

TIPS FOR TEACHERS



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IDIOMS – FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

READING MANIPULATIVES PRODUCT: Idioms Match

Since Jack had <u>told lies</u> before, his coach did not believe him.	cried wolf
Our teacher <u>was right</u> when she said that book was boring.	hit the nail on the head
Mary <u>avoided the issue</u> rather than telling me the facts.	beat around the bush
Our class <u>studied</u> so we'd do well in the current-events contest.	boned up
Tim didn't finish everything because he <u>tried to do too much</u> .	bit off more than he could chew
The boys <u>got going</u> and picked up all the trash in the alley.	took the bull by the horns
I <u>used my connections</u> to get tickets to the sold-out show.	pulled strings
Ted <u>blamed others</u> every time he had a problem.	passed the buck
Susan found out about her surprise party because Jill <u>told</u> .	let the cat out of the bag
Last night it <u>poured</u> , so soccer practice was cancelled.	rained cats and dogs

ORIGIN ON BACK

During heavy rains in 17th-century England, some streets became filthy rivers carrying cats and dogs.

Understanding idiomatic expressions facilitates comprehension since students tend to interpret language literally.

Idioms should be formally taught for several reasons. Students are less exposed to figurative language than in the past, and idioms are especially confusing to English language learners. In addition, idioms illustrate the richness and cultural diversity of our language.

The 18 sets cover 180 idioms. Each set has 10 sentences with a word or words underlined. Students use contextual clues to decide which idiom can be substituted, then match the pairs.

The origin of each idiom is on the back of the idiom card. Finding out how these colorful sayings became part of the English vernacular is interesting and should aid comprehension.

IDIOMS MATCH

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SKILL OVERVIEW: Inferential comprehension of idioms

An idiom is an expression in which the meaning cannot be derived from the conjoined meanings of its elements. In figurative language, meaning is conveyed by suggesting that something is like something else. Therefore, the expression must be comprehended metaphorically. For instance, when someone says, "It's raining cats and dogs," it has nothing to do with cats and dogs. This idiom dating back to 17th century England means it is raining hard (see origin above). The reader must use context or prior knowledge to infer what the expression actually means.

Every language has its own unique figurative language usages. In this fast-paced, media-dominated age (Internet, television), many communication skills, including familiarity with idiomatic usages, are waning. The high number of idioms and their frequency of use make them a critical component of comprehension and language acquisition. Idioms often confuse native speakers, and they are especially challenging for foreign students. Do not assume that idioms will be learned through informal exposure. Direct instruction is necessary to assure that students develop familiarity with commonly used idioms.

Model appropriate use of idioms in instruction. Repeated and correct exposure to idioms can build understanding and give students confidence to use the idioms themselves. Instruction is more effective if idioms are grouped according to metaphorical themes (i.e., colors: redneck, yellow belly, green with envy, blackball) or usage (nouns, verbs, adjectives).

MAKING MATERIALS: Idioms match

1. Line off cover-weight sheets of paper (8.5 x 11 inches) into 8 horizontal strips (1.375 inches high).
2. Draw a vertical line at about 5.75 inches to divide the width of the page into 2 sections.
3. Use the accompanying idiom resource list. The sentence will be written or printed on the left, and the corresponding idiom on the right.
4. Write the meaning of the idiom on the back of the idiom card. Understanding origins helps students to remember the idiomatic usages.
5. Sets will be more challenging if you do not mix parts of speech. For instance, the idioms in the set illustrated on the previous page are all verbs and those in the sample below replace adjectives.
6. Sets must be coded in some way. This can be done with codes or color.
7. Laminate cards. Cut apart and place pieces in zipper bags or other storage devices. Create a checklist to track the completed sets.

Sherry has <u>no patience</u> , so she may never finish the puzzle.	ants in her pants
I got <u>nervous</u> and backed out just as I was about to try the jump.	cold feet
Our indispensable school custodian is <u>skilled and hard-working</u> .	worth his weight in gold
Joan was <u>feeling depressed</u> because she was not invited.	down in the dumps
After our team won the soccer championship, we were <u>elated</u> .	on cloud nine
When I heard that you were going to Europe, I was <u>jealous</u> .	green with envy
The Rolling Stones prove that age alone doesn't make people <u>old</u> .	over the hill
I try to avoid Jill when I see her because she is <u>annoying</u> .	a pain in the neck

TEACHING STRATEGIES: Idiom use

1. Idiom of the day. Select and use an idiom at the start of a day or period. Encourage students to use it at least once that day (give bonus points for doing so).
2. Give extra credit for using idioms in assignments.
3. Find examples of idioms in printed material or on television. Discuss use and meaning.
4. Tell a story laden with idioms. Students are to write down idioms they identify as the story is told. See who finds the most.
5. Add-on story. List several idioms on the board. Discuss meanings. Start a story, using one of the idioms. Each person adds to the story and uses another idiom in the process.
6. Illustrating idioms literally. This is a fun way to contrast literal and figurative meanings.
7. Write idioms on index cards. Have students draw a literal illustration on another card. Group these pairs in sets and allow students to match the pairs.
8. Charades or guessing games. Act out or give clues to lead teammates to guessing the correct idiom.

