

ANIMAL IDIOMS in concept and practice

Methodological guide to teaching idiomatic language to secondary school students



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Baia Mare, 2017

WHAT IS AN IDIOM?

The prolific literature that attempts to define the concept of “idiom” has fostered a tendency to treat them as prefabricated structures, which fall into various patterns of definition, without reaching a consensus in what regards the terminology. Therefore, we encounter terms such as *fixed expressions*¹, *multi-word items*², *phraseology*³, *phraseology unit*⁴ whereas McCarthy (op.cit¹) prefers the common term of idiom, according to the eastern European linguistic tradition.

There is a broad range of definitions for the concept of “idiom”, seen from different perspectives – from structure to meaning, from imagery to figurative shades. Thus, according to the ever more popular virtual resource Wikipedia⁵, “*an idiom is a phrase whose meaning cannot be determined by the literal definition of the phrase itself, but refers instead to a figurative meaning that is known only through common use. In linguistics, idioms are widely assumed to be figures of speech that contradict the principle of compositionality; however, this has shown to be a subject of debate.*”

Other linguists⁶ define the idiom as “*words collocated together happen to become fossilized, becoming fixed over time. This collocation -- words commonly used in a group -- changes the definition of each of the words that exist. As an expression, the word-group becomes a team, so to speak. That is, the collocated words develop a specialized meaning as a whole and an idiom is born. An idiom is a word or phrase that means something different to what the words imply if interpreted literally. When a person uses an idiom, the listener might take the actual meaning wrong if he or she has not heard this figure of speech before.*”

According to the Webster Dictionary⁷, the term idiom falls under several categories of meaning. Thus the idiom is “*a manner of speaking that is natural to native speakers of a language [...] the usage or vocabulary that is characteristic of a specific group of people. [...]An expression whose meanings cannot be inferred from the meanings of the words that make it up. The syntactical or structural form peculiar to any language [...]. An expression conforming or appropriate to the peculiar structural form of a language; in extend use, an expression sanctioned by usage, having a sense peculiar to itself and not agreeing with the logical sense of its structural form; also, the phrase forms peculiar to a particular author*”. For instance, the term “*red herring*”, meaning ‘*false trail*’, is used of something which is *neither red nor a herring.*”

As generally used, “idiom” most often refers to a phrase or expression that cannot be understood merely by knowing what the individual words in the phrase mean. For example, “*to roll out the red carpet*” is to welcome a guest in an extravagant manner, with no red carpet needed. The phrase is misunderstood when interpreted in a literal fashion. An example of a Romanian idiom is “*a bate câmpii*”, literally

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Carter, R. (1998). *Vocabulary. Applied Linguistics Perspectives*, London/New York

² Moon, R. (1998): *Fixed Expressions and Idioms in English. A Corpus-Based Approach*, Oxford University Press

³ Howarth, P. (1998): *Phraseology and Second Language Proficiency*, in: *Applied Linguistics*.19

⁴ Gläser, Rosemarie. *The Stylistic Potential of Phraselological Units in the Light of Genre Analysis*

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idiom>

⁶ Saeed, J, (1997): *Semantics. Introducing Linguistics*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

⁷ <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org>

translated into “to beat the fields”, which makes no sense in the word-by-word transfer, but generally means “to speak nonsense”. Although most idiomatic phrases are of basically colloquial usage, we can find them in standard speech and writing, as well.

The definition of idioms can be reduced to words collocated together which fall into a mould, generating a new lexical unit, which eventually shifts from the meaning of the words employed. Collocations are made of several words having different lexical values, linked by grammatical mechanisms and forming full, descriptive structures, with independent meaning. As an example, we can take “*the black sheep of the family*” which consists of noun phrases linked by genitive devices, which sounds as nothing odd or complicated, just that it doesn’t refer to a shepherd’s flock, rather to a member of a human family, which is a kind of an outcast, due to misbehaviour.

According to a segment of research⁸, idioms are taken to be conceptual and only in the background a property of language. It is shown that metaphorical idioms weigh considerably in a people’s language for several reasons. First, they show that words can depict and give access to segments of conventional images. Second, these conventional images are not distinct among people but are shared by a large proportion of language communities. Third, aspects of cultural legacy are tightly related to the nature of these conventional images. Fourth, lexical differences among the various languages may be attributed to shifts in conventional imagery. Finally, metaphorical idioms show that their overall meaning is not the sum of their constituent parts. Rather, the interconnections in the morphological structure of idioms prove to be a complex issue.

II.2. Idiom structure and relevance in the act of communication.

The phrases that can be defined under the idiom principle are a class with a mixed content. These lexical items exhibit certain features; they have an indeterminate extent (varying from one-word phrases, such as “*to bug*” or “*to ape*”, to very complex sentence structures, such as rhetorical questions: “*why keep a dog and bark yourself?*” Or proverb like sentences: “*you can take a horse to water but you cannot make it drink*”), they can be said to be rather “stiff” in terms of internal lexical, syntactic and word order variation, rarely allowing any of the words to be modified (you can say “*catching flies*”, keeping your mouth open while staring at something, but not “*catching some flies*” which would instantly change the whole situation); many words and phrases show a tendency to strong collocations (there is no alternative for “*bee*” in “*having a bee in one’s bonnet*”, thus “*having a wasp in one’s bonnet*” is a worthless structure in terms of idiomatic value), to certain grammatical choices (for instance verb phrases featuring in the active voice cannot be changed in the passive voice. You can have “*to bell a cat*” but not “*the cat was belled*”) and certain semantic environments. The class of the multi-part lexical structures consists of several categories, which are not static and close-ended but various overlaps are permitted, since language is a flexible and dynamic system open to many changes.

⁸ Lakoff, G./Johnson, M. (1999): *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York: Basic Books.

Idioms are anything but standard, they fall into sundry categories and divisions, according to their grammar and lexical structure, meaning or the means of formation, (rules of collocation, morphological structure) origin (even though not all the idioms have an identifiable root) and the field of application for each of them. The first category presents idioms under many patterns, as in the classification below: (the examples have been selected from the lexical corpus presented in the third chapter of the paper, i.e. animal idioms):

□ noun phrases: *a bird of passage, big dog, catnap, horse sense, cash cow, a snake in the grass, loan shark, rat race, a loan wolf, the bee's knees, a sitting duck, a white elephant.*

□ verb phrases: *open a can of worms, cast sheep's eyes, sweat like a pig, take the bull by the horns, play possum, rule the roost, clam up, fishing in troubled waters.*

□ adverbial phrases: *like a bat out of hell, in the lion's den, in donkey's years, as the crow flies, till the cows come home, (learn something) parrot-fashion, etc.*

□ adjective phrases, especially comparatives and compounds: *as proud as a peacock, as hungry as a bear, as merry as a cricket, bull-headed, lion-hearted, hawk-eyed*

□ full sentences or clauses, usually in the form of sayings and proverbs: *curiosity killed the cat; even a blind pig finds an acorn once in a while; If you pay peanuts, you get monkeys; a leopard cannot change his spots; you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink; you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, and so on.*

□ Rhetoric questions: *Why keep a dog and bark yourself? Why keep a cow when you can get the milk for free? Has the cat got your tongue? Why lock the stable after the horse has bolted? Why wake up a sleeping lion?*

□ Imperatives: *Don't count your chickens before they are hatched! Don't look a gift horse in the mouth! Let sleeping dogs lie!*

Most idioms are offspring of imagination, as they come over in the shape of unexpected combinations, most of them being ingenious pictures of stereotypes from the multiple associations people usually make between things belonging to different semantic classes.

Thus, we have:

□ **concrete** idioms: *a dog's breakfast, packed like sardines, a loan shark, the crow's feet, to have a hen to the nest, a sitting duck, a beehive of activity, make a beeline for, a one-horse town, by shank's mare/pony, etc.*

□ **abstract**: *a bee in your bonnet, butterflies in your stomach, in the doghouse, crocodile tears, as happy as a lark, lion-hearted, dog-tired, a dog's chance, a feather in one's hat, an albatross around one's neck, etc.*

An interesting aspect of composition in idiomatic structures⁹ say something about people's poetic mind and plastic imagination, illustrating this with a set of idioms which are generated directly from people's "rhyming thoughts": "eager beaver", "humpty- dumpty", "easy peasy", "may day, "jet set", "hum-drum", "lean and mean", "nitty gritty", "no go", "no pain, no gain", "pie in the sky", "plain Jane" "out and about", "real deal", "seventh heaven", "sound as a pound", "teeny weeny", "ants in your pants", or based on alliteration and assonance: "lily-livered", "lie low", man of means", "rack and ruin", "rags to riches", "safe and sound", "seamy side", "slippery slope", "spick and span", "turn turtle", "ugly duckling", "war of words", "wet your whistle", "a long row to hoe", "fuddy-duddy".

Structurally, an idiom is a combination of words that has a meaning that is different from the meanings of the individual words themselves. It can have a certain literal meaning in one situation and a different idiomatic meaning in another situation. It is a phrase which does not always follow the normal rules of meaning and grammar. *To be in the doghouse* can literally mean that one is cramped in a dog's kennel, as in the sentence:

e.g. The child was in the doghouse, hiding from his nanny.

However, the idiomatic meaning of *the phrase* is that one is in trouble or in a difficult situation, like in the following example:

e.g. The business was gradually losing money and the stockholders knew they were in the doghouse.

Many idioms are similar to expressions in other languages and can be easy for a learner to understand. Other idioms come from older phrases which have changed over time. "*To hold one's horse*" means to stop and wait patiently. It comes from a time when people rode horses and had to hold their horses while waiting for someone or something.

A collocation can be analysed horizontally, thus relying on a certain structural pattern, or on a vertical axis, residing in words belonging to the same semantic field which may work as substitutes for each other or be semantically opposites. In effect, idioms are colloquial metaphors requiring some basic knowledge, information or experience, employed within a culture where the users must share a common reference point. Necessarily, they make up more than just a semantic part of language, but rather a symbol of a particular culture. For example, "*a da ortu' popii*" in Romanian, meaning "*to die*" goes back to the traditional custom of placing a coin (ort) in the mouth of the deceased during the funerals, so that the soul might be able to pay his pass to the other world, in the afterlife.

II.3. Form vs. meaning in idioms

The idiom is sometimes assessed and used as a type of a *prefabricated structure*. There aren't many changes that can be brought to them without spoiling the original meaning or sliding in misuse. The expressions that are of interest here are those lacking in a predictable relationship between the meaning of an expression and the meanings of its parts. For instance, although we know what the meaning of all the words is in "*keep the wolf from the door*", the meaning of the whole expression is not that which we might predict. It certainly does not refer to taking up a rifle and guarding the door lest the wolf should come in or attack the subject. It actually refers to saving money or spending thoughtfully, in order to

⁹ Gibbs (1994, *The poetics of mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

ensure a decent living to the family. The words not having semantic independence, the expression cannot be translated word by word.

The main particular characteristic of idioms is obviously that of using lexical elements with certain individual meanings and conveying a completely different message through its overall construction. In this regard, “*raining cats and dogs*” would mean anything but the view of countless such mammals dropping from the sky. Even if there is no apparent connection whatsoever between the weather phenomenon and the animal species of dog or cat, the idiom “raining cats and dogs” comes like a completely new language structure, autonomous in form and meaning. Likewise, when mentioning “*his bark is worse than his bite*” is never used to describe canine behaviour, but rather a human temper, even if the main lexical components “bark” and “bite” go together to best describe a dog’s habits. Comparatively, in terms of message, just like if a dog is barking it doesn’t necessarily mean that it will bite someone, the idiom is used to denote a person who displays a threatening attitude, but is very unlikely to actually put it in practice.

Idioms are fixed expressions that are typically used in a **figurative** sense. For example, in the sentence “*Exams are part of a carrot and stick method*”, there are obviously no real carrots and sticks involved. The image is that of a donkey being encouraged to move forward by dangling a carrot in front of it or by hitting it with a stick. We can use this idiom to describe any event that involves more abstract rewards (the carrot) and threats (the stick). All languages are full of idioms, and native speakers use them spontaneously without even thinking about their figurative nature. Language learners generally find idioms hard to understand, and this is not surprising. For example, learners are often not sure what image the idiom is based on. If a native speaker makes you *buy a pig in a poke* and you are not familiar with this expression, you might not immediately understand that the person means to sell you something which is not at sight, or is hidden in a sort of coverage. It would help if you knew that the expression was originally used in the context of [marketing](#), where dishonest merchants would trick the potential buyers by placing a cat or some other small animal in a bag and pretending that it is a piglet.

According to (Gibbs, 1994), traditional linguistics used to believe that idioms were completely **arbitrary**: that is, one would fail to guess their meaning from the words they consist of. Consequently, teachers used to tell their students that the only way to master idioms was to learn them by heart. “*The meanings of idioms might be determined by arbitrary conventions of usage. The expression “to break a leg” - used when intending to wish a performer good luck before a competition – originated with the old superstition that it was bad luck to wish someone good luck. Over the time this expression has become rigidly fixed as a convention and contemporary speakers take it as such*”¹⁰. Fortunately, this is not the general case, as many idioms can be explained after all, and so they can be learned in systematic ways. There are many idioms whose meanings are easy to infer from their inner semantic structure.

¹⁰ Gibbs, R. (1994), *The poetics of mind. Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Moreover, recent research¹¹ tells us that when idioms are presented as **non-arbitrary** features of language, students find them much easier to understand and remember. In this respect, presenting the origins and connection of idioms to different fields of application may be a possible strategy of making students more familiar to the world of idioms and thus feeling more confident about them. In terms of origin and field of application, an example of experience-based language construction is “*to bite the bullet*”, idiom derived from old surgical process where patients were operated upon without anesthetic. Patients were given a bullet to bite to clench their teeth against the pain. The intention was to make sure the patients didn't hurt themselves by uncontrollable movements of their teeth and biting their tongue off. Modern usage of the expression means to accept an unpleasant situation, so you can do something about it.

In this regard, animal idioms, which are the main corpus of analysis in the current study (see Chapter III) are built-up on very rich suggestive interrelations among their lexical constituents. For instance, “*a wild-goose chase*” obviously refers to something done in vain, as wild geese are quite difficult to catch. Another relevant example is “*to fish in troubled water*”, idiom taking its slightly negative meaning from the adjective “*troubled*”, with the general meaning of getting involved in a risky situation.

¹¹ Lakoff, G./Johnson, M. (1980): *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press; Gibbs, R. W., Nayak, N. P., Cutting, C. (1989). How to kick the bucket and not decompose: Analyzability and idiom processing. *Journal of Memory and Language* 28

USEFUL CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING IDIOMS

“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.” Albert Einstein

This chapter comes as a sequel to the previous one, in an attempt to support the theoretical parametres outlined in the previous chapter. In this respect, the contents are woven around a set of vocabulary teaching classroom techniques, focusing both on receptive and productive skills, which are to enhance students’ understanding, learning and usage of idioms in communicative activities. Both traditional and modern techniques have been approached and described, in a practical and detailed manner, so as to be relevant in terms of class applicability and efficiency. All of them have been grounded on the author’s personal experience at class and some of them contain full coverage of task set up and completion, taken from the students’ activity.

In order to support the practical side of the teaching-learning process, the following techniques and samples of teaching practice refer to various effective activities for teaching English idioms to secondary school students in order that they can not only learn them effectively but also apply them practically.

The first step in idiom in the idiom learning process consists in using proper **teaching techniques** in order to get the students familiar to the vast coverage of idiomatic expressions, in terms of meaning and usage.

V.1. Non-contextual techniques

Idioms, as common elements of language and culture, can be approached both in contextual and non-contextual learning situations. While the former are more meaningful and are the best choice for non-decomposable structures (whose meanings can only be inferred from a meaningful language environment) the latter are simple techniques, relying mostly on possible semantic analogy between the structures in the two languages involved in the process (foreign language and mother tongue). They are grounded on the traditional (grammar-translation) method, which is likely to work especially if the applied to students’ with less developed foreign language skills.

V.1.1. Mother tongue equivalence

a) One rather technique is to compare idioms in the **target language** with idioms in the **mother tongue**. This can be both an interesting exercise in itself and a means of remembering idioms more effectively. It can be applied using the traditional translation technique of the idioms organized in the form of a table. By translating the sentences word by word, the students will discover very close resemblance with similar expressions belonging to the Romanian culture. Of course, the students will benefit from the teacher’s assistance, whenever they seem to be in difficulty; the technique can be applied to classes of intermediate level students.

ENGLISH IDIOM

1. *a barking dog never bites*
2. *A beehive of activity*
3. *to lead a dog’s life*
4. *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*
5. *bird of passage*
6. *a little bird told me*
7. *birds of a feather flock together*
8. *the early bird catches the worm*

ROMANIAN IDIOM

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- | | | |
|-----|---|-------|
| 9. | <i>take the bull by the horns</i> | |
| 10. | <i>play cat and mouse</i> | |
| 11. | <i>when the cat's away, the mice will play</i> | |
| 12. | <i>to kill the fattened calf</i> | ..... |
| 13. | <i>cash cow</i> | ..... |
| 14. | <i>go to bed with the chickens</i> | ..... |
| 15. | <i>crocodile tears</i> | ..... |
| 16. | <i>walk on eggshells</i> | ..... |
| 17. | <i>like a fish out of water</i> | ..... |
| 18. | <i>a different kettle of fish</i> | ..... |
| 19. | <i>with the tail between the legs</i> | ..... |
| 20. | <i>if you run after two hares, you will catch neither</i> | ..... |
| 21. | <i>don't look a gift horse in the mouth</i> | ..... |
| 22. | <i>Put the cart before the horse</i> | ..... |
| 23. | <i>The black sheep of the family</i> | ..... |
| 24. | <i>Night owl</i> | ..... |
| 25. | <i>as sly as a fox</i> | ..... |
| 26. | <i>as stubborn as a mule</i> | ..... |
| 27. | <i>as fat as a pig</i> | ..... |
| 28. | <i>as full as a tick</i> | ..... |

b) Another variant of the technique described above relies on the discovery skills of the students and is suitable rather to those idioms which have a similarity only in meaning, not in structure, with Romanian sayings. In this case, the students are presented with a two-column table, the first of which enlists a set of English animal idioms, and the second enlists Romanian idiomatic phrases with similar meaning, but a different lexical content. The grammar pattern happens to be common in some of them, though. The task is based on students' intuition, knowledge of Romanian proverbial language and analogical reasoning, as learners are required to find the best Romanian match for each English item, as the second column presents the idioms in a jumbled order, as follows:

TASK: Match the English idioms with their Romanian equivalent in meaning:

- | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|
| 1. | <i>when pigs fly</i> | a) | a arata ca o gaina (curca) plouata |
| 2. | <i>bookworm</i> | b) | lupul isi schimba parul, dar naravul ba |
| 3. | <i>to kill two birds with one stone</i> | c) | a intra in gura lupului |
| 4. | <i>Like water of a duck's back</i> | d) | gura-casca |
| 5. | <i>Let the cat out of the bag</i> | e) | s lasa lupul paza la oi |
| 6. | <i>Work like a dog</i> | f) | a vedea rosu in fata ochilor |
| 7. | <i>Look like a drowned rat</i> | g) | la Pastele cailor |
| 8. | <i>Casting pearls before swine</i> | h) | a o face de oaie |
| 9. | <i>To flog a horse</i> | i) | de-o schioapa |
| 10. | <i>If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride</i> | j) | boii se leaga cu funia si oamenii cu cuvantul |
| 11. | <i>To get in the doghouse</i> | k) | a impusca doi iepuri deodata |
| 12. | <i>A leopard cannot change its spots</i> | l) | soarece de biblioteca |

13. *To bug someone* m) a umbla dupa potcoave de cai morti
 14. *Like a red rag to a bull* n) a fi un cal de povara
 15. *Not everything that flies makes honey* o) a alege graul de neghina
 16. *Catching flies* p) a trece (printr-o experienta) ca gasca prin apa
 17. *Cook one's goose* q) a arunca orzul pe gaste
 18. *To set the cat among pigeons* r) a iesit porumbelul
 19. *Separate the sheep from the goats* s) nu tot ce zboara se mananca
 20. *Knee-high to a grasshopper* t) a taia frunze la caini
 21. *Horses for courses* u) pica para malaiata in gura la natafleata
 22. *to bark at the wrong tree* v) a bazai (la bate la cap) pe cineva

V.1.2 Introducing idioms through the “Questions and answers” technique:

The meaning of idioms can also be triggered by ways of posing questions specially aiming to the structure or meaning of an idiom. Psychologically, this exercise simulates the logical activity of the learner's mind, who will instinctively ask questions whenever it encounters an unknown element. The most common are the “wh” type of questions, which entail a quest for meaning, origins, reasons and comparisons. The effect is boosted if the answers tend to have a slightly joyful manner, with funny hints.

A suggestion of material to be applied using this kind of technique is provided in the following set of questions and answers, inspired from the “Fun Trivia” internet site¹² (most of the questions have been changed and adapted to the students' level: upper-intermediate, the 11th form, having two English classes/week);

What small forest animal can be prickly to touch?

... ***A porcupine...*** well it's not easy to have any dealings with them. Their quills always prick and hurt, whether they are sore or not.

What animal reacts aggressively when seeing a red piece of cloth?

... ***A bull.*** A source of irritation and anger is ***like a red rag to a bull.***

How sly can people be?

... ***As sly as a fox.*** From the tradition of the classic fable we know that foxes turn to their tricks when they want to get something and they have obstacles.

