

1 Describing people 1

Match the idioms on the left with the correct definitions on the right.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 absent-minded | a insincere, deceitful (e.g. agree when talking to someone but disagree behind their back) |
| 2 big-headed | b clever, intelligent |
| 3 brash | c insensitive to criticism; not easily offended |
| 4 cheeky | d stupid, unintelligent |
| 5 hot-headed | e very forgetful; easily forgetting things |
| 6 nosy | f mean (with money) |
| 7 pig-headed | g rude, disrespectful (especially towards someone older, e.g. parents, teachers) |
| 8 thick | h stubborn; unwilling to listen to advice |
| 9 thick-skinned | i rich, wealthy |
| 10 tight-fisted | j get angry quickly; tending to do things without thinking |
| 11 two-faced | k conceited, boastful, self-important |
| 12 well off | l inquisitive, curious about others |

Write your answers here:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
e											



Most double adjectives are joined by a hyphen. Notice how parts of the body are often used in idioms to describe people – cheek, head, mind.

2 Describing people 2

Match the idioms on the left with the correct definitions on the right.

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 1 down-at-heel | a very thin |
| 2 full of beans | b dishonest; likely to steal things |
| 3 heartless | c dirty, poor, shabby, not well looked after |
| 4 hen-pecked | d old |
| 5 hot-blooded | e young and inexperienced |
| 6 laid back | f proud, conceited, thinking you are better than others |
| 7 light-fingered | g very emotional, passionate |
| 8 long in the tooth | h slightly bald |
| 9 skinny | i (of a man) always being told what to do by his wife and afraid to disagree with her |
| 10 stuck up | j very relaxed; not seeming to be worried about anything |
| 11 (a bit) thin on top | k cold and cruel |
| 12 wet behind the ears | l very lively |

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It is possible to tell the age of a horse by looking at its teeth. Also, the older the horse gets, the more its gums will recede and the longer its teeth will

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3 Describing moods, states and feelings

Fill in the missing idioms in the sentences below. To help you there is an explanation of the missing idioms after each sentence. Choose from the following:

bedridden broke broken-hearted dead beat
~~down in the dumps~~ hard of hearing ill at ease keyed up
 laid up off-colour on the dole peckish
 scared stiff tongue-tied

- 1 She was really down in the dumps when she didn't get that job at the BBC. She'd really set her heart on it. (*depressed, unhappy*)
- 2 He was very shy and always felt _____ when meeting new people. (*awkward and uneasy*)
- 3 My uncle has been _____ for nearly a year. To be honest, I don't think he'll ever work again. (*unemployed, out of work*)
- 4 My aunt has been _____ for years. (*too weak to leave her bed*)
- 5 Although he was a great actor, he sometimes got very _____ when speaking to his fans. (*found it hard to speak easily*)
- 6 You haven't got anything to eat, have you, Sue? I'm feeling a bit _____! (*hungry*)
- 7 Speak up! I'm a bit _____! (*deaf*)
- 8 I'm _____ at the moment, Kevin. You couldn't lend me £20 until the weekend, could you? (*without money*)

- 9 Are you all right, James? You look a bit _____.
(unwell, ill)
- 10 My sister was _____ when her boyfriend finished with her. (*very sad*)
- 11 He was _____ for a month after his car accident. (*in bed*)
- 12 After spending the whole day walking around the shops in London, we were _____. (*exhausted*)
- 13 I always get a bit _____ before making a speech in public. (*worried and nervous*)
- 14 I'm _____ of flying – especially taking-off and landing. (*terrified, really frightened*)



Although both *down in the dumps* and *broken-hearted* mean the person is very sad and depressed, *broken-hearted* usually means you are very sad because someone you love has died or left you.

Both *bedridden* and *laid up* mean you are in bed through illness, etc. but *bedridden* is more permanent and is often associated with someone being

4 Describing things

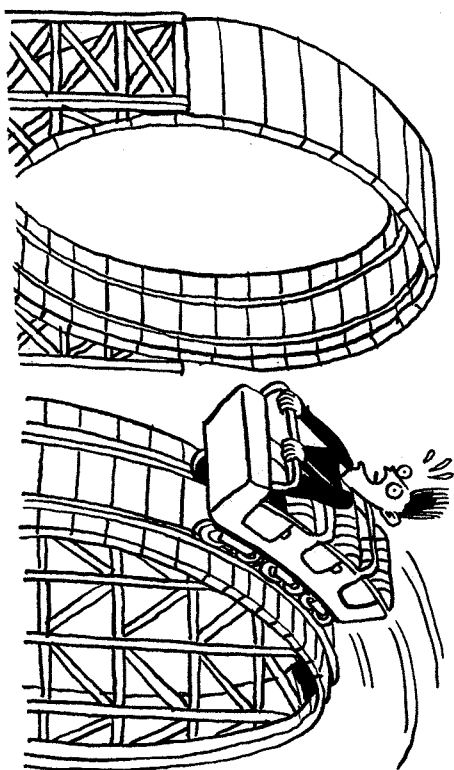
- A** Complete the definitions below with a suitable idiom. Choose from the following:

dog-eared eye-catching few and far between
 fishy frosty hair-raising long-winded
 second-hand whole-hearted

- 1 If your visits to the cinema are very **few and far between**, this means you don't go there very often – your visits are very infrequent.
- 2 If something is a bit _____, then there is something not quite right about it. (You suspect that something is wrong.)
- 3 If something is _____, it is very frightening.
- 4 If you give someone your _____ support, this means you support them totally.
- 5 A _____ welcome is a very unfriendly one.
- 6 If a speech is _____, it is usually boring and goes on for too long.
- 7 If you buy something _____ (e.g. a car), this means that it is not new. (Someone has owned it before.)
- 8 If a book is _____, the corners of the pages have been folded down, usually because it has been read a lot.
- 9 An _____ design is one that grabs your attention because it is attractive, unusual, etc.

