

# LADO LANGUAGE SPECIALISTS

## Synopsis for MY COUSIN VINNY

### Main Characters

| <u>Character</u>                | <u>Description</u>   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Vinny Gambini</b>            | Vinny is a lawyer who just got his law degree. He comes from a poor New York Italian family. He doesn't like to study but he is very good at arguing.  |
| <b>Mona Lisa Vito</b>           | Vinny's girlfriend. She doesn't have a job, but she knows everything about cars. She loves Vinny and wants him to be successful, so she is always trying to help him. She also loves to argue. |
| <b>Billy Gambini</b>            | Vinny's cousin. He is driving to UCLA when he is arrested for murder in the Southern USA.  |
| <b>Judge Chamberlain Haller</b> | He is the very strict and formal Southern judge. He has a lot of problems with Vinny's style in the courtroom.   |
| <b>Jim Trotter III</b>          | He is the District Attorney (DA) who is prosecuting Billy and Stan.  |
| <b>Sheriff Farley</b>           | He is the sheriff of the small Southern town.  |
| <b>J.T.</b>                     | He is the guy who doesn't pay Lisa the money she wins from him in a game of pool (He stiffes her!).  |
| <u>Witnesses</u>                |  |
| 1) <b>Mr. Tipton</b>            | He is the fastest grits cook in the world.   |
| 2) <b>Mr. Crane</b>             | He is able to say the names of many things in his front yard.  |
| 3) <b>Mrs. Riley</b>            | She needs new glasses.   |
| 4) <b>FBI Agent Wilbur</b>      | He is an expert about car tires.   |

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## **PLOT SUMMARY**

Billy and Stan live in New York, and are on vacation in Alabama. Alabama is known for not liking strangers, especially those from the north. In Alabama the police and judges are very tough on criminals. murderers can be given the death penalty. They are "fried": slang for being killed in an electric (electrified) chair.

Billy and Stan accidentally get involved in a murder case. They are mistaken for criminals (murderers), and need a lawyer. Billy's cousin Vinny comes down from New York to defend them. He has very little experience, but Billy wants him to help because they are "family": from the same family. Vinny brings his girlfriend Lisa with him. She wants him to do well, but he doesn't want her to help.

Vinny has a lot of problems learning how to be a lawyer during the murder trial. He has a lot of problems with Judge Haller, who is a very strict and formal judge. He often sends Vinny to jail, because Vinny doesn't know the court rules or how to act in the courtroom. Vinny also tells the judge that he has a lot of legal experience and Vinny pretends he is different famous lawyers from New York to trick Judge Haller.

This movie is a comedy, partly about the law, and partly about the development of the relationship between Vinny and his girlfriend as the murder trial proceeds. Some of the humor involves words and phrases which have double meanings, so people make mistakes and misunderstand each other. There is also a lot of specialist vocabulary about law, and car mechanics. Watch how Vinny speaks and how things develop between him and Lisa. Also watch how others' opinions of him change as the movie goes on. Enjoy the movie!

**NOTE: An American murder trial follows these steps.**

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>1) Arraignment</b>         | <b>This is where the defendants say "Guilty" or "Not Guilty".</b>  |
| <b>2) Preliminary Hearing</b> | <b>This is where the Prosecution shows the judge that there is enough evidence for the trial to begin.</b>         |
| <b>3) Jury Selection</b>      | <b>This is where the Prosecutor and the Defense Lawyer check to see if the witnesses are acceptable.</b>           |
| <b>4) Main Trial</b>          | <b>This is where the lawyers give evidence and question witnesses to prove the defendant's guilt or innocence.</b> |

