



Shoot for the moon, at least you'll land among the stars

Idioms – they don't work the way you think they do

AFNAN AHMED CRYSTAL

Yeah, if you miscalculate the distance, that is. You might even hit your head on the moon; at least the impact may set your brain in place. If you're among the minority who aren't weak at math (the moon is WAY closer than the stars), hearing this particularly misused phrase must have made you cringe and wonder why you have a brain during the million times you've heard it. Unfortunately, you'll probably hear it a million more times in the future too, along with these other misinterpreted gems:

Blood is thicker than water: Oh, you want to ditch dinner with the nosy relatives and head to that sleepover at Kuddus' tonight? Too bad your wannabe-Avicii cousin goes on to say something along the lines of "Hey sister, know the water's sweet but blood is thicker." How simpler could the meaning be? Blood relations (family) come before what—hold on. WHY in the world would friends be water? Ever thought of that? No, you only think about yourself.

The original proverb is, "Blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb." Funny enough, it's actually in reverse. "Water of the womb", a.k.a. family ties, that we're bound to by fate are not as thick as the friendships we choose to establish. It seems the misconceived maxim stemmed from covenants made in the olden days using blood.

The origin can also be attributed to the battlefield — the time spent and memo-

ries made while struggling, taking/shedding blood alongside fellow comrades create a much denser bond than the amniotic fluid you floated in for nine months.

Funny how all this time we referred to friendships as "water". Why? Because we met them at a swimming pool?

Tip: DON'T try elucidating the genuine meaning to your mom, though. You'll only be responded with the "Morey gelebujhbi" card yet again.

Curiosity killed the cat: So, some cat got trampled by the rover on Mars. Big deal.

Just kidding. But if curiosity killed the cat, what next, "Studying killed my brain cells"?

Once again, the truncated version seems to be spreading a message completely contradictory to the connotation of the full axiom. Think about it, if every "cat" feared potential consequences, Columbus would never set foot in America, Neil Armstrong would never land on the moon, Fleming wouldn't ever discover penicillin. Heck, we'd never have '3 Idiots' if Chetan Bhagat had gone along with this repugnantly curt saying and not drastically changed his career to become a

writer. Then how did such a phrase get coined in the first place?

Well, it dates back to the 1598 play 'Every Man in His Humour', where one dialogue read, "Care will kill a cat". Care in that context meant worry/sorrow, with no implication of its modern meaning, i.e. affection. Thus, the playwright meant that fretting too much might just give the cat a heart attack. Shakespeare later propagated the phrase by using it in 'Much Ado about

Nothing'. No one seems to be able to cite who replaced "care" with "curiosity" over time, neither can anyone refer to the person who came up with the iconic riposte making up the last half of the phrase – curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back. Nine times.

Jack of all trades, master of none:

To those who use this in a disparaging way, think of Benjamin Franklin. How many could live a life as interestingly versatile as his? It takes brains to be a polymath, and they are definitely more insightful than a master of one. Learning isn't a zero-sum pursuit. Who says you can't be a hacker, business tycoon, magician, and lead singer of a band altogether?

Then again, if someone claims to be an eye, heart and kidney specialist at the same time, you probably shouldn't visit that doctor.

Carpe Diem: "Eh, screw the test tomorrow, let's party. Carpe Diem!"

We all know "carpe diem" as the vintage, sophisticated ancestor of the contemporary #YOLO, a jargon used by many of us to shirk off tedious responsibilities, smugly shrouding the fact that we're just lazy.

The full Latin aphorism is "carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero", which translates to "seize the day, trusting as little as possible in the future". What's ironic is that the Roman poet Horace – who first quoted it in his book, 'Odes' – meant you cannot expect everything to fall in place in the long run due to its sheer unpredictability, and so need to work hard in the present for a better future.

It gets even more ironic if you believe Mr. Keating was advising his students to forget textbooks and get wasted in a cave in 'Dead Poets Society'. "Carpe diem. Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary." Read the last line again.

Perhaps you should go study for that test now, lest your CGPA slides and you end up as a janitor instead at your dream university. Remember, carpe diem!

Crystal's a foodaholic whose only life achievement has been being the *insanest* one in the room involuntarily. Yes, it's her real name. Send her dank memes, good music, and all things aesthetic at crystalafnan@gmail.com