How strong can you be?

... ***As an ox.*** But lions are competitive to them as they are also perceived to be very strong, therefore we don't know which is better, to be “as strong as an ox” or “as strong as a lion”? Oxen are also supposed to be dumb, which is not the case of the felines, though

When you are poor, you may be as poor as?

... ***a church mouse.*** Just imagine the life of a tiny little mouse in an empty, damp, cold church. No food, no hope for a better life. However, its larger size variant – the rat is rather seen as a traitor which is often sniffed down.

¹²

<http://www.funtrivia.com/en/Humanities/Animals-in-Idiom-18097.html>

The rat is also a good racer and has a keen feeling about sinking ships, hurrying to abandon them before the catastrophe.

☐ **Vanity makes you as proud as.....?**

... **a peacock.** Parrots and buffaloes may be proud creatures too, but neither is so proud as the peacock when it spreads its tail.

☐ **What good qualities are birds endowed with in the idiom culture?**

... **Owls** are said to be wise. A bird can catch the helpless worm only if it is an early bird. The hawk-eyed looker never misses any detail, there is hardly any happier environment than a “box of bird”, and who doesn’t dream about being ‘as free as a bird?’

☐ **What animal has a very unpleasant and unhappy life, if we are to believe the English language?**

... **dog.** 'A dog's life'. Working like a dog is not easy or pleasant either. And the quality and 'a dog's breakfast' is a poor one. The dog seems to be a bad omen in these idioms.

☐ **What animal do you imitate when you have a short sleep during day-time?**

cat. A “catnap” can be the perfect solution for an after-noon rest.

☐ **Whose eye do you try to hit in a game of darts?**

... **the bull's.** The old killing instinct is probably the real driving force behind a number of 'sports'

☐ **What animal wants by far the largest share, if not the totality of the catch?**

... **lion.** As king of the jungle, it usually claims the greatest portion when something is to be shared.

☐ **Among which creatures should you not put the cat?**

... **the pigeons.** As there would be a real havoc coming from the feline hunting birds instinct, and the pigeons would definitely have a hard time with it.

☐ **What animal are you like when you are in a bad temper?**

... **a bear with a sore head.** Why bears are particularly susceptible to "headaches" is not very clear, but we can use the idiom successfully to describe one’s bad moods.

☐ **What animal are you like when you behave rudely and roughly and causing uproar and damage?**

... **a bull in a china shop.** What can be more out of place than the large-size, clumsy herbivore in a place full of finely designed and fragile objects?

☐ **What life do you lead with your partner when you are always quarreling with each other?**

... **a cat-and-dog life.** Cats and dogs are reputed not to get on well, though there seem to be exceptions.

☐ **What sort of animal can you be compared to, when you begrudge others what you cannot use yourself?**

... **a dog in the manger.** This type of proverbial dog features in a well-known story attributed to Aesop (“The Dog in the Manger”), which wouldn’t let the cattle eat the hay from the stable, even if the hay was of no use for it.

☐ **What kind of work needs no skill?**

... **the donkey work,** as donkeys are animals carrying burdens and obeying instructions.

☐ **To perform a series of tasks in the wrong order is to do what?**

... **put the cart before the horse.** If you do this, no wonder that nothing will work properly, as the horse is not trained to push the cart, but to pull it, thus, the other way round position of the two would be recommended.

☐ **A circumstance or a topic that is very different from what you had first thought it would be, is what?**

... **a horse of a different colour**. If you said you didn't like going to the movies just because you couldn't afford it (not because you didn't enjoy it), well, that's a horse of a different colour!

□ **If someone feels superior and starts criticising other people just because they think they are better or cleverer, they are said to be doing what?**

... **getting on their high horse**. From up there, you can get a natural and confident position to criticize, give orders and disregard the others around you!

□ **Wasting time trying to achieve something that you will not succeed is said to be doing what?**

... **beating a dead horse**. Try as you might, the horse is dead and there will be no reaction from a stiff body!

□ **If you get information from someone who is directly involved in something and therefore knows a lot about it, you are said to be doing what?**

... **getting it straight from the horse's mouth**. If someone assures you that a piece of information is true and you still have doubts, nothing would be more convincing than the mention that it has been uttered straight from the horse's mouth. Just like at horse races, where the horses are best holders of the truth.

▪ **What animal cannot see anything in the daylight?**

A bat. If you have eyesight problems or skip the obvious element of a general picture, then you must be "as blind as a bat".

The teaching material presented above can be organised in at least two types of classroom activities:

a) **Reading activity**

□ **Procedure:**

□ The teacher chooses a number of questions (for example, 10) on a worksheet and delivers the papers to the class, together with the necessary instructions, i.e. to study the contents.

□ Then, the students are required to read the material aloud, in pairs (usually the pairs are made by the heterogeneous principle, thus the student with poorer language skills will read the shorter and simpler part of the dialogue, in our case, the question, whereas, the other one, with better skills, will read the more complex part, the answer

□ For the practice stage, the teacher can resort to an information gap activity (see examples in the Appendix, 2.)

□ The production stage can be materialised by applying structural-situational technique¹³. At this point, the students are required to remember three events from their own experience and express them in sentences using three of the idioms previously learnt.

👉 Examples from students' answers:

a) "My cousin used to be like a dog in a manger when he was a little boy. He never let us play with his old toys, even if he had other new ones for himself."

b) When father offers himself to help mother in the kitchen he is like a bull in a china shop.

c) Our neighbours got divorced after they had led a long cat-and-dog life together.

b) **Discovery activity** – upper intermediate level

¹³ Harmer, J. (1992), The Practice of English Language Teaching, Lingman Group Ltd

Procedure: the teacher organises the questions and answers selected (10 – 15) in a jumbled order, so that the students’ main task is to make use of guessing strategies in order to match the questions with the right answers, as in the sample given below:

TASK: Find the right answer to the questions and write the corresponding letter in the empty squares of the table:

1. What kind of work needs no skill?	a. a bear with a sore head. Why bears are particularly susceptible to "headaches" is not very clear, but we can use the idiom successfully to describe one’s bad moods
2. Among which creatures should you not put the cat?	b. put the cart before the horse. If you do this, no wonder that nothing will work properly, as the horse is not trained to push the cart, but to pull it, thus, the other way round position of the two would be recommended.
3. What animal are you like when you are in a bad temper?	c. donkey-work, as donkeys are animals carrying burdens and obeying instructions
4. To perform a series of tasks in the wrong order is to do what?	d. crow's. The little lines around the corners of a person's face, radiating out from near the eyes, coming especially with age
5. Which bird's feet spoil the appearance a pretty face?	e. the pigeons. As there would be a real havoc coming from the feline hunting birds instinct, and the pigeons would definitely have a hard time with it.

For practice and production, the suggestions from variant a) can be tackled.

V.1.3. Common vocabulary exercises

Non-contextual introductory and practice techniques can take various forms of exercises, which involve the students’ intuition, problem-solving skills, dictionary work skills and memory. Among the most common types, four have been developed in the practice section of the paper¹⁴

gap-filling exercises

Description: the exercise consists in sets of target vocabulary (in our case, idiomatic expressions); each idiom has one element (usually a lexical, meaningful one) removed from its structure. The task involves the completion of the gap space with the missing word. The exercises given as practice support in the current paper present no more that one word removed from each expression, the missing word denoting mostly an animal name, since the target vocabulary field orbits around the “animal idioms”.¹⁵

Example: “to put the cart before the” (answer: horse)

This type of exercise complies with practice purposes, as the students need some previous knowledge in order to carry it out. Level: intermediate (the 10th form)

idiom reconstruction

¹⁴ See Appendices, section 2, exercises 1, 5, 9, 14, 17, 21, 25

¹⁵ See Appendices, section 1.

Description: This exercise is based on idioms having been split in halves which are arranged on two columns, in a jumbled order. The students' task is to match the corresponding items from the two columns, in order to remake the original structure.

Level: intermediate (the 10th form, two classes / week). Examples of such exercises organised around groups of idioms sharing a common lexical item (animal names, for instance) are provided in the Appendices, section 2.¹⁶

□ **sentence fill-in**

Description: The sentence fill-in exercise is organised around sentences, in which the blank space has to be completed with one idiom. The idioms are provided at the beginning or end of the exercise. It is a slightly more complex type of activity, as it involves a more extended comprehension of the context, so that the students can use the correct idiom, to make the sentence meaningful. The technique is illustrated in the set of exercise provided in the Appendices, section 2.¹⁷

Level: upper-intermediate (the 11th form, two classes / week)

□ **making collocations**

Description: this type of exercise can be employed as introductory and practice technique, and consists in matching two segments of an idiom that correspond in terms of lexical compatibility.

Level: intermediate / upper – intermediate, according to the complexity, or the extent to which can infer the matches from the individual meanings of the words or from their general experience.¹⁸

□ **jumbled words**

Description: this exercise comes as a game or a riddle, challenging students to reorder the words in a chain, so that to obtain correct idioms. The longer the idiom, the more complex the task. It not only checks students' knowledge of phrases, but their skills in sentence construction.

For example: “*can't / new / an / you / dog / tricks / teach / old*” can be reorganised in the more logical structure: “*you can't teach an old dog new tricks*”

Level: intermediate (the 10th grade, two classes / week)

Description:

A fine example is the following handout (available on the official site of the Cambridge Publishing House¹⁹, containing various idiom exercises (designed for use with the Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs and the Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms. They can be used with students from intermediate to advanced level). It offers samples of efficient activities that can be easily drawn up by teachers themselves – using the types of idioms they need to teach to a particular group of students – and applied in the classroom.

1. Below on the left are some common idioms. Choose the correct meaning from the list on the right.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>be par for the course</i> | a. <i>find compromises</i> |
| 2. <i>give the game away</i> | b. <i>make people feel relaxed with each other</i> |
| 3. <i>give and take</i> | c. <i>do something in a way that will give good results</i> |
| 4. <i>have it in for somebody</i> | d. <i>choose what you want</i> |
| 5. <i>know something out inside out</i> | e. <i>be determined to hurt or criticize sb</i> |
| 6. <i>break the ice</i> | f. <i>spoil a secret surprise or joke</i> |
| 7. <i>take your pick</i> | g. <i>know everything about a subject</i> |

¹⁶ See Appendices, section 2. Exercises 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28

¹⁷ See Appendices, section 2. Exercises 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, 26, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40.

¹⁸ See Appendices, section 2. Exercises 29, 32

¹⁹ Available on <http://dictionaries.cambridge.org/assets/idiomswksheets.pdf>

8. *be on the right track*

h. happen as you would expect

2. Fill gaps in these sentences with the idioms in Exercise 1.

1. A: Which one can I have? B:
2. The train was half an hour late but I suppose that, isn't it?
3. They weren't very talkative at first, then someone told a joke and that really
4. You have to in these situations. There's always an element of compromise.
5. A: Peter's going to be there and there's going to be a band and you'll never guess ...
B: Oh don't say anything else. You'll
6. You could ask Emma. She can recite most of the words in the film. She
.....
7. We've got all the answers right so far so it looks as though we
8. My boss She's constantly criticizing my work even when someone else has praised it.

3. The following idioms are missing prepositions. Can you guess which preposition goes where? Check in the dictionary.

1. He didn't get any authority to take the action. He went his boss's head.
 2. Don't say a word to anyone, do you promise? Keep it your hat.
 3. Go easy her. She doesn't understand. She's only a child.
 4. She won't tell me anything. It's like trying to get blood a stone.
 5. Go on spoil yourselves. Push the boat for a change.
 6. She's got a good ear languages and she's pretty musical as well.
 7. That was quick. You're the ball this morning.
 8. I've had it with him and we seem to have resolved most of the problems.
- on out on for out of over under

Opposites

4 The entries for the idioms below all show their opposites too. Use the opposites to fill in the gaps in the appropriate sentences. Remember to use the correct form of the verbs.

- a. *on the agenda*
 - b. *open your eyes to something*
 - c. *nothing to write home about*
 - d. *keep track*
 - e. *get in my hair*
1. We've been to this problem for far too long.
 2. I wish you would and leave me in peace for 5 minutes.
 3. If I won the lottery, now that would be
 4. Unfortunately, tennis is until my leg gets better.
 5. Where are you living these days? You move so often I'm always

Interesting origins

5. Look at the dictionary (using the word underlined) and answer true or false to these statements. What is the idiom connected with each statement?

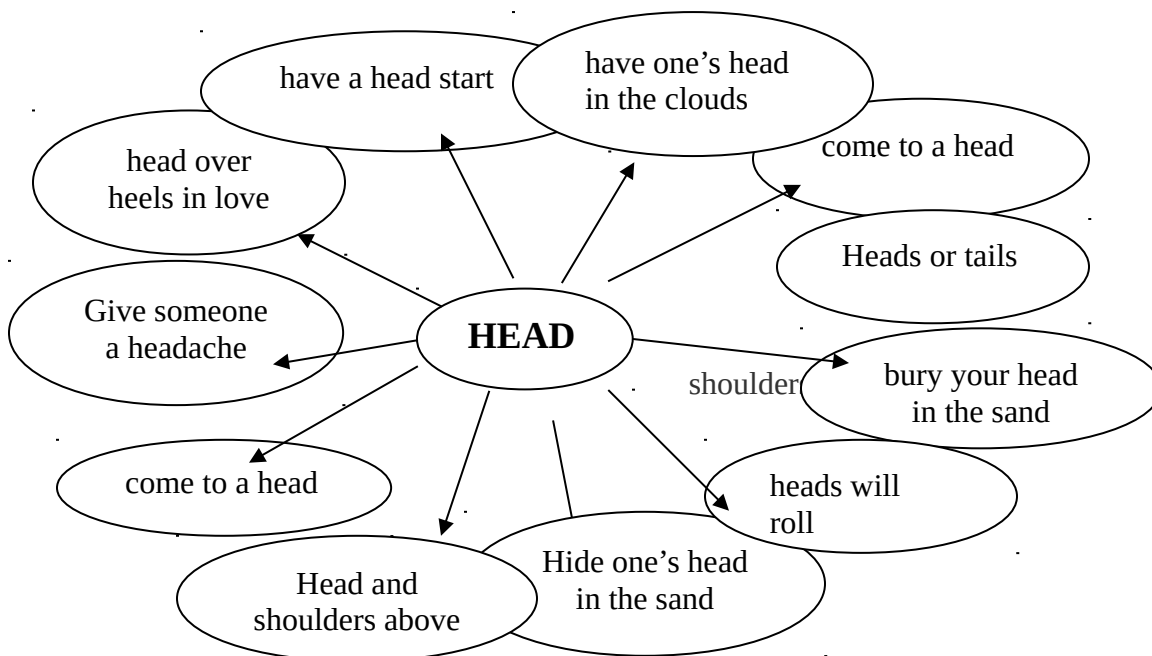
- 1. Achilles was a man in Greek mythology who injured his arm.
- 2. Knights were soldiers in medieval times who rode on horses and helped rescue women in danger.
- 3. Card players throw in their hand when they know they can win a game.
- 4. A magic wand is a stick used in magic tricks.
- 5. A clam is a type of shellfish which is slow to react when it is attacked.
- 6. A beaver is a small animal which people believe to be hard-working and eager to help.

Collocations

6. Common collocations using idioms are highlighted in bold in the example sentences in the dictionary. Match the beginnings and ends of these collocations.

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. a last ditch | a. like a headless chicken |
| 2. way | b. the drain |
| 3. make a clean break | c. a hasty retreat |
| 4. cheap shot | d. into your pockets |
| 5. go down | e. attempt |
| 6. start with | f. out of line |
| 7. running around | g. with the past |
| 8. dig deep | h. a clean slate |
| 9. beat | i. artist |

7. Write an example sentence for each of these idioms. Now choose another part of the body or face and draw similar diagrams. Write example sentences for the idioms you have chosen.



Themes

7. Look at the 'Business' theme panel at the back of the dictionary and answer these questions.

How can you describe someone who:

1. is more successful than other people trying to achieve the same things as them?
2. is one of the most important people in a small organization (they would have much less power and importance if they were part of a larger organization)?
3. is good at their job and soon becomes rich?
4. demands a lot when making an agreement with someone?
5. is practical and determined?
6. is trying to get money or power in a dishonest way?
7. is stealing money from the place where they work?
8. has firm control over the organization they run?

These examples of exercises are standard models used in class activities meant to practice and reinforce the information learnt by the students. Most of these types of exercises have been taken as matrices for those which make up the practical and application units of the current paper.

V.2 Teaching English Idioms in Contexts

V.2.1. Introducing English idioms in short passages



In order to make understanding easier, the teacher can come up with short contexts using a comprehensible input which contains one idiom at a time, so that the message is completely dedicated and focused on the meaning of that particular idiom. The short passages must therefore be woven around the idea expressed by the idiom. In elements of design or graphic support, it is a useful choice to emphasize the idioms in the texts using bold letter and / or different colours. The contents of the passages needs to be adapted to the level of the class, so that the children are dealing with a comprehensible input, which will help them make an idea about the meaning and relevance of the new items. Short dialogues are a good choice of text type, as they are usually more entertaining, livelier and attractive. The comprised content favour students' focusing on the target language, without the risk of getting lost among details.

Reading task:

The texts are read by the students appointed by the teacher, who will make the selection paying attention to name students with a good pronunciation, loud voice and fluency.

The Early Bird Catches the Worm

In donkey's years

"Peter, the queue for the circus is going to be miles long! If you want to get tickets for Saturday's show, remember that **"the early bird catches the worm."** It's been a long time since the circus last visited our town.

"I think you're right, mother. I've been waiting **in donkey's years** for the circus to come again so, I'll get up early to get a place at the head of the line. That way I'll get the tickets I want, for sure!

Let the cat out of the bag

Richard was going to retire from law practice in June, and his workmates were planning to give a surprise party. He wasn't supposed to know about it, but someone must have **let the cat out of the bag**. At the dinner Bob acted surprised, even though a colleague had already told him about it all before the event

Gone to the dogs

"Have you seen the medieval castle lately? It's really **gone to the dogs**."

"It's true that it has become run-down and in serious need of repair, but I'm sure that it can be fixed up to look like new."

"I guess with a little carpentry work and some paint it could look pretty."

Take the Bull by the Horns

Julie felt was sad that she couldn't have much fun at parties because she felt shy on the dance floor.

But she finally **took the bull by the horns** and went to a professional dance studio for help. She was tired of feeling helpless out and took the decision to correct the situation.

Smell a Rat

"The front door is open! Didn't you close it before we left?"

"I'm sure I did. I can't understand it. Frankly, I can **smell a rat**."

"So do I. I feel that something is definitely wrong here. We'd better call the police."

Fishy

When the security guard saw a light in the store at midnight, it seemed to him that there was something **fishy** going on. He called the central office and explained to his superior that he thought something strange and suspicious was occurring.

For the Birds

Jenny and Sara went to a drawing club, but they got bored and restless. For them, it was **for the birds!** They left during the break because they found the activity totally uninteresting and meaningless.

Straight From the Horse's Mouth

"How did you find out that Jill was engaged, Sean?"

"I got the information from a very reliable source."

"You mean Jill told you so herself?"

"That's right. I got it **straight from the horse's mouth!**

Look like the cat who swallowed the canary

I saw the neighbour's child over the fence playing in the yard. He **looked like the cat who had swallowed the canary**"

His father told me that he had just won three series of card games against his elder brother and he was very proud and satisfied with his success

The passages above are samples of materials used to introduce a number of idioms, on a procedure based on reading, comprehension check (elicitation), isolation, guessing strategies (associative reasoning) and explanations. The main interaction is students – teacher, as the activity needs constant monitoring and assistance. The texts in the form of dialogues can also be performed in pairs, each student getting the lines of one character. In this way, more students are activated and get involved in the reading process, the activity evoking a variant closer to real communication, since it involves a speaker for each role.

□ Procedure:

Comprehension check

The next stage of the activity requires that the students’ understanding of the situations depicted in each of the passages be checked by the teacher. This is mainly done through comprehension questions, such as:

- *What did Peter want to see on Saturday? What did his mother tell him?*
- *What did Richard’s colleagues plan? On what occasion? Did they tell him about it? So, that means Richard had no idea about the party? How did the situation change?*
- *How did Jenny and Sara feel about the drawing club? Did they stay for the whole course? Why not?*
- *How did Sean know about Jill’s engagement? Did he believe this news? What made him be so sure it was true?*
- *Why did Julie feel sad? Did the situation change? How?*
- *In what condition was the medieval castle? What did it need?*
- *Why was the couple surprised when they came home? What did they think?*
- *What did the neighbour’s boy look like? What was the reason for this?*

Isolation

Asking the questions above and making sure that the students’ answers are satisfactory and prove a good understanding of the text favours a deeper insight in the language and situational contexts that idioms are engaged. Once completed, the discussion about each episode is a pathway to the next step – when the bolded and colourful idiomatic expressions are **isolated from their contexts**. The students are given a **problem-solving task**, related to text-study: they have to observe the passages and find the meaning of each idiom in the form of an expression having similar meaning or explaining its message.

