: But I like gatherings, which is ironic.

A very clever dialog: "Ironic" is a good word that refers to something that appears logically inconsistent, or is unexpected.

My cousin Walter broke his neck trying to suck his own dick!

An interesting image!: "Dick" is a common slang word for penis.

There was cum resting on his lips.

The classic porn word for semen or ejaculate.

Fucking pervert. I never tried it!

Another word for deviate, or someone who is considered sexually sick.

Perspicacity.

An excellent and educated word referring to intelligence and ability to see things clearly.

You knocked the casket over, for Christ's sake!

A "casket" is a coffin, or a box for dead bodies. "For Christ's sake" is a common colloquial phrase used to express disbelief or possibly anger.

I told you not to be dealing in front of the store.

In this context, "to deal" means to be selling illegal drugs.

I work in a **shitty** video store.

A crude but important and common little adjective meaning "bad."

Annoying customers.

"Annoying" is a good alternative word for irritating, or troublesome.

Fucking dick head!

A crude and somewhat ridiculous insult meaning jerk, asshole, etc.

Standard operating procedures.

"The typical way that things are done."

That's just **gratuitous**.

An interesting adjective that means unnecessary and pointless (as in the phrase "gratuitous violence").

Title dictates behavior.

Randal's way of saying "your job won't allow you to do certain things."

You're not being asked to slay children.

"To slay" is a powerful verb meaning to kill violently (often with a sword).

Paradigm.

"A classic example" that serves as a pattern or model.

Dante continues to have a pretty bad day...

You strained picking up the milk!

"To strain" is to physically struggle, or try with great effort.

Is this guy **out of shape**?

If someone is "out of shape," they are not physically fit (the opposite is to be "in shape").

How much can you bench?

"To bench" means to lift weights for exercise (as in "to bench press").

For god's sake, I'm not out of shape!

Similar to "for Christ's sake." Used to show anger or irritation.

He's got **love handles**.

A great expression for the extra fat people carry near their hips.

"An Asian design major."

The person Caitlin will marry: An Asian person who is studying design in school.

Don't take this the wrong way, but I used to fuck her.

"Do not be offended, but..." Of course, here, "to fuck" is to have sex.

A fine of \$500, for violating New Jersey statutes prohibiting the selling of cigarettes to a minor under 18.

A "fine" is a penalty which requires the payment of money for breaking a law. A "statute" is a law.

You sold cigarettes to a four year old?! Scumbag!

A great but crude insult. Another alternative to jerk, asshole, etc.

This cannot be contested in any court of law, and failure to pay will result in your arrest.

"To contest" is an educated verb meaning to legally challenge.

Caitlin arrives to give Dante another chance with her.

Something I read in the tabloids.

Sensationalistic newspapers, often the size of magazines.

You could have broken it to me gently.

"To break" some news to someone is to inform them.

You prefer drastic measures to rational ones.

"Drastic" is a good word for radical, or extreme.

I knew you'd be a wreck, and disturbed.

If someone is "a wreck," they are badly hurt, either physically or emotionally.

I love a macho facade. It's such a turn on.

"Macho" is a Spanish word used in English to mean very masculine or muscular. "A turn on" is a great noun (and phrasal verb) for something that excites you, usually in a sexual sense.

Look how full of yourself you are.

If a person is "full of himself," he is conceited, or egotistical.

Jesus, you're so caustic.

A powerful adjective which means stinging, or violently critical.

Let's introduce them (Sang and Veronica) and they'll hit it off.

If two people "hit it off," this means they like each other.

A dinner date.

An official social engagement (usually between a man and woman).

Its hard not to succumb to your wily charms.

"To succumb" is to give in to, or surrender. "Wily" is an educated word for cunning, clever, or seductive.

I'm offering you my body and you're offering me semantics.

"Semantics" is the study of the meaning of words.

I'll break the disengagement news to my mom.

"To break the news" to someone is to let them know.

I'm easy, but not that easy!

Here, referring to how readily she has sex with boys.

Hermaphrodite porn.

A person with the sex organs of both sexes.

You're missing it. Chicks with dicks.

"Girls with penises."