- B** Now complete the following sentences using five of the idioms already listed.

- 1 His lecture was very _____ and at least half the students walked out before the end of it.
- 2 The prime minister got a very _____ welcome when he visited a hospital in Liverpool two days after announcing health spending cuts.
- 3 You can tell lots of people have read this Harry Potter book. It's really _____.
- 4 Since my parents moved to Wales, my visits to them have been very _____.
- 5 There's something very _____ about this free offer. It's just too good to be true!



It certainly was a hair-raising experience!



When you are frightened, your hair sometimes stands on end, thus (hair-raising).

When you fold the corner of a page in a book, it resembles a dog's ear. (dog-eared).

5 Adjective + noun combinations 1

Choose the adjective (a, b, or c) which best completes each sentence.

- 1 I really must go and lie down for a while. I've got a splitting headache!
 - a) cutting
 - b) splitting**
 - c) ringing
- 2 No wonder your car won't start! Your battery's _____.
 - a) jammed
 - b) empty
 - c) flat
- 3 My uncle's always had a _____ spot for children. He really likes them.
 - a) soft
 - b) kind
 - c) warm
- 4 I had a _____ escape this morning when a car almost hit me as I was cycling to work.
 - a) near
 - b) narrow
 - c) close
- 5 It's a bit of a _____ statement to say that 'all Welsh people can sing' or 'all black people can dance'. I know lots who can't do either.
 - a) sweeping
 - b) general
 - c) broad
- 6 I didn't like smoked salmon at first. For me it was an _____ taste. Now I really love it.
 - a) experienced
 - b) original
 - c) acquired
- 7 I don't think Simon will ever get married. He told me he's a _____ bachelor.
 - a) decided
 - b) confirmed
 - c) complete
- 8 One of his _____ hates was people pushing in front of him at bus stops.
 - a) main
 - b) favourite
 - c) pet
- 9 She had a very _____ tongue, and could be really sarcastic when she was angry.
 - a) bitter
 - b) sharp
 - c) hot

- 10 It was the first _____ meal the tramp had had for several days.
 - a) compact
 - b) round
 - c) square
- 11 My son's always getting into trouble for fighting at school. I think that's because he has such a _____ temper.
 - a) loud
 - b) quick
 - c) high
- 12 There's an _____ law in this club that you never borrow money from a fellow member.
 - a) unspoken
 - b) understood
 - c) unwritten
- 13 'What does *inevitable* mean?'
 - a) 'I haven't the _____ idea. Ask the teacher.'
 - b) briefest
 - c) smallest
- 14 The result of the election was a(n) _____ conclusion. Everyone knew which party would win.
 - a) obvious
 - b) ready
 - c) foregone
- 15 'I don't really want to be twenty-five again,' she said to her husband. 'It was just _____ thinking!'
 - a) hopeful
 - b) wishful
 - c) playful



Two other idioms that mean the same as a *narrow escape* are a *close shave* and a *near miss*.

A *hot-blooded* person often has a *quick temper*.

6 Adjective + noun combinations 2

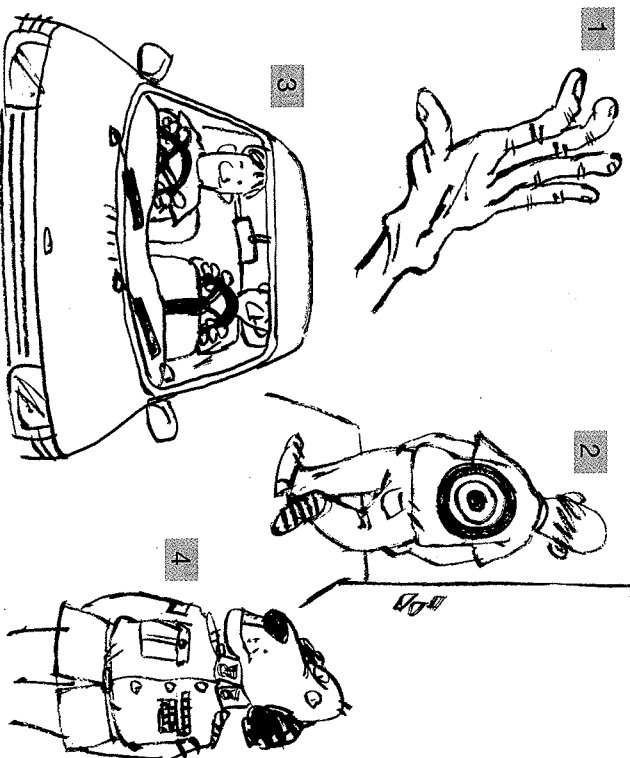
A Match the people on the left with the correct definitions on the right.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 a backseat driver</p> <p>2 a big shot</p> <p>3 a blue-eyed boy</p> <p>4 a dark horse</p> <p>5 a fair-weather friend</p> <p>6 a general dogsbody</p> <p>7 a live wire</p> <p>8 an old hand</p> <p>9 a marked man</p> <p>10 a rough diamond</p> <p>11 a smart aleck</p> <p>12 a wet blanket</p> | <p>a someone who stops being your friend when you are having problems or difficulties</p> <p>b a person who is being watched by someone who wants to harm or kill them</p> <p>c a dull or boring person who tries to spoil other people's fun</p> <p>d a passenger in the back of a car who gives the driver unwanted advice on how to drive</p> <p>e a person who has greater capabilities than he/she shows or that people are aware of</p> <p>f an experienced person; someone who has done a job for a long time and is very good at it</p> <p>g someone who has to do all the jobs no one wants to do</p> <p>h a person who annoys everyone by claiming to know everything and trying to sound clever</p> <p>i an important and influential person</p> <p>j a very active and lively person</p> <p>k a man who is liked and admired by someone in authority (e.g. his boss)</p> <p>l someone who looks rather rude, rough and unfriendly but who is actually kind and generous</p> |
|--|---|

Write your answers here:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<i>d</i>											

B Look at the four drawings. Which idioms do they remind you of? Choose from those already listed.



