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# **Idioms in American Life**

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Julie Howard

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# To the Teacher

## ABOUT THE BOOK

This introductory book of idioms is designed to be used in advanced-beginning and intermediate classes of ESL/EFL and is appropriate for adult, college-level, or secondary school students.

An idiom is a group of two or more words that has a special meaning different from the meanings of its component parts. The idioms in this book have been selected with regard to frequency of use and degree of difficulty. The lesson design is based on the following premises:

1. Advanced beginners and intermediate students have encountered idioms and are curious about them.
2. These students can and should learn to understand and use idioms.
3. To attain fluency learners must come away from the lesson with a clear understanding of the idioms in both situational and grammatical contexts.
4. A feeling of accomplishment will result when students have had intensive practice in the use of a few idioms at a time. Memorization of long lists of idioms that they cannot use confidently will result in discouragement and apathy.

The text consists of twenty self-contained lessons. There is a review section after every four lessons, and a crossword puzzle follows lessons 10 and 20.

The book will reinforce students' grammar, writing, and conversation skills. Manipulation of statements, questions, and negatives in the simple present, present continuous, simple past, and future tenses is required throughout. As a rule, items requiring familiarity with the present perfect are located in the second half of the book.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE LESSONS

Each lesson presents five idioms and is divided into six sections:

- I. *Dialogue.* The dialogues in which the idioms are introduced are adult in content and illustrative of real-life situations. Each is entitled with an expression or proverb that is explained in the appendix. Each dialogue consists of seven parts and is short enough to be memorized.
- II. *Definitions.* Definitions are not given in the lessons so that students may have opportunities to guess meanings through the context of the dialogues. Definitions are listed in the index/glossary at the back of the book in the simplest terms possible without compromising the meaning.
- III. *Notes.* These offer clarification and practical points to be considered in the use of the idioms.



- IV. *Structure Practice.* Exercises reinforce grammar skills while increasing familiarity with the uses of the idioms. Words in parentheses make students aware of possible changes in form.
- V. *Comprehension.* This section tests learners' understanding of the idioms after their exposure to them in preceding parts of the lesson.
- VI. *More Practice.* These exercises allow students to use the idioms according to their own abilities and life experiences.

Each lesson, presented in its entirety, will occupy approximately forty-five minutes of class time. Part or all of sections IV, V, and VI, however, can be assigned for homework, thus reducing the time expended in class.

HOW TO USE THE LESSONS

- 1. Read the dialogue aloud to your students. You may want a student to participate with you, or you may ask two students to read.
- 2. Try to elicit definitions of the idiom by asking comprehension questions about the dialogue. Students should be encouraged to guess meanings, and they may write the definitions in section II. Discuss the title and its relationship to the dialogue; then reread the dialogue, asking students to repeat after you or to practice in pairs.
- 3. Write each idiom on the chalkboard, using parentheses to indicate words capable of change in form.

Example: (take one's) time

Ask students to complete sentences requiring manipulation.

Cue	Response
I	take my time.
She	takes her time.
Yesterday we	took our time.

This step may not be necessary after students have become familiar with the format of the exercises. At this stage you should point out the idiosyncrasies of the idioms, which are found in section III.

- 4. Sections IV and V can be completed by students in class. Afterward, write the answers on the board so that students may correct their errors. Any appropriate answer should be accepted. In some cases more than one may be correct.
- 5. Section VI may be used for class discussion, written practice, or both. Encourage students to use the idioms in their responses.

Before beginning a new lesson, take a few minutes to review the idioms introduced in the preceding one. Ask for definitions and sample sentences.

