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Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale

Education Committee

**9.4 Beginning to understand idioms**

**Why is this important?  
An idiom is a phrase where the words, when put together, have a meaning  
which is different from that of the words when used individually (e.g. ‘Pull  
your socks up’ has nothing to do with the action of pulling or socks). This  
makes idioms tricky to understand and learn, but there are lots of them in  
the English language.**

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What to do  
• Compile a list of idioms/phrases/sayings that are used on a regular basis, e.g.  
★ ‘On the other hand.’ ★ ‘Don’t cry over spilt milk.’  
★ ‘Raining cats and dogs.’ ★ ‘Pulling your leg.’  
★ ‘A piece of cake.’ ★ ‘Feeling under the weather.’  
• Choose one idiom at a time and write down two or three alternatives to the  
meaning (e.g. for ‘Pull your socks up’):  
★ Make sure your socks are always tidy. ★ Try harder.  
★ Put your socks away tidily.  
• Ask the child to say what he/she thinks the idiom means. Talk through the options. Put the idiom in a scenario. For example, a girl is doing her numbers in school. The teacher knows she is good at number work and says ‘Come on Emily, pull your socks up and then you can go out to play’.  
• Work through various idioms and try to use examples in everyday conversation  
which illustrate how idioms are used and what they mean. If you hear someone  
use an idiom, comment on it and explain the meaning.**

**The YouTube clip below looks at some common idioms**

[**https://youtu.be/jUT\_WSavAC8**](https://youtu.be/jUT_WSavAC8)

**And below are some examples of idioms, their meaning**

| **Idiom** | **Meaning** | **Usage** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **A blessing in disguise** | **a good thing that seemed bad at first** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **A dime a dozen** | **Something common** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Beat around the bush** | **Avoid saying what you mean, usually because it is uncomfortable** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Better late than never** | **Better to arrive late than not to come at all** | **by itself** |
| **Bite the bullet** | **To get something over with because it is inevitable** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Break a leg** | **Good luck** | **by itself** |
| **Call it a day** | **Stop working on something** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Cut somebody some slack** | **Don't be so critical** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Cutting corners** | **Doing something poorly in order to save time or money** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Easy does it** | **Slow down** | **by itself** |
| **Get out of hand** | **Get out of control** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Get something out of your system** | **Do the thing you've been wanting to do so you can move on** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Get your act together** | **Work better or leave** | **by itself** |
| **Give someone the benefit of the doubt** | **Trust what someone says** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Go back to the drawing board** | **Start over** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Hang in there** | **Don't give up** | **by itself** |
| **Hit the sack** | **Go to sleep** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **It's not rocket science** | **It's not complicated** | **by itself** |
| **Let someone off the hook** | **To not hold someone responsible for something** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Make a long story short** | **Tell something briefly** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Miss the boat** | **It's too late** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **No pain, no gain** | **You have to work for what you want** | **by itself** |
| **On the ball** | **Doing a good job** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Pull someone's leg** | **To joke with someone** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Pull yourself together** | **Calm down** | **by itself** |
| **So far so good** | **Things are going well so far** | **by itself** |
| **Speak of the devil** | **The person we were just talking about showed up!** | **by itself** |
| **That's the last straw** | **My patience has run out** | **by itself** |
| **The best of both worlds** | **An ideal situation** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Time flies when you're having fun** | **You don't notice how long something lasts when it's fun** | **by itself** |
| **To get bent out of shape** | **To get upset** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **To make matters worse** | **Make a problem worse** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **Under the weather** | **Sick** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **We'll cross that bridge when we come to it** | **Let's not talk about that problem right now** | **by itself** |
| **Wrap your head around something** | **Understand something complicated** | **as part of a sentence** |
| **You can say that again** | **That's true, I agree** | **by itself** |
| **Your guess is as good as mine** | **I have no idea** | **by itself** |