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ENGLISH

Idioms and Phrases

What are Idioms and Phrases?

A phrase is a group of words which represents a part of speech.

- The big bad wolf – Noun Phrase
- Surprisingly good – Adjective Phrase
- Was sleeping – Verb Phrase

When the group of words or a phrase represents an idea or a thought which has a deeper, figurative meaning, it is called an **idiom**.

- Wolf in sheep's clothing – A deceptive person or a thing
- Flesh and blood – related by blood
- No love lost – not on good terms

In this chapter, we shall learn some commonly used English idioms and phrases.

Idioms Related to Animals

- **To cry wolf**

Meaning: To raise a false alarm

Usage: Naresh has a tendency **to cry wolf** every time, so don't pay attention to him.

- **A bull in a china shop**

Meaning: Someone who is clumsy or unskilled

Usage: Mario was like **a bull in a china shop** when it came to handling the finances.

- **A fly in the ointment**

Meaning: Something which spoils the beauty or balance

Usage: The only **fly in the ointment** is the ugly looking house amid the beautiful buildings.

- **To be the underdog**

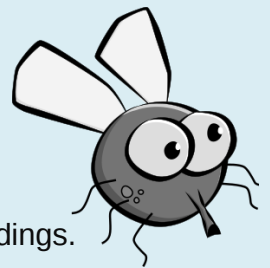
Meaning: A competitor who has little or no chance of winning

Usage: No one had expected **an underdog** like Floyd to beat the three-time champion.

- **The elephant in the room**

Meaning: A deliberately unaddressed topic which may cause embarrassment or awkwardness if mentioned

Usage: Rohini's ugly divorce was **the elephant in the room** at the party.



- **Barking up the wrong tree**

Meaning: To make a wrong choice or to ask the wrong person

Usage: If the detectives think the house help is involved in the theft, they are barking up the wrong tree.

- **Cat's got one's tongue**

Meaning: To neither speak nor respond

Usage: Why aren't you answering? Did the cat get your tongue?

- **The lion's share**

Meaning: The biggest part

Usage: Being the person who invested the most, Rajan got the lion's share of the profits.



- **A red herring**

Meaning: A deceptive piece of information intended to mislead someone from the truth

Usage: The scarf at the crime scene was a red herring which made us think that the culprit is a woman.

- **Raining cats and dogs**

Meaning: To rain very heavily

Usage: Last night, it rained cats and dogs. Fortunately, everyone was indoors.

- **Straight from the horse's mouth**

Meaning: Information taken from a reliable or an authorised source

Usage: Jagan, Krishna's best friend, said that he is indeed resigning. I heard it straight from the horse's mouth.

- **Until the cows come home**

Meaning: For a very long time

Usage: We cannot delay the matter till the cows come home.

Idioms Related to the Paranormal

- **Baying for blood**

Wanting to punish or hurt someone

After the con artist decamped with their money, the swindled residents are now baying for his blood.

- **Witch hunt**

A campaign to punish people who may have unconventional views

The authorities launched a witch hunt against the people who voted for the opponent.

- **Devil's advocate**

A person who presents a counter view just for argument

Let me play the devil's advocate and ask you what happens if plan A fails.



- **To come back to haunt someone**

Meaning: A memory which recurs to affect someone in an adverse way

Usage: The mistakes of Sushant's past came back to haunt him.

- **Witching hour**

Meaning: Midnight or the time between 3 and 4 AM when witches and evil spirits are known to be active

Usage: Who could be calling us on the phone during the witching hours?

- **Skeleton staff**

Meaning: The minimum number of people needed to run business

Usage: The office comprised only the skeleton staff after the downsizing.

- **A ghost town**

Meaning: A town in which no or very few residents live

Usage: El Fantasmal is now reduced to a ghost town after the war.

Idioms Related to Food

- **Apple of someone's eye**

Meaning: A beloved person cherished more than any other

Usage: Samantha was the apple of her father's eye.

- **The salt of the earth**

Meaning: A person who is giving, trustworthy and honest

Usage: I am glad that my friend married Kamlesh. He truly is the salt of the earth.

- **With a grain of salt**

Meaning: To not trust something completely; to treat something with suspicion

Usage: The news related to the cricketer's retirement should be taken with a grain of salt.

- **Put all your eggs in one basket**

Meaning: To depend on something entirely

Usage: By depending entirely on the written section of the examination, you have put all your eggs in one basket.

- **Bread and butter**

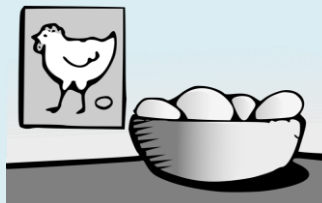
Meaning: Livelihood

Usage: Singing is my bread and butter.

- **Bring home the bacon**

Meaning: Earn a livelihood

Usage: These days, women not only look after the needs of their family but also bring home the bacon.



- **A bad egg**

Meaning: A dishonest person

Usage: Nilesh is a bad egg who was accused of stealing money from his workplace.

- **Cool as a cucumber**

Meaning: A calm and relaxed person

Usage: Our new manager is as cool as a cucumber; he handles everything calmly.

- **Cry over spilled milk**

Meaning: To worry about something which cannot be undone

Usage: You cannot take back the harsh things you said to him; there is no use crying over spilled milk.

- **Full of beans**

Meaning: To be very energetic and spirited

Usage: Gregory who is usually morose is full of beans today.

- **Eat the humble pie**

Meaning: To be humbled by an experience which proves one wrong

Usage: If I am right, I will gloat about it; if I am wrong, I will gladly eat the humble pie.

- **Piece of cake**

Meaning: An extremely easy task

Usage: Test driving the new fully automatic car was a piece of cake.



Idioms Related to Mental State

- **Method to the madness**

Meaning: A plan in somebody's seemingly illogical behaviour

Usage: It is easy to dismiss Van Gogh's works as products of an unstable mind; however, there is a method to his madness.

- **To lose one's marbles**

Meaning: To lose one's mental balance

Usage: The man was rambling about how he fought in the world war. I think he has lost his marbles.

- **Harebrained idea**

Meaning: A silly or impractical idea

Usage: Don't fall for Dinesh's harebrained ideas. He is not the most sensible person around.

- **Stark raving mad**

Meaning: Completely crazy

Usage: Imagine keeping a cobra as a pet. Looks like she is stark raving mad!