

- Mala had *a whale of a time* at the birthday party.

Idioms are considered to be important language tools which add variety to one's usage. They are used by authors or speakers of a language to add variety and beauty to their written or spoken language. The origin of idioms is usually obscure, but most are considered to have originated from folk tales, stories and creative writing and undergone transformations over time to acquire their current meaning.

Similarly, the idiom, *Penny for your thoughts* does not mean that the speaker of the idiom would pay a penny or pay money to the listener for their thoughts. It just means that the speaker is wondering what the listener is thinking about.

- You seem pretty perturbed Ramesh – *a penny for your thoughts*.

Idioms are often categorised under various types for ease of learning.

Idioms describing people

Idiom	Meaning	Example
angel investor	someone who provides financial backing to a startup	Mr Ratan Tata is an <i>angel investor</i> who has funded many startups in the country.
eagle eyes	sharp eye for details	Raman has <i>eagle eyes</i> and never allows errors in his assignments.
blue-eyed boy	favourite person of those in authority	Rakesh is the <i>blue-eyed boy</i> of the Chairman.
heart of gold	very kind and generous	Mother Teresa was known to have a <i>heart of gold</i> .
hard as nails	devoid of sympathy	Mr Desai is always about profits; he is <i>hard as nails</i> .
a cold fish	distant, unfriendly	I wonder what has happened to her. She has become <i>a rather cold fish</i> .
number cruncher	a person skilled at working with numbers	A statistician is a complete <i>number cruncher</i> .
whistle-blower	someone who exposes corrupt practices by taking them to the public domain	Venkat was the <i>whistle-blower</i> who exposed the malpractices of this company.
know-it-all	someone who behaves as if they know everything about everything	Shalini is such an insufferable <i>know-it-all</i> .

Idiom	Meaning	Example
loan shark	someone who lends money at a very high interest rate and may threaten borrowers with violence if the money is not returned on time	Start-up companies must be alert about <i>loan sharks</i> in the market.

Idioms describing feelings or moods

Idiom	Meaning	Example
on cloud nine	elated, very happy	My daughter was <i>on cloud nine</i> after she came first in her class.
tickled pink	delighted	I was <i>tickled pink</i> when I met my favourite author at the Literary Festival.
out of sorts	low, unwell, unhappy, irritable	The weather for the past few days is making me feel <i>out of sorts</i> .
at your wit's end	upset and have no more patience to deal with it anymore	I am <i>at my wit's end</i> with these assignments, and I don't know what to do.
like a bear with a sore head	extremely irritated	Be careful! The manager has been yelling at people <i>like a bear with a sore head</i> .
jumped out of my skin	startled, literally jump unknowingly	I <i>jumped out of my skin</i> when I saw the huge lizard in my drawer.
fly off the handle / blow up / see red	get furious suddenly	My teacher <i>flew off the handle</i> / <i>blew up</i> / <i>saw red</i> when I interrupted him during the lecture.
eat a horse	extremely hungry	Please open the lunchbox! I could <i>eat a horse</i> .

Idioms connected with different situations

Idiom	Meaning	Example
to be in a fix / to be in a tight corner	in a difficult situation	My modem is not working. I am <i>in a fix</i> / <i>in a tight corner</i> .
to stir things up	make a situation worse	She is such a troublemaker; she constantly <i>stirs things up</i> .

Idiom	Meaning	Example
to sit up and take notice	pay attention	For people to <i>sit up and take notice</i> of you, you must perform well at work.
bury the hatchet	make peace / come to an amiable solution	We must learn to <i>bury the hatchet</i> with our colleagues for the company to perform well.
keep one's cards close to one's chest	not disclose information	He is <i>keeping his cards close to his chest</i> ; otherwise he fears trouble.
get a grasp of	understand	It takes a while to <i>get a grasp</i> of the way an organisation works.
hand in hand	together	Social backwardness and poverty often go <i>hand in hand</i> .

Idioms connected with praise or criticism

Idiom	Meaning	Example
head and shoulders above the rest / miles better	better than everybody else	Phil is <i>head and shoulders above the rest</i> / <i>miles better</i> than the others in presenting a report to the leadership.
really on the ball	knows a lot	When it comes to mathematics, Maria is <i>really on the ball</i> .
butter up	flatter	I overheard her trying to <i>butter up</i> the CEO of the company.
the cat's whiskers / the bee's knees	when people think they are wonderful (criticism)	She behaves as if she is <i>the cat's whiskers</i> / <i>the bee's knees</i> .
has green fingers	has a knack / is good at gardening	Prithi chose the right profession of starting her own horticulture farm; she <i>has green fingers</i> .
run down / pick holes	to constantly criticise	She is tired of her husband <i>running down</i> / <i>picking holes</i> (in) everything she says.
a dog's breakfast	a complete mess	You made <i>a dog's breakfast</i> of the report you presented this morning; you must redo the whole thing.

Miscellaneous idioms

Idiom	Meaning	Example
foot the bill	pay the bill	I was asked to <i>foot the bill</i> because it was my birthday.
drive a hard bargain	demand a lot or refuse to pay much when striking a deal	The horse-seller <i>drove a hard bargain</i> . I finally gave up.
buy a pig in a poke	purchase something without examining its worth	Let me examine the laptop. I refuse to <i>buy a pig in a poke</i> .
finger in every pie	being involved in many things	Jack has a <i>finger in every pie</i> ; he is part of the Sales and Marketing team and a good HR employee as well.
put all your eggs in one basket	invest/risk everything on one person or thing	We must diversify our investments and not <i>put all our eggs in one basket</i> .
make quite a bit of headway	make progress	She has <i>made quite a bit of headway</i> after joining the company.
pull a fast one on me	deceive someone	The salesman tried to <i>pull a fast one on me</i> by trying to sell me a damaged product.

English has many such useful idioms that enrich it. The list given above is by no means a comprehensive or complete one.

Exercise 12

A. Choose words/phrases from the box and fill in the blanks to form suitable idioms.

day an arm and a leg corners apple cart bridges

- After having worked on the project for nine hours, Vikas decided to call it a _____.
- I decided to go to Europe on a holiday, but the trip cost me _____.
- We planned a picnic but the rainy weather upset the _____.
- Please do not cut _____ with any work that is assigned to you.
- Every time he resigns from a company, he burns all his _____.
This might hamper his career.

B. Make sentences with these idioms.

- a. let the cat out of the bag
- b. a dog's breakfast
- c. number cruncher
- d. like a bear with a sore head
- e. angel investor

C. Read this passage and identify the idioms. Construct more such passages using the situations given below.**Situation 1: A day at work**

It was raining cats and dogs in Mumbai that day. Raj had to go to work, but he was feeling slightly under the weather. He literally dragged himself out of bed, forced himself to get ready and left the house. Luckily, the rain stopped and he made it to the Metro without getting wet. He reached his office on time. His manager was behaving like a bear with a sore head and was talking down to one of Raj's colleagues who was almost on the verge of tears.

Situation 2: Talking about your dream job

Situation 3: Preparing for a presentation in college

Situation 4: Talking to a friend after getting selected for an internship