Such a sordid state of affairs.

"Sordid" is a powerful adjective meaning corrupt or foul.

Kindergarten.

Preschool for children who are 3 to 5 years old.

Caitlin seduces Dante in the bathroom, except it wasn't Dante after all....

A body can maintain an erection after expiration.

"To expire" is to die. "Expiration" is the very medical noun.

This has got to be the weirdest thing you've ever been called in for.

"Weird" is a great adjective meaning strange or odd.

Lamentation.

An education word referring to the expression of grief or sadness.

I'm stuck in this pit, with slave wages, dealing with the most backward people on the planet.

A "pit" is a hole in the ground, often used to mean a disgusting place. "Slave wages" generally means very low pay or salary. In this context, people who are "backwards" are uneducated, stupid or pathetic.

I'd like to stew a bit

"To stew" is an interesting little verb meaning to think and reflect and perhaps to get angry about what one is thinking.!

You should shit or get off the pot.

A common and crude expression meaning "Decide what you want to do and then go out and do it."

The pathetic microcosm that is your life.

"Pathetic" is a great word meaning worthy of pity, or truly very bad. A "microcosm" is a small biological system representative of a much bigger biological system.

Veronica is convenient and low maintenance.

Great slang: A "low-maintenance" girlfriend is one that is emotionally stable and easy to be with. The opposite is a "high-maintenance" girlfriend, which is one that requires a lot of care.

Melodrama from you is as normal as an oral bowel movement.

A clever line: "Melodrama" is exaggerated emotion (which is common in movies). A "bowel movement" is the medical term for excrement (shit) and obviously has nothing to do with a mouth!

Jesus H. Christ

Note the middle initial that people occasionally add when saying "Jesus Christ," to express anger or other emotion.

Juxtaposition.

A useful word meaning the contrast or difference between two things.

You don't have the guts to force change.

Guts are intestines, but colloquially it means courage.

Do you smoke weed, drink beers, get high?

"Weed" is a dated word for marijuana. "To get high" is a common alternative to becoming "stoned" or inebriated on illegal drugs.

I heard he was jerking off.

"To jerk off" is to masturbate.

Knock it off! That used to be my girlfriend.

A great expression that simply means "stop it!"

Randal tells Veronica that Dante is going back to Caitlin. It isn't true, but Veronica believes him, and thus Dante's day goes from bad to worse...

The latent homosexual part. That's my theory.

"Latent" is an educated word that means existing in the present, but developing later. "Latent homosexuality" is the idea that people may be gay very early in life, but only realize it years later.

Why did you pussyfoot around my back?

"To pussyfoot" around someone means to do something secretly, without telling them.

Why did you pull that shit?

"Why did you do that?" Crude, but not uncommon.

You dumped me for her?

"To dump" someone is to break up with them, or to stop going out with them. A slangy but useful verb.

Catharsis.

An emotional or religious purifying.

Denouement.

A French word for the climax of a story, or the outcome.

Pull yourself out of this senseless funk.

This refers to a feeling of depression, or lack of direction in life.

You're spineless.

Literally without a spine, but colloquially it means a coward.

You get me slapped with a fine, and you violate a corpse!

Note that a judge "slaps a fine" or other penalty on a criminal. A corpse is an important and unpleasant word: A dead body!

There you go, trying to pass the buck.

"To pass the buck" is a set expression which means to place the blame or responsibility on someone else.

You like to think the weight of the world is on your shoulders.

A poetic expression meaning "all the problems of the world."

Like it's some great epic.

An "epic" is a big and heroic literary tale.

If were so advanced, what are we doing here?

Here, "advanced" means intelligent and sophisticated.

For Randall and Dante, the key statement of the movie...

Clerks

Some Potential Questions for ESL Class Discussion

1. What are Dante's biggest problems in life?
2. Do you see the type of customers that come into Dante's store in real life?
3. Will Dante or Randal ever escape?
4. What do people like Dante and Randall do as they grow older? Will they get married and have kids? Go back to school? Find better jobs? Or just be unhappy and frustrated forever?
5. Have you ever had a dead-end job? Are there advantages to having them?
6. What did you like or not like about this movie?

