



American Expression E2304 Give the slip

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The phrase "give the slip" is an idiomatic expression that means to escape or evade someone who is pursuing or watching you. It conveys the idea of eluding capture or avoiding detection, often in a cunning or skillful manner. This expression has roots in various forms of literature and speech and is used in both literal and figurative contexts.

The origin of "give the slip" can be traced back to nautical terminology. In the days of sailing ships, to "slip" meant to let go of or release something quickly. For instance, sailors would "slip" the anchor cable to let the ship move away from a dangerous situation swiftly. This nautical usage evolved into the broader meaning of escaping or evading, hence "give the slip."

In everyday language, "give the slip" is often used to describe situations where someone avoids being caught or followed. For example, a person might "give the slip" to a pursuer by taking a sudden turn down an alley or by blending into a crowd. It suggests a level of cleverness and quick thinking on the part of the person evading capture.

The phrase can also be used metaphorically. In a figurative sense, to "give the slip" means to avoid an obligation, responsibility, or unwanted attention. For instance, someone might "give the slip" to an unwanted task by delegating it to someone else or by finding a way to avoid it altogether. This use of the phrase emphasizes the idea of evasion and escape, not from a physical pursuit, but from something less tangible like duties or expectations.

The expression "give the slip" is prevalent in literature, movies, and everyday conversation, often adding a layer of drama or tension to the scenario. In literature and film, characters who "give the slip" to their pursuers are typically portrayed as resourceful and quick-witted. These scenarios can add excitement and intrigue to the narrative, showcasing the character's ability to outsmart their adversaries.

Moreover, the phrase "give the slip" can be found in various idiomatic contexts. For example, someone might say, "He gave the police the slip," indicating that the person managed to escape from law enforcement. Another example might be, "She gave her boss the slip to attend a concert," illustrating how someone avoided their boss to do something more enjoyable.

In summary, "give the slip" is an idiomatic expression that conveys the act of evading capture or avoiding detection. Whether used in a literal sense to describe a physical escape or metaphorically to indicate avoiding responsibilities or unwanted attention, the phrase implies a certain level of cleverness and quick thinking. Its origins in nautical terminology highlight the historical context of the expression, while its continued use in modern language underscores its versatility and enduring appeal.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some historical or literary examples where a character successfully "gives the slip" to their pursuers, and what tactics did they use?
2. How does the expression "give the slip" apply to modern-day situations, both in personal and professional contexts?
3. Can you think of a time when you or someone you know "gave the slip" to avoid an obligation or responsibility? How was it accomplished?
4. How does the concept of "giving the slip" reflect on a person's problem-solving and quick-thinking abilities?
5. In what ways can the phrase "give the slip" be used metaphorically to describe evading non-physical pursuits, such as unwanted attention or tasks?