

The Graduate

(Drama/Romance) (1967)

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Major Characters

- Benjamin Braddock.....Dustin Hoffman**
 A young and confused student who returns home to Los Angeles after graduating with honors from a good university, but with no idea as to what he now wants to do with his life.
- Mrs. Robinson.....Anne Bancroft**
 The sexy and alcoholic wife of Benjamin's father's law partner, who has known Benjamin and his parents since he was born.
- Elaine Robinson.....Katherine Ross**
 Mrs. Robinson's daughter, who is finishing her studies at the University of California at Berkeley.
- Mr. Robinson.....Murray Hamilton**
 Husband of Mrs. Robinson, father of Elaine, and law partner of Ben's father.
- Mr. Braddock.....William Daniels**
 Benjamin's father, who is a successful Los Angeles lawyer.
- Mrs. Braddock.....Elizabeth Wilson**
 Benjamin's mother, who is a typical housewife.

Plot Summary

This is the story of Benjamin Braddock, a 20 year old college graduate who comes home from his four years in school completely unsure of what he wants to do with his life. While staying at the house of his upper middle class parents, he suddenly finds himself being seduced by Mrs. Robinson, the sexy wife of his father's law partner. At first, Ben resists her attractions, for he has known her since he was a baby, and it is simply too strange to consider.

Soon after, however, Benjamin finds himself so bored with his life that he decides to have an affair with her after all, meeting her secretly several nights a week at a local hotel. All is going well until Mr. Robinson, completely unaware of what is happening, insists that Ben take out his daughter Elaine,

who was coming down to LA from Berkeley, where she was attending school. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Mrs. Robinson is determined to not let Benjamin go out with Elaine, but he does anyway. The result is a disaster for all involved, as the affair is soon exposed. The situation then becomes even more complicated when Ben finds himself falling in love with Elaine.

A quick background note: Many people consider this movie to be a true classic. At the time it came out in 1967, it caused a sensation, and to a certain extent, many might still say that it captured the rebellious spirit of the times in which it was made. Perhaps, but as famous and loved as this film is, it now seems to be very dated, and perhaps not as great as so many once thought.....

Some Words and Expressions that You may not Know

Ben comes home from school, an accomplished graduate with no idea what to do with his life.

What is it, Ben?

In the right context, another way to say "what's wrong?"

Come on.

The most versatile phrasal verb in the English language, used to show a wide variety of emotions, or, as here, to simply mean "let's go."

You won't have much trouble **picking them up** with that, will you?

"To pick up" girls (or boys) is to try and meet and attract them so that they will go out with you later.

The chicks. The teeny-boppers.

A "chick" is a somewhat dated slang word for a girl or woman, and a "teeny bopper" is a very old-fashioned term for teenage girls who often love musicians who specialize in cute looks and stupid love songs.

I think Ben has gotten beyond the teeny-bopper stage.

In this case, a particular phase or period of time in life.

Here's the track star, himself!

"Track and field" are sports such as running and long jumping that are popular in schools, and in the Olympics.

The Helpingham Award.

The name of the prize that Ben apparently won at school.

Plastics.

The flexible building material, of course, but more importantly, *the* most remembered single word in the entire movie.

That's a deal.

Very common for "agreement," and in other contexts, a good price.

College yearbook.

The annual book published by schools that have pictures of all of their students.

Captain of the cross-country team.

A "captain" is a military term meaning leader. "Cross-country" races are those that are very long, such as the 5,000 meter race, as opposed to races like the 100 meter dash.

Managing editor of the paper in his senior year.

Remember, college is usually divided into four years; Freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior.

Ben and Mrs. Robinson become reacquainted....

I'm just sort of disturbed about things.

"Disturbed" is an interesting alternative to upset, or bothered.

Do you know how to work a foreign shift?

In this case, referring to the "stick shift" in a car, which allows a driver to change gears, or speed.

I feel funny about coming into a dark house.

