

English Idioms (US)

Common English Sayings and What They Mean

Idiom: a set of words that has a meaning to a group of people that may not be obvious to others based solely on the meanings of the words themselves

Expression: a word or phrase used to convey an idea

Saying or Proverb: a short, commonly known expression which generally offers advice or wisdom

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.	What you have now is more valuable than what you might have later	by itself
A penny for your thoughts.	Tell me what you're thinking	by itself
A penny saved is a penny earned.	Money you save today you can spend later	by itself
a perfect storm	the worst possible situation	as part of a sentence
A picture is worth 1000 words.	Better to show than tell	by itself
Actions speak louder than words.	Believe what people do and not what they say	by itself
add insult to injury	To make a bad situation worse	as part of a sentence
barking up the wrong tree	To be mistaken, to be looking for solutions in the wrong place	as part of a sentence
Birds of a feather flock together.	People who are alike are often friends	by itself

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
bite off more than you can chew	Take on a project that you cannot finish	as part of a sentence
break the ice	Make people feel more comfortable	as part of a sentence
by the skin of your teeth	Just barely	as part of a sentence
comparing apples and oranges	Comparing two things that cannot be compared	as part of a sentence
costs an arm and a leg	Very expensive	as part of a sentence
do something at the drop of a hat	Do something without having planned beforehand	as part of a sentence
Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.	Treat people fairly. Also known as "The Golden Rule"	by itself
Don't count your chickens before they hatch.	Don't count on something good happening until it's happened.	by itself
Don't cry over spilt milk.	Don't complain about something that can't be fixed	by itself
Don't give up your day job.	You're not very good at this	by itself
Don't put all your eggs in one basket.	What you're doing is too risky	by itself
Every cloud has a silver lining.	Good things come after bad things	by itself
get a taste of your own medicine	Get treated the way you've been treating others (negative)	as part of a sentence

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
give someone the cold shoulder	Ignore someone	as part of a sentence
go on a wild goose chase	To do something pointless	as part of a sentence
Good things come to those who wait.	Be patient	by itself
He has bigger fish to fry.	He has bigger things to take care of than what we are talking about now	by itself
He's a chip off the old block.	The son is like the father	by itself
hit the nail on the head	Get something exactly right	as part of a sentence
Ignorance is bliss.	You're better off not knowing	by itself
It ain't over till the fat lady sings.	This isn't over yet	by itself
It takes one to know one.	You couldn't say that about me unless it was also true about you	by itself
It's a piece of cake.	It's easy	by itself
It's raining cats and dogs.	It's raining hard	by itself
kill two birds with one stone.	Get two things done with a single action	as part of a sentence
let the cat out of the bag	Give away a secret	as part of a sentence
Live and learn.	I made a mistake, but I'll learn from it	by itself
Look before you leap.	Take only calculated risks	by itself

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
on thin ice	On probation. If you make another mistake, there will be trouble.	as part of a sentence
once in a blue moon	Rarely	as part of a sentence
put something on ice	Put a projet on hold	as part of a sentence
rain on someone's parade	To spoil something	as part of a sentence
saving for a rainy day	Saving money for later	as part of a sentence
Slow and steady wins the race.	Reliability is more important than speed	by itself
Spill the beans.	Give away a secret	as part of a sentence or by itself
take a rain check	Postpone a plan	as part of a sentence
take it with a grain of salt	Don't take it too seriously	as part of a sentence
The ball is in your court.	It's your decision	by itself
the best thing since sliced bread	A really good invention or idea	as part of a sentence
The early bird gets the worm.	The first people who arrive will get the best stuff	by itself
the elephant in the room	The big issue, the problem people are avoiding	as part of a sentence
the whole nine yards	Everything, all the way.	as part of a sentence
There are other fish in the sea.	It's ok to miss this opportunity. Others will arise.	by itself

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
There's a method to his madness.	He seems crazy but actually he's clever	by itself
There's no such thing as a free lunch.	Nothing is entirely free	by itself
Throw caution to the wind.	Take a risk	as part of a sentence or by itself
You can't have your cake and eat it too.	You can't have everything	by itself
You can't judge a book by its cover.	This person or thing may look one way, but it could be different inside.	by itself