

Idiom awareness task

The idiom awareness task is a measure we used to assess the students' knowledge of idioms and double meanings. Read out the idioms to the students and ask them to tell you what they think they mean. Make sure you give them the two trial items first so that they fully understand the task. In the pilot study, students receiving the vocabulary enrichment programme showed significant improvement in idiom awareness on this task after the intervention.

You might choose to discuss a wide range of idioms in the programme, but only some of the idioms that form part of this assessment. This will allow you to explore not only the students' knowledge of specific idioms discussed in the programme, but also their knowledge of idioms which have not been explicitly taught in the programme, i.e., their ability to generalise the knowledge learned in the sessions to items not explicitly taught. One prediction, for example, might be that a greater awareness of idioms will result in fewer literal interpretations of all idioms, even those unfamiliar to the students.

Students obtain a score of one for each correct interpretation given per idiom. Detailed examples of accepted responses are provided below. The score sheet also allows you to record the number of literal interpretations (L/R) and the number of 'no responses' (N/R). You will find more details of the scoring system on the next page.

Idiom awareness task score sheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

School: _____ Tester: _____

Instructions

'Sometimes we use sayings and words which mean different things. We are going to play a game where I am going to give you a few popular sayings which you may or may not have heard before. I want you to think carefully about each one and then tell me what you think it means. If you are not sure, then try to guess.'

Trial items

- 1 'First let's try this one. What do you think the saying "**They are away with the fairies**" means?'

Response (indicate if no response is given):

Provide the following support or feedback:

'Here is an example of the saying being used. Imagine your teacher called your name in class but you did not hear them because you were thinking about a television programme you had seen. Your teacher could say that you didn't hear them because you were "away with the fairies". So the saying "They are away with the fairies" means that someone is not concentrating or is distracted.'

- 2 'Here is another one. What do you think this saying "**You must face the music**" means?'

Response (indicate if no response is given):

Provide the following support or feedback:

'Here is an example of this saying being used. If you were misbehaving in a science lesson and broke some equipment, the teacher might ask you to visit the head teacher to "face the music" for what you have done. So the saying "face the music" means to accept responsibility or punishment for something you have done.'

Please note: the feedback you give for these trial items will vary depending on whether the student gives the correct or incorrect answer.

'OK, I am now going to give you some more sayings which you may or may not have heard before. Think carefully about each one and tell me what you think they mean.'

Write each response verbatim or indicate if no response is given.

	Idiom	Response	1	0	NR/LR
1	Full of beans To have a lot of energy and enthusiasm				
2	Turn a deaf ear To ignore what someone is saying				
3	Turn a blind eye To choose to ignore a behaviour that you know is wrong				
4	To be in the red To owe money to the bank				
5	To be in the black To be in a situation where you are earning more money than you are spending/to have money in the bank				
6	Red herring Something that takes people's attention away from the main subject being talked or written about				
7	Once in a blue moon Very rarely				
8	Appears out of the blue Something or someone appears suddenly when you are not expecting it				
9	Feel blue To feel sad or depressed				
10	Give someone the green light Give permission for someone to do something or for something to happen				
11	Have green fingers A knack for growing plants and keeping them healthy				

	Idiom	Response	1	0	NR/LR
12	See red To be or become extremely angry				
13	Black sheep of the family A member of the family who is considered undesirable or disgraced				
14	Keep your head above water To have enough money to live or continue a business/keep out of trouble				
15	Two heads are better than one It is better to do something with help than alone				
16	Reach for the moon Try to achieve something that is very difficult				
17	Brain like a sieve Has a bad memory/forgets things easily				
18	Pick someone's brain Ask for information or advice from someone who knows more about a subject than you do				
19	All skin and bone Very thin/underweight				
20	Under the weather Feeling slightly ill or lacking energy not healthy				

Total correct: /20

Total 'no responses' (NR): /20

Total incorrect: /20

Total 'literal responses' (LR): /20

Idiom awareness: acceptable responses

	Idiom	Response	1	0	NR/LR
1	Full of beans To have a lot of energy and enthusiasm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lively • Energetic/full of energy • You can't sit still • Excited • Full of life • Hyperactive 			
2	Turn a deaf ear To ignore what someone is saying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You pretend not to hear • Someone says something, and you don't listen on purpose • You ignore someone <p>The main idea is deliberately not listening</p>			
3	Turn a blind eye To choose to ignore a behaviour that you know is wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You pretend not to look • You don't look on purpose <p>The main idea is deliberately ignoring something</p>			
4	To be in the red To owe money to the bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You owe money • You're in debt 			
5	To be in the black To be in a situation where you are earning more money than you are spending/to have money in the bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You don't owe money any more • You're in the clear with the bank • You have lots of money 			
6	Red herring Something that takes people's attention away from the main subject being talked or written about	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something put there to confuse people • Something put there to take their attention away from something 			
7	Once in a blue moon Very rarely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It doesn't happen very often • It happens rarely • Like when you're not allowed a Big Mac most of the time, but then sometimes you're allowed one • Once every 200 million years (the idea of being rare is expressed in this example) 			

	Idiom	Response	1	0	NR/LR
8	Appears out of the blue Something or someone appears suddenly when you are not expecting it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To come out of nowhere • When they weren't there and then you turn around and all of a sudden they're there • You weren't there before, where did you come from? • To just show up • Wasn't expecting that 			
9	Feel blue To feel sad or depressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling upset • Feeling sad 			
10	Give someone the green light Give permission for someone to do something or for something to happen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone saying you can go and do it now 			
11	Have green fingers A knack for growing plants and keeping them healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good gardener • Gardening 			
12	See red To be or become extremely angry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You're angry • See anger 			
13	Black sheep of the family A member of the family who is considered undesirable or disgraced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bad one of the family • The naughty one of the family • You're different and you don't fit in 			
14	Keep your head above water To have enough money to live or continue a business/keep out of trouble	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't drown in your work • Try and stay out of trouble 			
15	Two heads are better than one It is better to do something with help than alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two persons are better than one at work • Teamwork • Two people helping each other can be better than one • When you join your ideas together you make something new • Group working 			

	Idiom	Response	1	0	NR/LR
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working together • Two brains are better than one when working 			
16	Reach for the moon Try to achieve something that is very difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach for your dreams • Try and be successful • Reach for something you've never reached before – like high grades • Try really hard • Reach for your goal (the process of getting) • Try your best • Live your dream 			
17	Brain like a sieve Has a bad memory/forgets things easily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bad memory • Whatever your teacher puts into your brain, you lose it and it goes • Someone tells you something and it comes out 			
18	Pick someone's brain Ask for information or advice from someone who knows more about a subject than you do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ask someone else's ideas • To ask someone questions 			
19	All skin and bone Very thin/underweight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thin • You don't eat very much • Skinny 			
20	Under the weather Feeling slightly ill or lacking energy not healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not feeling that well • Feeling sick 			