Note the use of "funny" in this context to mean nervous or strange. A common use of a versatile adjective.

I'm very **neurotic**.

"Neurotic" is a very useful word from psychology that describes someone who is convinced the world is against them, or more generally, who is very nervous.

Did you know that I was an **alcoholic**?

Someone who is dependent on alcoholic drinks.

For God's sake, Mrs. Robinson, here we are.

An interesting little expression that shows frustration, anger or other intense emotion.

You start opening up your personal life.

Note that you can "open up" a book, but if you do the same with your life, you are revealing its private details.

You are trying to seduce me.....aren't you?

A critical verb meaning to try and attract, in a sexual or romantic way.

I feel very flattered that you---

"To flatter" is to compliment excessively or insincerely, but if you *feel* flattered, you are happy that somebody looks upon you positively.

I'm mixed-up.

If a person is "mixed-up," they're generally confused.

Won't you unzip my dress?

Note that the noun is a "zipper" (the metal device used on clothes), but the verb is "to zip," or more dangerously, as in this case, "to unzip."

He might get the wrong idea.

An interesting and common way to refer to an inaccurate impression of a general situation.

Well, I'll hand it to you.

Put here to remind you that an event in the *immediate* future will almost always take the *contracted* form of verb+will, and not the full form ("I will") or even "[I am] going to."

Jesus Christ!

A very common way to express anger, surprise frustration, etc.

I want you to know that I'm available to you.

If a person is "available," they are ready to be of service.

You can call me any time you want and we'll make some kind of arrangement.

An interesting alternative to agreement, in this case referring to when and where Ben and Mrs. Robinson should meet.

***Ben and Mr. Robinson discuss the future,
and Ben's parents celebrate his past.***

Swell. I appreciate it.

A very old-fashioned way to say "great" when someone tells you good news.

Standing guard over the old castle, are you?

A "castle" is a huge fortress that was built in the middle ages, but can be used, as in this case, to refer to one's own house.

You look like you need a refill.

Both a verb and noun, used when you're still thirsty and your glass is now empty.

You look a little shaken up.

If someone is "shaken up," they are upset, startled or possibly scared.

Let's have a nightcap together.

A "nightcap" is a way to refer to the last drink of the evening.

Scotch. Bourbon.

Two types of strong liquor.

That's a hell of a good age to be.

An expression used for emotional emphasis that in this case is equivalent to "very."

I hope you won't mind my giving you a friendly piece of advice.

"Advice" is an opinion on what should or should not be done. Note that you can give *some* advice, or a *piece* of it.

I think you ought to be taking it a little easier right now.

Generally speaking, "to take it easy" is to relax or not work too hard.

Sow a few wild oats.

A silly and old-fashioned expression meaning to have sexual adventures with lots of different girls. "To sow" is literally to scatter seed, and oats are a type of cereal. Yes, a very stupid saying.

Have a good time with the girls and so forth.

Another way to say "and so on."

You think that's sound advice?

As an adjective, "sound" means correct or wise.

You have yourself a few flings this summer.

A "fling" is an interesting word for a brief sexual affair.

I bet you're quite a ladies' man.

"To bet" is obviously to gamble, but used with this common construction, it means to be sure of something. "A ladies' man" is a stupid expression for a man who is popular with women.

You look like the kind of guy who has to fight them off.

"To fight off" something is to protect yourself from attack, although in this case, the something in question is women.

Ladies and Gentlemen, for this afternoon's feature attraction...

A common expression that refers to the "main event" when there are two or more concert performers or movies.

Now I'm going to ask for a big round of applause.

A "round of applause" refers to a few seconds of clapping, or cheering.

Let me amend that.

"To amend" something is to change it. An "amendment" is a change added to an official document, such as a Constitution.

A Frank Halpingham award scholar.

A "scholar" is an educated person, student or researcher. Students often receive awards named after people, as here.

It better work or I'm out over 200 bucks.

