

Term Test Reading Packet

Train of Thought

I searched through *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* to find information on the expression *train of thought*, but found nothing under either *train* or *thought*.

5 Certainly the origin of that expression couldn't have predated the invention of the locomotive in 1801. Before 1801, when a person was alert to a clattering onslaught of thoughts, big overloaded
10 boxcars of thought, thoughts linked together and barreling by, what expression would that person have used?

The etymology of this expression stems from the industrial age, that reign of
15 clanking mechanical contraptions, pistons pumping, conveyor belts conveying. But it's a sadly lacking expression for the post-industrial age,
20 when voluminous amounts of information are sent across continents in nanoseconds and practically every week physicists proclaim the existence of a subatomic particle that is smaller and
25 shorter-lived and more elusive than the particle thought to be the fundamental building block of matter the day before. And what with frequent technological advances in the rapid transmission of
30 words and images, from telex to modem to satellite dish, even the *lightning* in the term *lightning fast* seems feeble and inadequate, a waning glow in our vocabulary.

35 So the question is how to update the phrase *train of thought*, how to dust it off, streamline its antiquated angles, how to make it purr like a monorail. You can replace the cowcatcher with a nose cone,
40 use plutonium instead of coal, fit the caboose with a booster rocket, but that won't make it modern for long. At the rate science proceeds, rockets and missiles may one day seem like buffalo—slow,
45 endangered grazers in the black pasture of outer space.

It was only thirty years ago that my father read me asleep from *The Big Book of Trains*. Each page illustrated explained
50 the function of a single car—hopper, tank, flatcar, stock car—and I'd pull away from the station of my waking toward the deep, improbable twilight of dreams. In the realm of dreams there was a train,
55 too; but wheeling freely off its track, strange fumes spewing from the smokestack. In one dream from my childhood I was on a train with a woman who was dressed in an enormous satin
60 skirt. I was sitting in her lap and we ladled cupfuls of water into each other's mouths. "Where are we going?" I asked her. "To the city," she said, "where the rustling of a woman's skirt sounds the
65 same as the rain." I remember that dream because it was the first from which I awoke with a phrase intact, a phrase that withstood the morning light, and I fell in love with words.

Adapted from Bernard Cooper, "Train of Thought." Copyright 1996 by Bernard Cooper.

The Indian Dog

When I was growing up I lived in a pueblo in New Mexico. There one day I bought a dog. I was twelve years old, the bright autumn air was cold and delicious, and the dog was an unconscionable bargain at five dollars.

It was an Indian dog; that is, it belonged to a Navajo man who had come to celebrate the Feast of San Diego. It was one of two or three rangy animals following in the tracks of the man's covered wagon as he took leave of our village on his way home. Indian dogs are marvelously independent and resourceful, and they have an idea of themselves, I believe, as knights and philosophers.

The dog was not large, but neither was it small. It was one of those unremarkable creatures that one sees in every corner of the world, the common denominator of all its kind. But on that day—and to me—it was noble and brave and handsome.

It was full of resistance, and yet it was ready to return my deep, abiding love; I could see that. It needed only to make a certain adjustment in its lifestyle, to shift the focus of its vitality from one frame of reference to another. But I had to drag my dog from its previous owner by means of a rope. Its bushy tail wagged happily all the while.

That night I secured my dog in the garage, where there was a warm clean pallet, wholesome food, and fresh water, and I bolted the door. And the next morning the dog was gone, as in my heart I knew it would be; I had read such a future in its eyes. It had squeezed through a vent, an opening much too small for it, or so I had thought. But as they say, where there is a will there is a way—and the Indian dog was possessed of one indomitable will.

I was crushed at the time, but strangely reconciled, too, as if I had perceived intuitively some absolute truth beyond all the billboards of illusion.

The Indian dog had done what it had to do, had behaved exactly as it must, had been true to itself and to the sun and moon. It knew its place in the scheme of things, and its place was there, with its right destiny, in the tracks of the wagon. In my mind's eye I could see it at that very moment, miles away, plodding in the familiar shadows, panting easily with relief, after a bad night, contemplating the wonderful ways of man.

Caveat emptor. But from that experience I learned something about the heart's longing. It was a lesson worth many times five dollars.

Adapted from N. Scott Momaday, "The Indian Dog." © 1997 by N. Scott Momaday.

The Snowstorm

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
5 And veils the farmhouse at the garden's end.
The sled and traveler stopped, the courier's feet
Delayed, all friends shut out, the house mates sit
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

10 Come see the north wind's masonry.
Out of an unseen quarry evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Curves his white bastions¹ with projected roof
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
15 Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he
For number or proportion. Mockingly,
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian² wreaths;
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;
20 Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall.

Maugre³ the farmer's sighs; and at the gate
A tapering turret overtops the work.
And when his hours are numbered, and the world
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,
25 Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,
Built in an age, the mad wind's nightwork,
The frolic architecture of the snow.

¹ Fortifications

² A fine, white marble of the Greek city Paros

³ In spite of

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Snowstorm."

A Loaf of Bread

A 1926 Nash sedan pulled wearily off the highway. The back seat was piled nearly to the ceiling with sacks, with pots and pans, and on the very top, right up
5 against the ceiling, two boys rode. The car pulled up to the gas pumps. A dark-haired, hatchet-faced man got slowly out.

Mae walked around the counter and stood in the door. The man was dressed
10 in gray wool trousers and a blue shirt, dark blue with sweat on the back and under the arms. The boys in overalls and nothing else, ragged patched overalls. Their faces were streaked with dust.
15 They went directly to the mud puddle under the hose and dug their toes into the mud.

