

**Disclaimer:**

Any workshop foolish enough to embark on a project like this one is fully aware that it cannot be all-inclusive. We endeavored to include a comprehensive list of idioms that would be beneficial to the user.

We have made every effort to include commonly-used signs and to not be influenced by regional variances.

We are aware that all languages are alive, and are, therefore, constantly changing. Thus, we encourage our users to be aware of and respectful of sign variations used in different geographical areas.



Bio

### Sherry Padgett's Bio

Sherry has been involved in Deaf Ministry in her local church since 1981 as a church interpreter. She began attending the National Deaf Conferences in 2000. In 2006 - 2013, she was the National Media Coordinator for UPCI Deaf Evangelism. Sherry began community interpreting in 2007, and has become a Licensed Interpreter for the state of Missouri in 2009. She holds a Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing BASIC Certification with a RCED (General) PSE Endorsement. She was employed as a public school educational interpreter, K-12 for 2 years. Sherry's passion in Deaf ministry is to provide resources for interpreters to use to reach the Deaf with the gospel. She also has created several websites to make resources easy and accessible:

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## Lesson 01

# Why do we need this workshop?

- In the English language there are thousands of idioms and they can be found in just about every book and heard in every conversation.
- It was made to help you improve your knowledge of idioms in English and ASL. Idioms are fixed expressions whose meaning is not immediately obvious from looking at the individual words in the idiom. You will come across a great many idioms while interpreting. It is important that you learn about the meanings of idioms and about how they are used.
- We want to encourage language learners to have a balanced approach to idioms in English and ASL. Idioms are in such widespread use that it is inappropriate to ignore the. This workshop focuses just on those idioms which the modern student needs to know and it aims to provide the information and practice which will help you understand and use them correctly.



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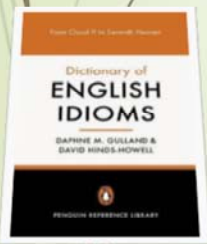
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## Lesson 01

# What does **id.i.om** (id' e em) mean?

- An **idiom** "special property", "special feature", "special phrasing", a phrase or a fixed expression that has a figurative, or sometimes literal, meaning. An idiom's figurative meaning is different from the literal meaning.
- **There are thousands of idioms, and they occur frequently in all languages. It is estimated that there are a least twenty-five thousand idiomatic expressions in the English language.**
- Idioms fall into the category of *native language* (often non-literal in meaning with attitudinal nuances). [nuance: a very small difference]
- *Standard language* includes pause fillers (e.g. "Like," "Er" or "Uhm") and conversational speech formulas ("You've got to be kidding," "Excuse me?" or "Hang on a minute")



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## On www. **ASLU** .com

■ Dr. Bill,

In an ASL/English bilingual training today, a trainer said that **ASL only has FOUR true idiomatic expressions**. Surely ASL has more than four idioms! The trainer explained that some things we call idioms may not necessarily be idioms. They could be metaphors, simply figurative language, or an ASL interpretation of an English idiom.

I'd love to hear your thought on this!

Bill's response:

- Once we analyze many signed phrases that *some people* commonly call "idioms" we do find that those phrases are *not* idioms and instead are something else. **However, if we delve into the definition of the term "idiom" and use that definition to "screen" the whole of ASL phraseology we certainly find more than just "four" ASL idioms.**
- The trick is getting people to agree on what is an "idiom" and prevent people from pooh poohing your idiom examples and calling them metaphors or "metaphorical use of language."

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The definition of a "**metaphor**" according to dictionary.com is:

- 1. A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in "a sea of troubles" or "All the world's a stage" (Shakespeare).
- 2. One thing conceived as representing another; a symbol: "Hollywood has always been an irresistible, prefabricated metaphor for the crass, the materialistic, the shallow, and the craven" (Neal Gabler).

So then, how is a metaphor different from an idiom?

- The definition of an "**idiom**": According to the 1993 Merriam-Webster dictionary, an **idiom** is "an expression in the usage of a language that is peculiar to itself either grammatically or in having a meaning that cannot be derived from the conjoined meanings of its elements" (575).
- Ah ha! There we go. The ASL idiom "TRAIN GONE" means "no, I'm not going to repeat what I said." It isn't a metaphor because "the leaving of a train" is sufficiently different from the idea of "someone not repeating themselves" that you really can't make a direct connection between the two.

