Language Arts
Idioms

An **idiom** is a group of words that, as a whole, has an entirely different meaning than its individual parts would suggest.

The easy way to figure out if an expression is an idiom is to think how someone who does not speak our language would react to its translation. In other words, if we translated the expression word-for-word into that person's language, that person would still have no idea what that expression means.

Idioms appear in every language, and English is definitely no exception. They become part of the language for many different reasons. An idiom may have been first used by a popular writer and because of that writer's popularity, that idiom may have become commonplace. An idiom can also be born from the slang of a teenager that catches on and spreads through a social network like Facebook. You never know.

The idea here is that we have to make ourselves aware of expressions in our language that simply do not make sense if we look at the meaning of the individual words. One important thing to keep in mind, however, is that most people won't just say something that doesn't make any sense. If we think through the words of an idiom and look at the context that it's in, we have a good chance of figuring out its meaning.

Here are some examples of popular idioms. Can you guess their meanings and origins?

- Since you were the one who broke your neighbor's window, you should **bite the bullet** and let him know that you're responsible.

- I'm a pretty good golfer, but putting has always been my **Achilles' heel**; I even miss putts from two feet away!

- Charlie hardly moves all day, but if he smells something good cooking in the kitchen, he will investigate what it is **at the drop of a hat**.

- After it **rained cats and dogs** yesterday, our basement became flooded.

- This presentation is a big deal for all of us, so you need to make sure you **dot your I's and cross your T's** so that you don't leave anything out of your section.

- I know you think I'm the one that started the rumor, but you're **barking up the wrong tree**.