

Idioms and Slang: What does that mean?

Idioms and slang are special words and language used within a culture or group of people.

An **idiom** is an expression which has a meaning different from the meaning of its individual words. We call this type of language **figurative**. The opposite of this word is **literal** language. Look at these examples:

**Break a leg!** Figurative meaning: good luck on your performance (for an actor)

I'm feeling **under the weather**. Figurative meaning: I'm feeling tired and sick

If you think about the literal meaning of these expressions, they might sound funny. English speakers use many idioms (**idiomatic expressions**) in their everyday speech.

**Slang** is like an idiom, but it is usually used by a group a people, for example: text message slang or California slang. Slang words are more often used by teenagers and young people. Here are two examples.

I have five **bucks**. (Dollars)

I **aced** my test! (Got a good grade, did well)

**These sentences use idioms and slang. What do these words mean? Rewrite the sentences without slang.**

1. I flunked my test and got Grade F.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you know that dude's name ?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. The stores are open 24/7 so you can buy stuff whenever you want.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do I know Jim? Of course, I do. We've been pals for years.

\_\_\_\_\_

5. I need some bread to pay for my house.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. My neighbor is a pain in the neck.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Don't forget to bring two bottles of booze to the party.

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Would you like your scotch on the rocks?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. It takes a lot of guts to jump out of an airplane, even with a parachute.

\_\_\_\_\_

10. I know zilch about computers. I never use them.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Idioms and Slang Discussion: In pairs, ask and answer these questions:**

• Do people in your home country use idioms or slang? Do the young people use a lot of slang? What is one of the common idioms or slang words used in your native language? What does it mean literally?

In your home country do some groups of people use slang more than others? (An age group? An economic group? A social group?) Do you know something about people just by listening to the way they talk?

In America where do you hear the most slang and idioms used? When is it most difficult for you to understand English? (Conversations, TV shows, news, telephone, business, etc.)

Have you heard any strange slang words or idioms lately? Do you know what they mean? Talk with a partner.

In English, we have animal and/or food words in many of our idioms and slang. Is it the same in your native language? If not, what is a common topic in your idioms and slang?

**Here are some common American expressions. What do they mean?**

It costs an arm and a leg.

I am so hungry I could eat a horse.

She let the cat out of the bag.

He is a couch potato.

I am going to catch some z's.

She spilled the beans.

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

His bark is worse than his bite.

She wears her heart on her sleeve.

He is really cool.

She is a backseat driver

I bent over backwards to help them.

Cross your fingers!

Those children drive me up the wall.

That was the icing on the cake.

I'm on the fence about it.

She made the cake from scratch.

**With your partner(s) write a dialogue using 5 of these idioms or slang words.**