To be able to understand what is meant by an idiom you have to possess "insider" knowledge. You can't just look up the meaning of the individual words in a dictionary and piece together the meaning of an idiom.

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# On www. **ASLU**.com

You generally can figure out a **metaphor without context or insider knowledge**. It is likely that a person could figure out that the metaphor "**sea of troubles**" means to have a lot of problems. But without context or insider knowledge a would be unlikely to figure out that the idiom "**kicked the bucket**" means someone "He died." You might assume that someone was mad or that he messed up -- but died? No. So, an phrase becomes an idiom (and not just a metaphor) when the phrase's meaning moves so far from the literal interpretation that it makes no sense.



Consider this conversation about an idiom:

- **Bob:** Hey John, what does the phrase "He kicked the bucket" mean?  
**John:** Well, Bob, it means "He died."  
**Bob:** That doesn't make any sense. What does a bucket have to do with dying?!?  
**John:** I don't know. It's just an idiom.

Compare that with this conversation about a metaphor:

- **Bob:** Hey, John, what does the phrase "He passed away" mean?  
**John:** Well, Bob, it means "He died."  
**Bob:** Eh, I don't get it.  
**John:** Well, it's like you are saying his spirit has passed on to the next life.  
**Bob:** Oh, I get it. "He passed away" is saying that dying is like "passing through a door into another realm." That is sort of poetic.  
**John:** Yah, it is *metaphorical*.

In a **metaphor** the meaning has been abstracted but held on to.  
In an **idiom** the meaning has been obliterated and replaced.

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- ★ 1. **TRAIN GONE** = missed opportunity to know what is being talked about
- 2. **CIGARETTE GONE** = missed opportunity to know what is being talked about. Note, this is a clever twist on the "train gone" idiom since some people say, TRAIN BACK! But you can't bring back a smoked cigarette.
- 3. **FINISH TOUCH** = been there, have physically been to a place
- ★ 4. **FISH** = "I am done. It is over." This is a pun / idiom based on the fact that many Deaf when doing the sign for "FINISH" make a mouth movement that looks as if they were saying the word "fish."
- 5. **BASEMENT** = Stayed home, didn't go out.
- 6. **"BY-A-HAIR"** (pull a hair) = "Whew! That was a close one!" The signer does a sign that depicts the "pulling of a single hair" but the actual meaning has nothing to do with the pulling of a single piece of hair.
- ★ 7. **FISH-SWALLOW** = gullible. The signer does a sign which depicts the swallowing of a fish but the actual meaning is that someone is gullible.
- 8. **BLOW-BRAINS-OUT** = Gee, oh wow, I can't believe that it (a certain piece of information) isn't coming to my mind. I know this but can't think of the right word, or information.
- ★ 9. **SCRATCH-FOREHEAD** = I will never forget that. / "Scarred for life."
- 10. **STRICT** = "hard nosed" = unyielding, not flexible. This sign is interesting because the meaning of the sign is interpreted as "strict." You see the sign and you think "strict" -- you don't think of it as being an idiom. But if you consider the likely history of the sign you can see that it is a combination of the signs "HARD" and "NOSE." The phrase, "He (or she) is hard nosed," is obviously an idiom since the literal meaning has nothing to do with having a "hard nose."

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**Debatable idioms:**

1. HEARING SCHOOL = "public school" This is somewhat of an idiom to Hearing people who don't understand ASL fully. But it makes perfect sense to "Deafs" (Deaf people).

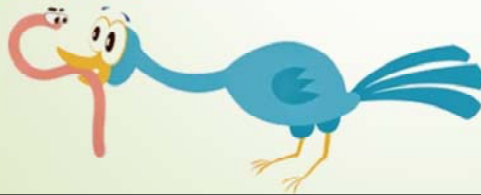
2. HORNY: This sign shows a single horn protruding from the head. If taken literally it would mean a person looked like a unicorn ("He/she/I have a horn sticking out of my head.") But what it actually means is that a person is aroused.

Idioms are supposed to consist of "more than one word." So how is it that a single sign qualifies as an idiom? I'm not saying that a single sign in isolation qualifies as an idiom. "BASEMENT" out of context doesn't qualify as an idiom, but if a signer asks, "PAST WEEKEND what-DO YOU?" and gets a reply of "BASEMENT" that reply if interpreted literally would mean "I was in the basement all weekend" -- which is obviously more than a single word but has an actual meaning of "I stayed home and didn't go anywhere" -- which has nothing to do with an actual "basement."