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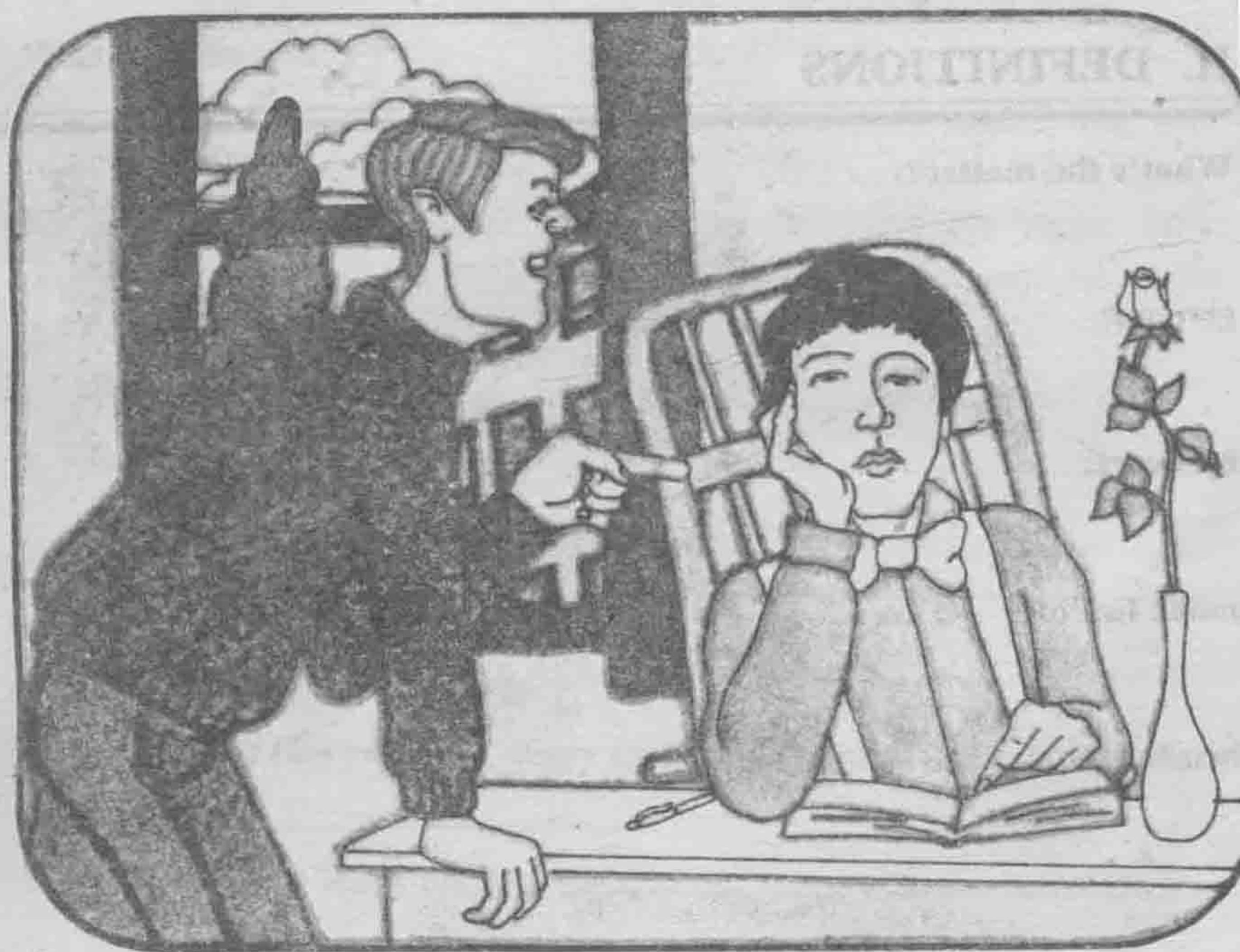
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# Lesson 1





## **I. DIALOGUE: Easier Said Than Done**

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Tom: What's the matter? You look upset.

Marco: I **give up**! I'll never learn the past tense of these verbs.

Tom: That's easy. Just add *ed* to make the past tense.

Marco: I mean the irregular verbs. You have to learn them **by heart**.  
The past of *go* is *went*. It's crazy!

Tom: Why don't you sleep with the grammar book under your pillow?  
Maybe that will help.

Marco: Don't **make fun of** me! This is serious. We're going to have a test  
next week.

Tom: I'm sorry. I'll help you **brush up on** those verbs.

## **II. DEFINITIONS**

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What's the matter?:

give up:

by heart:

make fun of:

brush up on:

### III. NOTES

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**give up:** This idiom is often followed by a gerund (verb + *ing*).

*Example:* If you want to lose weight, you'll have to give up eating candy.

### IV. STRUCTURE PRACTICE

---

Write the idioms in the spaces provided. Be sure the statements agree in person and tense. Some statements will be negative (-). You may change the form of the words in parentheses.

1. **What (be) the matter?**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ with Helen last night? She was very quiet.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ with William? He looks very sad.

2. **(give) up**

- a. My brother \_\_\_\_\_ smoking last year.
- (-)b. He tries very hard to learn English. He \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. Why \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_ running? It was very good for you.

3. **by heart**

- a. I have read that poem so many times that I know it \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. An actor must learn his role \_\_\_\_\_



## 4. (make) fun of

- a. I thought my new hat was beautiful, but my husband \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ it.
- b. Why \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_  
Bill's southern accent? That wasn't very nice of you.
- c. Robert \_\_\_\_\_ modern art because he  
doesn't understand it.