Task: scan the texts and find equivalent phrases for the idioms:

- a. *the early bird catches the worm*
- b. *in donkey’s years*
- c. *let the cat out of the bag*.....
- d. *for the birds*.....
- e. *straight from the horse’s mouth*.....
- f. *looked like the cat who had swallowed the canary*
- g. *smell a rat*
- h. *took the bull by the horns*
- i. *fishy*

The answers are:

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. I'll get up early to get a place at the head of the line | e. from a very reliable source |
| b. for a long time | f. strange and suspicious |
| c. a colleague had already told him about it all | g. took the decision to correct the situation |
| d. uninteresting and meaningless | h. run-down and in serious need of repair |
| | i. very proud and satisfied |

V.2.2. Introducing English Idioms in stories. Applying reading techniques

Some authors suggest teaching idioms by using larger literary contexts, such as stories, which are said to have been commonly used to teach and entertain students in language learning. Interesting stories usually draw students' attention and easily make students absorbed in them. Since contextual information is significantly effective for aiding students' understanding English idioms, it is essential for teachers to provide students with rich context.

Thus, introducing English idioms within interesting stories can possibly help students to understand and remember them better. When it comes to teaching idioms, the *simulated context* is a better choice than the *real* one, as in real communication sequences it is unlikely for us to encounter a large number of idioms in a short text. Thus, the presence of short stories in the process of teaching idioms, can take various forms. The text study can involve reading skills or listening skills, depending on the type of activity applied.

□ The following text –created by the author of the present work - text is a good example of how teachers can build stories which not only provide a good communication setting for language presentation, but can also serve as raw material for other language models:

A number of 18 animal idioms are the target vocabulary in the simulated context of an improvised story (created by the teacher and adapted to the level of the target group of students); the new elements of vocabulary meant to be presented are written in bold letters.

“I have **the memory of an elephant**, so I remember things from my childhood like it was yesterday, even if I am no longer **a spring chicken**. It was one of those **dog days of summer**, when the nature was **as gaudy as butterfly** with so many flowers and birds around, and the water of the lake was **as calm as a toad in the sun**. While I was **shooting the bull** with a few friends by the lakeside, we heard a strange loud noise from the bushes which gave us **goose-bumps**, as we didn't know what it was. We **waited motionless for the cat to jump**, but it was time **to take the bull by the horns**, as we wanted to know what was hiding behind those bushes. Feeling like **having ants in our pants**, we tried to convince one boy, who was older, to **bell the cat**, as we thought him to be **lion-hearted**. Actually, in our group he was a sort of a **big fish in a small pond**. He tried but, another boy from the group reminded us that **curiosity killed the cat**; in that moment, like some **scared bunny rabbits**, we **hoofed it** to the village **as the crow flies** and imagined **a cock-and-bull story** to tell the other children...”

After the lead-in episode, during which the text had been read by one student with a good pronunciation, loud voice and appropriate fluency (appointed by the teacher), the following techniques were applied in

order to clarify the message of the whole text and implicitly, meanings of the idioms emphasized through bold characters.

□ Elicitation

The teacher checks the students' understanding of words which are suspected to ne have been understood well by all the students. This act can be carried out through questions like:

- “How do the bolded expressions sound to you?”
- “Have you encountered them before? In what contexts?”
- “Do you find them difficult to understand?”

□ General comprehension check

The success of the activity was boosted when the discovery process was assisted through of **comprehension questions**, especially when the teacher noticed that not all the students managed to understand what the story was about. Examples of comprehension questions used:

- ❖ When did the action happen?
- ❖ What time of the year was it?
- ❖ What was the weather like?
- ❖ Who was involved in the action?
- ❖ Where did the action take place?
- ❖ Which is the climax point of the event?
- ❖ How did the children react?
- ❖ Did they solve the mystery?
- ❖ How does the episode end?



V.2.3. The discovery technique

At intermediate and upper-intermediate levels we can assume that students already have a considerable store of vocabulary. Rather than give them the new language readily explained, it seems to be more challenging and efficient to let them work out the aspects related to the new expressions, from the context they are presented in. by provoking this involvement with words, the teacher makes it likely that students will remember them at least for some time.

In this way, the discovery technique aims to give students a chance to engage their own knowledge and skills in the learning process. In this case, the meaning of the idioms can be inferred from the story context and discussed with the teacher, who will confirm or correct the students' predictions. As an alternative technique, instead of brainstorming the class, the teacher can come up with a sentence completion activity on the idioms presented in the text. The main mechanism in applying this task resides in inferring the meaning from context. The students try to grasp the general context of the story and imagine what the bolded segments could refer to:

- “the memory of an elephant” means.
- “dog days of summer” are:
- “no spring chicken” refers to :
- “was shooting the bull” can be replaced with:

- “goose-bumps” appear on:
- “to wait for the cat to jump” means
- “to take the bull by the horns” can be replaced with
- “curiosity killed the cat” teaches us that
- “to hoof it” means
- “to have ants in one’s pants” means
- “as the crow flies” refers to
- “a cock-and-bull story” is
- An equivalent for “lion-hearted” could be.....

Another approach of the idioms introduced by means of a narrative is to **elicit students’ opinions, intuition or mere guesswork** on the items under discussion. The teacher asks polar questions (yes / no answers) (for “memory of an elephant”) “Does he remember well or he has just a faint memory of those times?”

▪ **Brainstorming** can be also applied in order to get all the possibilities that cross the learners’ imagination when thinking the memory of an elephant, and then choose the best of them. The brainstorming technique can set off from the question: “How can the memory of an elephant be?” The same questioning / discovery techniques may be applied to the rest of the idioms in context, as follows:

- o “What human characteristic could a “spring chicken” reflect? Beauty? Age? Intellect? Character? Behaviour? Size? Others?” If the students miss the right answer, their thinking can be redirected through further helping questions, such as: “What is the difference between a spring chicken and an autumn one? When do chickens hatch? And so on.
- o “How can the dog days of summer be?”
- o “Do you think the group of children were actually shooting some animal? What else could they be doing there?”
- o “What can goosebumps be? Were there any geese around? What reaction could they get when hearing a strange noise?”
- o “Why did they wait for the cat to jump? Was there a cat with them? What did they actually wait for? What do you usually wait for in such a situation?”
- o “How did they take the bull by the horns? Isn’t it dangerous? Was there any bull around? What does the Romanian translation mean? Does it make a sense in the context of our story?”
- o “What kind of story is a cock-and-bull story? Do you think the boys could tell the truth or the real reason of that noise?”
- o “How does someone react when feeling ants in their pants?”
- o “What kind of behaviour does a person with a lion’s heart have? Is the lion a strong or a weak animal?”
- o “How do the crows fly from one point to another?”

The quiz can be successfully employed as feedback or follow-up activity that could reinforce the students’ fresh acquisitions.

- The memory of an elephant refers to: a) a short memory

- b) a selective memory
 - c) a long-term memory
- ☐ “*Dog days of summer*” are: a) rainy days
 - b) very hot days
 - c) long days
- ☐ “*no spring chicken*” refers to : a) an old person
 - b) a sick person
 - c) a young person
- ☐ “*was shooting the bull*” can be replaced by : a) going hunting
 - b) killing time in small talk
 - c) aiming at a bull
- ☐ “*goosebumps*” appear on: a) goose legs
 - b) in people’s stomachs
 - c) on people’s skin
- ☐ “*waiting for the cat to jump*” can be replaced by: a) chasing the cat
 - b) waiting to see what happens
 - c) teaching a cat how to jump
- ☐ “*to hoof it*” represents the action of: a) starting running
 - b) shoeing a horse
 - c) a horse hitting with its shoe
- “*like bats out of hell*” refers to an action performed: a) in a relaxed manner
 - b) very fast
 - c) without seeing anything
- ☐ “*as the crow flies*” means: a) very fast
 - b) with short halts
 - c) directly from one point to another
- ☐ “*lion-hearted*” could be replaced with the adjective: a) brave
 - b) kind
 - c) successful
- ☐ “*a cock-and bull story*” is a : a) a true story
 - b) a story about a dog
 - c) a silly story difficult to believe

V. 2.4. Retelling and rewriting stories to practice English idioms

Retelling is a good strategy to know how much students have learned and to increase their comprehension. Retelling activities can ease students’ reading feedback, as the activities can spur students to try to reactivate their memory. Their retrieval gives indicators of how much from the target contents their students have gained. Older students can benefit from retelling stories because it allows them to learn to organize and describe events, which enhances reading comprehension²⁰. During class

²⁰ Brandi-Muller, J. (2005). Retelling stories. <http://www.colrincolorado.org/article/13282>

experiments, there has been shown that students not only became more enthusiastic and willing to take a chance and read aloud but also remembered the vocabulary better with this method. As a result, retelling activities can boost integration of recently learned reading.

The re-telling / rewriting technique can be applied after discovering, explaining discussing and reinforcing the meaning and the usage of each idiom, by asking the students to rewrite the story in a variant employing equivalent expression for the idioms featuring in the original version.

Since retelling activities are good techniques to facilitate students' reading retrieval, this can be highly motivating in applying the activities in teaching English idioms. After introducing the meanings of English idioms to the students, they are asked - in pairs - to retell the content in their own words instead of the English idioms and to rewrite sentences provided in class by using English idioms. The retelling and rewriting activities provided students with more chances to be aware of the meanings of English idioms and be familiar with the English idioms they have just learned.

V.2.5. Applying listening techniques in teaching idioms

Context-teaching can be used in activities involving not only reading, but also listening skills. In this way, the students' attention is likely to be sharper and their involvement may become more efficient.

An example of complex class activity, integrating the four skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) is offered by the "**Inside Out**" students' textbook, *upper-intermediate* level (MacMillan Publishing House, 2005), authors Sue Kay and Vaughan Jones. The activity is drawn up on introducing and practicing body idioms, but it can be used as framework for any class of idioms, for instance *animal idioms*, since this is the language corpus debated in the paper, just as in the procedure below:

The teacher prepares a tape with the text containing a set of idioms. As practical example, we shall use the narrative from the reading activity above (V.2.3.a.) on tape. The teacher prepares a text for reading, this time having replaced the idioms with other phrases or lexical equivalents.

Task 1 : *Read and listen to the following narrative of a person who recounts an personal experience. Underline sixteen sections of the text that are different from what you hear on the recording:*

Task 2: *Replace the sixteen underlined phrases in task 1 with the appropriate body idioms from the box:*

goose bumps
was shooting the bull
wait for the cat to jump
to take the bull by the horns
as the crow flies
dog days of summer
no spring chicken
as calm as a toad in the sun

the memory of an elephant
curiosity killed the cat
as gaudy as a butterfly
ants in one's pants
a cock-and-bull story
lion-hearted
big fish in a small pond
hoofed it

“I have **a very good memory**, so I remember things from my childhood like it was yesterday, even if I am no longer **very young**. It was one of those **very hot summer days...** when the nature was **brightly coloured** with so many flowers around, and the water of the lake was **motionless**. While I was wasting time chatting (having meaningless talk with a few friend by the lakeside, we heard a noise from the bushes which gave us **a strange sensation on our skin**, as we didn't know what it was. We **waited motionless to see what would happen**, but it was time **to do something about it**, as we wanted to know what was hiding behind those bushes. Feeling **anxious and restless**, we tried to convince one boy, who was older to **take up the challenge**, as we thought him to be **quite brave**. Actually, he was **important only in our small group**. But, another boy from the group reminded us that **it is not very wise to be curious**; in that moment, as we were so frightened, we **started running as fast as we could** and headed for the village **without any bypass**, while imagining **an exaggerated version of the story** to tell the other children...”

Task 3: Listen again and check your answers.

Task 4: Work with a partner. Tell your partner about someone who(m):

- has the memory of an elephant
- is no longer a spring chicken
- is lion-hearted
- once made you get goose-bumps
- has ants in his pants
- is as calm as a toad in the sun
- told you a cock-and-bull story
- you met on a dog day of summer
- sometimes looks as gaudy as a butterfly

TASK 5: Work with a partner. Use the dictionary (or a copy of the Appendix, section 1) to find one expression containing the following animal names:

Student A: horse, peacock, bee, dog

Student B: donkey, sheep, feather, cat

TASK 6: Work together to write a 15-20 line conversation incorporating as many of the expressions found as possible. Act out your conversation in front of the class.

Class results: Example of students' work:

Student A: “I haven't seen our old friend Tommy in **donkey's years!**”

Student B: “I remember that he used to be **the black sheep of his family**, but now he's a **top dog** now, working for a big company”

Student A: “Even if he came from a **one-horse town**, he has become a successful man.
No wonder, I see that he is always **as busy as a bee**”

Student B: “And that engineering project he carried out last month is another **feather in his cap**. He must be **as proud as a peacock** about it”

V.3. Immediate creativity is another technique that favours the assimilation of idioms and facilitates their usage in students' acts of communication. In this view, the students are required to use the freshly

learnt idioms strips of narrative or short stories, even sentences (depending on their individual possibilities) having a similar or a different subject, according to their own inspiration or imagination. For higher efficiency, the students are asked to work in pairs, favouring student-student interaction and mutual support, as well as increased confidence.

This activity proves to grant the necessary freedom of expression and independence in employing a certain segment of language in personal language situations and contexts, like in assisted practice.

From the class results, the following sentences have been selected:

- *“In the **dog days of summer**, people like going to a lake or a river to swim or in the mountains, where the shade keeps them cool. There they can feel **as calm as toads in the sun** and enjoy the beautiful nature”*
- *“The students decided to tell the teacher a **cock-and-bull story** about the broken windows, but there was no one who would **bell the cat**, as the teacher wasn’t a **spring chicken** and they knew felt like some **scared bunny rabbits**”*
- *“When the pirates saw the ghost, they got **goose-bumps** and they ran out of the cave like **bats out of hell**”*
- *“The princess was as **gaudy as a butterfly**, and the duke, wishing to dance with her, went to her like the crow flies, feeling **ants in his pants**.”*
- *“I started to have **ants in my pants** when I heard that the results of the competition were about to be released”*

V.4. Introducing idioms with progressive input

In order to extend the scope of the learning process and to get the students enlarge their baggage of English idioms, **progressive input** can be introduced by the teacher, who will enrich the list with a few more animal idioms, that would relate – in one way or another to the ones analyzed.

a) One variant is when the teacher prepares a set of idioms, each matching one from the previously learnt set in terms of structure or morphology pattern. The newly introduced idioms come in a table, alongside the previously learnt ones. The students have to find pairs of idioms from the two columns matching in terms of grammar structure. This first step in the presentation of the new language input is meant to get the students familiar with the **structure pattern** these items are built in.

- For instance, in the following chart, the idiom *goose-bumps* has the same inner pattern like *road hog*, both being compounds of two nouns; *spring chicken* matches lone wolf, as they are both noun phrases made up of nouns modified by nouns; *bell the cat* goes with *smell a rat*, as they consist of a verbs with a direct object. And the procedure goes on with the rest of the list. The activity is a complex one, as it involves grammar knowledge, besides intuition. The students must pay a lot of attention, lest they should mix up the structures.

1. <i>lion-hearted</i>	a. To beard the lion in its den	Genitive phrase
2. <i>Dog days of summer</i>	b. Like a dog with a bone	Verb+noun
3. <i>Spring chicken</i>	c. bookworm	Noun ph+prep ph.
4. <i>Scared bunny rabbits</i>	d. have a bee in a bonnet	Noun+pron+noun
5. <i>goose bumps</i>	e. To rat on	Adj + noun ph.
6. <i>to wait for the cat to jump</i>	f. dog and pony show	Verb phrase
7. <i>to take the bull by the horns</i>	g. To smell a rat	Comparative adj. p
8. <i>big fish in a small pond</i>	h. in donkey's years	Adj+noun ph.
<i>to hoof it</i>	i. night owl	Compound -adj.
9. <i>ants in one's pants</i>	j. as busy as a bee	Vb+noun+prep ph
10. <i>Bell the cat</i>	k To horse around	Verb+noun+inf.
11. <i>Like bats out of hell</i>	l. Let sleeping dogs lie	Noun+noun +noun
12. <i>cock-and-bull story</i>	m. Hawk-eyed	Compound noun
13. <i>as gaudy as a butterfly</i>	n. biggest frog in the puddle	Comparative adv.

TASK:
look at the
internal

(morphological) structure of the idiom in the first two columns and match the pairs that share a similar pattern, then find their common structure in the third column:

The following stage of the introduction activity consists in giving the students a list with the **meanings** of the newly encountered expressions, in a jumbled order.



Match each of the following meanings with one of the idioms in the second column, by writing them on the dotted lines:

- *don't bring up old problems*
- *have a troubling thought or worry*
- *a person who reads a lot*
- *a presentation of meant to impress or to sell a product*
- *to challenge the enemy on his territory*
- *agile, very attentive*
- *hard working*
- *a very long time*
- *to suspect that something is wrong*
- *to play in a silly manner*
- *someone who stays up late at night*
- *to report someone's bad behavior to someone in authority*.....
- *to refuse to stop doing something you like*

Applying the principles of the task-based approach, the students are challenged to try and connect each explanation with its idiomatic equivalent. The teacher provides the necessary assistance and directions for the students, depending on the kind of intervention needed.

b) Another possibility to introduce the **progressive input** set out from the *lexical key element* in each of the idiomatic expressions presented, which is *the animal name*. By re-creating further idioms woven around the same animal names that feature in the previously learnt ones, the students become aware of the *prolific nature* of these structure, and subsequently, their distribution in the language. The presentation can take the form of a problem solving task, in which the teacher will write an incomplete form the new idioms, each missing the core element, i.e. the animal name, as follows (the teacher will remind the children that the missing animals are those from the previously learnt expressions, adding that some of the animals can feature more than once):

TASK: Write the name of the animal matching the following idioms:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the .....’s den ▪ Kill the .....that lays the golden eggs ▪ Working like ▪ Like a .....in a china shop ▪ To put the cart before the ▪ Let the .....out of the bag ▪ As ugly as a ▪ A white ▪ To pull a .....out of the hat ▪ As blind as a ▪ Don’t count your .....before they hatch ▪ Have .....in your stomach ▪ Cook one’s ▪ Like a .....out of water ▪ Play .....and mouse 	 
---	---

The meanings of these newly introduced idioms will be established through the discovery techniques, following the model from the first type of activity described.

V.4.1. Creative writing as a step forward to mastering idioms

After acquiring such a certain amount of new idioms, it is necessary that the students use them in personal productions, which can range from the simplest tasks of writing sentences or short dialogues in which the idioms to have a relevant place, to more complex ones, dealing with story writing or a descriptive text, that contains as many idioms as possible. The activity can take the form of a class competition, in which the winner is the student who can use the biggest number of idioms in a meaningful context.

Examples of dialogues devised by the students at this stage of learning:

- S1: “How did Pam feel before the new date?”
- S2: “She appeared to be as calm as a toad in the sun, but I knew she had butterflies in her stomach!”

∏

S1: "I haven't seen you **in donkey's years!** What have you been doing?"

S2: "Well, nothing special, but I don't like to go out in these **dog days of summer**"

∏

"The child **had ants in his pants** but I stopped them from their **horsing around** in the museum. I felt embarrassed, as he was **like a bull in a china shop** there, until I started telling him a **cock and bull story** about the mummies who eat naughty children.

∏

S1: "How is your new roommate? Is he a **night owl**, like you?"

S2: "No, he is a **bookworm**. When he finds a good book, he is like **a dog with a bone**"

∏

S1: "What is wrong? You seem to **have a bee in your bonnet!**"

"In a moment of folly I **let the cat out of the bag** about the missing money and I **cooked my cousin's goose**, as she had taken it without permission"

∏

S1: "Why didn't the agent **take the bull by the horns** when he **smelled the rat** in that case of child kidnapping?"

S2: "He **waited for the cat to jump** and then **beard the lion in its den**. He was a **lion-hearted** hero for the victim's family."

S1: "We **were working like ants** in my grandparents' garden, when a homeless man, as **ugly as a toad**, burst out of a bush like **a bat out of hell** and we were so startled that his appearance gave us **goose bumps**"

S2: "This sounds like a **shaggy dog's story**, I don't know if I should believe it or not!"

Of course the tasks will differ among the members of the group, according to the personal competences and skills. Those who master the foreign language at a higher level will find it challenging to write a new story, whereas the students who have poorer skills in English will find it helpful to start from the given story, to which they can add up a few more sentences, using the extra idioms provided by the teacher. In this way, the progressive input techniques addresses to students of different English levels, without favouring one category or another. The students will be organised in pair during the activity, so that they can consult one another, rely on each other's knowledge and especially learning through cooperation.

The introduction techniques can be applied to simpler contexts, according to the level of the students involved. Thus, we can have short nice stories or dialogues as models to be followed by the class during the creativity stage.

V.5. Teaching English idioms with Readers' Club activities

V.5.1. Reading activities

Readers' Club is a dramatic presentation of a written work in a script form. Readers read from a "script" and reading parts are divided among the readers. No memorization, costumes, blocking, or special lighting is needed. Scripts are held by the readers. Lines are not memorized. The focus is on reading the text with expressive voices and gestures. Making comprehending the text meaningful and fun for the student is the key to an efficient learning and the feeling of accomplishment²¹.

Readers' Club has been viewed as an interesting and motivating strategy that can provide readers with a legitimate reason to re-read a text and further improve their word recognition, reading fluency and reading comprehension. Researchers claim that Readers' Theater offers a way to improve fluency and enhance comprehension as well as to create interest in and enthusiasm for learning²². Even slow learners can benefit from Readers' Club activities, because there is no memorization required and there is no risk of being at a loss. Apparently, Readers' Club provides enough opportunity for practice, through repeated reading in language learning. This activity also enhances interaction opportunities with peers and makes the reading task more appealing than learning alone. The technique can be applied on reading dialogues from a text, the students being assigned certain roles, alongside a narrator, which can be performed by the teacher or one of the students.