Another word for a *big shot* is a *bigwig*.

The phrase a *dark horse* comes from horse racing. A dark horse was a fairly unknown horse whose abilities were kept secret until it came to the race track and, hopefully, won the race.

A *live wire* is a reference to a wire which has a 'live' electric current running through it.

7 Adjective + noun combinations 3

Say whether the idioms in the following sentences are used correctly (true) or incorrectly (false).

- | | True | False |
|---|------|-------|
| 1 We were late, so we took a short cut through the park. | ✓ | |
| 2 A woman would probably be pleased if a man gave her a dirty look , and vice-versa. | | |
| 3 Hobson's choice is no real choice at all. | | |
| 4 The two runners finished the race at the same time. It was a dead heat . | | |
| 5 Most people would be too embarrassed to tell others that they had a plum job . | | |
| 6 I hate tight spots , so I never get into lifts. I always use the stairs instead. | | |
| 7 In Britain, when a couple have been married for fifty years, they are often given a golden handshake . | | |
| 8 To get a job you need a permanent address, but to be able to rent a flat you need to have a job. It's a vicious circle . | | |
| 9 Don't believe a word he says; it's just another of his tall stories . | | |

- | | True | False |
|--|------|-------|
| 10 Daniel is Catholic and his wife is Methodist so they went to the local church for a mixed blessing . | | |

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 11 He can speak two languages fluently – he's double Dutch . | | |
| 12 If something was a long shot , it might not have a great chance of succeeding. | | |
| 13 A flying visit is a very short trip in an aeroplane. | | |
| 14 Don't mention last year's Christmas party to Harry. It's a bit of a sore point with him. That's when he split up with his girlfriend. | | |
| 15 I felt really pleased when she told me that she thought I had a fat chance of getting the job. | | |



The expression *Hobson's choice* refers to Tobias Hobson who lived in Cambridge during the sixteenth century. He owned a stable and used to hire out horses. However, he only allowed his customers to choose the horse nearest the stable door – the one that had run the least recently. So, in

8 Adjective pairs

Complete the paired idioms in the sentences below. Choose from the following adjectives:

alive dried dry early easy fast less low sound spick
square surely sweet thin tired void white worse-

- 1 For *better or worse*, the mobile phone is now a normal part of people's lives.
- 2 He drove *slowly but* _____.
- 3 She was beaten *fair and* _____ by her opponent in the first round at Wimbledon.
- 4 'How's your father these days?'
'Still _____ and *kicking*. He's living in Brighton now.'
- 5 Oh, thank goodness you're both *safe and* _____. I was so worried about you!
- 6 They promised to stand by each other *through thick and* _____.
- 7 He won't believe anything unless he actually sees it *in black and* _____.
- 8 If we win next Saturday, we'll be *home and* _____ for a place in the next round of the Cup.
- 9 John's a farmer and has to get up *bright and* _____ every morning.

- 10 The contract was declared *null and* _____, as one of the partners had forgotten to sign it.
- 11 Could you wait - I'm *more or* _____ ready now.
- 12 He lived a very *free and* _____ life in the country.
- 13 Natalia is *sick and* _____ of hearing about how 'wonderful' and 'clever' her neighbour's children are!
- 14 The police have searched *high and* _____ for the missing teenager, Connie Brown. But they still haven't found any trace of her.
- 15 I'm afraid you'll have to wear a jacket, sir. It's a *hard and* _____ rule at the club.
- 16 The lecture was just how the students liked it - *short and* _____.
- 17 The result of tomorrow's match is *cut and* _____, New Zealand is bound to win.
- 18 Her flat was so _____ and *span* that it looked more like a well-kept museum than a home.

9 Idioms using common adjectives

Complete sentences 1–15 by choosing an ending from a–o.

- 1 Sally's not speaking to me. I ...
- 2 If you're applying for a job with my company, I'll ...
- 3 Since Tom Blake got that book of poems published, he's ...
- 4 Have I upset Emma in some way? I said hello to her and she just ...
- 5 It's like *flogging a dead horse* trying to teach Richard to ...
- 6 Last year the Patel family decided to leave Britain *for good* and ...
- 7 I'm a bit *hard up* at the moment, so I ...
- 8 Of course Olaf likes you. He's just ...
- 9 You'll be for the *high jump* when dad ...
- 10 You're nearly thirty now. Isn't it *high time* you ...
- 11 The politician got very *hot under the collar* when the journalist ...
- 12 Your son is very talented, Mrs Cappelli and ...
- 13 He *got into hot water* for ...
- 14 We had to *cut our holiday short* when my wife ...
- 15 Taxis in this town after midnight ...

- a finds out you've been smoking. You know how much he hates it!
- b use a computer. I don't think he'll ever learn!
- c using the office phone for private calls.
- d accused him of taking bribes.
- e try and *put in a good word* for you.
- f seem to be pretty *thin on the ground*.
- g *cut me dead*.
- h should *go a long way*.
- i *playing hard to get*, that's all! must be *in her bad books*.
- k broke her leg on our first day on the ski slope.
- l settle in New Zealand.
- m become *too big for his boots*.
- n stopped living with your parents and got a flat of your own?
- o can't afford to go out with you tonight.

