

e-lesson

Week starting: February 8, 2010

1. Idioms challenge!

This week's lesson introduces a selection of popular idiomatic expressions.

Level

Upper intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level B2 and above).

How to use the lesson

1. Make sure the students understand what idioms are (a simple definition would be: a group of words with a meaning that is different from the meanings of each individual word understood on its own). Give some examples, before asking students if they can provide some additional examples. Are there any idioms in English that the students find particularly strange or amusing?
2. Divide the students into pairs and hand out Worksheet A. Explain that in Exercise 1 they have to work together to try to find the idiom that matches the definition given. For each definition there is a real English idiom accompanied by two invented ones. In some cases the students will probably have to guess.
3. Check answers in open class.
4. Keeping the students in their pairs, hand out Worksheet B and ask them to do Exercise 2, in which they have to work together to try to decide on the meanings of some idioms. Again, in some cases they will probably have to guess.
5. Check answers in open class.
6. Hand out Worksheet C and ask the students to fill in the blanks using the appropriate idioms from Worksheets A and B. Point out that each idiom appears only once and that it may be necessary to change the verb forms.
7. Check answers in open class.
8. As an additional activity, you could play a game that is essentially the oral equivalent of Exercises 1 and 2. First, you will have to supply a list of idioms and their definitions – preferably ones that none or only very few of the students are familiar with. Next, divide the students into two teams and give each team half of the idioms. For the equivalent of Exercise 1, for each definition the two teams would invent two idioms in addition to the real one. For the equivalent of Exercise 2, for each idiom the two teams would create two false definitions in addition to the correct one.

The teams then take turns reading their definitions/idioms aloud to the other team, followed by the three idioms/definitions. The idea is to make it difficult for the other team to identify the true idiom/definition, so in each case the false ones should be made to sound just as convincing as the correct one. The teams score points for identifying the correct idioms/definitions, and the team with more points at the end is the winner.

Answers

Exercise 1

1. a 2. a 3. b 4. b 5. a 6. b 7. c

Exercise 2

1. a 2. a 3. c 4. b 5. a 6. b 7. c

Exercise 3

1. deliver the goods; poor man's; easier said than done; nail (in Francis's) coffin; acid test
2. dog eat dog; keep (my) ear to the ground
3. digging (their) heels (in); have their cake and eat it too
4. calls a spade a spade; happy medium
5. fly in the ointment
6. in full swing; on the same page

2. Related Websites

Send your students to these websites, or just take a look yourself.

<http://www.usingenglish.com/reference/idioms/>

A large collection of idioms listed alphabetically, with brief definitions.

<http://a4esl.org/q/h/idioms.html>

A selection of "self-study idiom quizzes" with answers.

<http://www.idiomsite.com/>

A website explaining the meaning of dozens of popular idioms.