The next dialogues is an example of text created by the teacher and adapted to the class level, at the same time containing idioms that have already been introduced to the class:

Husband and wife conversation:

Wife: *"Did you have a good rest after a whole morning in that **beehive of activity**?"*

Husband: *"No, I only took a **catnap**. But something didn't let me sleep. I fell asleep only after I started **counting sheep**"*

Wife: *"What was the matter? What **bee** was there in your bonnet?"*

²¹ Bafile, C. (2003). Reader's Theater: A reason to read aloud. Education World

²² Bafile, C. (2003). Reader's Theater: A reason to read aloud. Education World

Husband “Well, I am **dog-tired**. My boss always gives me the **donkey work** at the office, while he stays in his office **as snug as a bug in rug!** He never **gets off his high horse**, and always treats everyone as if he were **the cat’s whiskers!**

Wife Why doesn’t your office mate help you?

Husband: Well, that’s **a different kettle of fish**; he can’t operate in that program, he’s a **one pony trick**, typing contracts all day, and I feel like a **clay pigeon** around there.

Wife: “I think you should let these worries roll off like **water off duck’s back**; maybe things will change soon!

Husband: Soon? There is **as much chance as a wax cat in hell!**

After a first reading session, the idioms encountered along the lines of the text are selected and written on the board and in the notebooks. The teacher can choose one of several discovery techniques in order to help the students understand and master the idioms under discussion (see the discovery techniques section in this paper).

The reading session can be repeated until the necessary fluency is attained, and every student involved feels comfortable with reading and understanding the part he is reading.

If there aren’t enough lines in the text for every student in the group, the reading activity will be reiterated with another group of children, until each member of the group has had the chance to fit in one of the characters. The exercise is grounded on the drilling principle, which is always guaranteed to favour pronunciation, the feeling of increasing control over the newly learnt language segments and thus, their assimilation.

V.5.2. Practice activities

The technique described above can be successfully employed not only to help students understand a certain set of idioms, but also to encourage them in practicing activities, in order to enhance their capacity of retaining as many of these structures as possible, as a direct outcome of a classroom activity.

Therefore, as a sample of such practice based on the Readers’ Theatre method, we can develop an activity woven around the personalisation and localisation techniques combined with immediate creativity.

□ Procedure:

Level: upper-intermediate (the 11th grade, age groups: 16-18, 2 classes / week)

The teacher delivers instructions to each group / individual (depending on the choice of class management): the students have to make a selection of the idioms they have learnt and imagine different situations in which these can feature. They have to write sentences in their notebooks. When they finish, they announce the teacher, who will ask each of them to share their production with the rest of the class. For a better quality, higher efficiency and controlled complexity of the output expected from this activity, it is advisable that the teacher should set a number of words that students are to use, again, according to the level of the class.

For example, taking the phrase “*shaggy dog’s story*”, and fitting within a 15 and 20 word-sentences pattern, the students are expected to write sentences like: “*I don’t take my desk-mate too seriously when we talk, as he usually tells me all kinds of shaggy dog’s stories*”

As error correction techniques, the teacher can elicit the class' opinions about the sentences presented and draw a conclusion for each.



Of course, this activity can be carried out at more complex levels, depending on the general skills and knowledge of the class. For students who present better skills and foreign language competences, the teacher can prepare tasks consisting in mini-dialogues, which are to be presented to the class.

Class observation and students' interviews further revealed their positive attitudes, such as excitement toward the implementation of Readers Theater in reading classes. Moreover, students retained English idioms better by applying Readers Theater because it provided students with opportunities for idiom oral practice because of rereading scripts. Consequently, it is obvious to see that Readers Theater has a significant effect on students' learning and retaining English idioms.

V.6. The role of illustrations in teaching idioms

Even though there is an ongoing debate regarding the effect of visuals on reading comprehension, some researchers claim that reading materials accompanied by visuals will be more comprehensible. Class experiments carried out by researchers²³ stressed that teachers need to illustrate key vocabulary effectively by showing pictures and diagrams so as to improve the students' reading comprehension. They found that words and pictures presented together trigger an activation of students' memory devices, helping them to assimilate vocabulary more easily. It is efficient to bring interesting pictures to support and encourage vocabulary development. As a result, visuals prove to be stimulating, interesting and motivating to students' comprehension and retention of reading.

The boosting effect of illustrations on reading is easy to be demonstrated by applying a set of 10 idioms which have been selected from the corpus laid in the present paper (see Appendix, 1.). The selected idioms were presented to one class of 26 students (level-intermediate, the 10th form, age groups: 15-16) in a specially designed form, with meaningful or just funny pictures accompanying the sentences. The introductory activity was followed by elicitation, the necessary explanations in order to make the meanings of every idiom clear to everyone in the class. The presentation form goes as follows:

	Idiom: <i>working like ants</i>	Meaning: being very dilligent and organised
	Example: <i>The bricklayers were all on the building site, working like ants.</i>	
	bark up the wrong tree	Pursue an erroneous course of action
	<i>This trail won't get him to the anywhere – he's barking up the wrong tree</i>	
		



²³ Scarcella, R.C., & Oxford, R.L. (1992). *The Tapestry of Language Learning: The Individual in the Communicative Classroom*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

like a bat out of hell	fast
<i>When the bell rang, all the children rushed in the schoolyard like bats out of hell.</i>	

make a beeline	go straight towards
<i>The guide asked the tourists to make a beeline to the ruined castle up the hill.</i>	



do something in a cat's paw	Do something secretly
<i>The other employees mustn't know about this change, so do it in a cat's paw.</i>	

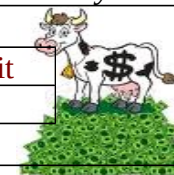
catnap	A mid-day snooze.
<i>I like to have a catnap in the hot summer afternoons, when things are quiet around.</i>	



clam up	to keep or become silent or withhold information
<i>The foreign prisoner clammed up when asked about his true identity</i>	



cash cow	having much money and supporting someone else with it
<i>We mustn't upset Mr Simpson, as he is the cash cow of our business</i>	



a sitting duck	An easy mark / target.
<i>I have a good feeling about the next mission – our target is a sitting duck</i>	



buy a pig in a poke	Buy something without seeing it first.
<i>They bought a pig in a poke when they accepted that deal with the stranger</i>	

For a comparative purpose, the same set of idioms was introduced in sentences and with explanations, to another class of students with similar foreign language skills, but this time without any pictures. The conclusion in term of efficiency favoured by far the former variant of presentation that English, as idioms with illustrations could increase the students' understanding much better.

This effect has two psychological factors at its basis: first, the students' attention is higher, their interest is visibly raised towards the language contents presented; secondly, their memory mechanisms are efficiently activated and supported by the visual stimuli.

Thus, it is effective to present English idioms accompanied by visual stimuli that clearly illustrates the idioms being taught.

Going deeper into the matter, this effect can easily be acknowledged psychological profiling. Human perception is a cooperation of several case, understanding of a language situation can only benefit from the presence of relevant images, as the memory based visual stimuli is the highest level, compared to other types of input. Of course, this



through a senses. In our suggestive known to reach instrument is not

perfectly applicable to all and any type of idiom whatsoever, but it works with those idiom samples which can be mentally represented through an image.

For instance, it's easier for learners to assimilate an idiom such as the “*lion's share*” or “*playing cat and mouse*” if they not simply imagine a lion having a big piece of something or a cat teasing a little mouse, but



actually see it ready pictured for them. In this way, the clear image will always serve as a “tip” or a helpful instrument in imagining, understanding and using the language structure in relevant context.

Of course there are differences in what regards the extent to which idioms' understanding by the learners can be enhanced through the use of images. Some idioms are favoured to a greater extent in this way than others, for example “*catnap*” would be easier for children to remember if the concept is related in their mind with the image of a sleeping cat.



V.7. Group work and discussion in teaching idioms

Idioms can be acquired as a result of group discussion activities, which provide a good environment for teamwork in the purpose of discovering, understanding, debating and using different English idioms. The discussion can be free, open and independent of teacher's interference, but it can also be assisted or directed frontally, through tasks and assignments. In this way, the teacher gives clear instructions to individual students or pre-established groups of discussion, setting rules and a strategy to make things work out. The cooperation can be carried out within the groups, case in which the students belonging to one group discuss the idioms among themselves within a time limit set by the teacher. □ **Procedure**

Level: upper-intermediate (the 11th grade, age groups: 16-18, 2 classes / week)

The class activity starts from reading a text containing a certain number of idioms. The reading can be carried out through several variants of strategies (silent, individual reading, reading aloud by one student who masters diction, fluency and pronunciation at a good level, one student appointed for each paragraph, and so on. The assisted reading techniques are not among the objects of the current paper, though, so the choice will be left in the care of every teacher, depending on the group / class of students).

After the reading activity has been completed, the teacher delivers a series of tasks approaching the issue of discussing the idioms encountered in the text. These tasks can be the same for every group, or they can be different. In the former case, all the groups will have to tackle the same language input, whereas in the latter, each group will be required to approach a different set of idioms. The best way for the group to work out their tasks is on flip charts sheets of paper, so that they can make a class frontal presentation of their results. When the group debate is finished, the teacher will ask each of them to present their conclusions /results, depending on the type of activity they have been assigned. Their answers are compared, and the best of the most appropriate are enlisted on the blackboard and in the students' notebooks.

□ Example of **worksheet** applied in group discussion activity:

TASK 1: *Read the following text individually, then, in groups, underline as many animal idioms as you can find* (the original handout doesn't display the animal idioms in bold letter, this feature has been applied here for practical reasons):

*Everybody knew Detective Sheridan was a **hawk-eyed** investigator, due to his good sense for crime doers. He was **as wise as an owl** with his peers and **as gruff as a bear** with the criminals. He always knew when an investigation was **a wild goose chase**, and tried **to get his ducks in a row**, re-directing the enquiry on the right path. Whenever he **smelt a rat**, he didn't hesitate **to take the bull by the horns**, as he didn't like to stall things. But if it happened for the criminal to **duck out**, it was **like an albatross around his neck** for a long time. He didn't like to give up so easily. His team usually carried out dangerous missions. Sometimes, he had **to beard the lion in its den**, but every time he got away unharmed.*

*Once he was questioning two suspects in a bank robbery. The two looked quite **chicken-hearted** and keep **clamming up**. This attitude **ruffled the detective's feathers**, as he said: "Look, fellows! We can stay here **until the cows come home**. Or you can decide to cooperate and **talk turkey** to me. Unless you want to stay behind bars for **donkey's years**!*

*"But, Detective, we don't know much about the robbery. We are **in the doghouse** now by mistake. We don't know the people who planned it all."*

*"That's **just a shaggy dog's story**! You can't fool me. I need the name of the **big dog** in this business"*

*"We could give you the name, but you would be **flogging a dead horse**."*

"Why are you saying that?"

*“As far as we know, **the bird has flown**”.*

TASK 2. Work out the following, in groups:

- Group A:** *find and write on your worksheets as many idioms as you can find containing the name of a bird / fowl*
- Group B:** *extract the idioms made up from wild animal names*
- Group C:** *identify and enlist the idioms made up from household animal names*
- Group D:** *make a double list of idioms having positive and negative connotations*

TASK 3: *From the story context, try to guess or infer the meaning of the idioms you have identified in your group and write your solutions on the paper*

TASK 4: *Present your results to the class*

The results presented by each group are submitted to class discussion, then they must be analysed; meanwhile the students come with observations or other proposals for the answers. The teacher monitors the whole activity (by confirming or declining the solutions presented) and finally, the best variant id written on the blackboard and in the students' notebooks.

A good motivation for the choice of this type of activity when tackling idioms is that students are likely to become passive learners when they attend classic lectures in classrooms. On the contrary, small group discussions could motivate students to get involved in the active process of knowledge build-up. What's more, during group discussions, students will learn from each other, whether aware or not of doing this. In this way, it is useful for teachers to apply group discussion in students' active learning of idioms before explaining the meaning of idioms to them.

V.8. Idiom practice in Dialogue Writing and Role-Play

Dialogues are prolific settings for students to practice common conversation and offer them extended practice with elementary speaking skills in context. One variant of dialogues can be the short school / classroom plays which can be employed in students' acting out, not only reading them, as in the Readers' Theatre activities. This approach gives the students more independence, self-confidence and autonomy in the speech delivery.

Another important aspect of this activity is the fact that when students are the creators of their own lines, this works as basic communication at all levels. Then, organizing learners into pairs or groups for the role-play in the common dialogues is an accessible form of speaking practice for secondary school students of all levels, as the complexity and length of the dialogues can be adjusted according to their needs and possibilities. In addition, the familiar classroom environment fosters a good setting for role-play, as the teenagers tend to feel safe and more confident that in a strange place, aspect which is likely to boost the results of the activity. Therefore, dialogues offer students the possibility to act out and practice oral skill before doing this in the outside reality.

Dialogue writing could motivate students to write without too much difficulty or fear of failure, because of pair work and role-play activity could help them remember the dialogue they wrote through repetitive practice. It is easier and even fun for them to remember English idioms because they share an enjoyable activity with friends while learning. Thus, dialogue writing and role-play are useful and appealing activities, using meaningful contexts and students' creativity.

 Example of classroom activity involving dialogue writing and role-play:

□ **Procedure:**

Level: upper-intermediate (the 11th grade, age groups: 16-18, 2 classes / week)

The teacher selects a number of idioms from the ones the students have previously been introduced with. Thus, these idioms are selected to be accessible to students's understanding, organised in the following table

The principle of organisation was that of a CAUSE – EFFECT relationship in the pair-connection:

TASK 1: Match each of the idioms of idioms from the first column with one from the second,, trying to establish a cause-effect relation between the items of each pair (example : as meek as a lamb ⇔ wouldn't hurt a fly)

TASK 2: Choose one pair of idioms to make a short double-line dialogue in which to use the idioms meaningfully

TASK 3: Learn your lines by heart

TASK 4: Perform the short dialogue in front of the class

CAUSE

1. raining cats and dogs ⇔
2. let the cat out of the bag ⇔
3. no room to swing a cat ⇔
4. shaggy dog's story ⇔
5. dog-tired ⇔
6. make a monkey of him ⇔
7. as hungry as a bear ⇔
8. bark up the wrong tree ⇔
9. dog and pony show ⇔
10. in the doghouse ⇔
11. as meek as a lamb ⇔

EFFECT

- a. chickens come home to roost
- b. packed like sardines
- c. all hat and no cattle
- d. look like a drowning rat
- e. go to bed with the chickens
- f. pig out
- g. change horses in midstream
- h. for the birds
- i. wouldn't hurt a fly
- j like a red rag to a bull
- k. egg on his face

Some of the students' answers are displayed below:

▪ S1: "Why did your little brother look like **having an egg on his face?**"

S2: "His **classmates had made a monkey** of him in front of some girls from another class and was really embarrassed"

▪ S1: "When I opened the door, my friend came in looking **like a drowned rat**"

S2: "Oh, it must have been one of those nights when **it kept raining cats and dogs!**"

▪ S1: "How could you tell that your guest was **as hungry as a bear?**"

S2: "Well, as soon as mother had laid the table, he stopped talking and started to **pig out!**"

S1: "What was the neighbour's reaction when he found out that you **had let the cat out of the bag** about his plans to move out?"

S2: "It was **like a red rag** to a bull: he started shouting and blaming me for it"

V.8.1. The origin connection technique

Idioms can be introduced in a meaningful context by using passages, fragments recounting the story or the cultural, historical, social events and aspects from which the idiom was inspired. This technique allows for the development of an apparently simple activity, yet having complex implications.

The extended version of the activity involved both receptive and productive skills, and applies to advanced level of study.

□ Procedure:

Level: upper-intermediate (the 11th grade, age groups: 16-18)

The teacher prepares a set of 10 paragraphs, each retelling the explanation of one animal idiom. The texts are processed and adapted, so that their message is relevant, but without containing the idiom or very obvious key words.

Meanwhile, the 10 idioms are written on the blackboard in random order. The students are grouped in pairs and given the worksheet with all the ten passages. After given the necessary instructions, they set down to work out the idiom matching each paragraph.

Task: Read the paragraphs in the following table, containing explanations for the 10 animal idioms written on the board. Find the correct idiom for each explanation and write it in the left columns of the table:

Target vocabulary: *swan song, live high on the hog, a cock-and-bull story, sitting duck, the lion's share, to bell the cat, a white elephant, as the crow flies, as dead as a dodo, an ugly duckling*

IDIOM	The story of its ORIGIN
	<i>This idiom draws its inspiration from a classic fable, in which a group of animals go hunting after that each of them will take a part of the pray. But, in the end, one of them tries to convince the rest that only he deserves to enjoy the catch, as he is the greatest and the only rightful beneficiary.</i>
	<i>This idiom refers to type of bird originating from Mauritius, which ceased to exist, after the colonisation of the island by the European settlers in the 17th century. It has survived only in paintings and drawings</i>
	<i>This idiom originates from a children's story that goes about an animal family in which one of the brothers is mocked at and shunned by the rest,</i>

	<i>because of his different appearance. Eventually, the little discriminated creature leaves the farm and years later, when he comes back, he surprises everyone by his new look, which developed from his inner beauty and good soul.</i>
	<i>This is an idiom implying that one must have great courage, just like the mice from one of Aesop's Fables, who failed to be brave enough for this job. They wanted to get a sound warning their enemy was around, but none of them could do it. This situation led to the meaning of the idiom which is to perform an impossible task or mission.</i>
	<i>This idiom's meaning is to be affluent or having a posh lifestyle, and finds its origins in the long history of the British Empire. The source of this phrase is said to be the fact that the best pieces of pork are cut from the back and upper leg of the animal. Centuries ago, at noble courts, only the wealthy could afford to relish in eating these chops. From this privilege, the meaning of this idiom has come to describe a lavish lifestyle.</i>
	<i>This is an idiom referring to something redundant and very expensive to keep. The meaning stems from the story of the ancient King of Siam who made this gift (which was obviously rare, expensive and could not be returned) to subjects who didn't inspire trust and worth to him. The original expression meant to be compelled to take care of something at a high cost.</i>
	<i>This idiom draws its origins from a tale about two inns, named as in the idiom, which served as staging posts for rival coach lines, whose passengers usually brought news to the locals. The story goes that strangers who passed by the inns had the tendency to flourish and forge the truth in their stories, for fun and confuse the locals. Thus, it is tale with many untrue details in it.</i>
	<i>This phrase means in a direct line, without any diversions. It seems to have been in use since the early 1800s, originating from sailing practice. It was customary for British coastal vessels to carry a cage of these birds in journeys. The birds don't like large expanses of water and head, thus, their flight points directly to the nearest land if released at sea.</i>
	<i>This idiom refers to an artist's last show and comes from a legend about a large size water bird, which is supposed to be silent throughout its life (though scientific facts contest this assumption), and only in the last minutes before its death, it gives out a wonderful "performance".</i>
	<i>It sounds like an expression inspired from the field of shooting sport and hunting, in which a type of wild fowl found in a static position would be an easier target than one in the air.</i>

Speaking and even writing skills can also be practiced in the context laid by this activity, and it can be favoured by different types of techniques:

- Eliciting students' knowledge and understanding of the texts presented
- Organising a "draw" in which each student gets one idiom to explain, after they have studied the explanations with attention (the teacher gives them a few minutes to review them)

□ Asking the pairs of students to write and act a short dialogue around one of the idioms (previously chosen) in which to share the class a detailed explanation for the target idiom.

Take the following dialogue as example:

S1: "What does the idiom **a white elephant** mean?"

S2: "A gift, most of the times useless, that is expensive to maintain."

S1: "Where does it come from?"

S2: "It comes from an ancient legend about the King of Siam"

S1: "What did he do?"

S2: "He gave a white elephant to the subjects he didn't like"

S1: "Why did he do that?"

S2: "He wanted to get revenged, by taking them to ruin"

S1: "Why would they be ruined?"



S2: "Because the gift couldn't be refused".

The material presented above contains suggestions and samples of techniques inspired and based on the author's activity in class and is far from ensuring an exhaustive coverage of the possibilities of introducing and practicing English idioms. However, the feature shared by all of them is the originality of the teaching material (texts, tasks, procedures) and the practical quality which gives them the advantage of efficient usage at class. Most techniques presented above are not limited to idiom teaching, they can be successfully adapted and employed in other vocabulary-focused activities.

APPENDICES

PART I

An illustrative map of animal idioms in English

1	2	3	4	5
 Frog is my throat	 eats like a horse	 cry wolf	 raining cats & dogs	 get your goat
 live high on the hog	 make a mountain out of a molehill	 monkey business	 cat nap	 eats like a bird
 smell a rat	 does the cat have your tongue?	 a road hog	 bull headed	 snake in the grass
 hold your horses	 barking up the wrong tree	 eager beaver	 talk till the cows come home	 let the cat out of the bag

PART II

Animal Idioms in exercises – support material for classroom activities

Idioms 2 (Animals: Ants - Birds)
to be very restless

- Have  in your pants
- Go 
-  up the wrong tree
- Like a  out of hell
- Have a  in your bonnet
- The 's knees
- (Strictly) for the 

I. An illustrative map of animal idioms in English

In order to support the relevance of animal idioms in the framework of everyday language, hence the importance of introducing them in the foreign language students's knowledge, it is necessary to see what semantic patches the cover in the canvas of verbal communication. The phrase collection which is

going to be presented has been made up in the practical form of a table, containing a generous amount of figurative expressions, as alternative patterns for a broad line of meanings.

