

American Idioms

American English has a lot of unique expressions that come from the daily speech patterns of ordinary people. These sayings, which are unique to people and a language, are called *idioms*. The words mean something very different than the literal or exact meaning of each word. For example, if your mother says, “you got up on the wrong side of the bed,” she really means that you’re in a bad mood. If you buy something “for a song,” you didn’t literally sing for it, but what you bought was inexpensive.

If someone is “pulling your leg,” he or she is trying to fool you. If your friend “sold you down the river,” he or she betrayed you. When you are getting secrets “straight from the horse’s mouth,” you are getting the

information from a reliable source. If you’re “at the end of your rope,” you can’t handle the problem anymore. You may want to “knock their socks off” (impress) if you try out for a play. Your best friend will tell you not to “spill the beans” when telling you a secret he or she doesn’t want anyone else to know. You will have to “bite the bullet” if you do something wrong and have to face the consequences. Don’t “jump down your brother’s throat” (scold severely) if you’re angry with him. Just “take the bull by the horns” (be in control) and “stick to your guns” (keep your position) when you have to do a tough job.

Check Your Understanding

- Which idiom means to face the consequences?
 - “sold you down the river”
 - “for a song”
 - “bite the bullet”
 - “at the end of your rope”
- What is the meaning of the idiom “people in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones”?
 - Use wooden walls in a house.
 - Don’t accuse others of things you also do.
 - Don’t peek into people’s homes.
 - Be careful of glass.
- If the “cat got your tongue,” what is your real problem?
 - You don’t know what to say.
 - You’re afraid of cats.
 - You’re “up a creek without a paddle.”
 - You have too many cats in your house.
- If you’re “sitting pretty” and “feel like a million dollars,” which phrase best describes your mood?
 - sad and angry
 - happy and comfortable
 - in danger and in trouble
 - lucky and upset