Write your answers here:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
j														



The opposite of being in someone's *bad books* is to be in someone's *good books*.

To *flog* is to beat a person or animal with a whip or stick. If the animal is

Section 2:

Idioms using nouns

This section looks at the use of nouns as idioms.

It starts with common nouns to describe people – either single nouns or compound nouns. These can be positive, e.g. a *whizz kid* (someone with lots of modern ideas, energy and enthusiasm and who achieves a lot while still young) or negative, e.g. a *busybody* (someone who always wants to know about other people's private lives).

There are idioms based on phrasal verbs, e.g. a *break-in* (burglary) and a *tailback* (long line of traffic), as well as fairly abstract single noun idioms, e.g. an *eyesore* (something ugly to look at) and a *snag* (a hidden problem or difficulty).

Compound nouns are also examined, e.g. a *busman's holiday* (a holiday spent doing the same work as you would do in your job) and a *stag party* (an all-male party for someone getting married).

There are also idioms based on noun phrases, e.g. a *bolt from the blue* (a sudden and unexpected event) and a *flash in the pan* (something that is suddenly popular but only lasts for a short while).

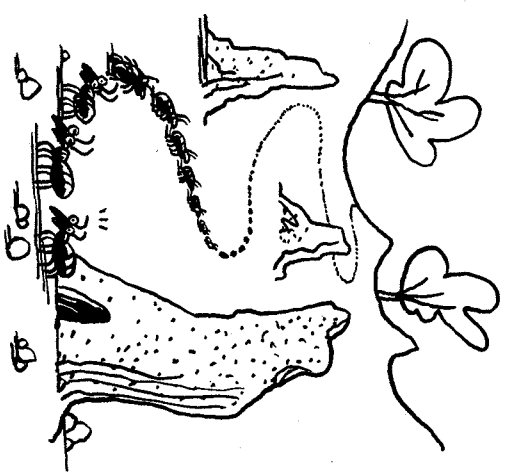
This section ends by looking at pairs of nouns, e.g. *flesh and blood* (members of your own family) plus specific nouns used in idiomatic phrases – *end, mind, point, line, word, way and time*.

Some examples are:

be at a loose end (not have anything to do)

drop someone a line (write a letter to someone)

slip one's mind (forget)



11 Types of people 1

Match the idioms on the left with the correct definitions on the right.

- | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 the apple of someone's eye | a | someone who spends a lot of time sitting and watching television |
| 2 a bighead | b | someone who turns up at parties without being invited to them |
| 3 a blackleg | c | the minimum number of people that can run an office successfully |
| 4 a busybody | d | a person who loves taking dangerous risks |
| 5 a chatterbox | e | the person someone loves most and is very proud of (e.g. a grandchild) |
| 6 a couch potato | f | someone with lots of modern ideas, energy and enthusiasm and who achieves a lot while still young |
| 7 a daredevil | g | a person who talks a lot especially about things that are unimportant |
| 8 a figurehead | h | someone who continues to work when their fellow workers are on strike |
| 9 a gatecrasher | i | someone who is the leader of a country or organization, but in name only. He or she doesn't have any real power |
| 10 a pain in the neck | j | someone who always wants to know about other people's private lives |
| 11 a skeleton staff | k | someone who is very conceited, vain or boastful |
| 12 a whizz kid | l | a person who is very annoying |

Write your answers here:

