

## Idioms

By C4A Academy



An IDIOM is a phrase or expression that has a FIGURATIVE (symbolic, allegorical) meaning different from the LITERAL meaning of the words. Idioms are used in a particular language and often reflect the culture and history of a people. They are used in everyday conversation and add richness and variety to the language. For example, the English idiom "to break the ice" means to start a CONVERSATION or to become relaxed in a social situation, even though the phrase literally means to break a block of ice. Understanding idioms can be challenging for non-native speakers of a language, as the meaning of the idiom cannot be deduced from the individual words that make up the expression.

Spell: IDIOM PHRASE CONVERSATION

The idiom "to break the ice" can mean to become what in a social situation? RELAXED

The lesson said that understanding idioms is challenging for \_\_\_\_\_. NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

An idiom has a figurative meaning different from the \_\_\_\_ meaning. LITERAL

What is an idiom? PHRASE, EXPRESSION WITH FIGURATIVE MEANING

What do idioms often reflect for a group of people? CULTURE, HISTORY OF A PEOPLE

Figurative was defined as what? ALLEGORICAL, SYMBOLIC

What is the chemical formula of water? H<sub>2</sub>O

The O in water is the abbreviation for what? OXYGEN

Why can the idiom “to break the ice” be a good metaphor for starting a conversation?

The English language is full of idioms and expressions that may seem strange or confusing to those who are not native speakers. The word "idiom" comes from the Latin and Greek word IDIOMA meaning "a peculiarity in language." In the English language, "idiom" originally referred to a PECULIAR or characteristic expression or usage of a language or dialect. The word was later extended to ENCOMPASS figurative expressions that are unique to a particular language or culture, such as the various idioms used in English. The use of idioms adds richness and variety to a language and often provides insight into the culture and history of a people.

Spell: IDIOMA                      PECULIAR                      ENCOMPASS

What word means "a peculiarity in language?" IDIOMA

Which language did I say is full of idioms and expressions? ENGLISH

What kind of expressions do idioms now encompass? FIGURATIVE

From which language does the word “idiom” come from? GREEK, LATIN

“Idiom” originally meant a peculiar or characteristic expression or usage of a what? LANGUAGE, DIALECT

What do idioms add to a language? RICHNESS, VARIETY, FUN

What is the capital of Greece? ATHENS

Name something that encompasses you?

"Bite the bullet" is an idiom that means to face a difficult SITUATION with courage, or just handle the pain, get working, and get it over with. The story is that in olden times before ANESTHESIA, soldiers who were about to undergo surgery would bite down on a lead bullet or leather strap as a way of distracting themselves from the pain and to stop themselves from crying out. This idiom is a reminder that sometimes we have to endure unpleasant experiences in order to ACHIEVE our goals or overcome challenges. The phrase "bite the bullet" encourages us to face our fears and difficulties with strength and determination, much like how a soldier would bite down on a bullet to endure the pain of surgery.

Spell: SITUATION                      ENDURE                      ACHIEVE

“Bite the bullet” means to face a difficult situation with what? COURAGE

What are we given to become insensitive to pain during surgery?

ANESTHESIA

Soldiers would bite down on a leather strap or \_\_\_\_ to distract themselves from pain during surgery? LEAD BULLET, BULLET

What do we sometimes have to endure in order to achieve goals or overcome challenges? UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES

What can we face our fears and difficulties with? STRENGTH, DETERMINATION

What initially became the most commonly used general anesthetic during the 1800s? CHLOROFORM (TRICHLOROMETHANE)

What have you metaphorically had to “bite the bullet” and do?

"Bread and butter" is an expression that means a person's main source of income. The story behind this idiom is that in MEDIEVAL England, peasants could only afford soup with bread and butter. It was considered a staple food, and so having it meant having a steady source of SUSTENANCE (food). Today, this idiom is used to describe the job or source of income that provides a person with the NECESSITIES of life, such as food and shelter. In other words, a person's "bread and butter" is what they rely on to get by.

Spell: MEDIEVAL                      SUSTENANCE                      NECESSITIES

“Bread and butter” means a person’s main source of what? INCOME

From which country does the idiom “bread and butter” come? ENGLAND

What was a staple food in medieval England? BREAD, BUTTER, SOUP

What is a necessity of life for a person? FOOD, SHELTER, LOVE

What provides a person with the necessities of life? JOB, SOURCE OF INCOME, PARENTS

What is a synonym for sustenance? FOOD, CHOW, DIET, FARE, MEAT, NOURISHMENT, PROVISIONS VITTLES, VICTUALS

What is a staple food for you?

"Let the cat out of the bag" means to reveal a secret ACCIDENTALLY. This phrase has been around since the 1400s. The story goes that in medieval times, con artists would sell people piglets that were hidden in a bag. To

show the buyer the piglet, the con artist would have to "let the cat out of the bag." Of course, once the cat was out, the buyer would see that it was not a piglet at all. Today, this idiom is often used to describe when someone reveals a secret or truth UNINTENTIONALLY, especially one that was meant to be kept hidden. If someone "lets the cat out of the bag," they may cause confusion or embarrassment.