The second part of the chapter brings over 100 idiomatic similes to light, whose meanings are not explained or illustrated in sentences, as they are easily understood from the phrase construction, most of them being superlative figurations of the adjectives contained: “as hungry as a bear” could mean nothing else but “very hungry”.

Animal idiom collection – “the goose that lays the golden eggs”

The illustrative quality of idioms stands out as their utmost advantage in the process of vocabulary acquisition, as the learner definitely finds it easier to make connections and infer the meaning of the expression engaged. What usually adds up to the appealing feature of idioms is their humorous connotations, usually triggered by the unexpected or funny associations they make.

Here is a short selection of smile-triggering idioms, which might spark a bit more interest in the young learners’ attempt to understand, memorise and employ such structures in their language, especially if a certain special effect is pursued in the situation. The manner of presentation is a pragmatic one and it can successfully be employed in the classroom (and has been used as a model of introduction technique in the methodical part of the current work) as it displays the target language accompanied by concise explanations and usage in the context of a sentence.

Of course, this presentation holds to the traditional teaching approaches, as it lacks interaction and students’ involvement, favouring the stage of familiarization and understanding idioms in the first place. The idioms are presented by the following pattern.

IDIOM	MEANING
EXAMPLE OF SENTENCE	

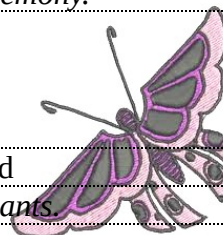
Bear Idioms



like a bear with a sore head /paw	Very disgruntled.
<i>After the long debate, our business partners left the meeting like bears with sore hands.</i>	

have a bear by the tail	to have a very difficult problem to solve
<i>We'll have a bear by its tail if the weather changes during the outdoor ceremony.</i>	

Insect Idioms



working like ants	being very dilligent and organised
<i>Example: The bricklayers were all on the building site, working like ants.</i>	

ants in one's pants	being very restless, anxious and impatient
<i>Our nephew seemed to have ants in his pants during our visit at the priest's house</i>	

a beehive of activity

a busy place, a room full of working people

My uncle's factory seemed like a beehive of activity during our visit there.



make a beeline for

go straight towards

The guide asked the tourists to make a beeline to the ruined castle up the hill.

the bee's knees

the best, superior, outstanding

The new student is said to have been the bee's knees in his former school.

having a bee in one's bonnet

Being worried or stressed about something

The show was about to begin and my two nieces were having bees in their bonnets.

put a bee in someone's bonnet

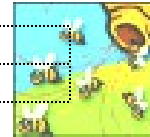
to give someone an idea about someone or something; to urge someone to do something.

Justin put a bee in my bonnet about a better way to work out our financial situation

stir up a hornets' nest

cause trouble, make a commotion

Don't mention his old debt to us unless you want to stir up a hornets' nest!



butterflies in the stomach

feeling nervous before something important or stressful

As a beginner, it's natural to have butterflies in your stomach before the show.

don't let the bed bugs bite

sleep well

Drink a hot tea with honey, go to bed early and don't let the bugs bite!

bitten by the same bug

have the same interest or hobby

I have long talks with my desk-mate on computer games - we are bitten by the same bug

to bug someone

to pester

My grandmother never stops bugging me about the clothes I must wear at church

would not hurt a fly

harmless

My brother can't have hit his classmate with a stone, he wouldn't hurt a fly!

catching flies

When someone keeps his / her mouth open

The tourists were catching flies while gazing at the astounding cathedral.

a fly on the wall

able to hear and see and hear secret things

If only I could be a fly on the wall during the meeting with the foreign partners!

fly in the ointment

something that spoils or prevents complete enjoyment


The power cut can like a fly in the ointment for the surprise party we had prepared.



you must lose a fly to catch a trout You must make sacrifices to get what you want.
She had expected things to be easier, but you must lose a fly to catch a trout


you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar It is easier to get what you want by being polite to them than by making demands.
Don't bring up that misunderstanding between you and your superior when negotiating your salary, after all, you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar

dropping like flies falling ill or dying in large numbers
When London was a pest hole, citizens were dropping like flies, as there was no cure

 **knee high to a grasshopper** a very young and small child
I've kept these fond memories since I was knee-high to a grasshopper

grasshopper mind unable to concentrate for long
It's difficult to work with overactive children who they have a grasshopper mind

A flea market A market, usually held outdoors, where antiques, used household goods, and curios things are sold
I found this Turkish rug in the flea market and it was quite a bargain



Bird Idioms

albatross around your neck Guilt, the haunting past, an unforgettable problem.
The argument you had with your superior is going to be an albatross around your neck.

a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush Having something for certain is better than the possibility of getting something better.
Are you sure about quitting your job? A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush

had the bird worn or broken
This old curtain has had a bird. We had better replace it with a new and modern one.

a bird of passage one who is transient, moving from place to place
I want what kind of life he leads as a bird of passage – it must be tiring sometimes.

have a bird be overcome with excitement or grief
My little nephew has a bird whenever there are guests around.

for the birds worthless or ridiculous, meaningless
I won't listen to such nonsense about ghosts! It's for the birds!

a little bird told me someone told me secretly



A little bird told me that our young neighbour is getting married this summer.

bird's-eye view

A panoramic sight perspective

We need a bird's-eye view in order to be able to assess the condition of this place.



birds of a feather flock together

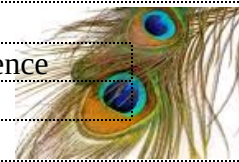
similar people tend to associate with each other.

Their friendship shouldn't be a surprise – after all, birds of a feather flock together

fine feathers make fine birds

it's the details that make the difference

Dress up for that fancy party – remember, fine feathers make fine birds!



killing two birds with one stone

accomplishing two things at the same time.

If they act on both sides with the project, that can kill two birds with one stone.

the early bird catches the worm

doing something in a timely manner brings success

I'll go to the market early tomorrow. After all, the early bird catches the worm.

the bird has flown

someone has escaped or disappeared

It's no use searching the hiding place any more. I am sure the bird has flown.

up with the lark

getting up very early.

We have to be up with the lark tomorrow if we want to enjoy colours of the sunrise.



clay pigeon

a person easily cheated or taken advantage of

It wasn't hard trying to take my brother in, as he is a clay pigeon most of the times

stool-pigeon

an informer.

Try not to share key information in his the presence of the stranger. He's a stool pigeon

night owl

Someone who stays up and does things late at night

My sister has always been a night owl. Even when she was a student she'd study late at night and get up as late as possible the next day.



to live in a cloud cuckoo land

having completely unrealistic ideas or plans

Don't count on his recommendations, he's rather living in a **cloud cuckoo land**

a cuckoo in the nest.

someone part of a group, but different and often disliked / a problem that grows quickly and crowds out everything else

Our manager is a real cuckoo in the nest. He's causing more problems than he's solving

learn something parrot fashion

learn it word for word, by heart

The children had to learn all the poems parrot fashion for the show to be successful

as the crow flies

from one point another directly

The commander ordered soldiers to march in line as the crow flew.



hawk-eyed / eagle-eyed

having extremely keen sight

We need a hawk-eyed agent to keep the suspect in sight until he strikes again.

know a hawk from a handsaw

able to distinguish things and assess them.

It's a delicate task, so we need to hire someone who knows a hawk from a handsaw.

go the way of the dodo

to become extinct; to become obsolete

You need a memory stick. The floppy disc has gone the way of the dodo.



a feather in your cap

an honor, a credit to you

Meeting the famous foreign professor was a feather in my cap.

to be in fine feather

to be in good humor, in a good mood

My friend seems to be in fine feather today and he has been joking all evening

get your feathers in a bunch

get upset or angry about something.

The driver got his feathers in a bunch when he saw the parking ticket on the windscreen

knock me over with a feather

expressing a state of surprise

The psychic will knock you over with a feather! Just listen to his predictions!



ruffle your feathers

annoy you, bother you

My desk-mate's reproachful attitude just ruffled my feathers for the day

feather one's nest

they use their position or job for personal gain

Our politicians care about nothing but feathering their nests during the mandates.

foul one's own nest

to harm one's own interests, to bring discredit to one's family

Telling the police about your father's business would mean fouling your own nest.

swan song

an artist's final achievement or public appearance.

Her last week's show was a wonderful swansong with positive echo in the media.

on a wing and a prayer

with only the slightest hope of succeeding

The local team joined the championship on a wing and a prayer

on the wing

flying



The good news from our relatives abroad came soon on the wing.

clip (someone's) wings

to restrict (someone's) freedom

My nephew has changed his attitude towards everyone since his father clipped his wings

Camel Idioms

strain at gnats and swallow camels

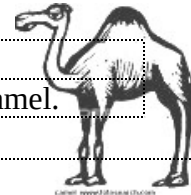
to criticize other people for minor offences while ignoring major offenses.

She is so subjective sometimes, all she can do is to strain at gnats and swallow camels

plain as the hump on a camel

obvious, clear

No need to explain the effect of the drought, as it is plain as the hump on a camel.



straw that broke the camel's back

the thing to push you over the edge.

He couldn't bear her mean comments – that was straw that broke the camel's back

Cat Idioms

look like the cat who swallowed the canary

to look proud of oneself.

What have you been doing, little boy? You look like the cat who swallowed the canary!



play cat and mouse

to play with someone in a cruel or teasing way

Owner of a strong position in local administration, the suspect could afford to play cat and mouse with the police during the enquiry.

grin like a Cheshire cat

to have a big smile because of some accomplishment

I saw her grinning like a Cheshire cat and I knew that she had carried out her plan

like herding cats

something extremely difficult

Trying to blackmail the company chairman is like herding cats, as he is untouchable

sitting in the cat bird seat

being in an advantageous position

As long as you are sitting in the cat bird seat, there is no reason for you to worry about being dismissed or undermined.

fight like Kilkenny cats

to fight until both parties are destroyed

The two gangs' policy is rather tough; when they meet, they fight like Kilkenny cats

high as the hair on a cat's back

very expensive

We couldn't afford that exotic holiday, as it was high as the hair on a cat's back



as much chance as a wax cat in hell no chance at all
We have as much chance as a wax cat in hell to make this business work.

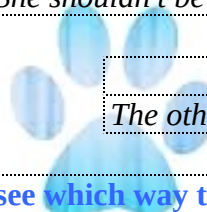
A fraidy / scaredy cat someone who is easily frightened
My neighbour's boy is such a scaredy cat, that he would run away from his own shadow!

dead cat on the line something wrong, suspicious
I can tell there's a dead cat in this contract –too much money for such an investment

fat cat a person high up in the business world with a lot of money.
You don't want to upset the supplier, as he's the fat cat in the whole oil business

bell the cat perform a difficult or impossible task
The client had to admit that the young lawyer belled the cat with the case he had won

a cat can look at a king No one is so important that a commoner can't look at them.
She shouldn't be so conceited with everybody - a cat can look at a king, after all

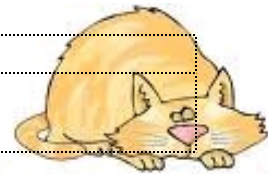


do something in a cat's paw do something secretly
The other employees mustn't know about this change, so do it in a cat's paw.

see which way the cat jumps / wait for the cat to jump postpone making a decision or acting until you have seen how things are developing
I advise you to wait for the cat to jump before giving your final answer to the coach

copycat someone who mimics someone else.
He thinks he's the funniest kid in the class, but most of us thinks he's just a copycat

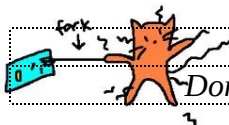
catnap a mid-day snooze.
I like to have a catnap in the hot summer afternoons, when everything is quiet around.



look what the cat dragged in Someone who arrives looking or flustered and bothered.
Look what the cat dragged in! Uncle is back from hunting, but where's the catch?

look like something the cat brought in to appear disheveled or be dragged.
Returning from the long hunting session, uncle looked like something the cat brought in

have kittens a dramatic way of expressing worry, anxiety or fear.
His mother nearly had kittens when he announced that he wanted to be a trapeze artist."



curiosity killed the cat It's not good to be too curious
Don't be eager to dig out this old story - remember, curiosity killed the cat!

a cat in gloves catches no mice | diplomacy isn't always the way to success
Don't cushion your opponent so much - a cat in gloves catches no mice

all cats are gray in the dark | in blurry conditions, appearances are meaningless.
Well, it's hard to place the main guilt in this case, as all cats are gray in the dark

like a cat on a hot tin roof / hot bricks | in an uneasy or agitated state
The supporters were cats hot bricks during the whole match



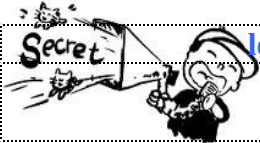
Has the cat got your tongue? | unable or too shy to speak
"Why don't you say something? Has the cat got your tongue?"

put the cat among the pigeons | to do or say something that causes trouble and makes a lot of people angry or worried
If you allow him to use his signature, you'll just put the cat among the pigeons

keep no more cats than will catch mice | do not support anyone who does not or cannot do something useful for you in return.
*Why are you hiring another clerk if there is only one supplier to work for?
You'd better keep no more cats than will catch mice*



between you and me and the cat's whiskers | asking for a secret to be kept
I'll give you the information, but it must be between you and me and the cat's whiskers



let the cat out of the bag | to tell a secret; (normally) accidentally
She didn't realise that she had let the cat out of the bag until after mentioning your name.

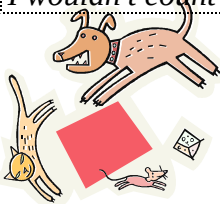
not enough room to swing a cat | very little room, shabby space
We found accommodation in a cottage, but there was not enough room to swing a cat

raining cats and dogs | raining heavily
The tourists managed to get shelter under a bridge - it was raining cats and dogs

more than one way to skin a cat | there is more than one possibility to do something
The engineers won't get stuck in this problem, as there's more than one way to skin a cat

when the cat's away, the mice will play | people misbehave without being supervised
Don't leave your children alone at home - you know, when the cat's away...

not to have enough sense to bell a cat | to act foolishly, recklessly
I wouldn't count on our neighbour for help - he doesn't have enough sense to bell a cat



like cat and dog enemies, quarrelling savagely

A family reunion isn't a good idea, as our relatives are like cat and dog

dust bunny / dust kitten a clump of dust or lint

The house hadn't been lived for some time, as there were dust bunnies all over the place

Cattle Idioms

all hat and no cattle all form and no substance

His long speech was all hat and no cattle, so you didn't miss anything important.

why buy a cow when you can get the milk for free? why pay for something that you can get for free otherwise?

Why buy a cow when you can get the milk for free? Let's ask our friends to help us with the decorations for the party.

big enough to choke a cow very big

I couldn't eat the whole pizza, it was big enough to choke a cow



cash cow having much money and supporting someone else with it

We mustn't upset Mr. Simpson, as he is the cash cow of our business

the tune the old cow died of a song which has been played ad nauseam.

Most guests left as the DJ kept playing that tune the old cow died of

a sacred cow held in such respect that it cannot be criticised or attacked.

Nobody must address such words to the chairman's son – he's a sacred cow around here

to have a cow to get hysterically mad.

Don't have cow now! It's just a painless shot of antibiotic.

till the cows come home late hours or for a long time

My husband is never on time and I have to wait for him till the cows come home

to kill the fatted calf to rejoice or prepare for a party or a warm welcome

The bride's parents killed the fatted calf to welcome their future in-laws

not to know B from a bull's foot to be extremely ignorant.

We cannot count on her help with the project – she doesn't know B from a bull's foot

take the bull by the horns to face up to a situation and deal with it straight

It's no use putting off the negotiation – we have to take the bull by the horns before it's too late

cock-and-bull story

untrue story

The detective didn't believe that cock-and-bull story told by the so-called witness

to shoot the bull

to kill time by talking meaninglessly

The travellers waited for the train to draw in the station shooting the bull



like a bull in a china shop

very clumsy

My nephew in the kitchen is like a bull in a china shop – he always breaks something

hit the bull's eye

to be exactly right about something

The agent hit the bull's eye with his remark about financial track of this investment

be like a red rag to a bull

making someone very angry

Hearing those lies about his girlfriend was like a red rag to a bull for him.

like a bull at a gate

doing something very quickly

The accountant was late for the meeting, so he climbed the stairs like a bull at a gate

buzzard bait

a dying or a worthless animal

Look what has become of our faithful old Dobbie! Nothing but a buzzard bait!

Poultry Idioms



don't count your chickens before they are hatched

don't assume you have something until you really have it

You must be more thoughtful and avoid counting your chickens before they are hatched

there is chicken in every pot

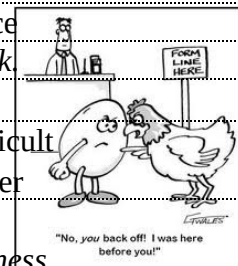
there is enough food for everybody

After the drought period was over, the locals were relieved to have chicken in every pot

To chicken out / to be a chicken

back out from fear or cowardice

I don't like people who chicken out at the slightest sign of menace or risk



chicken and egg situation

two things happen together and it is difficult to see which one of them caused the other

The discussion became a chicken and egg situation as nobody could get to the real cause of the money loss during the investment business.

have a chicken to pick with someone to have something to argue about with someone

My companion had a chicken to pick with the host, so I left them for a few minutes.

like a chicken with its head cut off in a wild, crazy manner
The patient was difficult to handle as he was acting like a chicken with its head cut off

the chickens come home to roost facing the outcomes of your mistakes or bad deeds.
The convicts should bear in minds that chickens always come home to roost.



no spring chicken old
My father can't dance like in the old times, he is no spring chicken any longer.

If it's not chicken, it's feathers. there is always a problem coming up
It's hard to settle things down with my grandmother, if it's not chicken, it's feathers.

rule the roost to be the boss or manager somewhere but often at home
My grandfather ruled the roost in his family and we had better ask for his consent.

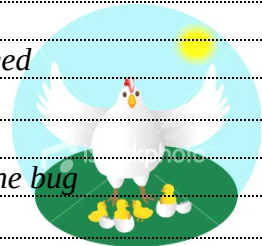


cock of the walk one who is too confident and thinks he's better than others
He won't accept your suggestions, as he's the cock of the walk in the company.

go to bed with the chickens going to bed very early
Her sister won't join us to the party, as she is used to going to bed with the chickens

scarcer than chicken's teeth non-existent
In that remote heath, the rains are scarce as chicken's teeth and only cacti can survive.

chicken feed very little (or low in value.)
The money he wanted to put at stake in the new business was chickenfeed



like a chicken on a June bug very quickly, in a flash
The hungry guest plundered the plates with pies like a chicken on a June bug

have a hen to the nest have a work in progress
It's not the time to start up a new building project, as we already have a hen to the nest.

hen party party for only women
Leave your boyfriend at home tonight, because it's going to be a hen party at my house.

bet on a lame rooster make wrong predictions
No wonder your desk-mate lost the game – this time he bet on a lame rooster.

duck soup very easy.
Is this all I have to do? No problem, it's duck soup for a genius like me!

biggest duck in the puddle most important person in a small group

This lad is the biggest duck in the puddle and most boys from the gang look up to him

duck out leave, run away, desert

Some of the boys panicked at the sight of the monster and ducked out.

ducks in a row organized, planned

The camp group were handled like ducks in a row by the teachers



dead duck someone or something that is certain to fail

Pick another partner for this investigation, your office mate is already a dead duck



a sitting duck an easy target.

I have a good feeling about the next mission – our target is a sitting duck

like water off a duck's back criticism or something similar doesn't affect its object

Don't bother so much! Your remarks stick to me like water off a duck's back



ugly duckling a child showing little promise, but developing later into a real talent or beauty

I can't believe that the cover girl used to be the ugly duckling of the neighborhood!

goosebumps a prickly or bumpy feeling on one's skin because of cold / fear / excitement (like the skin of a goose or chicken)

We got goose bumps as we watched the horror movie all alone in the forest house.

cook someone's goose to spoil someone's plans, to bring them to ruin, downfall

If the business fails to succeed, the investment in it will cook the stockholders' goose.

kill the goose that lays the golden eggs to sacrifice future benefits for the sake of momentary present needs.

Your current job sounds safer than this new offer – if you accept it, you might just kill the goose that lays the golden eggs without realizing it.

a wild-goose chase a vain pursuit, which, even if attained, would be worthless.

The teachers' strike turned out to be a wild-goose chase, as the country economy could cover neither raises in the salaries nor further investments in the educational system.

to talk turkey to talk straight or be honest.

If you don't want him to misunderstand your request, you'd better talk turkey about this

break the back of the beast accomplish a challenge

The hero wanted to prove his courage and broke the back of the beast in the fight

Dog Idioms

bark up the wrong tree

Pursue an erroneous course of action

This trail won't get him to the anywhere – he's barking up the wrong tree



his bark is worse than his bite

Only apparently mean and threatening

Don't worry about the new general. His bark is worse than his bite!

why keep a dog and bark yourself

you shouldn't do something you hired someone else to do

I wouldn't type those contracts myself - why keep a dog and bark yourself?



if you lie down with dogs, you will get up with fleas

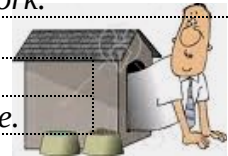
you share the condition of the people you accompany or work with

Think twice about that business - if you lie down with dogs, you will get up with fleas

gone to the dogs

taking a turn for the worse.

