

Prisoners are people, too, just like doctors, firemen, and abortionists. And when all else fails, just like most other people, they rely on WORDS to communicate with one another. Although undeniably cuddly, I am also a TOUGH guy because I survived a two-and-a-half-year odyssey through the Oregon Department of Corrections, where I was confined in county jails, minimum-security prison dorms, and all the way up to the Big Time—Oregon State Penitentiary alongside serial killers and other naughty, naughty boys. It was during this spiritual journey that I met thousands of felons and immersed myself in their delightfully earthy argot, the cute sayings and spicy phrases which make incarceration such a rewarding experience. I'm sharing a few of them here so the next time you meet an ex-con from the Pacific Northwest, you can pretend that you're tough, too...



ALL SUCKED-UP...Two meanings: 1. Scrawny, as in, "I had no access to weightlifting equipment during my seven-and-a-half months in county jail; thus, I was *all sucked-up* when I arrived in prison." 2. Mopey and offended, as in, "Todd acted *all sucked-up* when Darryl made sport of him in front of other inmates."

A TASTEFULLY RENDERED GLOSSARY OF NORTHWESTERN

BEEF...A criminal charge. For instance, a "skin beef" is a sex crime, while a "bum beef" is a false charge.

BUST A GRAPE...Become violent.

CELL WARRIOR...Someone who loudly runs his neck while safely locked in his cell but is a coward once the cell door pops open.

DICK MITTENS...The condition of one's hands when one neglects to wash them after urinating.

FREAK...Specifically, a sex offender. More generally, anyone who's a little unusual and doesn't fit the convict mold. More than once while watching *Seinfeld* in the day room, I heard cons comment, "That Kramer sure is a *freak!*"

FREAK BONE...A tendency toward kinkiness, usually described using a length of measurement, as in, "Perry may act like a solid, stand-up convict, but he's got a *freak bone* a mile long."

GRILLE...Collectively, one's teeth, as in, "I'll punch your grille out."

GRIP...Noun, meaning, "a lot," as in, "Waheed was sentenced to a *grip* of time."

GRUNION...A tiny amount, as in, "Hector had only a *grunion* of tobacco...not even enough for a cigarette."

HEART CHECK!...I dare ya!

HE'S A SOLID PECKERWOOD...That white male is a fine, dependable fellow.

I ALREADY KNOW...A nod of assent roughly meaning, "I hear you" and used with startling frequency among cons.

I GOT JIGS...I'll watch for guards while you commit that infraction.

INMATE/CONVICT...An *inmate* is helpful to guards and is genuinely thankful for this chance at rehabilitation; a *convict* has tattoos on his neck and chooses colorful names for himself such as "Snake" and "Jericho."

JACKET...A reputation for having a particular belief or being disposed toward a certain practice. A jacket is placed on you by others and may or may not be deserved, but once it's on you, it's hard to remove. For instance, a white male with a shaved head may have a "racist *jacket*," and an old man thought to be a child molester may be forced to wear a "chomo *jacket*."

JUICE CARD...Ability to influence events in prison, either with guards or inmates, as in, "I used my *juice card* to get moved to a cell in a quieter area."

KEISTER...Verb, meaning, "To insert an item of contraband into one's rectum for smuggling purposes." Also known as "takin' it to the hoop" and "puttin' it in the safe."

KICK ROCKS, SCRUB!...Fuck off, loser! Synonyms for "scrub": "lop," "lame," and "truck."

MACKIN'...Talking tough.

NECKIN' WIENERS/BOOKIN' WHAMMERS...Sucking dick.

NOW WHAT?...A taunt offered after a rhetorical comeback; it's a much more aggressive version of "the ball's now in your corner." For instance, one might say, "Oh, yeah? Well, you wuz so ugly as a kid, your parents had to tie a pork chop around your neck so the dog would play with you. *Now what?*"

ON MY SKIN...A secular version of "I swear to God," usually accompanied by tapping the fingers of one hand onto the wrist of another hand. It is a prisoner's oath.

PETER-GAZER...One who stares at penises in the shower, AKA a pecker-checker or a shower shark.

PLEXIN'...Worrying, stressing out.

POLE-SMOKER/PETER-PUFFER...Male homosexual.

PRESSURIZE...Verb, meaning, "to coerce."

PRUNO...Alcoholic beverage made from fermented chow-hall fruit, sugar, water, and yeast.

PUT SOME WATER ON IT!...The fact that you've failed to make a courtesy flush means that an unpleasant aroma is wafting from your cell to mine, so please rectify this situation.

RAPO/CHOMO...Rapist/child molester.

ROAD DOG...One's best friend in prison, as well as the one on whom you could most depend for backup in a fight.

ROLLIN'!...Fuck! Here comes a guard now!

RUNNIN' YOUR NECK...Bullshitting; mackin' without anything to back it up.

S.A....Acronym for "Spanish-American" used by both S.A.s and non-S.A.s alike. Emphasis is on the "S"; it's pronounced exactly like "essay."

SANCHO...The man who fucks your wife or girlfriend while you're in prison.

SCREAMIN'...Adjective used to describe a particularly delicious chow-hall item, as in, "That barbecued chicken we had for lunch was *screamin'.*"

SHIT...Verb which universally replaces the verb "to fart," as in, "Who shit all over themselves?"

SNIPES...Soggy, unsmoked ends of hand-rolled cigarettes.

SOMEONE JUST DID A DRIVE-BY...

Someone silently broke wind while walking past us, leaving us to experience the after-effects.

STARFISH...One's anus.

STRAIGHT YOKED...Muscular; antonym to meaning (1.) of "all sucked-up."

THAT'S A COLD SHOT...What he/they did to you was very cruel and uncaring.

THE FELLAS...The in-crowd; the group of convicts whom you can trust.

THEM...Universal replacement for "they" and "those," as in, "*Them* are some cool-lookin' sneakers."

TOAD/BONE/SPLIB/EGGPLANT/HAMMERHEAD/HAMHOCK...synonyms for "Afro-American."

YOU GOT LOVE...Your sentence/judicial decision was light and favorable to you.

YOU PUT ME ON FRONT STREET...Your comments unintentionally implicated me in a crime.



Illustration by Jim Blanchard

PRISON SLANG