



Learn English Through Stories

**Adopted and modified by
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Harleen's New Life in Leicester by K S Sandhu

Harleen had recently moved to Leicester from Punjab. She had good English, but she wanted to improve it more, so she joined a B2 level class at the local college. The students came from many different countries, and the teacher, Mrs. Patel, was kind and patient.

One Monday morning, the lesson was about idioms. Mrs. Patel started by asking, "What are idioms?" She explained that idioms are expressions where the meaning is different from the literal words. They make English more colourful and natural. Then she described the main types of idioms:

- Type A: verb + object/complement (and/or adverbial), like "drive someone around the bend"
- Type B: prepositional phrase, like "out of the blue"
- Type C: compound, like "rough and ready"
- Type D: simile, like "as dry as a bone"
- Type E: binomial or trinomial, like "cool, calm and collected"
- Type F: whole clause or sentence, like "to cut a long story short"

The class listened carefully. Harleen took notes quickly.

After the explanation, Mrs. Patel said, "Now let's hear a real story using many idioms. Listen and try to understand them in context."

She began:

"Last weekend, my brother visited me unexpectedly – he arrived out of the blue! I wasn't ready, but I stayed cool, calm and collected. He always gives me a hard time about my cooking, saying it's too spicy. It drives me around the bend when he complains, but I put my foot down this time. I told him, 'If you don't like it, make it yourself!'

To kill two birds with one stone, I suggested we go shopping together and then cook a simple meal. The supermarket was busy, but everything happened in the blink of an eye – we bought the food and returned home quickly. The kitchen was a bit rough and ready because I had just moved in, but it worked. Unfortunately, there was a bone of contention between us: he wanted to watch football, but I wanted to study. He tried to pass the buck and said it was his turn to choose the TV channel. I said, 'No way! You're lying through your

teeth if you say you don't care.' To cut a long story short, we argued a little, but then we laughed and watched a film instead. At the end of the day, he left safe and sound, and the flat was as dry as a bone after we cleaned up – no mess at all!"

The class laughed. Harleen understood most of the idioms because the story made them clear. She raised her hand. "Teacher, I like this way of learning. The idioms feel real now."

Mrs. Patel smiled. "Good! Idioms are everywhere in daily conversations. The more you hear them in stories, the easier they become."

After class, Harleen walked home feeling happy. She thought about her own life in England. Sometimes the weather drove her around the bend, but she was learning fast. She decided to use one new idiom every day. "To cut a long story short," she said to herself with a smile, "I'm enjoying my new life here."

1

What are idioms?

A Idioms and meaning

Idioms are expressions which have a meaning that is not obvious from the individual words. For example, the idiom **drive someone round the bend** means *make someone angry or frustrated*, but we cannot know this just by looking at the words.

The best way to understand an idiom is to see it in context. If someone says:

That noise is driving me round the bend! It's so annoying!

then the context and common sense tells us that **drive round the bend** means something different from driving a car round a curve in the road. The context tells us the noise is annoying and that it's having an effect on the person hearing it.

B Types of idioms

form	example	meaning
verb + object/complement (and/or adverbial)	kill two birds with one stone	produce two useful results by just doing one action
prepositional phrase	in the blink of an eye	in an extremely short time
compound	a bone of contention	something which people argue and disagree over
simile /'simili/ (as + adjective + as, or like + noun)	as dry as a bone	very dry indeed
binomial (word + and + word)	rough and ready	crude and lacking sophistication
trinomial (word + word + and + word)	cool, calm and collected	relaxed, in control, not nervous
whole clause or sentence	to cut a long story short	to tell the main points, but not all the fine details

C Fixed aspects of idioms

Most idioms are fixed in their form, and cannot be changed or varied. Sometimes, however, the grammar or the vocabulary can be varied slightly. Where this book or a dictionary gives information on what can be varied, always note it in your vocabulary notebook.

variation	example
Occasionally an idiom in the active voice can be used in the passive.	Government Ministers always pass the buck if they are challenged about poverty. [blame someone else / refuse to accept responsibility] The buck has been passed from Minister to Minister. No one seems prepared to accept the responsibility.
Some verb-based idioms also have noun-compound forms.	There is too much buck-passing in government nowadays. No one accepts the blame for anything.
One or more words in the idiom can be varied.	don't give me a hard/rough/tough time . [don't make things difficult for me]

Exercises

1.1 How much can you guess about the meaning of these idioms just by looking at the context? Tick the boxes according to what you can understand about the words in bold.

- 1 I decided I was going to get a place at university **by hook or by crook**. It had always been my dream to study for a degree in history.

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ CAN'T TELL	
means using illegal methods if necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
means nothing will stop me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
means I was very determined	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	See Unit 18.

- 2 The government and the unions are **at loggerheads**; there may be a general strike.

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ CAN'T TELL	
means have a good relationship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
means hate each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
means disagree very strongly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	See Unit 22.

- 3 We had to **pay through the nose** to get our visas in five days instead of the usual 30 days.

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ CAN'T TELL	
means suffer in some way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
means pay a small sum of money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
means pay a large sum of money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	See Unit 24.

1.2 Classify the idioms in the sentences below according to their grammatical type:

Type A	verb + object/complement (and/or adverbial)	Type D	simile
Type B	prepositional phrase	Type E	binomial or trinomial
Type C	compound	Type F	whole clause or sentence

- Should we fly or go by train? What are the pros and cons?
Type: **See Unit 11.**
- I'm having second thoughts about going on holiday with Jean. She can be a bit difficult.
Type: **See Unit 6.**
- When I had finished all my exams, I felt as free as a bird.
Type: **See Unit 62.**
- I don't know much about design, so I gave the decorator a free hand in my new flat.
Type: **See Unit 47.**
- She comes from a rather well-to-do family. She's always had a comfortable life.
Type: **See Unit 24.**
- My old school friend Harriet arrived out of the blue. I hadn't seen her for 15 years.
Type: **See Unit 43.**

1.3 Correct the mistakes in the idioms in these sentences. Use the clues in brackets. Use a good general dictionary or a dictionary of idioms if necessary.

- My father's foot was put down when I said I wanted a car for my seventeenth birthday. He said I was too young. (grammar – voice) **See Unit 48.**
- Her words put the cat among the birds; Sam is furious. (vocabulary) **See Unit 38.**
- You'll be pleased to hear we arrived sound and safe in Peru. (binomial) **See Unit 17.**
- He was lying in his teeth when he said he had got a first-class grade in his exam; the truth is he failed. (grammar – small word) **See Unit 53.**

Key phrases and idioms with like

Unit 1

1.1 1 by hook or by crook

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ CAN'T TELL
means using illegal methods if necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
means nothing will stop me	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
means I was very determined	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 at loggerheads

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ CAN'T TELL
means have a good relationship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
means hate each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
means disagree very strongly	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3 pay through the nose

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW/ CAN'T TELL
means suffer in some way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
means pay a small sum of money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
means pay a large sum of money	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.2 1 E 2 A 3 D 4 F 5 C 6 B

- 1.3
- 1 My father **put his foot down** when I said I wanted a car for my seventeenth birthday. He said I was too young.
 - 2 Her words put the cat among the **pigeons**; Sam is furious.
 - 3 You'll be pleased to hear we arrived **safe and sound** in Peru.
 - 4 He was lying **through** his teeth when he said he had got a first-class grade in his exam; the truth is he failed.