

1. Fun with idioms

This week's lesson introduces a selection of popular idiomatic expressions.

Level

Upper intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level B2 and above)

How to use the lesson

1. Make sure the students understand what an *idiom* is (a simple definition would be: a group of words with a meaning that is different from the meanings of each individual word on its own). Give some examples, then ask students if they can provide some additional examples. Are there any idioms in English that the students find particularly strange or amusing?

2. Divide the students into pairs and hand out Worksheet A. Explain that in Exercise 1, they have to work together to try to find the idiom that matches the definition given. For each definition, there is a real English idiom accompanied by two invented ones. In some cases, the students will probably have to guess.

3. Check answers in open class.

4. Keeping the students in their pairs, hand out Worksheet B and ask them to do Exercise 2, in which they have to work together to try to decide on the meanings of some idioms. Again, in some cases they will probably have to guess.

5. Check answers in open class.

6. Hand out Worksheet C and ask the students to fill in the blanks using the appropriate idioms from Worksheets A and B. Point out that each idiom appears only once and that it may be necessary to change the verb forms.

7. Check answers in open class.

8. As an additional activity, you could play a game that is essentially the oral equivalent of Exercises 1 and 2. First you will have to supply a list of idioms and their definitions – preferably ones that none or only very few of the students are familiar with. Divide the students into two teams and give each team half of the idioms. For the equivalent of Exercise 1, for each definition the two teams would invent two idioms in addition to the real one. For the equivalent of Exercise 2, for each idiom the two teams would create two false definitions in addition to the correct one.

The teams then take turns reading aloud their definitions/idioms to the other team, followed by the three idioms/definitions. The idea is to make it difficult for the other team to identify the true idiom/definition, so in each case, the false ones should be made to sound just as convincing as the correct one. The teams score points for identifying the correct idioms/definitions, and the team with more points at the end wins.

Answers:

Exercise 1

1. a 2. a 3. c 4. b 5. c 6. b 7. a

Exercise 2

1. a 2. c 3. b 4. c 5. c 6. b

Exercise 3

1. labor (of) love
2. yes man; question (of) time
3. under (her) thumb
4. pricked up
5. getting (his) foot (in the) door
6. quick (as a) flash
7. gone/going (to his) head
8. losing face; burying (his) head (in the) sand
9. lose (her) head

2. Related websites

Send your students to these websites, or just take a look yourself.

<http://www.usingenglish.com/reference/idioms/cat/>

A large collection of idioms listed by category, with brief definitions. Accessible to Upper intermediate level.

<http://a4esl.org/q/h/idioms.html>

A selection of “self-study idiom quizzes” with answers. Accessible to Upper intermediate level.

<http://www.idiomsite.com/>

A website explaining the meaning of dozens of popular English idioms. Accessible to Upper intermediate level.