IDIOMS – FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

IDIOM	MEANING	ORIGIN
ants in his/her pant	restless, can't sit still	Ants in one's pants would make one jump around and be restless.
at the end of the rope	out of patience	Animals at the end of their tethers cannot go further.
bark up the wrong tree	follow the incorrect course	Hunting dogs were trained to tree raccoons and bark, but often the raccoon escaped.
batting a thousand	doing a perfect job	1,000 is the perfect average in baseball with a base hit every time at bat.
beat around the bush	not getting to the point	Hunters need to proceed slowly and carefully if approaching a bush to beat out a bird.
bite off more than one can chew	try to do more than one has time or ability for.	One who takes a very large bite is trying to chew too much in a mouthful.
blow off steam	release energy	Early steam engines had so safety valves so engineers had to release pressure by pulling a lever.
break the ice	to become more open, friendly	Sometimes it is necessary for ships to break up the ice so other ships can pass.
carry the weight of the world on one's shoulders	worried	Greek god Zeus punished Atlas by making him carry the heavens on his shoulders.
chip off the old block	like one's parent	A piece of wood has the same characteristics as the larger block it was cut from.
cold feet	nervous, hesitant	People jumping into cold water might complain of cold feet and back out.
cold shoulder	reject someone	Knights got hot meals, but unwelcome guests were given cold mutton shoulder.
count chickens before they hatch	making plans based on what has not yet happened	Farmers cannot count on one chicken per egg since some will not hatch.
cry over spilled milk	feeling bad when it can't be undone	Once milk has spilled, little can be done about it.
cry wolf	lie warning against danger	Aesop's fable tells of a shepherd's false "wolf" alarms; when a real wolf appeared, no one came.
down in the dumps	feeling dismal and depressed	Feeling like you are in a garbage dump is gloomy.
eat one's words	regret something said	If courier delivered parchment bearing bad news to a nobleman, he made the courier eat the paper.
eyes bigger than stomach	ask for more than can be eaten	Hungry people may look at food and decide they can eat more than they actually can.
fish out of water	outside natural element	A fish out of water is out of its element and cannot function properly.
fly off the handle	lose control	Handmade axes sometimes flew off the handle and injured someone nearby.
get up on wrong side of bed	be in a bad mood	Romans thought getting up on the left side of the bed brought bad luck.
give a taste of own medicine	do same bad thing to someone that person did to you	Tasting medicine given to others might make one more sympathetic.
green with envy	quite jealous	Green is associated with envy, so jealous suitors used green jade as a potion.
hands were tied	unable to help in any way	Captives' hands are tied, rendering them powerless.
have one's head in clouds	not know what is going on	One cannot tell what is going on if buried in clouds.

IDIOM	MEANING	ORIGIN
high horse	acting superior	In parades in Medieval England, royalty rode on horses at least a hand taller than the average mount.
hit the spot	satisfies fully	The spot is the bull's eye on a target.
hold your horses	be patient	Jockeys must not start horses until signal is given.
in a nutshell	in very few words	The Bible, Koran, and Iliad have all been copied in such tiny print that they fit in a nutshell.
in one ear and out the other	not hearing or remembering	Something that goes in one ear and out the other makes no impression on the mind.
in the bag	success is assured	Birds and other small animals safely in the game bag mean a successful hunt.
jump the gun	start too soon	An anxious runner may jump the gun, or start before the starter fires the pistol in a track event.
leave no stone unturned	look everywhere	Polycrates found the treasure that the Persians had hidden in the battlefield by turning over every stone.
let the cat out of the bag	tell the secret	Unscrupulous merchants put cats in bags that were supposed to contain piglets or other animals.
mind one's Ps and Qs	be careful and precise	A "p" reversed carelessly is a "q."
on cloud nine	feeling elated or happy	Meteorologists classify clouds by number, with number nine being the highest clouds.
once in a blue moon	infrequently to never	The celestial occurrence, "blue moon," refers to the rare occurrence of two full moons in a month.
over the hill	getting old	Comparing life to a hill, once people pass the midpoint, they are over the hill and headed down.
pain in the neck	obnoxious, irritating	Having a pain in the neck is irritating.
pull strings	use influence to get desires	Refers to marionettes being worked by their strings.
put foot in mouth	say something one shouldn't	You couldn't say the wrong thing with foot in mouth.
put one's cards on the table	not to conceal anything	When playing card games, cards are laid on a table at the end of a hand to see who has the better cards.
put the cart before the horse	reverse the order of things	An order that must be followed if things are to work; i.e., cart before a horse wouldn't work.
raining cats and dogs	torrential (very hard) rain	During heavy rains in 17th-century England, some streets became filthy rivers carrying cats and dogs.
save for a rainy day	plan ahead	Since people can't know what the future will bring, they should prepare for bad times (rainy days).
split hairs	arguing over trivial matters	Hair strands are exceptionally thin and it was once thought that they were impossible to split.
stick one's neck out	take risks	Chickens stick their necks out on the chopping block making it easier for the butcher to chop heads off.
straw that broke camel's back	alludes to the final tiny thing that makes everything fall apart	The strongest camel can carry about 1200 pounds, and a straw more might literally break its back.
strike it rich	become wealthy	Prospectors' finds of oil, gold and other precious minerals are called strikes.
tip of the iceberg	small part of larger problem	Most of an iceberg is hidden under the water, thereby concealing the true danger.
up the creek without a paddle	hopeless situation	A boatman in a creek without a paddle would have no way to move against the current.
worth weight in gold	quite valuable	At present gold prices, a person worth one's weight in gold would be worth over a million dollars.