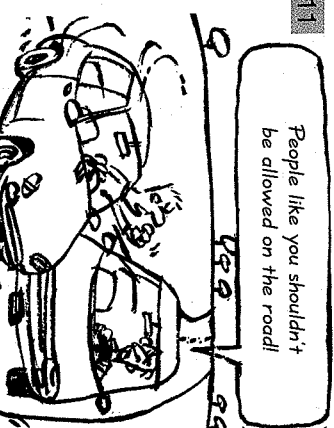
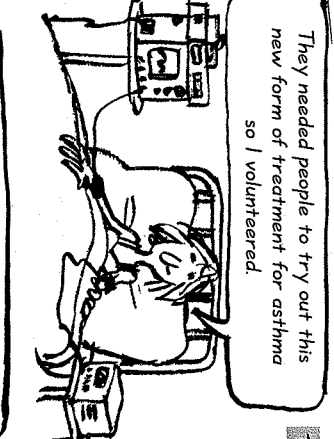
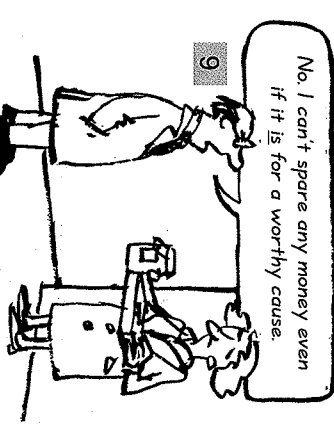
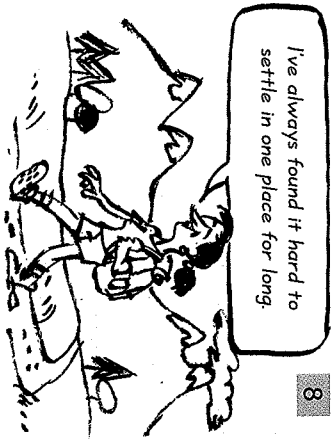
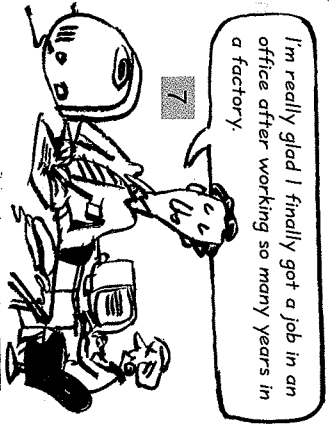
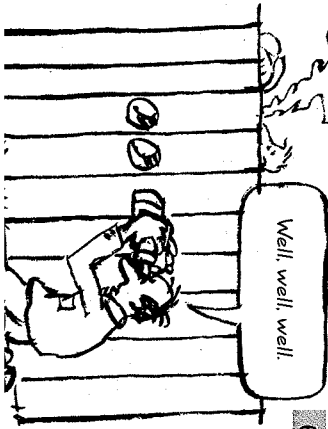
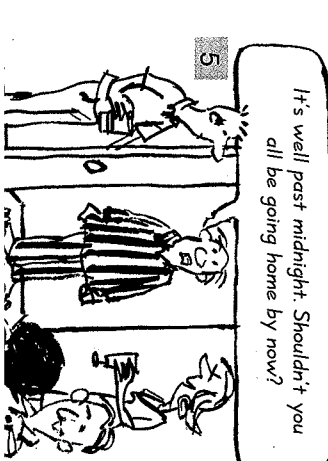
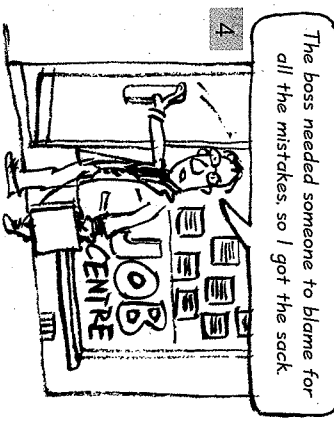
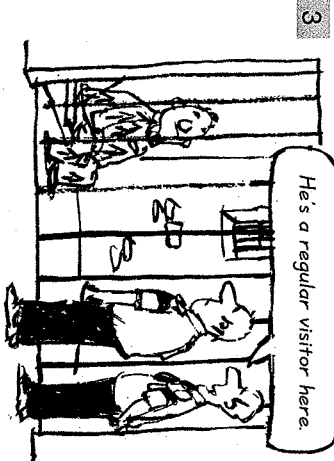
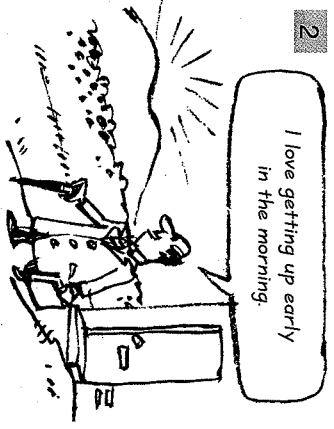
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e											

Bighead comes from the adjective *big-headed*.
 To **chatter** means to talk quickly without stopping. A **chat** is an informal, friendly conversation.

12 Types of people 2

Look at the drawings below. Find the following people:

- an early bird _____ 2 a guinea pig _____ a jailbird _____
- a killjoy _____ a night owl _____ a nosy parker _____
- a road hog _____ a rolling stone _____ a scapegoat _____
- a skinflint _____ a troublemaker _____ a white-collar worker _____



hag means to keep or use all of something. If you *hog the road* you drive so badly that you take up too much space.

joy is another word for 'fun' or 'happiness'. So if you kill someone's joy then you're stopping them being happy.

Office workers in the UK traditionally wear a suit and a white shirt. People who do hard physical work where they often get dirty are called *blue-collar workers*.

13 Nouns from phrasal verbs

Complete the newspaper headlines below with a suitable idiom. Choose from the following and write the correct letter (a-o) in the gaps.

- | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|---|----------|---|----------|
| a | BREAKDOWN | f | HOLD-UP | k | OUTLOOK |
| b | BREAK-IN | g | KICK-OFF | l | SETBACK |
| c | COMEBACK | h | KNOCKOUT | m | TAILBACK |
| d | CUTBACKS | i | MIX-UP | n | TURNOVER |
| e | DOWNPOUR | j | OUTBREAK | o | WRITE-UP |

1 **THIRD** b IN PEACEFUL SURREY VILLAGE
(burglary)

2 **2-MILE** _____ ON M1 AFTER MOTORWAY ACCIDENT
(traffic that is moving slowly or not moving at all)

3 **SUDDEN** _____ OF LEAD SINGER CAUSES
BAND TO CANCEL BRITISH TOUR
(medical condition where you are mentally
ill and unable to cope with life)

4 **NEW LLOYD-WEBBER MUSICAL GETS GOOD**
_____ IN LONDON EVENING STANDARD
(review)

5 **HEAVY** _____ RUINS FREE OPEN-AIR CONCERT
IN HYDE PARK
(rainfall)

6 **WEATHER** _____ FOR SUMMER IS NOT VERY PROMISING
(forecast)

7 **FAMOUS 80s BAND TO MAKE A** _____
(an attempt to become popular again)

8 **ROBBERS GET AWAY WITH £800,000 IN**
DARING _____ IN BROAD DAYLIGHT
(robbery)

9 **HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION LOSES BY A** _____
IN THE FIRST ROUND
(by being hit so hard that you become unconscious)

10 **HOSPITAL RECORDS** _____ CAUSES CHAOS
(mistake that causes problems)

11 **NEW GENERATION OF MOBILE PHONES**
INCREASES FIRM'S _____ BY 200%
(total income from sales)

12 **FA CUP** _____ DELAYED FOR 20 MINUTES
DUE TO DEMONSTRATION BY REFEREES
(start of football match)

13 **GOVERNMENT THREATENS** _____ TO THE
HEALTH SERVICE
(reduced funding)

14 **DOCTORS FEAR** _____ OF CHOLERA
AFTER EARTHQUAKE IN TURKEY
(a cholera epidemic)

15 **TUNNEL PROJECT BETWEEN WALES AND IRELAND**
SUFFERS SERIOUS _____
(delay in its progress)



You can also have an *outbreak* of war, fighting or sports.
You can also have a *breakdown* in your car – when your car stops because

14 Single nouns

A Match the idioms on the left with the correct definitions on the right.

