

B2.10 Idioms in Conversation - Handout

1 Idioms are a very noticeable feature of colloquial, spoken English. In fact, there are so many of them, regularly used, that they represent a good argument against having English as the international language. However, they are usually quite easy to remember as they often employ colourful imagery. Also, learners of English are generally very interested to discover their meaning. Some of them (but unfortunately not many) do translate word for word into other European languages.

2 These idioms are paired according to the categories described in the introductory explanation. So, the first two relate to the idea that 'argument is war', the second pair both use 'fire' imagery, the third pair relate to the idea that 'life is a journey', the fourth pair are 'animal' idioms, then there are two 'colour' idioms and finally there are a couple of 'food' idioms.

The learner should be able to find these idioms in a good monolingual dictionary. But your oral explanation and examples should serve to clarify and consolidate these explanations. The following definitions all come from: <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>

Answers: *to keep your head down* = to continue doing something quietly, especially when there is trouble happening around you; *to get caught in the crossfire* = angry words or actions between two people that may accidentally affect other people who are not directly involved; *to get on like a house on fire* = to become good friends very quickly and have a lot to talk to each other about; *a blazing row* = a very angry argument; *to be at a crossroads* = a point during your life when you have to make an important decision about what to do next; *a dead-end job* = a job that provides you with no chance of getting a better job; *plenty more fish in the sea* = used for telling someone whose boyfriend or girlfriend has left them that they will soon have another relationship; *until the cows come home* = for a very long time; *to see red* = to become very angry; *a white lie* = a lie told to avoid making someone upset, not for your own advantage or in order to harm someone else; *to sell like hot cakes* = to sell very quickly in large quantities; *the best thing since sliced bread* = a thing that someone thinks is excellent or likes very much.

3 These discussion questions are designed to personalise the idioms, and so hopefully to assist in their easier memorisation.

4 A dialogue has been chosen because idioms are a feature of informal, spoken English and are rare in more formal contexts. Please, discuss the meaning of these two expressions to assist with the ensuing writing task.