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## **VOCABULARY**

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>TUNA</b>                 | a kind of fish  |
| <b>CONFESS</b>              | tell somebody you committed a crime   |
| <b>ATTORNEY</b>             | lawyer  |
| <b>PLEAD GUILTY</b>         | say you did commit the crime  |
| <b>PLEAD INNOCENT</b>       | say you didn't commit the crime   |
| <b>DEFENDANT</b>            | person accused of a crime   |
| <b>CLIENT</b>               | attorneys customer: defendant   |
| <b>DEFENSE ATTORNEY</b>     | person who tries to free the defendant  |
| <b>PROSECUTING ATTORNEY</b> | person who tries to send the defendant to jail  |
| <b>GO TO THE BAR</b>        | become an attorney  |
| <b>PROCEDURE</b>            | rules about what you must do and say in   |
| <b>GRITS</b>                | court   |
| <b>CHOLESTEROL</b>          | food made from corn<br>kind of fat thought to increase the risk of a heart attack       |
| <b>TO GET STIFFED</b>       | to win a bet and have the loser refuse to pay   |
| <b>WITNESS</b>              | person who sees a crime happen or can give some information useful to the case in court |
| <b>CROSS EXAMINE</b>        | question a witness  |
| <b>STUFF</b>                | Slang meaning substance or material   |
| <b>QUINTESSENTIAL</b>       | typical, the perfect example  |
| <b>MAKE A COUNTER OFFER</b> | suggest a different price: bargain  |
| <b>DISCLOSURE</b>           | telling the other lawyer what evidence you have   |
| <b>STATE DEFENDER</b>       | attorney provided by the state for people with no money                                 |
| <b>OBJECTION</b>            | asking the judge to make the attorney obey the rules                                    |
| <b>SUSTAIN / OVERRULE</b>   | accept or reject an objection   |
| <b>AUTOMOBILE</b>           | car   |
| <b>TIRE TRACKS</b>          | marks on the road made by a car tire  |
| <b>MICHELIN</b>             | brand of tire   |
| <b>POSITRACTION</b>         | mechanical terms: features of cars  |
| <b>IGNITION TIMING</b>      |   |
| <b>DIFFERENTIAL etc.</b>    |   |
| <b>"Good Ole Boy"</b>       | Slang word for Southern men.  |
| <b>Trial</b>                | Legal procedure to prove a defendant's guilt or innocence.                              |

# **LADO LANGUAGE SPECIALISTS**

## **SCENES, COMPREHENSION, AND ADDITIONAL VOCABULARY**

**SCENE 1      Opening Credits: "Way Down South"**  
What was the truck in front of Billy and Stan carrying on the back?  
What county did they drive into?

**SCENE 2      Arrested on the Highway!**  
What do beans make you do?  
What did Billy forget to pay for?  
What does the police officer tell the boys?

**VOCAB**  
to fart                      When smelly gas comes out of your rear end, sometimes makes loud noise.  
medieval                  Very old

**SCENE 3      Questioned by Sheriff Farley!**  
What is the Sheriff asking questions about?  
What do Billy and Stan think he is asking about?  
Who do they call?  
What does she tell them?  
What American State are they in?  
How much does a good lawyer cost?  
Who is going to be their lawyer?

**VOCAB**  
To convict                when the prosecution wins the trial and the defendant goes to jail  
to murder                to kill somebody, also a legal charge.

**SCENE 4      Vinny and Lisa arrive!**  
What kind of car does Vinny drive?  
What kind of clothes are they wearing?  
What does the man say the town is "famous for"?

**VOCAB**  
"stick out like a sore thumb"    Slang expression means that you don't fit in, you look very different.

**SCENE 5      Stan/Billy go to State Prison!**  
What is Stan worried about?  
What does Vinny give the prison guard?  
Who does Stan think Vinny is?  
What does he think Vinny wants?  
How long has Vinny been a lawyer?

**VOCAB**  
to bribe                    to give illegal money to somebody (e.g. policeman) so they will do what you want.  
"lighten up"              Slang for relax.

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## SCENE 6 Vinny Meets Judge Chamberlain Haller

How long does Vinny tell the judge he's been a lawyer?  
Is Vinny telling the truth?  
Does the judge like Vinny?

### VOCAB

"Fire Away"! Slang for "Ask your questions!"  
serial killer A person who kills many people for no reason.  
sophisticated High class, complicated, complex.  
leeway Freedom of movement within a system of doing things.  
terms Conditions of an agreement.  
case Name for each job that a lawyer handles.

## SCENE 7 Vinny and Lisa check-in! Breakfast!

What wakes them up in the morning?  
What's on the menu?  
What is lard?

### VOCAB

steam whistle A very loud whistle that gets its power from steam.  
lard Cooking grease made from fat or a chemical substitute.

## SCENE 8 The Arraignment! Jail!

Does Vinny have a good first day at court?  
Why is the judge angry?  
Why does Vinny go to jail?

### VOCAB

to insult to make fun of somebody.  
shoplifting Steal something from a store.  
Judicial system The different steps in the Legal system. (Arrest to trial to Jail)  
Contempt of Court When the judge fines lawyer (or sends him/her to jail) for acting incorrectly in the courtroom.

## SCENE 9 Lisa bails out Vinny! Pool Hall!

How did Lisa pay for Vinny's bail?  
Does Lisa want to help Vinny?  
Why do Vinny and Lisa go to the Pool Hall?  
Is Vinny smart? Why?

### VOCAB

"get fried" Slang for electrocute, to kill someone (execute) them on the electric chair.  
bail The money amount set by judge (fine) to let people out of jail.  
"kick your ass" Slang for "beat you".



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## **SCENE 15 Vinny Meets the DA! Vinny Talks to Lisa!**

How did Vinny become a lawyer?

What does the DA give Vinny?

Is Vinny proud about this? What does Lisa tell him about the DA's kindness?