Spell: ACCIDENTALLY  
HIDDEN

UNINTENTIONALLY

The cheats were called what in the lesson? CON ARTISTS

What did con artists in medieval times say they were selling? PIGLETS

What were the con artists actually selling? CATS

This phrase has been around since the \_\_\_\_\_. 1400S

What can be revealed accidentally or unintentionally? SECRETS, TRUTH, DIRTY LAUNDRY

What can be caused when one "lets the cat out of the bag"? CONFUSION, EMBARRASSMENT, TROUBLE, etc.

Who is really good at keeping secrets?

"Take the bull by the horns" is an expression that means to confront a difficult situation directly. While one might assume the origin of this idiom came from bullfighting it actually originates from the America west. Men would catch a bull or a steer (a young bull) and grab its leg or neck to control it for entertainment at festivals. It was dangerous. In much the same way, when a person "takes the bull by the horns," they face a CHALLENGE head-on, without backing down. This idiom encourages us to be bold and fearless in the face of ADVERSITY, and to not shy away from difficult situations.

Spell: ADVERSITY                      CHALLENGE                      SHY

This idiom encourages us to not shy away from difficult \_\_\_\_\_. SITUATIONS

One might assume the expression "take the bull by the horns" comes from \_\_\_\_\_. BULLFIGHTING

When a person "takes the bull by the horns," they face a challenge how? HEAD-ON, WITHOUT BACKING DOWN

Men would try to catch what at festivals? BULLS, STEERS, YOUNG BULLS

What does "taking the bull by the horns" encourage us to be? BOLD,

## FEARLESS

What famous opera by Bizet has a matador as a character? CARMEN

How do you face challenges?

The idiom "cost an arm and a leg" means that something is very expensive. The APOCRYPHAL (fictional) story behind this expression is that in the olden days, artists would paint PORTRAITS of wealthy people and would include their most prized POSSESSIONS. If someone was willing to pay a lot of money for a portrait, the artist would include a more expensive item, such as a ship or a horse, and if they were willing to pay even more, they would include a limb, such as an arm or a leg. It is more likely that the idiom derived from the 19th century "phrases: 'I would give my right arm for...' and '[Even] if it takes a leg'." Or that the phrase referred to the amputations soldiers suffered from during the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> Today, this idiom is used to describe items or experiences that are excessively expensive, often to the point where they seem UNREASONABLY so.

Spell: POSSESSIONS UNREASONABLY

APOCRYPHAL

If something costs an "arm and a leg," then it is very \_\_\_\_\_. EXPENSIVE

In the olden days, artists painted \_\_\_\_\_ of wealthy people? PORTRAITS

The idiom could have derived from amputations suffered by soldiers during the what? CIVIL WAR

Supposedly what would be included in someone's portrait if they paid a lot of money? SHIP, HORSE, LIMB, ARM, LEG

Apocryphally what would be included in someone's portrait if they paid even more money? LIMB, ARM, LEG

An apocryphal story is \_\_\_\_\_. FICTIONAL, MADE-UP, UNTRUE, FABRICATED, FALSE, DOUBTFUL. etc.

What would you want to have painted in your portrait, and why?

"A picture is worth a thousand words" means that a single image can CONVEY (conduct, deliver) more information than a LENGTHY explanation. The origin of this idiom is unclear, but it has been around since the early 1900s. The idea behind this phrase is that a good picture has the power to capture and convey more meaning than words can. Whether it's a snapshot of a moment in time, or a visual REPRESENTATION of an idea,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/arm-and-a-leg.html>

a picture can convey a wealth of information in a single frame.

Spell: LENGTHY REPRESENTATION ORIGIN

A single image can convey more information than a lengthy what?

EXPLANATION

The origin of this idiom is what? UNCLEAR

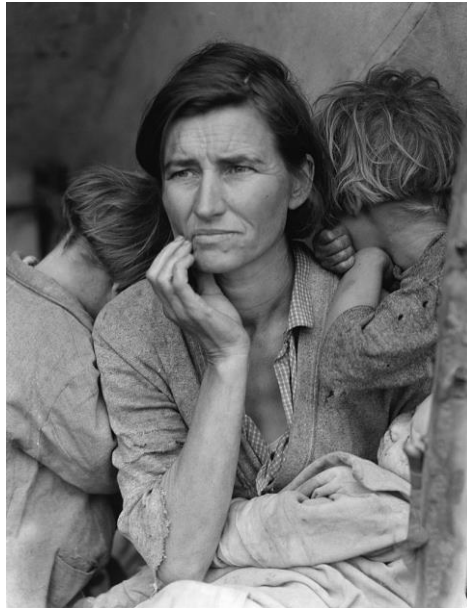
The idiom "A picture is worth a thousand words" has been around since the early \_\_\_\_\_? 1900s

According to this idiom, how many words is a picture worth? 1000

Why is a picture worth a thousand words? LOOKING AT SOMETHING GIVES MORE INFORMATION FASTER, etc.