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 1 a blackout | a something very unpleasant to look at (e.g. a building) |
| 2 a best-seller | b a loud whistle or cry of disapproval (e.g. from an audience at a theatre or a crowd at a football match) |
| 3 a bottleneck | c (of a country, organization) the time when they were most powerful, successful or popular |
| 4 a brainwave | d a situation or event from which you learn something surprising or something that you did not know before |
| 5 a catcall | e a sum of money that you get unexpectedly, such as winning the football pools or a lottery, etc. |
| 6 a catnap | f extra advantages on top of your regular salary (e.g. a company car, lunch vouchers) |
| 7 an eye-opener | g a book that sells in very large numbers; a successful book |
| 8 an eyesore | h a short sleep in a chair (not in a bed) |
| 9 a gimmick | i a small mistake in a law that makes it possible to avoid doing something that the law is supposed to make you do (e.g. a tax loophole) |
| 10 a heyday | j an electricity failure (when everything goes black) |
| 11 a loophole | k where the road narrows so that a traffic jam is quickly formed |
| 12 a perk | l a difficulty or problem – often hidden or unexpected |

13 a snag

m

some sort of trick, device or unusual action whose purpose is to attract attention or publicity, usually when trying to sell something to people

14 a windfall

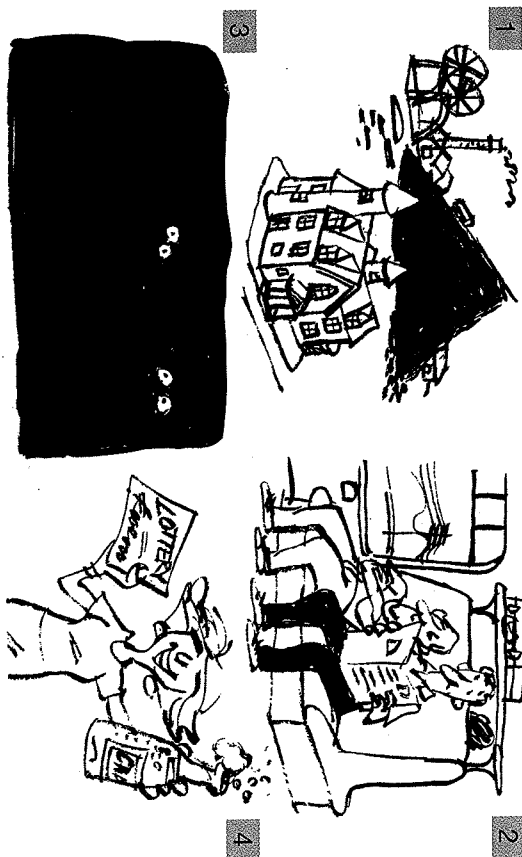
n

a sudden clever thought or idea

Write your answers here:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<i>j</i>													

B Look at the four drawings. Which idioms would you use to complete them? Choose from those already listed.



When you are surprised, your eyes often open wide (eye-opener) and something that is not very nice to look at can make your eyes very sore (an eyesore).

A nap is a short sleep. Cats can sleep anywhere at any time (catnap).

To remember *blackout*, imagine that the lights go out, so everything is very

15 Noun phrases 1

What do the following idioms mean? Choose the best alternative (a, b or c).

- 1 Our hotel was only a **stone's throw** from the beach.
 - a) It was on the beach.
 - b) It was a long way from the beach.
 - c) It was close to the beach.
- 2 Have you been invited to Basil's **stag party**?
 - a) an all-male party for someone getting married
 - b) an eighteenth birthday party
 - c) a party on someone's last day at work
- 3 I'm having a **busman's holiday** this summer teaching English to a group of French students.
 - a) a short holiday abroad
 - b) a holiday spent doing the same work as you do in your job
 - c) a holiday which also involves a lot of travelling
- 4 To most people, a Rolls-Royce is still something of a **status symbol**.
 - a) an unnecessary luxury
 - b) a possession they hope to have one day
 - c) a possession that shows others that you have money or position
- 5 It was a **dead-end job** and she hated it.
 - a) a very boring job
 - b) a job without prospects
 - c) a physically hard and dirty job
- 6 It's typical of him to take all the credit when we're the ones who've done all the **donkey work**.
 - a) all the work at the start of the project
 - b) all the work without getting paid for it
 - c) all the real hard work
- 7 They phoned me up today and told me I've been put on the **shortlist**.
 - a) the list of people waiting to go into hospital for an operation
 - b) the list of the most suitable people for a job
 - c) the list of people waiting for government housing
- 8 You won't get your shoes clean like that. Use some **elbow grease!**
 - a) put more effort into polishing your shoes
 - b) use a special type of shoe polish
 - c) use a very hard brush to polish your shoes
- 9 We were late for work because we got stuck in a **traffic jam**.
 - a) We were involved in a car accident.
 - b) We got stuck in heavy snow.
 - c) We were in a long line of cars which were moving very slowly.
- 10 The bar they worked at in Spain paid them **chicken feed**.
 - a) a small wage plus all they could eat
 - b) gave them cash at the end of each day
 - c) hardly any money at all
- 11 Everyone should have a **nest egg**. You never know when you might need it.
 - a) a life insurance policy
 - b) an amount of money saved for future use
 - c) a special place you can go to when you want to be alone
- 12 Roberto wasn't very happy at work, but the **last straw** came when a much younger man was given promotion.
 - a) he received the final insult
 - b) the last in a series of unpleasant things that have happened to him at work
 - c) he suffered a nervous breakdown

16 Noun phrases 2

Choose the word (a, b or c) which best completes each sentence. To help you, the meaning of the idiom is given in brackets after each sentence.

