

Idiom Lesson Plan 3: Understanding the History and Context of Idioms

Goal:

The goal of this lesson is to trace and understand the origins of idioms and their relation to history, culture and language.

Book used:

[Icing on the Cake: Food Idioms](#)

[The Lion's Share: Animal Idioms](#)

[With Flying Colors: Color Idioms](#)

[Fresh as a Daisy: Nature Idioms](#)

Snapshot:

- Discuss the origins of idioms with some specific examples.
- Enforce the concept with a creative activity: Classroom Idioms!
- Have the students take what they have learned home and discuss with their families, and then share with the class.

Lesson Plan:

Grade Level: 3-5

Time Frame: 45 minutes

Objectives:

To appreciate the broader meaning and significance of idioms in their cultural and linguistic context.

Knowledge:

- Identify the origins of certain idioms

Attitudes:

- Understand and appreciate that idioms are language-specific and are often related to the history and culture of the particular language that they come from.

Essential Questions:

- Where do idioms come from?
- Are idioms the same in different languages?

Introduction:

1. Remind the students that idioms have meanings which are not immediately understandable based solely on the words. Ask the students how they think that idioms come to be. Explain that idioms are often specific to the languages that they originate in. This is because they generally come from certain historical practices, cultural traditions, or religious beliefs, that are shared by the speakers of a certain language.
2. Use these two examples from the [Language Lizard Idiom books](#) to illustrate this concept.*

Green thumb: this idiom is based on the fact that handling plants can give a person green fingers. King Edward I of England awarded prizes to the servant who could shell peas the fastest. The winner's fingers would be stained green by the peapods. In America, pinching flowers out of tobacco plants in the fields would give farmers green fingers.

Lion's Share: This idiom comes from a fable by Aesop, called The Lion and His Fellow

Hunters. In the tale, the lion and other animals hunt together, but the lion doesn't share the catch and instead keeps it for himself. The term "lion's share" therefore means the larger portion of something. It is commonly used in situations where someone is taking more of something for themselves, like the selfish lion in the fable.

For information about the background/history of the idioms in each book and additional idioms, please see the documents included on the Language Lizard site. These can be accessed via the QR code on the last page of each idiom book.

Independent Work/ Group Work Activity

1. Create classroom idioms! The students can work either in groups or independently to think of something that is unique to their family or to the classroom, and turn it into their very own original idiom. (Ex: if their kitchen is yellow, then feeling hungry could be referred to as “wanting yellow.”) The students can illustrate the idiom as well. If there is time, you can even ask the students to present their idioms to the whole class and have their classmates guess what their idioms mean.
2. Another activity that you can do with your students is “When Pigs Fly!” Almost every country has a version of the idiom “when pigs fly.” For example: in Russian “when crayfish sing from mountaintops,” in French “when hens grow Teeth,” in Hungarian “when it is snowing red snowflakes” (see [this page](#) for more examples). Look at some of these with your students. Depending on their grade level, you may want to discuss any correlation between the saying and the geography/climate of the country that uses it. Next, discuss the Thai version of this idiom, “one afternoon in your next reincarnation” and how it is related to the Buddhist belief that everything is possible it just might happen in another life. (see [here](#)). Finally, have students create and illustrate their own idioms of impossibility or adynaton. You can even hang these up around the classroom.

Conclusion

3. Take it home! As a homework assignment, ask students to go home and speak to their parents/ family members about a favorite idiom. If the parent’s speak another language, ask for an idiom in that language. Students should also ask whether their parents/family members know how the idiom came about in that language. The student’s can then share their idioms with their classmates.