

Action Idioms

This unit highlights idioms that describe actions. Below are two lists of idioms that begin with verbs, or action words. The first, *Ten to Teach*, presents the 10 expressions introduced and taught in this unit. The second, *More to Mention*, offers additional expressions in this theme that you may want to mention or use to create additional activities.

Ten to Teach

1. blow the whistle
2. rock the boat
3. bite one's tongue
4. get off the hook
5. draw the line
6. hit the nail on the head
7. carry the ball
8. get to the bottom of
9. chill out
10. catch you later

More to Mention

- ▶ beat around the bush
- ▶ bury the hatchet
- ▶ come out of one's shell
- ▶ burn one's bridges
- ▶ put a cork in it
- ▶ hold your horses
- ▶ saw logs
- ▶ throw in the towel
- ▶ kick the bucket
- ▶ pull oneself together

Using This Unit

Begin by reading to students the basic *Ten to Teach* idioms. First, ask students if they have ever heard or used any of these expressions, and if so, how and where. Next, tell the students that you are going to read the expressions again, and this time they are to listen for anything they have in common. Accept all answers, and then point out that all the expressions begin with verbs, or action words. Teach or review the definition of an *idiom*—an expression that means something other than what the words actually say. If you like, read the list a third time and let students speculate on what each idiom might really mean.

On the next page is a story that includes the *Ten to Teach* idioms. Note that the story is not intended to be an example of good writing; it would not be natural to use 10 idioms in such a short piece. The story is written at about a 1.0 reading level. The purpose of the story is simply to use all the expressions in context. The story is a phone conversation, which demonstrates how frequently people use idioms in casual conversation. You may want to have two students read it as if on the phone. This reproducible page includes the story and questions for students to answer related to the idioms used.

The final five pages of the unit introduce the basic *Ten to Teach* idioms individually, two to a page. These can be reproduced as is, or cut apart into separate cards. Use these after the story to reinforce the meanings of the idioms or to test students' understanding of them. Or, use them before the story as preparation for reading or for scaffolding as needed.

Optional: Use one of the ideas or activities in the introductory section of this book as an extension or follow-up to the unit.

Name _____ Date _____

Below is a story that includes 10 idioms that begin with verbs. Can you tell what they mean?

Take Action: A Phone Conversation

Ring...

Joe: Hello?

Chris: Hey, Joe.

Joe: Hey. What's up?

Chris: Did you see what I saw during the test today?

Joe: Yeah, if you mean a certain person who looked like she was copying answers.

Chris: Should I **blow the whistle** on her or keep quiet and not **rock the boat**?

Joe: Well, if you **bite your tongue** about this, she will get away with it.

Chris: The trouble is that I am pretty sure, but not positive, that she was cheating.

Joe: If she was, do you want her to **get off the hook**?

Chris: No. I saw her do it before, but I let it pass. I guess it is time to **draw the line**.

Joe: You've **hit the nail on the head**. Now it is up to you to **carry the ball**.

Chris: I guess saying something is the only way to **get to the bottom of it**.

Joe: I know it will be hard, but try to **chill out**. Just do what you know is the right thing.

Chris: OK. I will. Thanks for helping me figure this out.

Joe: No problem. **Catch you later**.

Click

Read or listen to the conversation again. Then answer these questions about the idioms. To help you find them, the idioms are in **dark print** in the text.

1. If someone suggests that you **chill out**, circle the words that tell how you might be feeling.

nervous hot scared troubled warm
excited anxious feverish worried

2. Joe and Chris are not talking about nails, balls, whistles, drawing lines, or catching each other. What are they talking about? Describe the problem and solution. _____

3. Would you *blow the whistle* or not *rock the boat*? _____

4. Is the language in this conversation more like or unlike the way you talk to a friend on the phone? How? _____

Action Idioms (cont.)

Name _____ Date _____

Idiom ► **blow the whistle**

Meaning ► **tattle; tell on someone who is doing something they shouldn't**

How It Is Used ► My brother Dave told Mom that he was going to his friend's house after school. I knew that they were really going to the mall. I wondered if I should **blow the whistle** on him.

Which Is Right? ► Read the two selections. Choose the one in which **blow the whistle** is used as an idiom. Circle the number of your choice.

- ❶ During testing time at school, we get a few minutes of extra recess. Mr. Martinez said that he would *blow the whistle* when it was time to line up.
- ❷ Our class took a field trip to the museum. The guide told us not to touch anything. She said that if we saw kids touching a display, we should *blow the whistle* on them.

Idiom ► **rock the boat**

Meaning ► **cause trouble where there wasn't any; upset a calm situation**

How It Is Used ► My parents were in a good mood last night. I decided not to **rock the boat** by asking if I could have a raise in my allowance.

Which Is Right? ► Read the two selections. Choose the one in which **rock the boat** is used as an idiom. Circle the number of your choice.

- ❶ Last summer, Tanya's family went to the lake for a week. The first day they rented a small boat. Tanya was nervous as she got in. She tried not to *rock the boat* as she stepped aboard.
- ❷ My sister and I argue a lot, but recently we have been getting along better. When she got a new sweater, I was tempted to ask her if I could borrow it, but I decided not to *rock the boat*.