- 13 She had lots of **teething problems** in her new job, but things seem all right now.
 a) early difficulties
 b) problems of water seeping in
 c) staff problems
- 14 If you want my opinion, learning to use the Internet is **child's play**.
 a) lots of fun
 b) very easy to do
 c) only for young people
- 15 There was a big headline in today's paper: Minister admits paying **hush money** to French model.
 a) government money which the public know nothing about
 b) money from drugs
 c) money to keep something secret



Hush is a word you use when you want someone to be silent.

An all-female party for a woman about to get married is called a *hen party* (or a *shower* in American English).

Jam is very sticky, so we usually say *get stuck in a traffic jam*.

Nest egg originated in the seventeenth century and was an egg made of china that a farmer put in a hen's nest to encourage it to lay more eggs.

If a baby is *teething*, its first teeth are growing and it is often uncomfortable.

- 1 'What was the exam like, Carol?'
 'Great! It was a piece of **cake**.'
- a) cheese **b) cake** c) old rope
 (Meaning: *It was very easy.*)
- 2 The resignation of the chairman of the board came like a bolt from _____.
- a) the sky b) above c) the blue
 (Meaning: *It was sudden and unexpected.*)
- 3 The so-called scandal turned out to be nothing more than a storm in _____.
- a) an ocean b) a teacup c) a bucket
 (Meaning: *A lot of fuss and excitement about something that is not really important.*)
- 4 To be a politician it helps if you have the gift of the _____.
- a) gab b) lip c) tongue
 (Meaning: *You are able to speak fluently, confidently and persuasively.*)
- 5 He was £100,000 in debt. His friend offered to lend him £500, but it was just a drop in the _____ to what he really needed.
- a) swimming pool b) lake c) ocean
 (Meaning: *A very small amount compared with what is actually needed.*)
- 6 Today's revelation in the newspaper about police corruption is just the tip of the _____. If you ask me, there's a lot more to come.
- a) mountain b) needle c) iceberg
 (Meaning: *Only the start of something that is much bigger, most of*

- 7 Which is the _____ one out in these three words: sparrow, eagle, snake?'
'Snake! The other two are birds.'
- a) strange b) odd c) next
(Meaning: Which word is different from the rest.)
- 8 I'd hate to be the politician who said publicly that in his opinion 'the Internet was just a flash in the _____.'
- a) pan b) fire c) mirror
(Meaning: It would be suddenly popular but would only last a short time.)
- 9 If you're going to run for mayor, just make sure there are no _____ in the cupboard! You know what the press are like.
- a) moths b) skeletons c) ghosts
(Meaning: Make sure you don't have anything in your past that could be embarrassing or shameful.)
- 10 He had been a market trader for years and offered to show his nephew the tricks of the _____.
- a) job b) trade c) profession
(Meaning: The best ways and clever methods of being successful.)
- 11 My answer to the quiz question 'Who composed the Midnight Sonata?' was just a shot in the _____. I didn't really know it was Beethoven.
- a) night b) air c) dark
(Meaning: A wild guess.)
- 12 I didn't really mean to say that – it was just a slip of the _____.
- a) mouth b) jaw c) tongue
(Meaning: You said something you didn't really mean to say.)
- 13 It was an excellent dinner party. The only _____ in the ointment was Helen spilling red wine over our new carpet.
- a) finger b) fly c) stone
(Meaning: A small problem or minor incident that spoils something that is otherwise perfect.)
- 14 Not getting that teaching job in Florida was _____ in disguise. The school was destroyed by a hurricane the very same week I was due to start.
- a) luck b) the devil c) a blessing
(Meaning: Something which appears bad at first but then turns out well.)
- 15 Well, well, if it isn't Celia Durban! You're a sight for _____ eyes!
- a) old b) blue c) sore
(Meaning: You are really pleased to see someone. A very welcome sight.)



A *bit* from the *blue* refers to a sudden thunderbolt from a blue sky.

A *drop* in the ocean is known as a *drop in the bucket* in American English.

Since an ocean is very large, anything dropped into it would hardly be noticed. Only one-ninth of an iceberg is visible. The rest is hidden beneath the sea – so there is still a great deal to be revealed (*tip of the iceberg*).

If you shoot at something in the dark, you are very unlikely to hit the target. So

17 Noun pairs

Fill in the missing pairs of nouns in the sentences below. Choose from the following:

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|---|
| back to front | cock and bull | finger and thumbs |
| flesh and blood | fun and games | hand in glove |
| head and shoulders | hustle and bustle | life and soul |
| nook and cranny | pros and cons | skin and bone |
| tooth and nail | ups and downs | wear and tear |

- 1 Don't let Ross do the washing-up. He's bound to drop something. He's all fingers and thumbs .
- 2 We looked in every _____ for the missing ring, but couldn't find it anywhere.
- 3 Paul was so funny on Saturday. He was the _____ of the party!
- 4 This carpet is made from a brand-new type of fibre and should stand up to a lot of _____.
- 5 I like living in a small village in Wales, but there are times when I miss the _____ of London.
- 6 You're not eating enough! Just look at you! You're all _____!
- 7 He gave us some _____ story about being abducted by aliens to explain why he was late for work.
- 8 The police are working _____ with the Football Association in an effort to stamp out soccer violence.