Our plan has gone to the dog – I don't know what we can do to make it work.



in the dog house

in trouble

If you keep lying to your parents, you'll soon find yourself in the doghouse.

dog tired

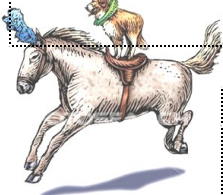
very tired

The farmer went to bed early, as he was dog tired after a long day of hard work.

one's bark is worse than one's bite

one's words are worse than one's actions

Let's not take his warning too serious! You know that when it comes to our father, his bark is worse than his bite



x24684063 fotosearch.com

dog and pony show

a good performance meant to impress

The advertiser had to make a dog and pony show in order to spark the interest of the possible clients

dog days of summer

very hot days in July and August

I like watching the sunset - it reminds me of those endless African dog days of summer

a barking dog never bites

he who makes threats all the time seldom carries them out

My uncle is overreacting about this, but you know that a barking dog never bites



a dog's breakfast

something that has been done very badly, a mixture of many things

I didn't see my niece trying to cut her own hair and now her head is a dog's breakfast

dog-leg right / dog-leg left

The fairway turns in a golf course

It's not difficult to learn the rules of playing golf, let's start with the dog-leg left move.

dog does not eat dog

one bad person will not harm another bad person.

Don't count on the apparent enmity among politicians, dog doesn't eat dog.

a dog eat dog world

a vicious world.

No wonder so many people fall into depression nowadays. It's a dog eat dog world.

like a dog with a bone

doing something for a very long time

Once he turns on the PC, he forgets to stop playing, like a dog with a bone.



every dog has its day

to exhibit a periods of ostentation, influence or power

Leave him alone; he's not in a very good mood. After all, every dog has its day

call off the dogs

to cause people to stop attacking or criticizing someone

It's time to call off the dogs and let the man say his side of the story

a shaggy dog's story

a joke or story that's obviously not true or has a silly ending.

I didn't listen up to the end of it, as I suspected it to be just a shaggy dog's story

a dog's chance

no chance at all

The employer wouldn't give me a dog's chance to prove my skills in the field.

lead a dog's life

have a wretched existence

The main character of the novel is a homeless young man, leading a dog's life



like a dog with two tails

feeling very proud and happy about something

The little child was like a dog with two tails when he saw his new toy car

big dog

an important person

The man being photographed by the press is a big dog in our town.

like a blind dog in a meat market

out of control

The drunk staggered out of the saloon like a blind dog in a meat market, stumbling all over the sidewalk and knocking a bottle of wine off a table

let sleeping dogs lie

don't bring up an old issue that will raise tempers or cause a row

You risk losing control over the situation if you don't let sleeping dogs lie.

you cannot teach an old dog new tricks

someone who is used to doing things a certain way won't change.

It's pointless to try and convince him - you cannot teach an old dog new tricks

put on the dog to dress or entertain in a luxurious and extravagant manner

Our relatives put on the dog for the engagement party of my elder sister.

rub (someone/someone's fur) the wrong way to irritate someone

The guest rubbed my fur the wrong way by gossiping about our common friends.

work like a dog work very hard.

That wretched old man works like a dog all day and he can hardly support his family.



top dog boss, leader

By the way he looks and acts you can tell that he's the top dog in the firm

dog in the manger person who will not share something he does not use or need

How can he be such a dog in the manger? I don't understand his selfishness

better be the head of a dog it is better to be the leader of a less prestigious group than to

than the tail of a lion be a subordinate in a more prestigious one

A publishing house had asked Simon to join in, but he chose to stay with his old workplace, since he thought it better to be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion.

glory hound person seeking popularity, fame and glory

My work mate does anything to be in the spotlight, just like a glory hound.

the tail wagging the dog when a small part of something controls the whole thing

In this company the tail seems to be wagging the dog, judging from the staff's attitude

Fish Idioms

sleeping with the fishes having died in the water

the whole village is grieving for the poor old sailor who is sleeping with the fishes now.

shooting fish in a barrel a task that is too easy, a game without challenge

Getting the shoplifters was like shooting fish in a barrel, as there were cameras all over.



red herring false trail

The escaped convict got away easily as what the agents tracked down was a red herring

neither fish, flesh, nor fowl something not fitting any category under discussion

I couldn't make out anything of that hotchpotch my fiancée cooked for dinner. It was



neither fish, flesh, nor fowl.

loan shark | someone who lends money at high interest rates

Don't borrow money from him – loan-sharks are not completely trustful"

fishing for a compliment | Looking to hear a compliment

Only later did I realise that she was fishing for a compliment when she asked my opinion about the changes she had made in her look



a kettle of fish

troublesomely awkward or embarrassing situation; A matter to be reckoned with

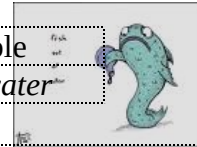
Making money and keeping it are two quite different kettles of fish.

Fishing in troubled waters | to get involved in a difficult, confused, or dangerous situation, especially with a view to gaining an advantage...

Our manager is fishing in troubled waters by buying more shares of that ghost company.

like a fish out of water | out of one's element, feeling very uncomfortable

The presence of these strangers around me makes me feel like a fish out of water

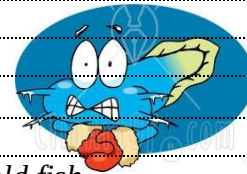


a different kettle of fish | different problem or matter to discuss

Don't bring up the salary topic in this context, that's a a different kettle of fish

fish or cut bait | do something or get out of the way

Are you going to watch or help us with the luggage? Fish or cut bait.



cold fish | a person who doesn't show how they feel.

Don't count on his compassion for the loss of your family. He's such a cold fish.

have (got) bigger fish to fry | more important things to worry about.

I wouldn't waste my time trying to convince him, as I've got bigger fish to fry

sprat to catch a mackerel | make a small expenditure in the hope of a greater gain

The old farmer used a sprat to catch a mackerel when he sold that remote piece of land.

there's more than one fish in the sea | there are always more options (when dating)

Why are you suffering for this careless boy? There's always more than one fish in the sea



a big fish in a small pond | having no competitor

My son is rather bored at school, just like a big fish in a small pond.

Horse Idioms

a dark horse a little known, unexpectedly successful competitor

The results of the competition suddenly changed at the appearance of that dark horse.

a horse of another color Something of a different nature.

We need shrubs around the statue, not trees. Trees are a horse of another color



a one horse town A small town.

Life in the big city overwhelmed her, as she was coming from a one horse town

beat / flog a dead horse to waste time trying to do something that will not succeed

I've tried to convince him to quit smoking, but I have the feeling that I'm flogging a dead horse, as he won't listen to me.

a one-horse race a competition which one particular person or team is very likely to win because they seem much better than the other contenders

Why bothering with a campaign? This election is going to be a one-horse race

By shank's mare / pony on foot; walking

The traveller didn't catch the bus to the station so he went there on shank's pony



to ride the high horse to act pretentiously, be arrogant

Few people talked to the mayor's daughter at the party as she was riding the high horse

change horses in midstream change plans or leaders when they are in the middle of something, at a certain risk

The tickets have already been bought; let's not change horses in mid-stream

look a gift horse in the mouth be ungrateful or rude when receiving a gift

It's a simple gift, but we should appreciate his gesture, not look a gift horse in the mouth



horses for courses the practice of choosing the best person for a particular job.

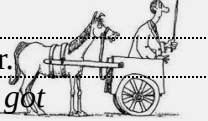
You can't expect the gardener to repair the fence – horses for courses!

a stalking horse something that is used to hide someone's real purpose

I suspect that the talks are just a stalking horse for another deal between the two parties

to put the cart before the horse doing something in reversed order.

No wonder we got it all wrong with the project, by hiring people before we got the contract – it is the thing that can happen when we put the cart before the horses



straight from the horse's mouth from the highest authority
It's no use checking the information up – it came straight from the horse's mouth

if wishes were horses then beggars would ride It's no good just wishing. You have to act in order to get what you want
There are so many people in our company who want higher salaries and less work to do - if wishes were horses then beggars would ride

if two ride on a horse, one must ride behind when two people do something together, one will be the leader and the other the subordinate
You can't be both company managers here - if two ride on a horse, one must ride behind

a charley horse a painful, persistent cramp in the arm or leg, usually from strain
Don't climb too high on the ridge or you risk getting a charley horse.

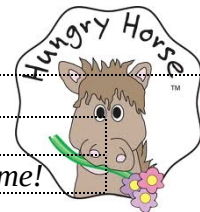
close the stable door after the horse has bolted try to fix something after the problem has occurred
*The money was gone and the thief left the country in no time. We let the police know about it, but all we could do was to **close the stable door after the horse has bolted***

you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink you can offer someone something but you cannot insist that they take it
Don't insist on lending her the money – after all, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.



Horse trade to bargain in a skillful and profitable manner
What happened to that land outside the city smells to me like political horse trade

horse-sense common sense
Everyone should have a bit of a horse sense in such situations – you can't ask someone to do a task that is beyond their qualifications.



eat like a horse to eat large amounts of food
No wonder he can't lose weight. I can see that he eats like a horse every time!

hold your horses! don't be so hasted; be patient
Hold your horse, will you? Let's talk this problem over and find some relevant solutions!

ride herd on (someone) to watch closely and strictly supervise someone
I can't access classified information, as our superiors are always riding herd on us.

to horse around To play or do things in a frivolous manner
The children kept horsing around, finally annoying our guest, who had a serious matter to



discuss with my husband.

On the hoof

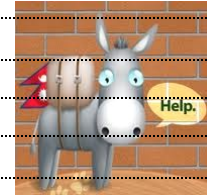
doing it without planning, responding to events as they happen

We didn't exactly discuss our strategy beforehand, we found the

Talk the hind legs off a donkey

be excessively talkative.

I can't stand her presence at the office – sometimes she can talk the hind legs off a donkey, even if the people around don't look interested in what she's saying



donkey's years

a very long time

How is Mike? I haven't heard news from him in donkey's years!

donkey work

the unpleasant, boring parts of a job

Why am I always sent to do the donkey work, while my office mate gets all the credit?

one-trick pony

one who does one thing well, but has limited skills in other areas

I wouldn't count on the plumber, our new neighbour, to help me with redecorating the house. There are many changes to be made and he is just a one-trick pony

Wild cats Idioms

a leopard cannot change his spots

people don't change

I can see that he's trying to shift his attitude towards the staff after the manager had a discussion to him, but I'm not very confident in it as a leopard cannot change his spots

in the lion's den

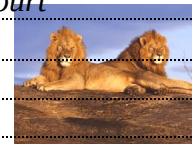
in a dangerous, risky situation

I'm afraid we'll end up in the lion's den if we use classified information in court

lion-hearted

very brave; courageous

The lion-hearted king led his army in a victorious fight against the invaders.



beard the lion in its den

to face a powerful or dangerous rival on their territory

A better strategy in combat would be to beard the lion in his den

a lion's share

the greater portion.

My elder brother always asks for the lion share when mother makes apple pie.

paper tiger

someone that looks powerful, but is actually weak

The staff fears the new boss in vain, some of us know he's just a paper tiger.



Monkey Idioms

throw a monkey wrench into the works

wreck a project

Your involvement in the building plan was no better than throwing a monkey wrench into the works – I thought you were a professional but this turned out to be wrong.



to make a monkey of somebody to make fun of; mock at somebody

The baker's boy came home crying as the other children had made a monkey of him.

I'll be a monkey's uncle! exclamation showing surprise, astonishment

I'll be monkey's uncle if I could recognize you on the street! Look how you've grown!

to have a monkey on your back to have an addiction or a serious problem

Gambling and night club life are monkeys on his back, he should get rid of them soon

get the monkey off your back pass on a problem to someone else

You agreed to this plan as much as the rest of us did, so it's not fair of you to get the monkey off your back now, that things are a little troubling.



monkey business something illegal or immoral, but not too serious

I wouldn't get involved in anything that has to do with that stranger

a monkey in silk is a monkey no less no matter how you dress up something, it is still the same underneath for all the window dressing

Why bother putting on so much make up - a monkey in silk is a monkey no less!

If you pay peanuts, you get monkeys No one will work if they are not paid properly

'This company is full of lazy people!' 'Well, if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys!'

monkey about play, waste time and not work

Stop monkeying about, will you? We've got so many things to make before the party!

go ape become extremely excited about something

The children virtually went ape when seeing the clown making his funny appearance

Pig Idioms

even a blind pig finds an acorn once in a while everybody gets lucky sometimes

So what if your younger sister won the game this time? Even a blind pig finds an acorn once in a while, it doesn't mean that she's better than you at chess.

pig-headed stubborn

I find it difficult to come to terms with my brother, as he is so bull-headed all the time

like stealing acorns from a blind pig something achievable very easily

Getting my aunt to sign the house over to me was like stealing acorns from a blind pig.

play piggy in the middle

be caught between two sides of an argument

Because they aren't talking to each other, I've been playing piggy in the middle."

when pigs fly

never

You will see your father selling his car to pay your studies when pigs fly!



road hog a motorist whose vehicle overlaps the traffic lane used by another motorist; a selfish or aggressive driver

It took us longer to cross the Golden Gate as there was a road hog in front of us.

buy a pig in a poke

Taking the risk when setting a deal or business

They bought a pig in a poke when they accepted that deal with the stranger



live on the pig's back

successful; established, safe

The young family has no more worries on their minds, they are on the pig's back now

Rabbit Idioms

to pull a rabbit out of the hat

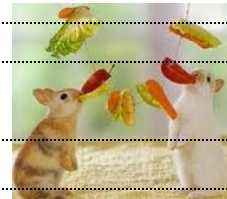
To surprise everyone by doing something clever

He really pulled a rabbit out of the hat by getting those orders in no time

like a rabbit / deer in the headlights

frightened or surprised

When the chief inspector entered the enquiry room, the suspect was like a rabbit in the headlight.



rabbit food

vegetables (cabbage, carrots, lettuce, radishes, etc)

This dish looks like rabbit food! I'd rather have some juicy pork steak instead!

to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds

to support both sides of a dispute.

I tried to keep the balance during the controversial discussion, running with the hare and hunting with the hounds, in the hope that there will be a final compromise.

if you run after two hares, you will catch neither

you cannot do two things

successfully at the same time

What did you think when dating another man while accepting the engagement ring from Larry? No wonder you are alone now - if you run after two hares, you will catch neither

Rat Idioms

Rat on

report an offence to the police or the authorities, to betray

We must avoid talking about our deal around the landlord, otherwise he would rat on soon and everything would be lost

smell a rat to suspect that there is a traitor or something going wrong

The Valkiri attempt was stalked for a few weeks, as the Colonel thought he could smell a rat around the men involved

rat race stressful competition

The stock market is nothing but a rat race, full nerves, haste and stress.



look like a drowned rat to be very wet, esp. because you have been in heavy rain

Our quest had to run all the way in the rain and came in looking like a drowned rat.

Sheep Idioms



a wolf in sheep's clothing someone who seems to be pleasant and friendly but is in fact dangerous or evil

My new office mate, apparently very warm and charming, proved to be a wolf in sheep's clothing after a few months of working together.

cast sheep's eyes at someone look lovingly or with longing at someone

It was easy to notice the love and care of the old woman by the way she was casting sheep's eyes at her beloved grandchildren

black sheep of the family most troublesome member of the family

The elder son has always been the black sheep of the family as he is very different from his other two obedient and diligent sisters



separate the sheep from the goats distinguish between good and bad items

We will check the application forms carefully and separate the sheep from the goats

like a lamb to the slaughter humble, obedient, without resistance

My heart shrunk when I read about the Jews being taken to concentration camps like lambs to the slaughter.



mutton dressed as lamb a grown/older woman dressed like a young girl.

It's funny to see all these muttons dressed as lambs at the balls held at the royal palace!

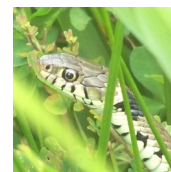
two shakes of a lamb's tail very fast

You can count on my cousin's help; he'll deliver the parcel in two shakes of a lamb's tail

get a sheepskin get a degree or diploma.

After I get the sheepskin from the university, I can prove my skills directly in your firm

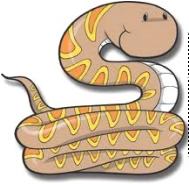
Reptile Idioms



snake in the grass

there is trouble

I could feel a snake in the grass when they presented their offer.



once a snake, always a snake

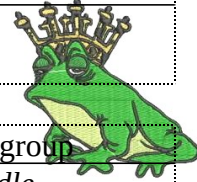
people do not change

What can you expect from a friend who has cheated on you? Once a snake, always a snake

snake oil

advice or medicine which is of no use

The old man tried to heal his infected wound with some plant ointment, made by his wife, but it was just snake oil, as his infection got worse in time.



biggest frog (toad) in the puddle

most important in a small community or group

Don't try to outsmart him when in investments, he's the biggest frog in the puddle

Wolf Idioms

keep the wolf from the door / Keep the wolf at bay

to ward off starvation or debts

We have some savings put aside, just enough to keep the wolf from the door.

lone wolf

a person who prefers to be alone

Don't count on his visiting you very often, he's rather a lone wolf.



Throw to the wolves

to abandon or deliver to destruction

Don't throw your marriage to the wolf! Try and fix things up before it is too late!

to wolf down

to gulp

I could tell the guest was very hungry by the way he wolfed down his dinner

to cry wolf

to raise a false alarm about something.

The tourists panicked for nothing as the guide cried wolf to check their attention.

Worm Idioms

Even the worm will turn

even a meek person will become angry if abused

How could I not react? Even a worm will turn at this outrageous news you've got!



bookworm

someone who reads a lot

The library gets filled up with book worms in weekends and on holidays

a can of worms

An issue that will cause more trouble than it's worth.

Dumping the factory waste in the river, you'll open a big can of worms



have a whale of a time

really enjoy oneself

All the guests seemed to have a whale of a time at the captain's wedding reception

worm your way in

getting yourself into a good position by being nice to people

The young employee wormed his way into the finance department in a few months

Worm's eye view

the view from below, either physically or socially

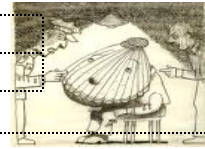
From the manager's office it's easy to get a worm's eye view of the firm's activity

Miscellaneous

clam up

to keep or become silent or withhold information

The foreign prisoner clammed up when asked about his true identity



with the tail between the legs

thoroughly coward

The bull fighter left the arena with the tail between the legs after he dropped the red cloth

squirrel something away

to hide or store something

I squirreled a little money away to buy a surprise gift for my best friend's wedding

weasel words

words used to avoid answering a question or to deceive someone.

The TV host was too experienced to be taken in by the weasel words of crafty politicians



Come out of one's shell

stop being shy and become more sociable.

