



Learn English Through  
Stories.

U Series

Advanced Idioms

Adapted and modified by

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## **Banta Sandhu's New Chapter by K S Sandhu**

Banta Sandhu, a retired maths lecturer from Coventry, had spent over thirty years teaching A-level students. A majority of his pupils achieved A or A\* grades, and he was proud of that. Now, in his sixties, he had a new passion: reading and writing short stories especially for ESOL students like himself once upon a time.

Fifty years ago, when Banta first arrived in England from Punjab, his English was not up to scratch. He struggled a lot with everyday conversations, job interviews, and even simple shopping. There was no Google Translate, no language apps, no online videos – just hard work, dictionaries, and patience. Those early years taught him resilience.

One day, Banta decided to set off on a long journey around the world. He wanted to visit old friends, see new places, and share his love of languages. His trip took him from Birmingham to Vancouver (Surrey), Canada, then to Victoria, across to Yuba City in California, USA, on to Melbourne in Australia, and finally to Jalandhar in India before returning home to Coventry.

While travelling, he met many people who reminded him of his own past. In Vancouver, he reconnected with a cousin who was the apple of his late mother's eye – her favourite grandchild. They talked for hours about family and old times.

In Yuba City, Banta stayed with a Sikh community group. One evening, a young man asked him for advice on funding a small business. "I have to go cap in hand to the bank again," the man sighed. Banta smiled and replied, "Don't bury your head in the sand. Face the situation, prepare your plan, and ask confidently. Sometimes, you just have to swallow your pride.

"The trip was full of adventures. In Melbourne, Banta joined a group of travellers. "There's safety in numbers," one said. "Let's hit the road together!" They had a whale of a time exploring the city, laughing and sharing stories late into the night. They spent money like there was no tomorrow – on food, trips, and souvenirs. When Banta's funds ran low, he had to twist his mother's arm back home to send extra money. "Son, you're incorrigible!" his mother laughed, but she foots the bill anyway.

Back in Jalandhar, Banta organised competitions for local students: English reading and comprehension, and creative writing in Punjabi. The winners were

thrilled. One girl, quiet but brilliant, reminded him of himself. "You're as quiet as a mouse," he teased her gently, "but your ideas are loud and clear!"

"During these events, Banta often explained English idioms to the participants. He loved how they captured big ideas in small phrases. "English idioms are like hidden treasures," he told them. "Once you understand them, the language feels alive."

For example, he shared stories from his journey. "When my first teaching job in England felt like a failure, I worried it was just a flash in the pan – something bright but short-lived. But I proved myself wrong by working hard."

He explained "take a shine to" by saying, "I took a shine to my new colleague straight away; we became friends quickly." And after a scary flight delay, he joked, "We arrived home safe and sound, thank goodness!"

"He warned against common mistakes too. "Don't put your foot in it by saying the wrong thing in a sensitive moment!" And about ignoring problems: "Never bury your head in the sand – face difficulties head-on."

"Banta's travels ended when he returned to Coventry. Sitting in his small garden, he wrote stories full of idioms for ESOL learners. His new hobby wasn't a flash in the pan; it became his way of giving back. He hoped his tales would help others, just as learning English had helped him all those years ago.

Now, whenever students read his stories, they smile and think: "Banta uncle really understands our struggles – and he makes idioms fun!"

# 1

## What are idioms?

### A

#### Formulaic language

Idioms are a type of formulaic language. Formulaic language consists of fixed expressions which you learn and understand as units rather than as individual words, for example:

type of formulaic language	examples
greetings and good wishes	Hi there! See you soon! Happy birthday!
prepositional phrases	at the moment, in a hurry, from time to time
sayings, proverbs and quotations	It's a small world! Don't put all your eggs in one basket. To be or not to be – that is the question.
compounds	car park, bus stop, home-made
phrasal verbs	take off, look after, turn down
collocations	blonde hair, deeply disappointed

### B

#### Idioms

Idioms are fixed combinations of words whose meaning is often difficult to guess from the meaning of each individual word.

For example, if I say 'I **put my foot in it** the other day at Linda's house – I asked her if she was going to marry Simon', what does it mean? If you do not know that **put your foot in it** means *say something accidentally which upsets or embarrasses someone*, it is difficult to know exactly what the sentence means. It has a non-literal or idiomatic meaning.

