

Foreign Language Film Festival 2011-2012

Whatever Works

About the movie

DIRECTOR	Woody Allen
YEAR / COUNTRY	2009 / USA
GENRE	Comedy
ACTORS	Larry David, Evan Rachel Wood, Patricia Clarkson



PLOT

Boris Yellnikoff (Larry David) is a bitter, grumpy pretentious intellectual who claims to be a genius professor of Quantum Mechanics at Columbia University, NY. Attempting to impress his ideologies on religion, relationships, and the randomness (and worthlessness) of existence, he rants to anyone who will listen, including the audience. During an existential crisis, Boris ends his marriage and tries to commit suicide by jumping through a window. However, the canopy saves his life. Left to walk with a limp, Boris quits his job at Columbia. He moves to an old apartment downtown and offers chess classes to children for money. One night he meets a simpleminded religious Mississippi runaway called Melodie Saint Ann Celestine. Begging him for food in the street and with no place to go, he reluctantly gives her temporary lodging in his apartment. His reclusive rages give way to an unlikely friendship and Boris begins to mold the impressionable young girl's worldly views to match his own. When it comes to love, "whatever works" is his motto and the girl, impressed with his pretentious geniality, fits into his world. Despite their age difference, they marry each other and have a routine life. His own already perplexed life complicates itself further when Melodie's parents eventually track her down.

LANGUAGE

New York Jewish accents with many examples of Hebrew idiomatic language and slang coupled with the sophisticated philosophical intellectual analysis so typical of Woody Allen's protagonists. To off set this, Allen cleverly places another example of language with the deep southern accent of the antagonist from Mississippi using extremely simplistic expressions and clichés. The clever dialogue of the main actors and their exceptionally diverse personalities give a deeper dimension to the script making it even more communicative.

GRAMMAR

Cliché definition: a cliché is a common phrase that has been overused. In general, clichés are to be avoided. In reality, they are not avoided - that is why they are called clichés! They are found everywhere: in letters, in films, in articles, in conversation.

What's the difference between an idiom and a cliché?

An idiom is a phrase that means something else than the literal words. Idioms always have figurative, not literal meanings. Here are some examples:

To get under someone's skin = to bother someone
She's getting under my skin!

No spring chicken = not young
Tom's no spring chicken. He's almost 70!

A cliché is a phrase which is considered overused (used too often) which can be literal or figurative in meaning. Here are some examples:

the good old days (literally = in the past when things were better)
I remember my college years. Those were the good old days.

tip of the iceberg (figurative = only the beginning, or just a small percentage)

VOCABULARY

To babble: to talk foolishly; to utter in an incoherently or meaninglessly repetitious manner	Proton: an elementary particle identical with the nucleus of the hydrogen atom that along with neutrons is a constituent of all other atomic nuclei that carries a positive charge numerically equal to the charge of an electron, and that has a mass of 1.672×10^{-24} gram.
To banter: to speak to or address in a witty and teasing manner	To impart: to give, convey or communicate the knowledge of; to disclose
Atrocious: extremely wicked, brutal or cruel; barbaric, appalling, horrifying	Misanthropy: a hatred or distrust of mankind
To flaunt: to display ostentatiously or impudently	Meager: deficient in quality and quantity
Bedraggled: soiled and stained by or as if by trailing in the mud or left wet and limp by or as if by rain	Vagrant: one who has no established residence and wanders idly from place to place without lawful or visible means of support
A crush: an intense and usually passing infatuation	To limp: to walk lamely favouring one leg
Zilch: zero	Cliché: stereotype of imitated origin: a trite phrase or expression also the idea expressed by it