## Lesson 01

# A Figurative Or Literal Meaning

- When one says "**The devil is in the details**", one is not expressing a belief in demons, but rather one means that things may look good on the surface, but upon scrutiny, undesirable aspects are revealed.
- Similarly, when one says "**The early bird gets the worm**", one is not suggesting that there is only one worm, rather one means there are plenty of worms, but for the sake of the idiom one plays along, and imagines that there is only one worm; alternatively, **the figurative translation** of this phrase is that the most attentive and astute individual, or perhaps the hardest working (or simply the first one) gets the desired outcome to a situation or the better product, depending on the context.
- On the other hand, "**Waste not, want not**" is completely **devoid of a figurative meaning**. It counts as an idiom, however, because it **has a literal meaning** and people keep saying it.



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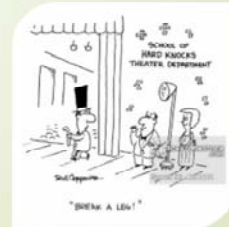
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# The Origin of Idiomatic Expressions

- Many idiomatic expressions, **in their original use** idioms were not figurative but **had literal meaning**. For instance:
- spill the beans** meaning to let out a secret probably originates in a physical spilling of beans which are either being eaten or measured out. The point is that the spiller certainly does not want to lose any beans. Or, alternatively, it may be that a person wants to share a secret, and finally, perhaps after prodding, does so, and when that happens it would be like spilling beans into a bowl.
- let the cat out of the bag** : has a meaning similar to the former, but the secret revealed in this case will likely cause some problems. A cat was sometimes put in a bag to keep it under control or to pretend that it was a more saleable animal, such as a pig or a rabbit. So, to let the cat out of the bag suggests either that the deception is revealed or that the situation is out of control.
- break a leg**: meaning good luck in a performance/presentation etc. This common idiom comes from belief in superstitions. The term 'break a leg' appears to come from the belief that one ought not to utter the words 'good luck' to an actor. By wishing someone bad luck, it is supposed that the opposite will occur.



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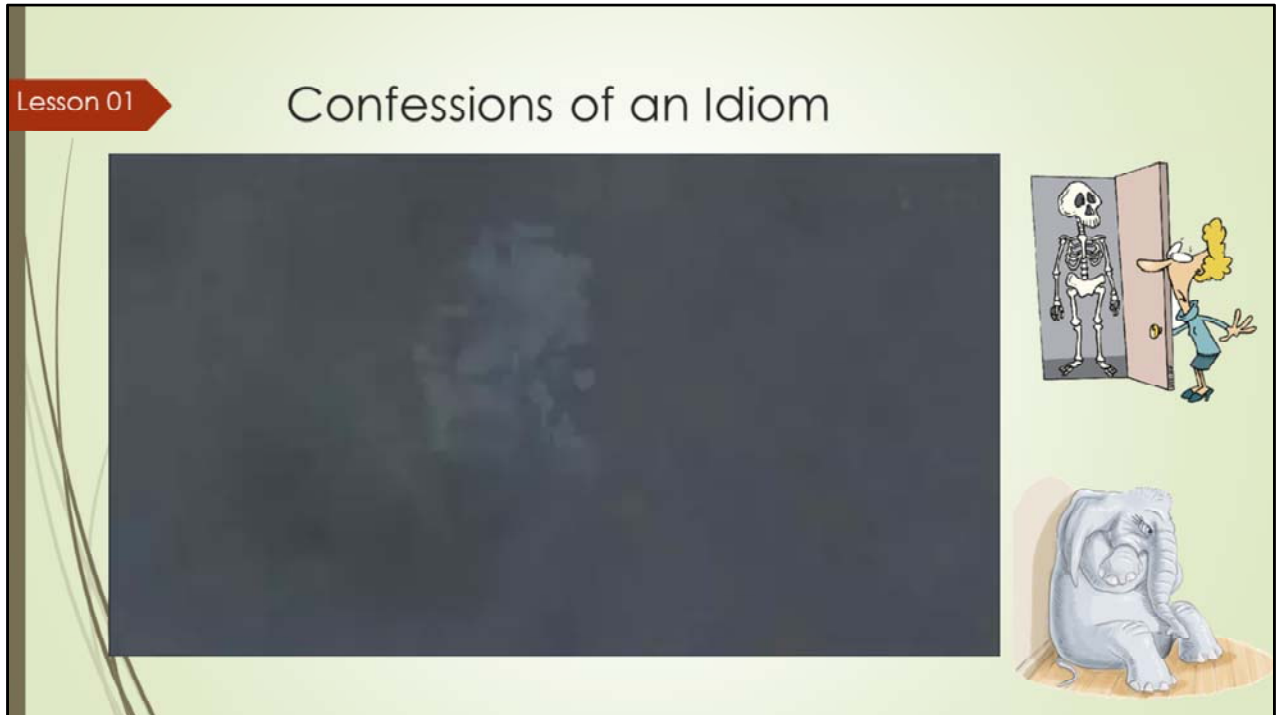
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## Confessions of an Idiom