Name _____ Date _____

Below is a story that includes 13 idioms about animals. Can you tell what they mean?

Case Closed

I've been a police detective for 25 years, and in this **dog-eat-dog** world, I thought I had seen it all. Coming from anyone else, you might not believe this story. However, I am going to give it to you **straight from the horse's mouth**.

A couple of years ago, a man had a pet that he thought was **the cat's meow**. It wasn't a cat, though. It wasn't even a dog. It was an alligator. At first he thought it was cool. It was just a baby and only a foot or so long. He kept it **squirreled away** in his backyard. Then, when people would come over, he'd **monkey around** with it and they would **hoof it** out of there. He'd just laugh because Alley was **all bark and no bite**.

But, as time passed, Alley grew. Soon he was more than six feet long. Now that's a **horse of a different color**. The man came to realize that if the police found out that he had Alley, his **goose would be cooked**. It was time to **take the bull by the horns**.

Late one night, the man and his buddy wrapped Alley in a blanket and carried him to the edge of a lake in a nearby neighborhood park and set him loose. They thought he would never be seen again, but he was—and by a lot of people. For a while, Alley seemed to **play cat and mouse** with the officials to avoid being captured. That's where I come in. I didn't catch Alley, but I did catch the guy who put him there. Believe me, when I got to the bottom of this, that guy had to **eat crow**. He was **barking up the wrong tree** with me!

It took a while, but both the criminal and Alley were caught, and both are behind bars—one in jail and the other at the zoo!

Read or listen to the story again. Then answer these questions about the idioms. To help you find them, the idioms are in **dark print** in the story.

1. At first, did the man think his pet was loud and frightening or wonderful?

2. Which idiom explains that the man took charge of his growing gator?

3. According to the man, was Alley fierce or friendly?

4. Would you have **hoofed it** along with the other visitors? Explain.

5. Would you **monkey around** with an alligator? Explain.

Idioms About Animals (cont.)

Name _____ Date _____

Idiom ► **straight from the horse's mouth**

Meaning ► information directly from the source, not from someone else

How It Is Used ► My brother told me that our parents were going to take us to King's Amusement Park next weekend, but I didn't believe him. I decided to ask my dad, so I'd hear it *straight from the horse's mouth*.

Which Is Right? ► Read the two selections. Choose the one in which *straight from the horse's mouth* is used as an idiom. Circle the number of your choice.

- ❶ Paul had just shown Polly how to put a bridle on his horse, Fawn. When Polly went to remove the bridle, she pulled it *straight from the horse's mouth*.
- ❷ There were rumors that we would be having a class party on Friday. I asked our teacher so that I'd hear it *straight from the horse's mouth*.

Idiom ► **the cat's meow**

Meaning ► really great

How It Is Used ► Gina had always liked bejeweled clothes and shiny jewelry. When she spotted a pair of jeans with gold, blue, and green gems, she exclaimed, "Those jeans are *the cat's meow!*"

Which Is Right? ► Read the two selections. Choose the one in which *the cat's meow* is used as an idiom. Circle the number of your choice.

- ❶ As they left the theater, Jenna and Anne talked excitedly about the great scenes in the movie they had just seen. Anne told Jenna that her favorite part was the big musical number at the end. Jenna agreed: "That scene was *the cat's meow,*" she said.
- ❷ Hilary had one important job when she watched her neighbor's house. When she heard *the cat's meow,* she knew to let him in for food and water.

Name _____ Date _____

Idiom ► **squirrel away**

Meaning ► hide things or put them away for a later time

How It Is Used ► Fran couldn't help but notice that her good markers kept disappearing. She spied on her little sister, Agnes, as Agnes snuck into her room, took two markers, and then *squirreled them away* in her own art box.

Which Is Right? ► Read the two selections. Choose the one in which *squirrel away* is used as an idiom. Circle the number of your choice.

- ❶ Peter kept asking his mom for pennies. He placed them in a sock, and hid them in the back of his drawer. When Peter's mom was putting his clothes away, she discovered his bundle of pennies. She figured that he must be *squirreling them away* to save up for a new toy.
- ❷ Hugh's stuffed animals were all over his bedroom floor. He had nearly finished putting them all back, when he heard his mom call from the living room, "Hugh! Come put this *squirrel away!*"

Idiom ► **monkey around**

Meaning ► fool around; goof off; play instead of work

How It Is Used ► Freddie and his friends were splashing and squirting one another in the pool. His sister Terry and her friends did not want to get wet. They asked the boys to stop *monkeying around*.

Which Is Right ► Read the two selections. Choose the one in which *monkey around* is used as an idiom. Circle the number of your choice.

- ❶ Bonnie and her mom loved the zoo. When they entered the primates area, they found themselves surrounded by apes, chimps, and lemurs. Bonnie pointed out a feisty *monkey around* the banana tree. He called and screeched until Bonnie threw a peanut for him.
- ❷ Jake and his friends were enjoying their time on the beach. Before long, they were kicking sand and tossing one another into the water. The lifeguard blew his whistle and instructed them to stop *monkeying around*. If they didn't, they would be asked to leave the beach.