Note that "better" is the only English adverb that also functions as a modal verb! "To be out" a certain amount of money is to waste or lose it, and "bucks," are of course, dollars.

Some spectacular and amazing feats of daring.

"Spectacular" is an excellent word meaning sensational, or perhaps, amazing. A "feat of daring" is a set expression that refers to an act of great courage, perhaps done because the person was challenged or dared to do it by someone else.

Ben rethinks Mrs. Robinson's offer, and the great adventure begins...

Mrs. Robinson, I don't know quite how to put this.

"Quite" is a filler word that often means exactly. Note that "to put" can mean to express, when searching for the right words in a delicate or embarrassing situation.

I was wondering if I could buy you a drink or something.

"To wonder" is to think about, and note that it is used in the past progressive tense when you want to ask somebody a question in a high-risk situation.

Are you here for an affair, Sir?

Note the play on words: It's most common meaning is a secret and sexual relationship, but it can more generally refer to any kind of event, such as a party.

I didn't get your name, Sir.

In this case, meaning to hear, but simply noted to remind you of the incredible semantic variations of this verb "to get"---To win, trap, make obtain, understand, become, arrive, etc....

I will have a martini.

A popular alcoholic drink made with vermouth and gin.

I'm a bit nervous. I mean it's pretty hard to be suave when...

A "bit" is a common and excellent alternative for a little.

"Suave" is a good word meaning socially refined or smooth.

I'll have a porter bring it in.

An old-fashioned word for the person who carries luggage to your room in a hotel or train. "Bell-boy" is a bit more current.

Actually, I'd just as soon find it myself.

A pretty common expression which basically means prefer.

Whatever you say, Sir.

"Whatever you prefer is OK with me."

The desk clerk seems to be a little bit suspicious.

A key adjective that implies illegal or improper behavior. Note that "suspicious" is a complex word, for a person can be suspicious *of* other people, or be acting in ways that is suspicious *to* other people.

I don't know what their policy is.

A critical word, here referring to their principles of doing business.

Shall I just stand here?

In American English, an old-fashioned word for "should," but still widely used in England.

Will you bring me a hanger?

Devices found in closets to hang clothes, made of wood or wire.

This is all terribly wrong.

"Terribly" is a good alternative adverb meaning "very" or "horribly. "

I think they deserve a little better than jumping into bed with the partner's wife.

"To jump into bed" with someone implies to have sex with them. Note that "partner" can refer to a girlfriend or boyfriend, or here, business associate.

I think you're the most attractive of all my parent's friends.

"Attractive" is a neutral and safe word that can mean physically pretty or even sexy, although it can also refer to a good personality.

You're missing the point!

"You are not understanding exactly what I'm trying to tell you."

That's a laugh, Mrs. Robinson.

Another possible way to say "that is ridiculous," or "what a joke!"

Are you kidding?

"To kid" somebody is to tease or make fun of them, often by saying something that cannot possibly be true.

Just because you happen to be inadequate in one way....

An interesting word meaning not satisfactory, or not good, and considered very negative when applied to sexual skills!

I would say that I'm just drifting.

"To drift" is to move slowly without a particular direction or goal.

Have you thought about graduate school?

The level of university study after the first four years of "undergraduate" education.

What was the point of all that hard work? :: You got me.

In a context like this, a cynical way to say "I have no idea."

A young man should have a chance to relax...and lie around.

"To lie around" generally means to do nothing in particular, outside of perhaps reading or watching TV.

I believe that a person would want to take some stock in himself..

An old-fashioned way to say "examine or use the skills that he has."

...and start to think about getting off his ass.

If you tell someone to "get off your ass," you are telling them to stop being so lazy. An "ass," of course, is a butt, or *derriere*.

I just think you two would hit it off real well together.

If two people "hit it off," this means that they each like other after having gotten to know each other for the first time.

What do you do when you go off at night?