**Confessions of an Idiom**

Everyone has **Skeletons in their Closet** but what happens if one day the **Elephant in the Room** decides to make the Skeleton in the Closet bring the truth to light? The Skeleton isn't one to confess to his crimes so easily. Chaos follows in this power struggle with a world full of idioms.

\* Video by Amanda Koh and Mollie Helms at Ringling College of Art + Design

1. Elephant in the room
2. Skeleton in the closet
3. Bone to pick with you
4. Sweeping dirt under the rug
5. Clean slate
6. Bigger fish to fry
7. Fishing for compliments
8. Shooting fish in a barrel
9. Holy mackerel
10. Eye on you
11. Well enough alone
12. Calling your bluff

13. Pack of lies (pack of cigarettes)
14. Let the cat out of the bag
15. Falling apart
16. Don't have a leg to stand on
17. In the lime light
18. Spill the beans
19. Break someone's heart
20. Kill 2 birds with one stone
21. Stab a man in the back
22. Window of opportunity (confession good for the soul)
23. Laughing your ass off

## Compositionality or Non-compositional

- How is it possible for us to understand potentially limitless new utterances? The most common solution in philosophy and linguistics is to maintain that the meanings of complex expressions depend on– and depend only on– **the meanings** of their simple parts and the ways that those parts are organized (put together by the grammar). This is called compositionality.
- How does this solution work? Since there are only finite (limited) many simple expressions (words/ morphemes) in English (or any other language), each language user only has to learn a finite (limited) many meaning facts: **what all the simple expressions mean**.
- Then when that user encounters a unique utterance she just uses the already-learnt meaning facts about words and the grammar of the utterance to work out its meaning. **Compositionality says that's all she needs!**
- "The meaning of the whole depends on (and only on) the meanings of the parts and the way they are combined."



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## Lesson 01

# What Idioms Are NOT...



- When two or three words are often used together in a particular sequence, the words are said to be Siamese twins. Usage will prevent the words from being displaced or rearranged. For example, a person may be left "**high and dry**" but never "**dry and high**". This idiom in turns means that the person is left in their former conditions rather than being assisted so that their condition improves.
- A literal translation (**word-by-word**) of idioms will most likely not convey the same meaning in ASL.
- Idioms are also not to be confused with **proverbs**, which are simple sayings that express a truth based on common sense or practical experience.

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Idioms are also not to be confused with **proverbs**, which are simple sayings that express a truth based on common sense or practical experience.

### Samples of a proverb:

Haste makes waste

A stitch in time saves nine

Ignorance is bliss

You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar

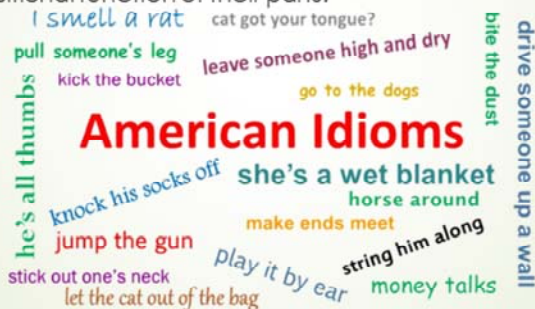
You can lead a horse to water, but you cant make him drink

Honesty is the best policy

## Characteristics of Idioms



- We cannot normally change the words, their order, or the grammatical forms in the same way as changing non-idiomatic expression. In other words, **idioms are basically fixed expressions**.
- The **meaning of an idiom is metaphorical** rather than literal. It is not a result of the compositional function of their parts.



- **The grammatical form of an idiom is invariable and fixed.** The process of substitution is not allowed and passive constructions can not be formed.