A good picture can do what with the meaning of something more than words can? CAPTURE, CONVEY, CONDUCT

What does this picture convey?



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The idiom "rain cats and dogs" means to rain heavily. One story behind this expression is that in medieval England, the streets were so poorly drained that when it rained, dead cats and dogs would float down the street. Another explanation is that anciently cats and dogs would hide inside the THATCH roofs during storms and would fall or "rain" out. Today, this idiom is used to describe a heavy downpour, usually ACCOMPANIED by strong

winds and thunder. The phrase "raining cats and dogs" is often used to describe a sudden and intense storm that seems to come out of nowhere. So the next time you hear someone say that it's raining cats and dogs, you'll know that they're not talking about actual FELINES and CANINES falling from the sky, but a storm that's sure to drench anyone who ventures outside.

Spell: ACCOMPANIED      FELINES      CANINES

What idiom means to rain heavily? RAIN CATS AND DOGS

Cats and dogs would supposedly rain from what type of roof? THATCH

A sudden and intense storm can seem to come out of \_\_\_\_\_. NOWHERE

In medieval England, what would float down the streets when it rained heavily? CATS, DOGS, FELINES, CANINES

What type of weather does this idiom describe? RAIN, THUNDER, THUNDERSTORMS, LIGHTNING

Do you like cats or dogs better?

What's your favorite animal?

"Beat around the bush" means to avoid getting to the point in a CONVERSATION or DISCUSSION. This expression is very old. It was first recorded in a poem in 1440. The story behind this expression is that during medieval bird hunts someone would rouse the birds by beating the bushes to flush (drive) out birds so they could be hunted. Today when someone "beats around the bush," they avoid getting straight to the point, often in an effort to avoid a difficult or unpleasant topic. This idiom is sometimes used to describe people who are evasive or VAGUE in their speech, and who prefer to dance around a subject rather than addressing it directly.

Spell: CONVERSATION      DISCUSSION      AVOID

What did hunters used to beat in order to drive out their prey? BUSHES

Or What idiom are we talking about? (TO) BEAT AROUND THE BUSH

The word used in the lesson for driving out the birds was what? FLUSH

What does a person avoid getting to in a conversation if they are "beating around the bush"? THE POINT

This idiom was first recorded in a poem in \_\_\_\_\_. 1440

What type of speech is used by a person who would rather not address a certain subject directly? EVASIVE, VAGUE

What kind of topic might a person try to avoid in a conversation?

DIFFICULT, UNPLEASANT

What is something some people feel uncomfortable talking about?

The idiom "throw in the towel" means to give up or abandon something. The origin of this expression is thought to come from boxing, where a cornerman would throw in a towel to signal that their fighter was unable to continue. It stops the fight and signals defeat. Today, this idiom is used to describe when someone gives up on a project, a relationship, or any other PURSUIT that they have been working on. When someone "throws in the towel," they are ESSENTIALLY admitting that they have reached their limit and can no longer continue.

Spell: PURSUIT                      ESSENTIALLY                      SIGNAL

What sport does the expression "throw in the towel" come from? BOXING

Who would throw in a towel to signal that their fighter was unable to continue? CORNERMAN

What has a person reached when they "throw in the towel"? (THEIR) LIMIT

If you "throw in the towel" on something, it means that you do what with that thing? GIVE UP, ABANDON

What is something that someone can give up on? PROJECT, ACTIVITY, GAME, RELATIONSHIP

What is a famous boxing movie that was released in 1976? ROCKY

Who played Rocky in the movie? SLYVESTER STALLONE

Describe something you have "thrown the towel" in on and why you did that.

"The ball is in your court" means that it's now someone else's turn to take action or make a decision. The origin of this idiom is America in the early 19th century. It's thought to come from possibly basketball but most likely tennis, where a player would return the ball to their opponent by hitting it over the net. In much the same way, when someone says that "the ball is in your court," they are handing over responsibility or control to someone else. This idiom is often used in a BUSINESS or personal CONTEXT to indicate that it's now up to the other person to take the next step.



Spell: BUSINESS                      CONTEXT                      COURT

What does a player return over the net in tennis? BALL

It's up to the person who has "the ball in their court" to take the next \_\_\_\_\_.  
STEP

What sport does the idiom "the ball is in your court" come from? TENNIS,  
BASKETBALL

What is it someone's turn to do when the ball is in their court? ACTION,  
DECISION

What is a person handing over to someone when the ball is in their court?  
RESPONSIBILITY, CONTROL

What is one of your favorite idioms?

Explain the following idioms:

Devil's Advocate

Apple of their Eye

Good Faith

Hold Your Feet to the Fire

John Doe

Once in a Blue Moon

*This lesson was adapted from text generated by ChatGPT.*

References:

<https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/arm-and-a-leg.html>

<https://www.theidioms.com>

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/idiom>