*If your cousin wants to have fun and make new friends in this trip, she had better **come out of her shell** and join our group here. She's welcome!*

to play possum

to pretend; to deceive

The student played possum when the teacher saw him trying to cheat at the test

the world is one's oyster

to have many opportunities of development

There are only a few privileged people here and for them the world is an oyster



make a mountain out of a molehill

make a big issue out of something small

Don't worry about the gossip. You're making a mountain out of a molehill."

the best-laid plans of mice and men

a very good planning and organization

We have nothing to worry about. These are the best-laid plans of mice and men

knee-high to a giraffe

very tall

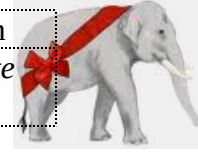
Only our cousin can reach up to the top shelf – he's knee-high to a giraffe

have a frog in your throat

have a scratchy voice

I can't understand what you are trying to say! Have you got a frog in your throat?

a white elephant something that is not useful and costs a lot to maintain
The new golf course will be difficult to keep. I think it is nothing but a white elephant for the company.



a memory like an elephant's never forgetting things
Don't count on his forgetting your mean words. He's got the memory of an elephant.



put all the eggs in one basket depending on one plan or one investment
Think about a back-up plan for the accommodation of the conference participants; don't put all your eggs in one basket.

egg somebody on encourage me, tell me to do it
The child is rather shy needs to be egged on for any kind of extra-school activity.

egg on someone's face embarrassed, outsmarted
The dancer had an egg on his face all along the show after he had stumbled on a step



walk on eggshells be very careful
You'll have to walk on eggshells in this enquiry, as the investigators are very agile

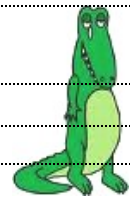
nest egg a fund of money kept in reserve; savings
Don't worry about the old widow across the street; she's got her nest egg for the old age

have bats in the belfry to be mad or eccentric; have strange ideas
I wouldn't recommend that foreign hair stylist – he works like having bats in his belfry.



like a bat out of hell very fast
When the bell rang, all the children rushed in the schoolyard of hell. like bats out

crocodile tears fake tears
She is a good pretender and people are usually deceived by her crocodile tears



2. ANIMAL IDIOMS IN SIMILES

IDIOMATIC SIMILES REFLECTING HUMAN NATURE

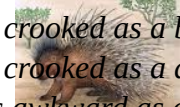
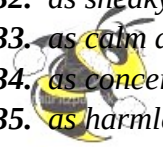
IDIOMS describing FEELINGS

1. *as happy as a clam in high tide*
2. *as happy as a fly in pie*
3. *as happy as ducks in Arizona*
4. *as happy as a flea in a doghouse*
5. *as happy as a box of birds*
6. *as happy as a pig in clover*
7. *as sad as a hound dog's eye*
8. *feeling like a rooster in a hen house*
9. *As merry as a cricket*
10. *as happy as a lark*
11. *as happy as a pig in mud*
12. *as proud as a peacock*
13. *as proud as a pup with a new collar*
14. *as sorry as owl bait worthless*
15. *as snug as a bug in a rug*
16. *as sorry as owl bait worthless*



IDIOMS describing FEATURES of CHARACTER

17. *as gentle as a lamb*
18. *as meek as a lamb*
19. *as stubborn as a mule*
20. *as wise as an owl.*
21. *as mad as a March hare*
22. *as mad as a wet hen*
23. *as mad as a hornet*
24. *as mad as a struck snake*
25. *as quiet as a mouse*
26. *Like a scared bunny rabbit*
27. *as crazy as a bat*
28. *as crazy as a loon*
29. *as crazy as a peach-orchard board*
30. *as dumb as an ox*
31. *as silly as a goose*
32. *as sneaky as fox in the hen-house*
33. *as calm as a toad in the sun*
34. *as conceited as a barber's cat*
35. *as harmless as a pet rabbit*
36. *as mean as a rattler*
37. *as mean as a junk-yard dog*
38. *as crooked as a rattler in a cactus patch*
39. *as crooked as a barrel of fish hooks*
40. *as crooked as a dog's hind leg*
41. *as awkward as a cow on roller skates*
42. *as prickly as a porcupine*



IDIOMS describing PHYSICAL CONDITION / STATE:

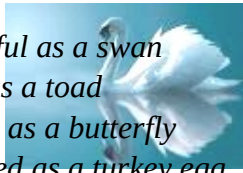
43. *as blind as a bat*
44. *as hungry as a bear*
45. *as sick as a dog*
46. *as sick as a parrot*
47. *as strong as an ox*
48. *as slick as goose grease*
49. *as sharp as a hawk*
50. *as slippery as an eel*
51. *as poor as Job's turkey*
52. *as poor as a church mouse*
53. *as naked as a jaybird*
54. *as clean as a hound's tooth*
55. *as swollen like a poison pup*
56. *as quick as a rabbit*
57. *as cute as a bug's ear*
58. *as steep as a cow's face*
59. *dark as the inside of a cow's belly*
60. *as full as a tick*



61. *as graceful as a swan*
 62. *as ugly as a toad*
 63. *as gaudy as a butterfly*
 64. *as freckled as a turkey egg*
 65. *as strong as a lion*
 66. *fine as a frog hair*
 67. *as drunk as a boiled owl*
 68. *as weak as a kitten*
69. *as slick as owl grease*
 70. *as fat as a pig*
 71. *as pretty as a speckled pup*
 72. [as fit as a butcher's dog](#)
 73. [as healthy as a horse](#)
 74. *as hoarse as a crow*
 75. *scarcer than hen's teeth*
 76. *as independent as a hog on ice*

IDIOMS describing active BEHAVIOUR AND ITS EFFECTS

77. *as busy as a bee.*
 78. *as busy as a beaver*
 79. *as busy as a fish peddler in Lent*
 80. *as free as a bird*
 81. *to eat like a horse*
 82. *to bray like a donkey*
 83. *as jumpy as a cat in a room full of rocking chairs*
 84. *as often as a goose goes barefoot*
 85. *has the manners of a hound pup*
 86. *sweating like a pig*
 87. *as easy as duck soup*
 88. *kick like a mule*
 89. *eat like a pig*
 90. *Leap like a salmon*
 91. *bleed like a stuck pig*
 92. *grin like a barrel of possum heads*
 93. *like rats abandoning a sinking ship*
 94. *as quick as a dog can lick a dish*
 95. *as fun as a barrel of monkey*



APPENDICES - part II

2. ANIMAL IDIOMS IN EXERCISES

A collection of common classroom exercises useful in idiom practice

The second part of the appendix comes to advance a series of lexical exercises meant to help teachers in the instruction activities and students to understand, practice and assimilate as many idiomatic expressions as possible. Linguists define their object of study as being a living organism, going on in a continual process of change and variation. The world of idioms looks as if it were endless and inexhaustible, as long as they are part of this ever-developing system called language.

Apart from the activities described in Chapter V of the present paper, there are many classic vocabulary exercises, which are useful to apply when teaching idioms.. From this area, four main exercise types have been designed and included in the Appendix section of the paper having the purpose to add to the practical profile of the current study and to support the methodological parameters described so far.

Thus, all the types of exercise have been designed for several groups of idioms organised around the animal names (for example, “bird idioms”, “dog idioms” and so on). The formula is meant to be an original one, as none of the reference books or school textbooks contains such collections.

The four types of idiom-based exercises are as follows:

- FILL-IN the blank spaces with missing information, based of the information gap principle and applying both to simple idiom structures and to complex sentences (level: intermediate, the 10th form, age group)
- JUMBLED WORDS – which deal with more complex idiomatic structures, that allow a mix-up in the order of the words (level: intermediate, the 10th form)
- SENTENCE COMPLETION – a more elaborate form of exercise involving a meaningful approach of the idioms in context (upper intermediate)
- MATCHING ITEMS, consisting of idiom splitting and



EXERCISE 1

Complete the following “bird idioms” with the missing words (use one word in each space):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> a little .....told me | <input type="radio"/> The bird has |
| <input type="radio"/> As happy as a | <input type="radio"/> Birds of a flock together |
| <input type="radio"/> A bird of | <input type="radio"/>-eyed |
| <input type="radio"/> Go the way of the | <input type="radio"/> As the..... flies |
| <input type="radio"/> like a bird | <input type="radio"/> Kill two birds with one |
| <input type="radio"/> As as a peacock | <input type="radio"/> The early bird catches the |
| <input type="radio"/> A bird | <input type="radio"/> Up with the |
| <input type="radio"/> Stool | <input type="radio"/> A .....to my cap |
| <input type="radio"/> Fine do not make fine birds | <input type="radio"/> Night |
| <input type="radio"/> Bird's view | <input type="radio"/> To feather one's |

EXERCISE 2

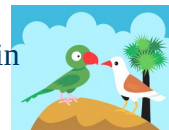
Complete the sentences with the correct idiom inspired from the “bird” lexical field:

- I know about the surprise wedding gift for your sister, last week.
- The ancient traditions of this regions have, as the local gradually forgot about them as they adopted a modern lifestyle.
- The new mayor of our village was walking in front of the crowd gathered around the town hall after the elections.
- Thedetective didn't miss any print or hair at the crime scene.
- The secretary was running out of time so she wanted to when speaking on the phone and typing the contracts.
- Don't bother preparing too many kinds of food for tomorrow's dinner; your guest is on a diet and his wife
- We will drive to the chalet, so as not to miss the beginning of the party.
- the suspect seemed to be, as the police couldn't find a stable address in his personal file.
- I wouldn't judge this stranger by his appearance, even if he comes around as being elegant and polite; all the time.
- I was happy to be offered this special prize – a medal which definitely after so many years of work in the field of research.



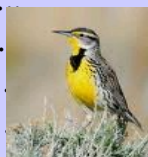
EXERCISE 3 Put the words in the correct order so as to obtain “bird idioms”:

- a. The / worm / bird / catches / early / the
- b. Bird / the / is / better / in / than / a / two / the / bush / hand / in
- c. together / a / feather/ of / flock / birds
- d. do / fine / feathers / fine / not / birds / make
- e. birds / one / kill / with / stone / two



EXERCISE 4 Match the words in the two columns to make “bird idioms”:

<input type="checkbox"/> The bird	<input type="checkbox"/> fine birds
<input type="checkbox"/> Free	<input type="checkbox"/> to my cap
<input type="checkbox"/> A bird	<input type="checkbox"/> like a bird
<input type="checkbox"/> Bird's eye	<input type="checkbox"/> of the dodo
<input type="checkbox"/> Eat	<input type="checkbox"/> has flown
<input type="checkbox"/> For	<input type="checkbox"/> told me
<input type="checkbox"/> The early bird	<input type="checkbox"/> as a peacock
<input type="checkbox"/> A little bird	<input type="checkbox"/> a bird
<input type="checkbox"/> Birds of a feather	<input type="checkbox"/> as a bird
<input type="checkbox"/> Fine feathers do not make	<input type="checkbox"/> of passage
<input type="checkbox"/> A feather	<input type="checkbox"/> song



<input type="checkbox"/>	Have.....	0	catches the worm
<input type="checkbox"/>	Swan	0	flock together
<input type="checkbox"/>	As proud	0	flies
<input type="checkbox"/>	As the crow	0	view
<input type="checkbox"/>	Go the way	0	the birds

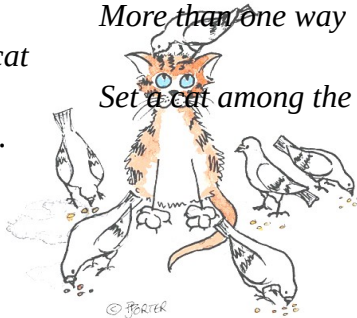


CAT IDIOMS

EXERCISE 5

Complete the following “cat idioms” with the missing words (use one word in each space):

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| ❖ Nine of a cat | ❖ | No room to |
| ❖ A cat | a cat | |
| ❖ A fat | ❖ |the |
| ❖ Looked like the cat that ate the | cat | |
| ..... | ❖ | The cat's |
| ❖ like a Cheshire cat | ..... |  |
| ❖ Look like the cat dragged in | ❖ | Have |
| ❖ Like a cat on bricks | ..... |  |
| ❖ Like cats | ❖ | Fight like cat and |
| ❖ Has the cat got your .....? | ..... |  |
| ❖ Curiosity | ❖ | ..... |
| the cat | cats and dogs | |
| ❖ Let the cat out of the | ❖ | When the cat's away, |
| ..... | the.....will play | |
| ❖ More than one way | ❖ | cat and |
| a cat | mouse | |
| ❖ Set a cat among the | | |
| | | |



EXERCISE 6

Complete the sentences with the correct idiom inspired from the “cat” lexical field:

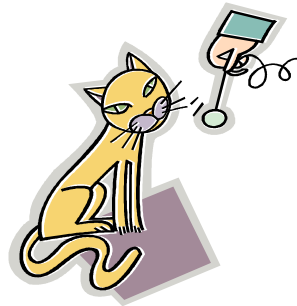
1. Don't forget to take your umbrella! It's
2. Let's think of another way to organize this event – after all there is.....
3. The children were hopping here and there in the park, like
4. Where have you been, little boy? You look like.....
5. He won't mingle with simple people like us – you know that she has always considered herself and her family as being around here.
6. If I were you, I wouldn't poke my nose in something that is none of my business, as you know what they say:
7. Yesterday at the hospital our aunt our aunt had been until she found out the result of my uncle's operation.
8. If this unexpected witness shows up in court and we, there are high chances for us to win this troubling case.
9. They haveto win the championship after losing two good players and switching the coaches.
10. Whenever my other two work mates don't agree upon a common decision, they start and I can hardly make them stop insulting each other.



EXERCISE 7

Put the words in the correct order so as to obtain “cat idioms”:

- a / wax / much / cat / as / in / hell / as / chance
- hair / high / the / a / cat's / on / back / as
- cat / like / look / the /swallowed / the / canary / who
- cat / at / a / king /can / a / look
- cat / which / the / jumps / way / see
- gloves / no / a / cat / in / mice / catches
- are / all / the / dark / gray / cats / in
- hot / a / on / cat / a / roof / like / tin
- keep / than / will / no / cats / mice / more / catch
- play / when / will / the / away, / the / mice cat's



EXERCISE 8

Match the words in the two columns to make “cat idioms”:

Let the cat	kittens
More than one way	at a king




Set a cat	the cat
Not enough room	catches no mice
Bell.....	cats and dogs
The cat's	to skin a cat
Have	to jump
Fight like	to swing a cat
Raining	out of the bag
When the cat's away,	the mice will play
Playing	your tongue
A cat can look	among the pigeons
Wait for the cat	cat and mouse
A cat in gloves	pyjamas (or whiskers)
Has the cat got	cat and dog

DOG IDIOMS

EXERCISE 9

Complete the following “dog idioms” with the missing words (use one word in each space):

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Face like a |  | <input type="checkbox"/> The tail .....the dog; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> like a dog | | <input type="checkbox"/> off the dogs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dog-..... | | <input type="checkbox"/> A dog in the |
| <input type="checkbox"/> As as a dog | | <input type="checkbox"/> If you lie down with dogs, you will get up with |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lead a dog's | | <input type="checkbox"/> on the dog |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Every dog has its | | <input type="checkbox"/> A dog and .....show |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In the | | <input type="checkbox"/> dog of summer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Why keep a dog and yourself | | <input type="checkbox"/> Like a dog with a |
| <input type="checkbox"/> His bark is than his bite | | <input type="checkbox"/> Like a dog with two |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Let dogs lie | | <input type="checkbox"/> A dog's story |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dog dog world | | <input type="checkbox"/> A dog never bites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> You can't an old dog new tricks | | |

EXERCISE 10

Complete the sentences with the correct idiom inspired from the “dog” lexical field:

- You had better no mention your old disagreements with him and
- If I had risked taking the money without my parents’ consent, I would have surely got in
- Little Jimmy waswhen his uncle brought him a new toy train.
- Thesecan be dangerous for people with heart condition.
- Can you believe what ahe is? He wouldn’t let the neighbours’ children play in his garden, even if there are no vegetable growing in it.

6. She told me some about the money she had inherited, but in the end she gave herself away with a few mismatching details.
7. I have met many people who and no one cares about their fate.
8. Not everybody can survive the stress of this world.
9. My new office mate played in an attempt to draw the committee's attention.
10. Don't mind all his menaces, most times
11. I don't appreciate thesein politics who come out in the press with any project they carry out just to shine in the spotlight.
12. Ask the secretary to fax these messages, don't waste your time :



EXERCISE 11

Put the words in the correct order so as to obtain "dog idioms":

1. can't / new / an / you / dog / tricks / teach / old
2. why / a / bark / keep / yourself / and / dog
3. lie / if / you / down / fleas / dogs, / get / with / you / will / up / with
4. wrong / up / tree / barking / the
5. never / barking / a / bites / dog

EXERCISE 12

Match the words in the two columns to make "dog idioms":


<input type="checkbox"/> As sick as	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> doghouse	
<input type="checkbox"/> Lead	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> manger	
<input type="checkbox"/> Treat somebody	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> new tricks	
<input type="checkbox"/> Every dog has	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> show	
<input type="checkbox"/> In the	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the dog	
<input type="checkbox"/> Love me, love.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> never bites	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gone to	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> his bite	
<input type="checkbox"/> Why keep a dog and	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a dog	
<input type="checkbox"/> His bark is worse than	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> you will get up with fleas	
<input type="checkbox"/> Let sleeping dogs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> lie	
<input type="checkbox"/> Dog eat dog	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> like a dog	
<input type="checkbox"/> Call off	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> my dog	
<input type="checkbox"/> A dog in the	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bark yourself	
<input type="checkbox"/> You can't teach an old dog	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a dog's life	
<input type="checkbox"/> The tail wagging	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the dog	
<input type="checkbox"/> If you lie down with dogs.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> world	
<input type="checkbox"/> Put on	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> of summer	
<input type="checkbox"/> A dog and pony	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the dogs	
<input type="checkbox"/> A barking dog	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> its day	
<input type="checkbox"/> dog days	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the dogs	



FISH IDIOMS

EXERCISE 13

Complete the following “fish idioms” with the missing words (use one word in each space)

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> like a fish; |  | <input type="checkbox"/> A red |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Swim a fish; | | <input type="checkbox"/> Packed like |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fish out of | | <input type="checkbox"/> A shark; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A pretty of fish; | | <input type="checkbox"/> A of a time; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other fish to | | <input type="checkbox"/> Happy as a at high tide; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not the only in the sea; | | <input type="checkbox"/> up; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> in troubled waters; | | <input type="checkbox"/> as an eel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing for a | | <input type="checkbox"/> The world is his |

EXERCISE 14

Complete the sentences with the correct idiom inspired from the “fish” lexical field:

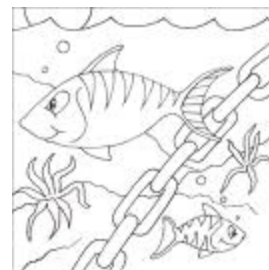
- The bus doors opened and in a few seconds the passengers got
- I would never borrow money from a....., they are not reliable.
- Now that he has inherited his late grandfather’s fortune, he can say that
- Everybody hadat the party and stayed until daybreak.
- When she insisted on showing me her special collection of pottery, I thought she was so I admired every piece in a loud voice.
- The child had been traumatised by that experience, that’s why he all through the questioning session. He wanted to speak only with his parents.
- He’s not afraid of deep waters – even as a child he could
- Now that’s a! How are we going to explain this to our boss?
- Although my uncle, he rarely gets a hangover.
- I noticed that he was feeling like aat that reception where most of the guests were strangers to him, that’s why I asked him to dance four times.
- My niece waswhen she saw so many children who had come to play with her in our backyard.
- No wonder he got away so easily from this tangled story – he is



EXERCISE 15

Put the jumbled words in the correct order so as to obtain “fish idioms”

- ❖ in / shooting / barrel / a / fish
- ❖ a / fish / kettle / different / of
- ❖ out / fish / a / water / like / of
- ❖ the / one / there's / fish / in / more / sea / than
- ❖ fish / a / like / small / in / pond / big / a
- ❖ fly / you / a / to trout / lose / must / a / catch
- ❖ troubled / waters / fishing / in



EXERCISE 16

Match the words in the two columns to make "fish idioms":



- A red
- Packed like
- A loan
- A whale of
- Happy as a clam
- Slippery as
- The world is
- Drink like
- Swim
- Fish out of
- A pretty

- ❖ the water
- ❖ in the sea
- ❖ an eel
- ❖ sardines
- ❖ kettle of fish
- ❖ with the fishes
- ❖ a compliment
- ❖ herring
- ❖ a time
- ❖ like a fish
- ❖ to fry
- ❖ nor fowl
- ❖ troubled waters
- ❖ in a barrel
- ❖ shark
- ❖ at high tide
- ❖ his oyster
- ❖ a fish



- Other fish
- Not the only fish
- Fishing in
- Fishing for
- neither fish

HORSE IDIOMS

EXERCISE 17

Complete the following "HORSE idioms" with the missing words (use one word in each space)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horse | <input type="checkbox"/> Lock the door after the |
| <input type="checkbox"/> around; | horse has bolted; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eat a horse; | <input type="checkbox"/> By mare / pony |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a horse; | <input type="checkbox"/> Get on/off one's horse; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Back the horse; | <input type="checkbox"/> Horse of a colour; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A horse; | <input type="checkbox"/> one's horses; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Straight from the horse's | <input type="checkbox"/> You can take a horse to the water but |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't look a horse in the mouth; | you can't make it |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A one horse | <input type="checkbox"/> Change horses in |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Put the cart the horse; | <input type="checkbox"/> Flog a horse |



EXERCISE 18

Complete the sentences with the correct idiom inspired from the "horse" lexical field:

- The homeless stranger was so hungry, he could
- I wasn't used to skyscrapers and endless highways, everything looked so impressive to me, as I was coming from a

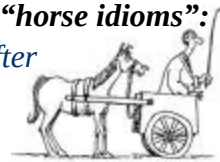


3. I don't think it's a good idea to hire another lawyer now - is not the right way to winning this trial.
4. The weather was fine and there wasn't much luggage to carry, so we made all the trip up here
5. We can rely on this piece of information, as it is coming
6. So what if it is not an SUV car? Your uncle was very kind to offer it to you, and it's not polite to
7. I suddenly felt a strongin my left leg, and I was lucky to be able to swim back ashore.
8.! Don't jump to conclusions before you analyse the situation thoroughly. You might be wrong about these assumptions, after all.
9. They shouldn't take advantage of the old man's kindness – a little bit of is part of a good human nature.
10. These children are exhausting me! They keepand refuse to eat, to let me change their clothes and to put their toys in their places!
11. No wonder this contract failed to make any profit! You were from the beginning, when you hired a non-professional team of workers for it.
12. My neighbour started to the moment his business went bankrupt and he lost a big part of his estate.