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Lesson 01

Idioms – A Closer  
Lesson 1  
Across the board



## Part A

- Across the board
- Against the clock
- All ears
- Antsy
- At cross purposes
- At each other's throats
- At large (1)
- At large (2)
- At the drop of a hat
- At the eleventh hour
- At wit's end
- Back down
- Back to square one
- Bank on it
- Be up and running

**An idiom may be listed multiple times due to multiple definitions and signs that may be possible.**

Across the board

Against the clock

All ears

Antsy

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Lesson 01 - A



Across the board Everyone or everything is included:  
The President wanted taxes lowered **across the board**.



Very eager to hear; very attentive:  
Go ahead with your story; we are **all ears**.



A test of speed or time:  
John was running **against the clock** to finish his paper on time.



To be restless or incapable of sitting still:  
Please don't be so **antsy**; sit still and be quiet!

Across the board Everyone or everything is included:  
The President wanted taxes lowered **across the board**. (General)

Very eager to hear; very attentive:  
Go ahead with your story; we are **all ears** (Pay Attention)

A test of speed or time:  
John was running **against the clock** to finish his paper on time. (Time Race)

To be restless or incapable of sitting still:  
Please don't be so **antsy**; sit still and be quiet! (Restless)

Lesson 01 - A



With opposing meanings or aims: Juan's parents acted **at cross purposes** in advising him: his father wanted him to become a doctor; but his mother wanted him to become a minister.



Bickering Ian and Alfonso have never been very friendly towards each other: For as long as anyone can remember, they've been **at each other's throats**.



Not contained within walls, fences, or boundaries; free: The killer remained **at large** for weeks.



Not contained within walls, fences, or boundaries; free: The killer remained **at large** for weeks.

With opposing meanings or aims: Juan's parents acted **at cross purposes** in advising him; his father wanted him to become a doctor; but his mother wanted him to become a minister. (Conflict)

Bickering Ian and Alfonso have never been very friendly towards each other: For as long as anyone can remember, they've been **at each other's throats**. (Confrontation)

Not contained within walls, fences, or boundaries; free: The killer remained **at large** for weeks. (Free)

Not contained within walls, fences, or boundaries; free: The killer remained **at large** for weeks. (Find? Cant!)

Lesson 01 - A



To make a decision or do something very quickly without thinking about it: If he asked me out I would go **at the drop of a hat**.



At the last minute; almost too late: Yes, I got the work done in time. I finished it **at the eleventh hour**.



Having no idea how to meet a difficulty or solve a problem: He had approached every friend and acquaintance for help in vain, and now he was **at his wit's end**.



To give up a claim: Bill said he could beat Antonio, but when Antonio put up his fists Bill **backed down**.

To make a decision or do something very quickly without thinking about it:  
If he asked me out I would go **at the drop of a hat**. (Immediately)

At the last minute; almost too late: Yes, I got the work done in time.  
I finished it **at the eleventh hour**. (Last Minute)

Having no idea how to meet a difficulty or solve a problem:  
He had approached every friend and acquaintance for help in  
vain, and now he was **at his wit's end**. (No Idea do do)

To give up a claim: Bill said he could beat Antonio,  
but when Antonio put up his fists Bill **backed down**. (Surrender)

Lesson 01 - A



To have to start over again: We tried another solution, but it didn't work, so now we are **back to square one**.



To depend on; put one's trust in: He knew he could **bank on** public indignation to change things.



(For a technological process) be operational; be ready to use:  
The web site has **been up and running** since December 1995.



To have to start over again: We tried another solution, but it didn't work, so now we are **back to square one**. (Start Over)

To depend on; put one's trust in:  
He knew he could **bank on** public indignation to change things. (Depend)

(For a technological process) be operational; be ready to use  
The web site has **been up and running** since December 1995. (Running [copy machine])

## Lesson 01 - A

### Idiom Intro

Why are idioms important?

Idioms appear in **every book** and **heard in every conversation** from the:

- 1) Family setting
- 2) Professional setting
- 3) Educational setting
- 4) Social setting

Example Idiom:

**English:** It's raining cats and dogs!

**ASL:** It is raining heavily!

- Facial Expressions; body movements and ASL structure order are all involved in becoming proficient in the interpreting process.