Idioms are constructed in different ways, and this book gives you practice in a wide variety of types of idiom. Here are some examples:

Tim **took a shine to** [immediately liked] his teacher. (verb + object + preposition)

The band's number one hit was just **a flash in the pan** [something that happens only once] (idiomatic noun phrase)

Little Jimmy has been **as quiet as a mouse** [extremely quiet] all day. (simile. **See Unit 9 for more similes.**)

We arrived **safe and sound** [safely]. (binomial. **See Unit 10 for more binomials.**)

Idioms are often based on everyday things and ideas, for example, the human body:

Mark and Alistair **don't see eye to eye**. [don't agree with each other]

### C

#### How can I use idioms?

Many idioms are quite informal, so use them carefully. You will need to be able to understand a lot of idioms if you want to read English fiction, newspapers or magazines, or understand TV shows, films and songs. People also often use idioms for humour or to comment on themselves, other people and situations.

You will sound more natural and fluent if you can use idioms in everyday conversation or informal writing. Be careful not to use too many, though!

#### Language help

The words and word order of idioms are usually fixed, and we cannot change them in any way. For example, we cannot say *gave a shine to* or *sound and safe*.

## Exercises

2

- 1.1** Read the beginning of this story and label the type of formulaic language used in the words in bold. Use the information in A opposite to help you.

In 2009, I **set off** on a long journey. As I left my house, my neighbour shouted, 'Good luck!' I didn't know **at that moment** that I would not see him again for three years. I **boarded the plane** at Heathrow, and soon it **took off** for Malaysia. When we **touched down** in Kuala Lumpur, I couldn't wait to **get off** the plane. I **took a bus** to the city centre and **spent the night** at a youth hostel. The first person I met was someone I had been at school with years ago. 'It's a small world!' he said when he saw me.



- 1.2** Underline the seven idioms in the rest of the story you read in 1.1.

My friend suggested that we join forces. 'There's safety in numbers,' he said. 'Let's hit the road together.' I was in two minds whether to go with him but finally decided to say yes. We travelled together for six months and had a whale of a time. We spent money like there was no tomorrow. I had to twist my dad's arm and persuade him to send me some more money so I could travel further.

- 1.3** Choose the correct answer.

- 1 His first novel was just a) a flash in a pan b) a flash of the pan c) a flash in the pan.
- 2 I think Philip has a) given a shine to b) taken a shine to c) got a shine to his new babysitter.
- 3 I hope you have a good trip and come home a) safely and soundly b) sound and safe c) safe and sound.
- 4 Oh dear! I think I've a) had a foot in it b) put my foot in it c) got my foot in it!
- 5 Kate is really noisy, but her best friend is a) as quiet as a cat b) as quiet as a mouse c) as quiet like a mouse.

- 1.4** Look at these newspaper headlines. Each one has an idiom based on a part of the human body. What do you think they mean? Choose the correct answer.

1 University **goes cap in hand** to finance minister

3 Rita Soraz is **the apple of** Hollywood's eye

2 Airline **foots the bill** for delays and cancellations

4 Government is **burying its head in the sand**, says Opposition leader

- 1 A university a) apologises to the minister b) asks the minister for financial help c) awards the minister a great honour.
- 2 An airline a) has refused to pay the costs b) sends the bill to someone else c) will pay the costs.
- 3 Rita Soraz is a) loved by everyone in Hollywood b) hated by everyone in Hollywood c) missed by everyone in Hollywood.
- 4 The government is a) refusing to face a difficult situation b) about to resign c) making unpopular plans.

# Key

## Unit 1

**1.1** In 2009, I **set off** (phrasal verb) on a long journey. As I left my house, my neighbour shouted, '**Good luck!**' (greetings and good wishes) I didn't know **at that moment** (prepositional phrase) that I would not see him again for three years. I **boarded the plane** (collocation) at Heathrow, and soon it **took off** (phrasal verb) for Malaysia. When we **touched down** (phrasal verb) in Kuala Lumpur, I couldn't wait to **get off** (phrasal verb) the plane. I **took a bus** (collocation) to the **city centre** (compound) and **spent the night** (collocation) at a **youth hostel** (compound). The first person I met was someone I had been **at school** (prepositional phrase) with years ago. '**It's a small world!**' (saying or proverb) he said when he saw me.

**1.2** My friend suggested that we join forces. 'There's safety in numbers,' he said. 'Let's hit the road together.' I was in two minds whether to go with him but finally decided to say yes. We travelled together for six months and had a whale of a time. We spent money like there was no tomorrow. I had to twist my dad's arm and persuade him to send me some more money so I could travel further.

- 1.3**
- 1 c) a flash in the pan
  - 2 b) taken a shine to
  - 3 c) safe and sound
  - 4 b) put my foot in it
  - 5 b) as quiet as a mouse

- 1.4** 1 b    2 c    3 a    4 a