An interesting phrasal verb, here simply meaning to leave.

I don't want to play games with you.

Note that in this case, it means "I don't want to have to guess if you're telling the truth." A related expression is "mind games."

Benjamin, I'm not going to pry into your affairs.

"To pry into" means to force open, and in this case, "affairs" simply means Ben's various activities in life.

<p><i>Ben and Mrs. Robinson face their first crisis.</i></p>

All we ever do is...leap into bed together.

"To leap" is to jump, and as you've seen, one can also "jump into bed."

Do you think we could liven it up with a few words now and then?

"To liven something up" is to make it more exciting or interesting.

You say the driveway is on your side of the house?

The short road next to houses where cars are often parked.

You didn't have to marry him or anything, did you?

If a couple "have to get married," it's often because the woman accidentally got pregnant.

I mean.....what were the circumstances?

An important word referring to the various facts or conditions that have influenced a general situation.

What was your major?

In the present tense, this is every student's favorite question when getting to know another student: A student's "major" is their specific focus of study, such as History, Math or French.

What does it possibly matter?

"How can this possibly be important?!"

In the car, you did it?!

Note that in the right context, "to do it" means to have sex.

Well, why is this such a big **taboo subject** all of a sudden?

Topics that people avoid discussing because it makes them extremely uncomfortable (such as sex, alcoholism, money, etc.)

Benjamin, don't ever take that girl out.

"To take out" someone can often mean to go on a date with them.

I was just **kidding around**.

"To kid around" can mean to simply say something one doesn't really mean.

I'm not good enough for her to associate with, am I?

"To associate with" somebody is to have some kind of business or social relationship with them.

You go to hell!

This is a less vulgar way of saying "fuck you," but note that Ben's use of the pronoun. "You" is a relatively rare addition.

I am not proud that I spend my time with a broken-down alcoholic.

A car or other mechanical object can "break down," (ie...stop working), but as a way to describe a person, this is both rare and very negative.

If you think I come here for any reason beside pure boredom, then you're all wrong.

The adjective "bored" is more common, but the noun is still useful.

This is the sickest, most **perverted** thing that ever happened to me.

"Perverted" is a powerful adjective meaning immoral or disgusting, and very often associated with sexual matters.

I'm getting the hell out.

This is a fairly common way to add emotion such as anger.

You're goddamn right I am!

Another vulgar word to express anger, frustration and other emotions, and frequently used in the phrase "goddamn it."

Did I say that? :: Of course you did, in so many words.

If you say something "in so many words," you mean the same thing as something else, though the words themselves are different.

I don't think you'd be right for each other.

"I don't think the two of you would like each other."

If it's sickening for you.

Less common than disgusting or even gross, but just as strong.

It never occurred to me to take her out.

If something "occurs" to someone, it just pops into their mind.

Then give me your word that you won't.

"To give someone your word" is to promise them.

This is absurd.

A powerful adjective meaning ridiculous, or perhaps crazy.

All right, for Christ's sake.

Another widely used "religious expression" which is used to show anger, frustration or other emotion.

Ben and Elaine get reacquainted, but the horrible secret is soon revealed.

I think it might be a nice gesture if you asked her out.

A good little word referring to a small act or expression, often made as a sign of good intentions or friendship.

Look, Elaine Robinson and I do not get along.

A critical phrasal verb generally meaning to enjoy the company of another person.

You're just too busy every evening doing god knows what.

An interesting expression used to show frustration when the speaker is unsure of the truth of a situation.

I'm afraid I couldn't quite handle that, if you don't mine.

In this context, "to handle" is a great verb meaning to be comfortable with a situation. Thus, if Ben "can't handle" what Mrs. Robinson is proposing, it's perhaps because he would end up panicking.

I want you to keep your wits about you tonight.

A fairly rare word for intelligence or mental sharpness.

You never know what tricks Ben **picked up** back there in the East.

