

Of Mice and Men Idioms

An idiom is a traditional way of saying something. Often an idiom, such as “under the weather,” does not seem to make sense if taken literally. Someone unfamiliar with English would probably not understand that to be “under the weather” is to be sick. Idioms are often a product of place and time, and since you weren’t around in 1930’s central California, this list will be helpful to you in decoding Of Mice and Men.

Chapter One

- blow their stake: Lose and/or spend all their money
- blowin' in our jack: losing, spending, or gambling away all our money
- bustin' a gut: Your gut is your stomach area. To bust a gut is to engage in very hard physical labor - - so hard that you ache all over - - even in your gut.
- in hot water: to be in hot water is to be in trouble.
- jungle- up: During the Great Depression, many wanderers (hoboes and tramps) would settle for the night in groups. These areas would be known as hobo jungles. To jungle- up is to camp out for the evening in the company of other like companions of the road.
- live off the fatta the lan': Live off the fat of the land. The fat of the land is an expression that refers to having the best of everything. In the case of Lennie and George and their dream for a place of their own, it also means that they believe they will be able to survive and prosper by simply relying on what they can grow and raise - - that the land is so "fat" they will need nothing else to be happy.

Chapter Two

- bum steer: bum, in this instance, means false or erroneous. A bum steer is false information or directions.
- canned: fired (also “get the can”)
- clear out: leave for good
- done quite a bit in the ring: The ring here refers to a boxing ring. Candy is making a reference to the fact that Curley has done some boxing.
- Drink hearty: in other words, "Drink up, drink well, have a good time!"
- flapper: mouth
- game: courageous
- gang up: attack as a group
- got the eye: Candy is referring to the fact that, instead of being faithful to her husband, Curley's wife tends to look around at other men.
- in heat: For a female animal (in this case, a dog), to be in heat (also known as estrus) is to be in a state of sexual excitement when she will accept mating from a male.
- jail bait: a girl below the legal age of consent for sex; an underage girl who tempts a man to sexual intimacy which is punishable by imprisonment
- licked: beat; loses the fight
- old lady: mother, or, in this case, Lennie's Aunt Clara.
- old man: in this case, father
- pants is full of ants: To have "ants in one's pants" is to be nervous and restless.

- pants rabbits: any type of parasites, such as lice; especially those that might affect the genital area
- picking scraps: A scrap is a fight or argument. To pick a scrap is to provoke fights or quarrels.
- plug himself up for a fighter: to "plug oneself up" is to advertise or display oneself; to boast. George is referring to the fact that Curley may want to prove what a good fighter he is by going after Lennie.
- poison: A woman who is poison is one who can only mean trouble, especially to a man.
- poke: A poke is a wallet or purse. Poke also refers to money; especially all the money one has.
- pokin' your big ears into our business: eavesdropping; listening in, uninvited, on a private conversation
- poop: energy; desire
- rassel: lift, carry, and handle; especially something heavy and awkward
- rattrap: a rattrap is a hopeless situation; one that no good can come from. George is warning Lennie to stay away from Curley's wife because getting involved with her would only result in a bad situation.
- scrappy: aggressive; fond of fighting and arguing
- shove off: leave
- shove out of here: get out of here
- slang her pups: gave birth to her pups
- sore as hell: extremely angry
- take the rap: take the blame; be the one who gets into trouble
- tangles: fights; argues
- two bits: a quarter; twenty-five cents
- what stake you got in this guy: In this case, a stake is an interest (financial, personal, etc.) in a person or thing. The boss is asking George what interest he has in Lennie.
- what the hell's he got on his shoulder: This refers to the expression "to have a chip on one's shoulder," which is used to describe someone who is bad tempered, easily angered, or always ready for a fight. George is wondering why Curley seems so bad tempered.

Chapter Three

- bucks: dollars
- crack: A crack refers to an attempt or a try. In this instance, a crack means one session of sexual intercourse with a prostitute.
- cut off his wind: wind, in this case, refers to breath or the ability to breathe. When someone is hit in the stomach and has his wind cut off, that person may have trouble breathing for a time.
- flat bust: completely broke; without any money
- flop: sexual intercourse with a prostitute
- goo- goos: silly young men; idiots; perhaps those who are a little lovestruck
- hoosegow: jail

- looloo: a sexy woman
- make it stick: To make something stick is to be successful. Curley was not successful in his attempt to scare or intimidate Slim.
- old lady: in this case, wife
- on the county: on welfare; on public relief
- people: family
- punk: an insignificant person; someone of no importance
- rabbits in: jumps in
- roll up a stake: save up some money
- scram: leave, usually in a hurry
- set on the trigger: Someone set on the trigger is on the verge of causing (just about to cause) trouble.
- set you back: cost
- shot: one drink (an ounce) of liquor
- start a party out to lynch: To lynch is to murder someone, usually by hanging, without following a legal procedure. A lynch party is a mob of people who take the law in their own hands and are determined to illegally kill someone. According to George, some men in the town of Weed wanted to capture Lennie and kill him.
- throw a litter: give birth. A litter is the young of an animal that were born at the same time.
- throw a scare: scare, intimidate
- welter: a welterweight; a boxer who weighs 136 to 147 pounds
- wing- ding: a terrific person; someone to be admired
- yella- jackets in his drawers: Yellow- jackets are a form of wasps (see a picture of some wasps). Drawers, in this case, are underwear. Whit's description of Curley is a lot like saying that he has ants in his pants; that is, that he is restless and nervous.
- yella: yellow; a coward

Chapter Four

- baloney: nonsense
- booby hatch: insane asylum; a place designed to house people who are mentally unstable
- corn: whiskey made from corn
- cover 'im up: protect him; make excuses for him; cover up for him
- doped out: figured out
- old lady: in this case, the mother dog
- put me in pitchers: put me in pictures; gotten me a job as an actress in the movies (motion pictures)
- right cross: in boxing, a punch delivered by the boxer's right fist
- screwy: crazy
- sellin' me: trying to make me believe
- set: sit; sit down
- strung up on a tree: hanged, lynched
- take you out in a box: in this case, the box is a coffin. Crooks is telling Candy that the old man will remain where he is until he dies.

Topping

- took a powder: left
- went with shows: been an entertainer on the stage.

Chapter Five

- we'd never do her: "her," in this case, refers to their plan to own a farm. George is saying that he thinks they all knew they would never really accomplish their dream of living on their own place.