### **VOCAB**

litigator

A legal word that means lawyer.

disclosure

Legal word. It means that both lawyers in a case must share their information before the trial.

## **SCENE 16 Vinny questions witnesses and talks to hotel clerk!**

What wakes up Lisa and Vinny?

Was the train on time?

## **SCENE 17 Approve the Witnesses! Vinny Meets Judge and talks to Lisa outside the restaurant!**

What does the judge tell Vinny?

Why does Vinny tell the judge there is no history of his court cases?

What does Lisa tell Vinny is wrong with Jerry Gallo?

### **VOCAB**

prominent

Well known/important.

## **SCENE 18 Vinny and Lisa at the Cabin and in the car!**

Why is Lisa worried?

Is Vinny happy? What wakes them up? Where do they sleep?

### **VOCAB**

"in the dark"

Expression meaning you don't know anything about something.

"go down in flames"

Expression meaning you are failing something very badly.

dress code

Formal rules for what clothes you can wear.

biological clock

Length of time in a woman's life when she can have children.

## **SCENE 19 Vinny and Lisa have a problem and then go to town!**

What's wrong with Vinny's car? What happens to his suit?

What does Vinny do to J.T.? Why?

### **VOCAB**

to get stuck

When you can't move because you are trapped or held in place.

In our movie, Vinny's car gets stuck in the mud.

trunk

The rear storage space in a car.

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## SCENE 20 Vinny arrives at the Court for the first day of the Trial!

What is Vinny wearing? What does the Judge think?  
Where did Vinny get the suit?  
What does Vinny do before his opening statement?  
What's wrong with Stan's Public Defender?

### VOCAB

to mock To insult/to make fun of.  
ridiculous Silly/strange/stupid.  
evidence Legal proof given by trial lawyers.  
jury Group of people who decide whether the defendant is guilty or innocent.  
verdict Legal decision by jury---Guilty or innocent!  
heinous Terrible/Horrible.  
to stammer A speech impediment or problem when people have trouble to pronounce words. They repeat the first sound.

## SCENE 21 Examining the First Witness---Mr. Tipton!

Is Stan's Public Defender a good lawyer?  
What word does Vinny mispronounce?  
How does Vinny show the jury that Mr. Tipton was wrong?  
What does Stan do to his Public Defender?

### VOCAB

youths Young Adults.  
to testify To give legal evidence in Court when you're a witness.

## SCENE 22 Vinny Questions Mr. Crane and Mrs. Riley!

Where does Vinny get a good night's sleep?  
What questions does Vinny ask Mr. Crane?  
Is Mr. Crane smart?  
How does Vinny show that Mrs. Riley isn't a good witness?

### VOCAB

Window Screen Metal barrier with many holes that lets in fresh air but keep out insects.  
"Your Honor" A formal way of talking to a judge in a courtroom.

## SCENE 23 The DA surprises Vinny with a telephone call!

What does the DA tell Vinny on the phone?  
Who is the DA's surprise witness? Is FBI agent Wilbur an expert?  
What does Agent Wilbur say?

### VOCAB

to admit evidence This means the judge will allow the evidence to be used.  
prior notice Prior=before. Notice=Warning. To be told in advance, told before the trial.  
assailant Legal word for a criminal who attacks somebody.  
identical Exactly the same. 100% the same.

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### SCENE 24 Vinny's in the Judge's chambers! Vinny eats lunch with Lisa!

What does the judge tell Vinny? What does Vinny tell the judge?  
What do Vinny and Lisa do in the restaurant? Why?

#### VOCAB

chambers A judge's office.

### SCENE 25 Vinny cross-examines Agent Wilbur! Vinny has his own surprise!

What does Vinny prove about the kind of tire on Billy's car?  
Who is Vinny's surprise witness?  
Why is Lisa an expert witness about cars?  
What is Lisa's job now?  
What is Lisa's evidence? Does FBI Agent Wilbur agree?  
What does Sheriff Farley testify about?

#### VOCAB

recess A short rest break during a trial.  
hostile witness hostile=angry A witness who is against you.  
metallic mint A kind of paint color.  
hairdresser A person who styles, cuts, and cleans your hair.  
trick question A question with no answer.  
.357 Magnum A very large powerful handgun.  
"to hold water" An expression that means "Is this true"?  
traction The ability of the car's tires to hold on to the road.  
"dismiss all charges" The prosecutor stops the case against the defendants because they are innocent.

### SCENE 26 Freedom! Vinny and Lisa go home!

Why does Vinny want to leave quickly?  
Who did Lisa call in New York to help Vinny?  
What are Vinny and Lisa going to do?

#### VOCAB

courtroom manner The way a lawyer acts in the court.  
unconventional Not normal.  
"hell of a lawyer/judge" An expression that means, "You're a very good lawyer/judge."