In this case, "tricks" refers to the general intelligence or ability to do various things with ease, and here, to "pick up" means to learn, probably without making much effort.

I've had this feeling, this kind of compulsion that I got to be **rude** all the time.

"Compulsion" is an uncontrollable need to act in a certain way, even if not rational or desired. "Rude" is a good word for impolite or mean.

They're being made up by all the wrong people.

Here, another way to say created, or simply "made."

The Taft Hotel.

The hotel where Benjamin and Mrs. Robinson had met, and where Elaine suggests Ben and her look for a bar.

They must think I look like this guy Gladstone.

"This + guy + proper name" is a common construction when referring to someone you don't know or know little about.

You're....the first person I can stand to be with.

"I can *not* stand him" is a very common way of expressing dislike. Here, Ben uses "stand" in the positive to express something close to "I think you're OK," but this is rare.

I can make things quite unpleasant.

This is an interesting way to threaten somebody.

Elaine escapes to Berkeley, but Ben is determined to win her back.

When did you talk this over?

"To talk over" something is to discuss it.

Ben, this whole idea sounds pretty half-baked.

An old-fashioned but fun expression used to describe a plan that is seen as silly or stupid, or even sure to fail.

To be perfectly honest, she doesn't like me.

Another interesting way to say "frankly."

I'm just sort of traveling through.

"Sort of" is very widely used, and means "somewhat, " or "rather," or, of course, "kind of. " All these expressions allow a speaker to say something is X, even though its really not totally X.

I like to know what my boys are up to.

To be "up to" something is simply to be doing it. A good question after not having seen a person for a while is "What have you been up to?"

You're not one of those agitators?

"To agitate" is an interesting verb meaning to move with violence or force, or to excite with words. In the 1960s, Berkeley had many student demonstrations, over issues from free speech to the Vietnam War.

One of those outside agitators?

When political agitation occurs somewhere, it is common to blame people who are from "outside" that community, whether true or not.

I hate that. I won't stand for it.

Note that if you *won't* stand for something, you will not accept it, but if you *do* stand for something, you embrace it and become a symbol for it.

Well, how about this for a coincidence.

"An accidental sequence of events that appear to have a causal relationship." A key word worth clarifying in a bilingual dictionary!

But you're not enrolled.

"Enrolled" is another word for registered.

I just sit in. They don't seem to mind.

"To sit in" a class is to attend it without actually registering or getting credit for it. A better way to say this is to "audit" it.

They've been very congenial about it.

An old-fashioned word for agreeable or sympathetic.

Maybe we can get together and talk about it.

"To get together" is a very common way of saying to meet.

He certainly is a good walker.

A silly comment from Ben. You can refer to a person as a "a good talker," which is somebody who can express themselves convincingly, but you're not likely to hear "a good walker."

And when we got up in the room she starts taking her clothes off.
 Note how Ben mixes both the "simple past" and "historical present" tenses to tell the story. Not correct, but alas, not uncommon.

Shall I get the cops?
 "Cops" is a widely used slang word for the police.

What for?
 Another alternative to "How come?" or, of course, "Why?"

How about tomorrow? I don't mean to be pushy, but...
 "Pushy" is a useful adjective meaning too assertive or aggressive.

We could go down and get our blood tests tomorrow.
 These are medical exams everyone needs to take in the US before they are given a marriage license.

We'll need our birth certificates. I happen to have mine with me.
 "Birth certificates" are the official documents issued for each baby when it is born. If you "happen to" do something, you did it by chance, without actually planning.

Why don't you just drag me off if you want to marry me so much?
 "To drag off" somebody is to physically pull them away.

Did he get down on his knees?
 A very old-fashioned way to ask somebody to get married!

<i>Mr. Robinson comes looking for Ben...</i>

Do you have a special grudge against me?
 A "grudge" is a good word for a strong feeling of resentment or anger.

Is there something I've said that's caused this contempt?....
 To have "contempt for" someone is to look down on them with scorn or hatred.

