

# Shakespeare's Interesting Idioms

## Explanation: What is an idiom?

An idiom or idiomatic expression is a group of words in a fixed order that have a meaning which cannot be worked out by looking up the individual words in the dictionary. Their meaning has to be learned by speakers of the language.

## ... and what does Shakespeare have to do with all of this?



Shakespeare wrote his plays more than 400 years ago, but the images he creates in our minds can be just as lively and interesting today as they were then. Some of the idioms that can be found in Shakespeare's writings are practiced in the following activities. They are still used in today's English!

### Activity 2: Pair the following idioms with their meanings.

#### Idiom

- 1 I haven't slept a wink.  
(*Cymbeline*)
- 2 Love's blind  
(*The Merchant of Venice*)
- 3 Cruel to be kind  
(*Hamlet*)
- 4 In a pickle  
(*The Tempest*)
- 5 He's eaten me out of house and home.  
(*Henry IV, Part 2*)

#### Meaning

- a You have to hurt people sometimes for their own good.
- b In a difficult or unpleasant situation
- c To eat a lot
- d When you love someone you don't see his or her faults.
- e I couldn't sleep last night.

### Activity 3: Match the following idioms with their meaning or definition.

#### Idiom

- 1 Lie-low  
(*Much Ado About Nothing*)
- 2 Good riddance  
(*Troilus and Cressida*)
- 3 Night-owl  
(*Twelfth Night*)
- 4 As dead as a doornail  
(*Henry VI, Part 2*)
- 5 A charmed life  
(*Macbeth*)
- 6 Send him packing  
(*Henry VI, Part 1*)

#### Meaning or definition

- a Dead beyond any doubt
- b A life that seems to have been protected by magic or a spell
- c To hide so you will not be caught by someone
- d To tell someone to go away, usually because you are annoyed with them
- e A person who stays up and is active late into the night
- f To be happy when someone or something is gone

**Activity 4:** Try to find the German equivalent for the following idioms.

1 All that glitters is not gold. (*The Merchant of Venice*)

German equivalent: \_\_\_\_\_

2 All's well that ends well. (*All's Well That Ends Well*)

\_\_\_\_\_

3 To wear one's heart upon one's sleeve (*Othello*)

\_\_\_\_\_

4 Much ado about nothing. (*Much Ado About Nothing*)

\_\_\_\_\_

5 Brevity is the soul of wit. (*Hamlet*)

\_\_\_\_\_

6 Break the ice (*The Taming of the Shrew*)

\_\_\_\_\_

7\* German idiom: "Ich verstehe nur Bahnhof."

What would be the literal translation? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the English equivalent for this idiom? \_\_\_\_\_

(Bonus question: Where does the idiom come from? You can use the internet for help.)

**Activity 5:** Complete each sentence with the appropriate idiom.

1 My mum's really angry with me because I broke the vase. I think it's best if I \_\_\_\_\_ for a little while!

2 I have an amazing family, a great job and a beautiful home. I really do lead \_\_\_\_\_.

3 He acted like an idiot, I think you should \_\_\_\_\_.

4 It was a terrible job anyway, \_\_\_\_\_!

5 I've been a real \_\_\_\_\_ since I started university. It's normal for me to stay awake until 3 o'clock in the morning.

6 'Are you sure the mouse is dead?' 'Definitely, \_\_\_\_\_'.

7 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(Create your own sentence with an idiom from the activities above which has not been used before.)