The man asked, "Can we git some water, ma'am?"

A look of annoyance crossed Mae's face. "Sure, go ahead." She said softly over
20 her shoulder, "I'll keep my eye on the hose." She watched while the man slowly unscrewed the radiator cap and ran the
25 hose in.

The man turned off the hose and screwed on the cap again. The little boys took the hose from him and they
30 upended it and drank thirstily. The man took off his dark, stained hat and stood with a curious humility in front of the screen. "Could you see your way to sell us a loaf of bread, ma'am?"

Mae said, "This ain't a grocery store. We
35 got bread to make san'widges."

"I know, ma'am." His humility was insistent. "We need bread and there ain't
nothin' for quite a piece, they say."

"F we sell bread we gonna run out."
40 Mae's tone was faltering.

"We're hungry," the man said.

"Whyn't you buy a san'widge? We got nice san'widges, hamburgs."

"We'd sure admire to do that, ma'am. But
45 we can't. We got to make a dime do all of us." And he said embarrassedly, "We ain't got but a little."

Mae said, "We only got fifteen-cent loafs."

50 From behind her Al growled, "Mae, give 'em bread."

"We'll run out 'fore the bread truck comes."

"Run out, then, darn it," said Al. And he
55 looked sullenly down at the potato salad he was mixing.

Mae shrugged her plump shoulders and looked to the truck drivers to show them what she was up against. She held the
60 screen door open and the man came in, bringing a smell of sweat with him. Mae opened a drawer and took out a long waxpaper-wrapped loaf. "This here is a fifteen-cent loaf."

65 The man put his hat back on his head. He answered with inflexible humility, "Won't you—can't you see your way to cut off ten cents worth?"

Al said snarlingly, "Darn it all, Mae. Give
70 'em the loaf."

The man turned toward Al. "No, we want ta buy ten cents' worth of it. We got it
figgered awful close, mister, to get to California."

75 Mae said resignedly, "You can have this for ten cents."

"That'd be robbin' you, ma'am."

Adapted from John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. © 1967 by John Steinbeck.

Death of a Salesman

[Light has risen on the boys' room. Biff gets out of bed, comes downstage a bit, and stands attentively. Biff is two years older than his brother Happy, but bears a worn air and seems less self-assured. He has succeeded less, and his dreams are stronger and less acceptable than Happy's. Happy is tall, powerfully made. He, like his brother, is lost, but in a different way, for he has never allowed himself to turn his face toward defeat and is thus more confused and hard-skinned, although seemingly more content.]

Biff:

15 I tell ya, Hap, I don't know what the future is. I don't know—what I'm supposed to want.

Happy:

What do you mean?

Biff:

20 Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it's a measly existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors. And still—that's how you build a future.

Happy:

Well, you really enjoy it on a farm?

Biff:

35 (*with rising agitation*) Hap, I've had twenty or thirty different jobs since I left home, and it always turns out the same. This farm I work on, it's spring there now, see? And they've got about fifteen new colts. There's nothing more inspiring or—beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not gettin' anywhere! What the heck am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! That's when I come running home. And now, I get here, and I don't know what to do with myself.

Happy:

50 You're a poet, you know that, Biff! You're a—you're an idealist!

Biff:

55 No, I'm mixed up very bad. Maybe I oughta get stuck into something. I'm like a boy. I'm not married, I'm not in business, I just—I'm like a boy. You're a success, aren't you? Are you content?

Happy:

60 Heck, no!

Biff:

Why? You're making money, aren't you?

Happy:

(*moving about with energy, expressiveness*) All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to leave. And suppose I get to be merchandise manager? He just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he's building another one. He can't enjoy it once it's finished. I don't know what I'm workin' for. Sometimes I sit in my apartment—all alone. And I think of the rent I'm paying. But then, it's what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, and plenty of money. And still, I'm lonely.

Biff:

80 (*with enthusiasm*) Listen, why don't you come out West with me?

Happy:
You and I, heh?

85 **Biff:**
Sure, maybe we could buy a ranch.
Raise cattle, use our muscles. Men built
like we are should be working out in the
open.

90 **Happy:**
(*avidly*) The Loman Brothers, heh?

Biff:
(*with vast affection*) Sure, we'd be known
all over the counties!

95 **Happy:**
(*enthralled*) That's what I dream about,
Biff. I mean I can outbox, outrun, and
outlift anybody in that store, and I have
to take orders from those common, petty
so-and-so's till I can't stand it any more.

100 **Biff:**
I'm tellin' you, kid, if you were with me I'd
be happy out there.

Happy:
If I were around you...

105 **Biff:**
Hap, the trouble is we weren't brought up
to grub for money. I don't know how to do
it.

Happy:
110 Neither can I!

Biff:
Then let's go!

Happy:
115 The only thing is—what can you make
out there?

Biff:
But look at your manager. Builds an
estate and then hasn't the peace of mind
to live in it.

120 **Happy:**
Yeah, but then he walks into the store
the waves part in front of him. That's
fifty-two thousand dollars a year coming
through the revolving door.

125 **Biff:**
Yeah, but you just said...

Happy:
I gotta show some of those pompous,
self-important executives over there that
130 Hap Loman can make the grade. I want
to walk into the store the way he walks
in. Then I'll go with you, Biff. We'll be
together yet, I swear.

Adapted from Arthur Miller, *Death of a
Salesman*. © renewed 1977 by Arthur Miller.