...or is it just the things I stand for that you despise?
 "To despise" someone is to hate them with great passion.
 Note that in this case, "to stand for" means to represent or symbolize.

Do you want to unclench your fists, please?

A "fist" is what your hand becomes when you fold over the fingers in such a way as to suggest you are going to hit somebody.

"To unclench" your fist is to turn it back into a harmless hand!

I am trying to tell you that I don't resent you.

"To resent" someone is to feel anger at them for something they did.

I do think you should know the consequences of what you've done.

An important word meaning "the logical result or outcome."

I feel quite sure you would get over that as quickly.

"To get over" something is to recover from it, or no longer care about it.

I don't know if I can prosecute or not.

"To prosecute" someone is an official legal term which means to charge them with a crime.

In light of what's happened, I think I can get you behind bars.

"In light of" is an interesting way to say "given," when referring to a set of facts. "To get somebody behind bars" implies to put them in jail or prison.

I don't want to mince words with you.

"To mince words" is an interesting expression meaning to speak diplomatically, but as in the case above, its almost always used in the negative to mean to speak directly, or bluntly.

You've got to get her out of your filthy mind.

In this context, "filthy" is a fine adjective for sick, perverted, etc...

I think you are scum.

Literally, a filmy layer of waste matter on a liquid, but more commonly, a very strong word meaning a worthless or disgusting person. And the root of my personal favorite insult word, "scumbag!"

You are a degenerate!

Another insult meaning a disgusting or sexually perverted person.

I'll give you ten dollars for a dime.

Ten cents, or the cost of a phone call in 1967! US coins are quarters (25), dimes (10), nickels (5) and pennies (1).

Will you send a patrol car to 1200 Glenview Road?

The police "patrol" neighborhoods, looking out for illegal activity, and thus a "patrol car" is a police car.

Are you armed?

If a person is "armed," they are carrying a weapon. Usually a gun, but perhaps a knife.

The arrangements have been so rushed.

"Formal plans," often referring to a wedding or other type of ceremony.

***As Elaine prepares for a life without Ben,
he makes one last attempt to win her back .***

He took off in the middle of the night to get married.

"To take off" is a common phrasal verb meaning to leave.

Probably one step ahead of the shotgun.

A shotgun is the gun used to start races, but the reference here is to a "shotgun wedding," often organized very quickly after the woman finds out she is pregnant.

He's probably still in the sack :: Or in the can.

The "sack" is a slang word for bed, and the "can" is very slangy word for a toilet (As is "the john").

Where is the makeout king getting married?

"To make out" is to engage in various romantic activities such as kissing or "petting," but does not mean actual intercourse.

Santa Barbara.

A beautiful city two hours North of Los Angeles.

Maybe at his old man's home.

This is a stupid and dated expression for father, or possibly boyfriend.

Give the bride a message for me.

The woman who is getting married. The man is "the groom."

Tell him to save a piece for me.

This can refer to a piece of (wedding) cake, or as a form of vulgar slang, to a woman.

I'm sure it's over by now.

If something is "over," it's finished.

The First Presbyterian.

The name of the church where Elaine is getting married.

I'm not a priest, I'm a minister.

A "priest" is a religious official in the Catholic Church, and is often called "father." A "minister" is the same in a Protestant Church.

Let's get this bus moving!

An alternative to the imperative command "Move this bus!"

The Graduate:

Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion

1. Why is Benjamin so confused? Do all college graduates go through an "identity crisis" after finishing school?
2. When this movie came out in 1967, the most well known word in the movie quickly became "plastics." Why? What does this say about the film makers? The 1960s? Are attitudes toward business, indeed, toward "plastics," different today?
3. Is Mrs. Robinson an admirable character? Contemptible? Both?
4. Why does Mrs. Robinson want Ben to stay away from Elaine?
5. If such an affair were discovered in your country, what would happen?
6. What are this film's biggest weaknesses?