EXERCISE 19

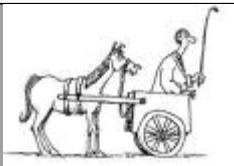
Put the jumbled words in the correct order so as to obtain "horse idioms":

- Door / the / has / stable / the / lock / horse / bolted / after
- high / one's / get / horse / on
- different / a / colour / of / horse
- take / you / drink / but / a / horse / to / the / make / can / water / you / can't / it
- midstream / change / in / horses
- horse's / the / straight / mouth / from
- mouth / don't / the / gift / horse / in / look / a
- the / horse / the / before / put / cart



EXERCISE 20

Match the words in the two columns to make "horse idioms":



- Lock the stable door
- Get on one's
- Horse of a different
- Hold
- You can take a horse to the water ...
- Change horses in
- Flog



Horse

- ❖ midstream
- ❖ before the horse
- ❖ sense
- ❖ the wrong horse
- ❖ the horse's mouth
- ❖ mare / pony
- ❖ high horse
- ❖ one's horses
- ❖ horse
- ❖ a dead horse
- ❖ in the mouth
- ❖ colour



❖ after the horse has
INSECT IDIOMS

EXERCISE 21

Complete the following “insect idioms” with the missing words (use one word in each space)

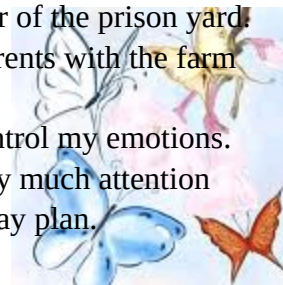
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> As happy as a in a doghouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Have a in one's bonnet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A market | <input type="checkbox"/> The knees |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Would not hurt a | <input type="checkbox"/> Make a for |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fly in the | <input type="checkbox"/> Put a in someone's ear; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fly on the | <input type="checkbox"/> someone; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Knee-high to a | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't let bed bite; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> As..... as a hornet | <input type="checkbox"/> Snug as a bug in a |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stir up a nest | <input type="checkbox"/> Have in my stomach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Like a moth to a | <input type="checkbox"/> in one's ear |
| <input type="checkbox"/> in one's pants; | |



EXERCISE 22

Complete the sentences with the correct idiom inspired from the “insect” lexical field:

1. The prisoners were ordered to the opposite corner of the prison yard!
2. That boy who is used to any household chore has been helping his parents with the farm activities since he was
3. I feelbefore every date I go on and I can't control my emotions.
4. My cousin seemed to as she didn't pay much attention while I was trying to have a conversation with her about a new holiday plan.



5. Their presence here is like I just hope they aren't going to start a fight over the inheritance, like last time they came.
6. I can't believe my neighbour threatened you! He
7. Drink a hot tea with honey before you go to sleep and don't
8. She's attracted to all paranormal phenomena and stories like a
9. My desk-mateabout the secret relationship between one classmate and a girl from another class.
10. Don't bring this issue up in the meeting, it's too delicate and you will just.....

EXERCISE 23. Put the jumbled words in the correct order to make "insect idioms":

- bug / as / a / rug / in / a /snug
- in / butterflies / have / stomach / my
- doghouse / a / as / flea / a / in / happy / as
- have / a / bee / in / one's / bonnet
- hornet's / a / up / nest / stir
- to / a / moth / flame / a / like
- don't / let / bed / bugs / bite;
- put / a bug / in / someone's / ear



EXERCISE 24: Match the words in the two columns to make "insect idioms":

<input type="checkbox"/> As happy as a flea	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> to a flame
 A flea	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> beeline for
<input type="checkbox"/> Would not hurt	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the wall
<input type="checkbox"/> Fly in	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in my stomach
<input type="checkbox"/> Fly on	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bed bugs bite
<input type="checkbox"/> Knee-high to	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a fly
<input type="checkbox"/> As mad as	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in a doghouse
<input type="checkbox"/> Stir up a	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in a rug
<input type="checkbox"/> Like a moth	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in one's bonnet
<input type="checkbox"/> Ants in one's	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> hornet's nest
<input type="checkbox"/> Have a bee	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in someone's ear
<input type="checkbox"/> Make a	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the ointment
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't let	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a grasshopper
<input type="checkbox"/> Snug as a bug	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> a hornet
<input type="checkbox"/> Have butterflies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> market
<input type="checkbox"/> Put a flea / bug	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> pants

LIVESTOCK IDIOMS


EXERCISE 25

Complete the following "livestock idioms" with the missing words (use one word in each space):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pig | <input type="checkbox"/> Like a in a china shop; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Live off the hog | <input type="checkbox"/>headed; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Casting before swine | <input type="checkbox"/> As .....as an ox |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A hog | <input type="checkbox"/> Like a rag to a bull; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To kill a fattened | <input type="checkbox"/> Take the bull by the |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A sheep; | <input type="checkbox"/> Hit the .....eye; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counting | <input type="checkbox"/> A market; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> your goat; | <input type="checkbox"/> A cow; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Separate the sheep from the | <input type="checkbox"/> A sacred |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cast sheep's | <input type="checkbox"/> Big enough to .....a cow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In two shakes of a tail; | <input type="checkbox"/> Till the cows come |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strong as an | |



EXERCISE 26 Complete the sentences with the correct idiom inspired from the “livestock” lexical field:

- The young man next door could help you carry the closet upstairs. He is
- You should try if you can't fall asleep, it usually works.
- The starving children started toafter a long day of outdoor games.
- We estimating the value of the company on the stock market.
-  There is no point in waiting any longer for things to change. You need to
- Let's not mix things up. First, we shouldand discuss things one by one, in the order of their priority.
- He is the in this business – without his investment, nothing would have worked out, as there is a lot of money involved in the building process.
- Grandmother wasat her beloved grandson, who was lying in bed with fever. He was her favourite grandchild of all.
- Seeing the woman who had betrayed him was like, as he suddenly got angry and left the office at once.
- My brother's elder son is of the family, as he ruined his parents' trust and support when he ran away from home with a gang of smugglers.
- When they have the honour of receiving guests from abroad, our relatives from the countryside usually to welcome them and show their hospitality.
- You had better not say bad words about her nephew, he's aaround here and nobody dares to challenge him.



EXERCISE 27 Put the jumbled words in the correct order to make “livestock idioms”:

- to / rag / a / like / bull / a / red
- horns / the / take / the / by / bull
- before / casting / swine / pearls
- out / purse / silk / make / sow's / can't / a / of / a / ear / you
- cows / till / home / come / the
- live / the / hog / off / high
- bull / a / like / in / a / shop / china
- from / separate / sheep / the / goats
- In two shakes of a lamb's tail
- a / like / bull / rag / to / red / a
- bull / the / take / the / horns / by
- get / why / a / you / when / can / milk / buy / the / for / free / cow
- cow / big / to / choke / a / enough
- cow / on / awkward / roller / a / skates / as



EXERCISE 28 Match the words in the two columns to make “livestock idioms”:

Sweat
 When pigs
 Live high off
 Casting pearls
 A road
 To kill the fattened
 A black
 Counting
 Get one's
 Separate the sheep
 In two shakes of a lamb's
 As strong as



Like a bull in a

.....
 Like a red rag to a



Take the bull

EXERCISE 29. Match the words in column A with the ones in column B in order to get correct collocations:

COLUMN A		COLUMN B	
1.	as happy as a	a.	mouse
2.	as slippery as a	b.	hornet
3.	as hungry as a	c.	pig
4.	as proud as a	d.	fly in pie
5.	as mad as	e.	lion
6.	as stubborn as	f.	snake
7.	as quiet as a	g.	bear
8.	as ugly as a	h.	mule
9.	as strong as	i.	toad
10.	as fat as	j.	peacock

- ❖ calf
- ❖ china shop
- ❖ bull
- ❖ market
- ❖ by the horns
- ❖ like a pig
- ❖ the hog
- ❖ headed
- ❖ from the goats
- ❖ come home
- ❖ the bull's eye
- ❖ tail
- ❖ story
- ❖ in a poke
- ❖ cow
- ❖ before swine
- ❖ sheep
- ❖ fly



an ox

Exercise 30. Fill each blank with one of the adjectives given in order to form correct idioms: *sneaky, crazy, scared, sick, full, busy, free, funny, weak, prickly*

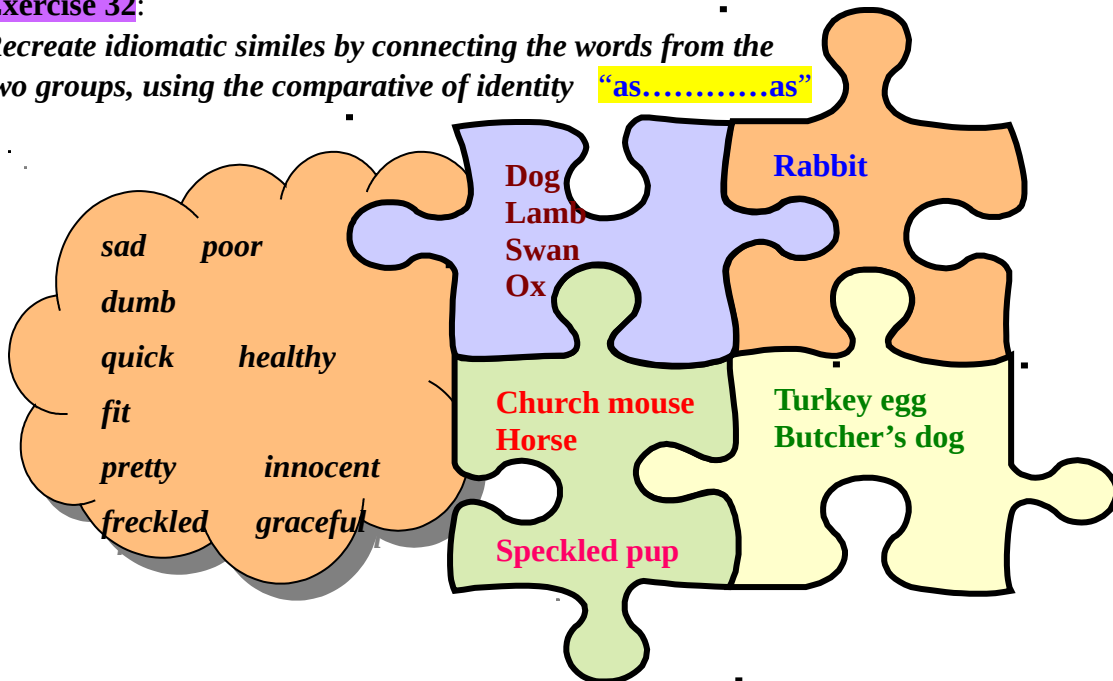
1. I ate too much steak at dinner, now I feel asas a tick.

2. The little girl couldn't carry the suitcase; she was asas a kitten.
3. My friend can get what she wants - she is asas a fox.
4. My husband is in bed with fever, he is asas a parrot.
5. Of course you can do what you want. You are asas a bird.
6. When the little boy saw the monster, he became asas a bunny.
7. If my sister doesn't like somebody's attitude, she gets asas a porcupine.
8. People don't like our neighbour too much, sometimes he is asas a bat.
9. Mother never seems to have any free time, she is always asas a bee.
10. Everyone was laughing, the show was asas a barrel of monkeys.

Exercise 31: Complete the following paragraph with the best idiom for each space:
 go ape; let the cat out of the bag; as healthy as a horse; cock of the walk; cast sheep's eyes; as snug as a bug in a rug; no spring chicken; as happy as a pig in mud; in a cat's paw; ants in her pants; catnap

Last month I paid a visit to my relatives at their country house. When I arrived there, I found them involved in some activities: my uncle was, thinking that everyone around had to listen to his orders; but things were a little different: my young cousin had just received a new toy car and he was.....; when he saw me, he justwith joy; my aunt seemed to bewith the gardening, their older son was lying in the shade under a tree, feeling; when their elder sister greeted me, she had..... and I didn't know what had happened to her; she told me about it all, because she didn't want anyone to hear. Of course, I had to be careful not to..... about her confession. Then I asked about grandfather – he was in the house, having a, after working at the farm; he is usuallyand keeps himself busy all day, but he's any longer and he gets tired quickly, although he says he is stillI hadn't seen him in....., so Iat him for a few minutes.

Exercise 32: Recreate idiomatic similes by connecting the words from the two groups, using the comparative of identity "as.....as"



Exercise 33 Complete the gap spaces with the correct word from the list, in order to get meaningful sentences:

horse / butcher's dog / lark / eel / ox / pig / butterfly / hawk / struck snake / mule

- a) Everybody admired the princess in her rainbow dress which made her look as gaudy as a
- b) The presence of his favourite cartoon character made the little boy feel as happy as a
- c) You can't count on his changing his mind about this – he's as stubborn as a
- d) I don't like her attitude; most times she is as conceited as
- e) When someone doesn't agree with her, my room mate becomes as mad as a
- f) The farmer was sweating like awhile trying to get the ox out of the stable.
- g) I have filled the table with vegetables, steak and pastry because my husband usually eats like a
- h) Don't trust door sellers; I hardly got rid of one who was as slippery as an
- i) The young detective is as sharp as a he doesn't skip a clue during his crime investigations.
- j) My cousin is as dumb as ansometimes. He can't tell left from right.

EXERCISE 34 Complete the gap spaces with the correct word from the list, in order to get meaningful sentences:

OX / SNAIL / LAMB / EEL / BAT / MULE / BIRD / PARROT / MOUSE / BEAVER / COW / PIG / CHICKEN / TOAD / PEACOCK / BUG / FISH / MOSQUITO/ OWL

- 1. Don't expect that she'll change her mind. She's as stubborn as an
- 2. I can't go to work today. I'm as sick as a(n)
- 3. Bob will help you carry that heavy box in the garage. He's as strong as a(n)
- 4. The old woman can't see anything without her glasses. She's as blind as a(n)
- 5. With all her activities, she's always as busy as a(n)
- 6. My computer is as slow as a(n) I'm afraid I'll have to buy a new one soon.
- 7. He will never settle down. He likes travelling from place to place as free as a(n)
- 8. I didn't hear her come into the room. She's as quiet as a(n)
- 9. My mum never shouted at me. She was as gentle as a(n)
- 10. If I were you, I'd never lend him such a lot of money. He's as slippery as a(n)
- 11. I always listen to my aunt's advice. She is as wise as a(n)
- 12. She refused to take part in the beauty contest, because she considered herself to be as ugly as a

Exercise 35

Fill in the spaces with one of the words from the box in order to get “animal idioms” matching the context of the following sentences:

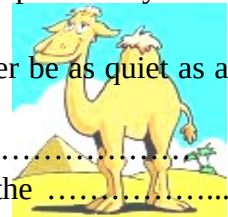
WOLF
CAT
MOUSE

BIRDS
GOAT
HORSES

CAMEL
FISH
DOGHOUSE

CAT
DUCK
HORSE

1. It really gets mywhen people judge things without knowing the truth about them.
2. This is going to be a nice surprise for your cousin, unless you let the out of the bag before the right moment comes.
3. Why don't you tell us your opinion about this decision? Has thegot your tongue? Or you just don't care?
4. I won't put up with this any more. His offence before he left was the straw that broke the’s back.
5. I will leave my car at the car-wash station while I'm paying these bills, in this way I can kill twowith one stone, as I'm running out of time.
6. It's not healthy at all toyour breakfast like that. There is enough time to eat slowly and chew the food properly.
7. Of course I'm going to her wedding! Wildcouldn't keep me away from this major event in my best friend's life!
8. I want to sleep for a few hours this afternoon, so the child had better be as quiet as a or let him go out and play in the yard.
9. I can't refuse to do this favour to my boss, as I risk getting in the
10. You had better believe me with this news – it came right from the mouth.
11. Don't worry about the translation of that letter. You will see that it is as easy as soup.
12. What was wrong with the manager yesterday? He seemed to be like a out of water all day at the office.



EXERCISE 36

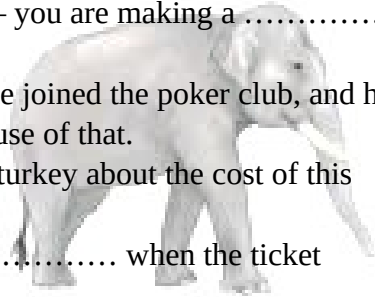
Fill in the spaces with one of the words from the box in order to get “animal idioms” matching the context of the following sentences:

Turkey
Elephant
Sardines
Hawk

Pig
Dog-eat-dog
Bull
Pigeon

Cats
Herring
Rat
Sheep

1. The audience could smell ain the attack on the republican candidate.
2. The media keeps aeyed view on the activity of the foreign company, which is suspected to add to the level of pollution in the city.
3. Family traditions and conventions are just a red diverting our attention from the more urgent problmes, such as keeping our business on the line.
4. Most employees have to cope with a world of the stock market.
5. It's not proper for a respectable man to eat like that – you are making a of yourself!
6. Our elder cousin refused to attend university when he joined the poker club, and he is regarded as the black of the family because of that.
7. There is no time for sideway approaches – let's talk turkey about the cost of this project.
8. I and the other passangers were just shooting the when the ticket inspector told us about the theft from the train.
9. The investors assured the local authorities that the new auditorium would not be a white project for the city.
10. I wouldn't disclose any details around the new office worker; he acts suspiciously, as if he were a stool
11. The patient's relatives were walking up and down the hospital corridors like on hot bricks all through the time of the surgery.
12. The journey was not really enjoyable, as our car had run out of petrol and we went on packed likein my uncle's car.



EXERCISE 37

Fill in the spaces with one of the words from the box in order to get “animal idioms” matching the context of the following sentences:

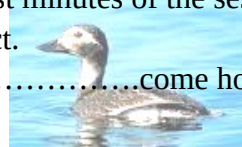
FISH
BONE
DUCK

WOLF
FROG
SHEEP

DOG
LION
COW

ELEPHANT
HORSES
DOGS

1. Some teachers don't agree to the idea of a strike because it's hard to keep the from the door if the salary isn't paid.
2. I wish mother could let my neighbour's remarks go away just like water off a 's back.
3. The political and cultural influence of some ethnic groups in Transylvania tends to become a tail wagging the
4. Your competitor in this business is not that important in town as you may think, he's just a big in a small town.
5. I think we should stick to our original plan o expenses; switching in midstream doesn't always work out well.
6. The opposition party called off the in the last minutes of the session, as the chairman came up with a convenient solution to the conflict.
7. The mechanic can try to fix that grandfather's car till the come home, I doubt he can make it work properly again. It is too old.
8. When she gives her little nephew the toy cars, he keeps playing with them in the middle of the rooms like a dog with a
9. My neighbour is not the perfect partner in this deal – I should say he is like a wolf in 's clothing.
10. In our family, thes share of affection goes to my baby sister.
11. Father always reminds us about our childhood pranks, amazing everyone, after so many years, with his memory of an
12. His voice sounded as if he had ain his throat, and I asked him to repeat the question so that I could understand it right.



EXERCISE 38: Complete each of the following sentences with one the idioms given that match in the context:

BY SHANK'S PONY
 THROWN TO THE DOGS
 BOOKWORM
 AS SICK AS A PARROT

UGLY DUCKLING
 AS BLIND AS A BAT
 CAT AND DOG
 HORSE FEATHERS

AS HUNGRY AS A BEAR
 HORSING AROUND
 LONE WOLF
 EARLY BIRD

1. John finished reading "War and Peace" in three days, and now he is reading another book. He is a total
2. My dog, Rufus, eats a lot of food every day. He seems to be.....
3. My professor has very bad eyesight. Without his glasses, he is
4. Little kids are naughty and they like
5. Jane is always the first person to get to the office every morning. She is an
6. I ate something that disagreed with my stomach yesterday and I was
7. The family dinner turned into a circus as the in-laws started to fight like

8. The stranger spend some time hitch-hiking, but as he caught no ride, he finally got to the farmhouse
9. It's a pity that the medieval theatre has beeninstead of being reconditioned and turned into a touristic point.
10. I can't believe what a beautiful ballerina she has become! Everybody remembers her as theof our childhood neighborhood.
11. What he told us about the stolen money wasI didn't believe a word!
12. My cousin is rather ahe doesn't like visitors and has very few friends who come around.

EXERCISE 39:

Put the words in the correct order so as to get idiomatic phrases and animal proverbs:

- a) purse / can't / a / silk / of / a / sow's / make / you / out / ear
- b) hatched / your / don't / they're / before / chickens / count
- c) in / horse / don't / a / gift / the / mouth/ look
- d) together / birds / a / flock / feather / of /
- e) do / fine / not / fine / birds / feathers / make
- f) A / bird / in / the / hand / is / better / than / two / in / the / bush
- g) mice / is / when / will / the / cat / the / play/ away
- h) your / don't / one / eggs / put / basket/ in / all
- i) were / if / horses, / beggars / then / ride/ wishes/ would
- j) get / will / if / up/ lie / dogs, / you / with / down / fleas/ you / with
- k) horse / you / can / to / can't / water, / a / you / make / it / drink/ lead / but /
- l) honey/ you / flies / with / than / will / vinegar/ more/ with/ catch



EXERCISE 40

Complete the sentences with one of the words given:

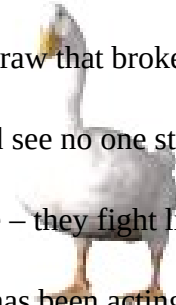
BEEHIVE
ROOF

CHICKEN
KNEES
MOUSE

CAMEL
GOOSE
CAT / DOG

SOMETHING
WOLF

1. Our lawyer sent us on a wild - chase after some documents that had been destroyed in a great fire at the town hall.
2. The payment I was offered at my new job was-feed compared to the profits I made from the estate agency.
3. My parents are eager to get a second job, so as to make sure they keep thefrom the door, in this times of hardship.
4. Having to work extra hours for such low salary was the straw that broke the’s back.
5. The factory was like aof activity; you could see no one staying or wasting time.
6. Asking them to work together would be a terrible mistake – they fight like and
7. Since he was given a higher position in the company, he has been acting as if he were the bee’s.....
8. My neighbour’s grandson can’t sit for a minute, he keeps bustling around like a cat on a hot tin
9. What happened to your clothes? You look likethe cat brought in.
10. I’m not sure what their intention is about the project, as they have been playing cat andwith us for the last few weeks.



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