

Topic: Idioms and Slang

Let's get started... Americans use many idioms and slang. This can make it difficult to understand what people are saying! Have you heard someone say something that seems to make no sense at all? They might be using an idiom or slang.

With your group, write a list of American idioms or slang that you have heard. Try to explain what each one means. Check with your teacher to see if you are correct.

Background:

Idioms and slang are special words and language used within a culture or group of people. For example, in the United States, there is "California slang" and "New York slang", and they are very different. If an idiomatic expression or slang becomes popular enough, it may spread across the country or even around the world.

Language changes very quickly now because of TV and the Internet. Old slang may become outdated and be replaced by new words and phrases. When someone uses a new idiom or slang, it can be difficult to understand what they mean. But if it is used by enough people, it may become part of common, everyday conversation.



In pairs for 5 minutes, ask and answer these questions:

- Do people in your home country use idioms or slang? Do the young people use a lot of slang? What is one of the common idioms or slang words used in your native language? What does it mean literally? What does the idiom mean? When do people say it?
- Is there a particular idiom (in English or in your native language) that you like? Is there one that you do not like?

Share your partner's answers with the group.

Discussion Questions:

In your home country do some groups of people use slang more than others? (An age group? An economic group? A social group?) Do you know something about people just by listening to the way they talk?

In America where do you hear the most slang and idioms used? When is it most difficult for you to understand English? (Conversations, TV shows, news, telephone, business, etc.)

Have you heard any strange slang words or idioms lately?
Do you know what they mean? Talk with a partner.

In English, we have animal and/or food words in many of our idioms and slang. Is it that true in your native language? If not, what is common in your idioms and slang?

Some idioms have been around for many years and people may not know their origin. Are there any idioms like that in your native language? Share with a partner.

How do you feel about slang and idioms? Are they good or bad?

Who invents an idiom or a slang word? Who decides what it means?

Here are some common American expressions. What do they mean? When are they are used? First look at them with a partner, and then share with the whole group.

Idiomatic expression or slang	When is it used?	What does it mean?
It costs an arm and a leg.		
I am so hungry I could eat a horse.		
She let the cat out of the bag.		
He is a couch potato.		
I am going to catch some z's.		
She spilled the beans.		
Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.		
His bark is worse than his bite.		
She wears her heart on her sleeve.		
He is really cool.		
She is a backseat driver		
I bent over backwards to help them.		
Cross your fingers!		
Those children drive me up the wall.		
That was the icing on the cake.		
I'm on the fence about it.		
She made the cake from scratch.		

New words and Idioms: idiom, slang, makes no sense, idiomatic phrase, expression, literally, spill the beans, let the cat out of the bag, straight from the horse's mouth, economic, social, origin, invent, outdated.