- 9 You can't throw her out, surely? Not your sister – not your own _____!
- 10 He couldn't understand why the students were laughing until he noticed that he'd got his jumper on _____.
- 11 The managing director carefully outlined the _____ of the proposed merger.
- 12 As soon as the teacher went out of the classroom, the children got up to all sorts of _____.
- 13 Louis and Anne-Marie are always fighting _____ divorced yet. I'm surprised they haven't got _____.
- 14 Kimberley was an outstanding student who was _____ above the others in the class.
- 15 Life is full of _____, isn't it? You just hope you get more happy moments than sad ones.

Nook is an old word for *corner* and *cranny* is an old word for *crack*.
Hustle means 'busy and noisy activity'.
The verb bustle means to move around quickly/looking very busy.

18 Idioms using common nouns 1

Read the speech bubbles below and then decide which idioms are being described. Choose from the following:

END

be at the end of your tether
be at a loose end

get hold of the wrong end of the stick

It's not the end of the world!
make ends meet

MIND

a weight off your mind
can't make up your mind

give someone a piece of your mind

slip your mind

LINE

drop someone a line

read between the lines

toe the line

POINT

at point-blank range

I take your point!

What's the point?

5

The snake was less than a foot away from her when she shot it. She couldn't miss!

6

Of course I'll do as I'm told.

7

You've misunderstood us completely. That's not what we meant at all!

8

What good is it complaining to the travel company. They won't do anything about it!

9

Shall I take the tabby or the ginger one? Oh it's so hard to choose, they're both so cute!

10

I spend more than I earn. What am I going to do? It's so hard to manage.

11

Yes, I understand what you're saying – you are quite right.

12

I've just seen the doctor again and he said there is no need for an operation after all. What a relief!

13

For the first time in my life I'm out of work! What am I going to do?

14

Oh I'm sorry about the lottery ticket, Helga. I forgot all about it!

1

I know she says she's happy in her letter, but I've just got this feeling she's hiding something.

2

He was annoying me so much that I told him what I thought of him!

3

Write to me some time!

4

I've tried everything to stop the baby crying. I just don't know what to do next.



If an animal is tied to a *reithor* (a rope attached to a post), it can only get a certain distance — no more.

You can also refuse to do something *point blank*. (I told him *point blank* I wouldn't do it!) which means you do so directly and without trying to explain your reasons.

19 Idioms using common nouns 2

Say whether the idioms in the following sentences are used correctly (true) or incorrectly (false).

- | | True | False |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1 I promised him. I gave him my word. | ✓ | _____ |
| 2 We'll have to ask someone for directions. I just don't know which way to turn. | _____ | _____ |
| 3 If you are having a whale of a time, you are probably not enjoying yourself. | _____ | _____ |
| 4 She was offended. She took it the wrong way. | _____ | _____ |
| 5 He's in prison. He's doing time. | _____ | _____ |
| 6 Justin is very hard to understand because he doesn't mince his words. | _____ | _____ |
| 7 If you are really angry with someone, you might have words with them. | _____ | _____ |
| 8 We checked the weather forecast to see which way the wind was blowing. | _____ | _____ |
| 9 The parcel was delayed – it arrived in next to no time. | _____ | _____ |
| 10 He's going to be a famous actor one day. You mark my words! | _____ | _____ |
| 11 Most soldiers are able to march in good time. | _____ | _____ |
| 12 Charles and I go back a long way. In fact, we started school at the same time. | _____ | _____ |
| 13 His house is a bit out of the way. In other words it's very modern. | _____ | _____ |

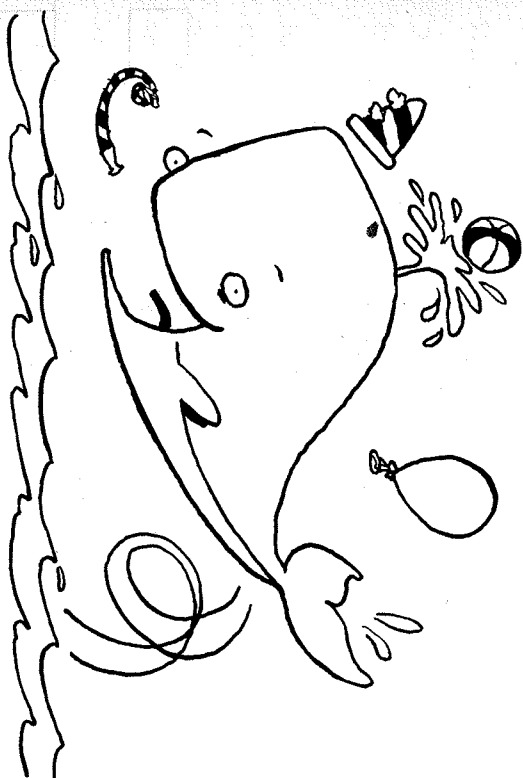
14 'Mum's the word!' Remember – it's a secret!

15 The fire brigade arrived in the nick of time.

16 Two minutes later and the house would have burnt down.

17 Mr Leung translated what the Chinese prime minister said. He took the words out of his mouth.

18 Watching TV or reading a book are two good ways of killing time.



Having a whale of time!

To serve time can also mean when you are in prison.

A nick is a tiny cut (or notch) in a piece of wood. Long ago people would keep the score when playing a game by cutting notches in a piece of wood. If one team scored at the last minute and won the match, then that nick