

LESSONS

Playing with Words: Idioms

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GRADES 3–5

TYPE

NARRATIVE

In this lesson, students will illustrate the literal and figurative meaning of idioms and write using idioms.

SESSION 1 : PLAYING WITH WORDS: IDIOMS

Educators will explain the meaning and use of idioms in writing and show students examples.

YOU WILL NEED

- List of Idioms Handout
 - 1 copy per student
- Idiom Illustration and Writing Handout
 - 1 copy per student
 - Optional: Additional copies for students to use in STEP 1
- Optional: dry erase boards and dry erase markers, scrap paper, markers, colored pencils and/or crayons

BEFORE YOU START

- Prepare a completed example of [Idiom Illustration and Writing Handout](#) on chart paper using the idiom *fish out of water*. Or, if you choose, create your own example using a different idiom. You'll share this example in STEP 1.
- Decide whether you will use the idiom examples provided for students in STEP 1 or create your own.
- Decide what materials students will use to illustrate idioms

in pairs in STEP 1 (dry erase board and dry erase markers, scrap paper, copies of Idiom Illustration and Writing Handout).

- Decide how students will share their work in STEP 3. You can choose to have students share in pairs and/or small groups.
- Optional:
 - Gather materials (markers, colored pencils, crayons) for students to use when illustrating the literal and figurative meaning of the Idiom Illustration and Writing Handout in STEP 2.
 - Prepare to collect students' copies of Idiom Illustration and Writing Handout at the end of the session to create a class collection of idioms as a reference for future writing.

Educator Note: Idioms can be challenging for English Language Learners. When teaching this session, adjust the amount of time spent on each step as necessary.

HOW TO BEGIN

- Start by telling students about a time when you were speaking with someone who used an idiom and you did not understand because you were thinking of the literal meaning, instead of what the idiom really meant. An example is included below. You can substitute your own example based on your experiences and your students' interests instead of using the one provided.
- Guess what happened to me yesterday? I was talking to my friend who just started a new job earlier this week. I asked how it was going and she said, "I feel like a fish out of water." I thought to myself, that's weird. She isn't a fish, and her job has nothing to do with water. She's a doctor. So I said, "I'm sorry. I don't understand what you mean." She explained that she felt out of place, like a fish would feel out of water. Then I understood. It was a funny way of describing how she was feeling, though. My friend told me she was using an idiom.
- With students, define *idiom* and explain its purpose in language.
 - Ask students what they think an idiom is based on what they heard in the story. Or, ask them if they had ever heard the phrase *fish out of water* before.

- Define *idiom*, adding to the ideas generated by students.
 - An *idiom* is a phrase that means or expresses something different from its exact meaning.
- We use idioms when we are speaking and in our writing to express what we are trying to say in a more creative way. Idioms paint a picture for the listener or reader and often create a funny image in their mind.
- An idiom is an example of figurative language. Many writers use figurative language to make their writing come alive!
- Elicit other examples of idioms from students.
 - In the English language, there are many idioms that we use. You know a lot of them already, even if you may not realize it. What are some idioms you have used or heard?

Educator Note: Idioms also exist in other languages; however, these phrases often don't translate well because they're full of cultural nuance! You can explore this with your students by soliciting examples they know from their own experiences with other languages and/or read this [post](#) about idioms in other languages.

- Explain the literal and figurative meanings of an idiom. Show an example of an illustration for each meaning and the idiom used in writing.
- • Using the idiom from How to Begin as an example, show students an illustration of the literal and figurative meaning on chart paper in the same format as the Idiom Illustration and Writing Handout. Highlight the differences between the literal meaning (exactly what it says) and the figurative meaning (something different than what the words mean).
 - Idiom: A fish out of water
 - Figurative meaning: someone who is uncomfortable in a specific situation
 - Using the idiom from How to Begin as an example, show how the idiom is used in a sentence.
 - My friend felt like a fish out of water at her new job.
 - Using the prepared example from How to Begin, show how the idiom can be used in a narrative

piece of writing.

- Have students try it out in pairs.
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- Ask students to choose an idiom they are familiar with. Use one from the list below or substitute your own.
- • • • Idiom: Piece of cake
 - Figurative meaning: something very easy
 - After a lot of practice, riding a bike was a piece of cake.
- Idiom: Hold your horses
 - Figurative meaning: wait a minute
 - Hold your horses. We're not ready to leave yet.
- Idiom: Costs an arm and a leg
 - Figurative meaning: expensive
 - A plane ticket costs an arm and a leg so start saving now.
- Idiom: It's raining cats and dogs
 - Figurative meaning: it's raining a lot
 - It's raining cats and dogs, so don't forget your umbrella.
- Have students turn and talk in pairs to discuss the literal meaning and figurative meaning and how to illustrate them. Have one person sketch the illustration for the literal meaning and the other person sketch the illustration for the figurative meaning. They can use a dry erase board and marker, scrap paper, or a copy of Idiom Illustration and Writing Handout. Choose a few students to share out.
- Have students turn and talk in pairs to discuss how the idiom could be used in a sentence and a narrative piece of writing. Choose a few students to share out.
- • Continue practicing with examples as time permits and as students remain engaged in the activity.

- Give each student a copy of the [List of Idioms Handout](#) and [Idiom Illustration and Writing Handout](#). Have students select an idiom from the List of Idioms Handout to use while completing the Idiom Illustration and Writing Handout independently.
- While students work, circulate and provide support for students as needed.
- Optional: Give students markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons to color the illustrations when they are finished with their writing.
- After students have finished illustrating the literal and figurative meanings of their idiom and piece of writing that includes the idiom, have them share in pairs and/or small groups.
- After everyone has an opportunity to share, ask students to share an idiom they would like to use in a future piece of writing.
- To carry this work into future writing, you can collect students' work to publish a class collection of idioms that can be read and referred to as students write other pieces.