## 5. (brush) up on

- a. He usually \_\_\_\_\_ grammar on the week-  
ends because he doesn't have much time during the week.
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ you help me \_\_\_\_\_  
idioms next week?
- c. I \_\_\_\_\_ my Spanish while I was in  
Mexico on vacation.

**V. COMPREHENSION**

Write the idioms from this lesson in the spaces provided. Be sure to use the correct person and tense.

1. It's a good idea to learn your social security number \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
2. I'm going to France next year. I'll have to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ my French before I go.
3. Ann looks angry. \_\_\_\_\_ with her?
4. The comedian \_\_\_\_\_ the president's for-  
eign policy on television last night.
5. The doctor told him to \_\_\_\_\_ drinking  
coffee and tea.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ with the oven? It burned my bread
7. You should never \_\_\_\_\_ another person's religion.
8. John finally \_\_\_\_\_ after trying to find his dog for three days.

## VI. MORE PRACTICE

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Respond with complete sentences, using the idioms as often as possible.

1. What poem or song did you learn **by heart** when you were a child? Do you still remember it?
2. What is something you should **give up** doing?
3. What are you going to **brush up on** this weekend?
4. Children are not very nice sometimes. Was there someone the children **made fun of** when you were a child? Why did they **make fun of** that person?
5. Your friend tells you his car is in the garage for repairs. How can you ask him what the problem is?



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# Lesson 2

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## I. DIALOGUE: Like Father, Like Son

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George: What a wonderful baby! And he certainly **takes after** me, doesn't he?

Kate: Oh, yes. He doesn't look like me **at all**. He has your eyes, your chin, your. . .

George: Uh-oh! He's going to cry again!

Kate: **Take it easy**, George. He's only yawning. Besides, you can't **go to pieces** every time the baby cries. Your mother told me you only stopped crying to eat.

George: You're right. I shouldn't be so nervous. We'll have to **take turns** watching him when you go back to work.

Kate: Now he really is crying.

George: I guess he has my personality, too.

## II. DEFINITIONS

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**take after:**

**at all:**

**take it easy:**

**go to pieces:**

**take turns:**



### III. NOTES

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**at all:** This idiom usually is used for emphasis in negative statements and questions.

*Examples:* I **couldn't** eat at all when I was sick.

**Didn't** you eat anything at all?

**take turns:** This expression is often followed by a gerund (verb + *ing*).

*Example:* My mother and aunt take turns **making** our Thanksgiving dinners.

### IV. STRUCTURE PRACTICE

---

Write the idioms in the spaces provided. Be sure the statements agree in person and tense. Some statements will be negative (-). You may change the form of the words in parentheses.

1. (take) after

a. She \_\_\_\_\_ her mother in both appearance and personality.

(-)b. Paul \_\_\_\_\_ anyone in the family.

c. When he was young, he \_\_\_\_\_ his mother, but now he looks more like his father.

2. at all

a. Carl doesn't play the guitar \_\_\_\_\_.  
anymore.

b. They don't eat meat \_\_\_\_\_. They're vegetarians.

## 3. (take) it easy

a. We had a wonderful vacation. We really \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

b. He doesn't work very hard. He usually \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

## 4. (go) to pieces

a. When Barbara heard the news, she \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

b. He \_\_\_\_\_ every time someone in the family is sick.

(–)c. Ann \_\_\_\_\_ when she lost her job. She was very calm.

## 5. (take) turns

a. It was an easy trip. My brother and I \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ driving.

b. Betty always \_\_\_\_\_ cleaning the house with her sister.

c. We \_\_\_\_\_ cooking dinner next week.

**V. COMPREHENSION**

Write the idioms from this lesson in the spaces provided. Be sure to use the correct person and tense.

1. Jane \_\_\_\_\_ when her father died.

2. His doctor told him to \_\_\_\_\_.

3. Frank \_\_\_\_\_ his grandfather. They're both very good musicians.



4. The children have only one bicycle. They have to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ using it.
5. \_\_\_\_\_, Sally! You don't have to drive so fast.
6. I don't speak Russian \_\_\_\_\_.
7. There aren't enough computers for all the students, so they'll have to \_\_\_\_\_.
8. I look like my father. I \_\_\_\_\_ him.

## VI. MORE PRACTICE

Respond with complete sentences, using the idioms as often as possible.

1. What do you like to do when you **take it easy**?
2. Whom do you **take after**? In what ways?
3. What are some things you don't do **at all**?
4. Describe a situation in which you **take (or took) turns** doing something with someone else.
5. Describe a situation in which you or someone you know **went to pieces**.