*DVD: Idioms incorporated into ASL and English*  
13 distinctive handshapes  
8 idioms for each handshape  
Total of 104 idioms

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13 distinctive handshapes  
8 idioms for each handshape  
Total of 104 idioms

1. S
2. X
3. A
4. B bent
5. Y
6. D
7. V bent
8. F
9. 8
10. B closed
11. Claw
12. B open
13. 5

# The Family Setting



BTE Handshape (B Open)



Don't Have

## The Family Setting

B-thumb-extended handshape

Don't have / gone

Girl: Candy I want more

Mom: Candy gone

# The Professional Setting



1 Handshape



The Point Is...

## The Professional Setting

1 handshape: point

The Point Is...

The point of this discussion is... ah...

# The Educational System



S Handshape



With the understanding; Only If...

## The Educational System

S-handshape: understand

With the understanding; Only if...

**Girl:** Play I want

**Teacher:** Play yes [with understand]

# The Social Setting



Y Handshape



Holy Cow...

## The Social Setting

Y Handshape

Holy Cow

Lady 2: Tomorrow rain a foot

Lady 1: Holy Cow

## Lesson 01 - A

### S - Handshape

- 1) Only if/when; but
- 2) Love (fond of)
- 3) To live and learn; learn/roll with the punches
- 4) To talk on and on; to go on and on
- 5) Strong; heavy; frequent (adj.)
- 6) Hot damn!; Yes! All right!
- 7) Skilled in signing; sign like a natural
- 8) To lose the point; idea/concept goes right by someone



### S – Handshape

- 1) With the understanding; Only if/when; but
- 2) Love (fond of)
- 3) To live and learn; learn/roll with the punches
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## Part B

- Beats me
- Behind the scenes
- Below the belt
- Bend over backwards
- Bent out of shape
- Bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
- Birds and the bees
- Birthday suit
- Bite off more than I can chew (1)
- Bite off more than I can chew (2)
- Blabbermouth (1)
- Blabbermouth (2)
- Blabbermouth (3)
- Black market
- Blood is thicker than water

An idiom may be listed multiple times due to multiple definitions and signs that may be possible.

Beats me

Behind the scenes

Below the belt

Bend over backwards

Bent out of shape

Bird in the hand is worth two in the bush

Birds and the bees

Birthday suit

Bite off more than I can chew (1)

Bite off more than I can chew (2)

Blabbermouth (1)

Blabbermouth (2)

Blabbermouth (3)

Black market

Blood is thicker than water

Lesson 01 - B



To have no idea:  
A: What time is the party? B: **Beats me.**



Out of sight; unknown to most people:  
Much of the banquet committee's work was done **behind the scenes.**



To do something in an unfair or cowardly way:  
I think it was a bit **below the belt** when he lied to her.



To try very hard:  
They both **bend over backwards** to please their boss.

To have no idea

A: What time is the party? B: **Beats me.** (Clueless)

Out of sight; unknown to most people

Much of the banquet committee's work was done **behind the scenes.**  
(Not See Happen)

To do something in an unfair or cowardly way

I think it was a bit **below the belt** when he lied to her. (Not Fair)

To try very hard

They both **bend over backwards** to please their boss. (Try Hard Help Help Help)

Lesson 01 - B



Needlessly worried about something:  
I know you're worried about your job interview, but don't get **bent out of shape**. You'll do just fine.



Don't go after something if it means losing what you have:  
Johnny has a job as a paperboy, but he wants a job in a gas station. His father says that a **bird in the hand is worth two in the bush**.



About sex, relationships, and the birth process:  
At various ages, in response to questions, a child can be told about the **birds and the bees**.



To be completely naked:  
When I looked in the crib, he was just laying there in his **birthday suit**.

Needlessly worried about something:

I know you're worried about your job interview, but don't get **bent out of shape**. You'll do just fine. (Upset)

Don't go after something if it means losing what you have:

Johnny has a job as a paperboy, but he wants a job in a gas station. His father says that a **bird in the hand is worth two in the bush**. (True Have Satisfied)

About sex, relationships, and the birth process:

At various ages, in response to questions, a child can be told about the **birds and the bees**. (Sex Explain)

To be completely naked:

When I looked in the crib, he was just laying there in his **birthday suit**. (Naked)

Lesson 01 - B



Take responsibility for more than one can manage: Overwhelmed  
I'm really behind with my project. Can you help me? I'm afraid  
I **bit off more than I could chew.**



Take responsibility for more than one can manage: Above  
I'm really behind with my project. Can you help me? I'm afraid  
I **bit off more than I could chew.**



A very talkative person—especially one who says things that  
should be kept secret: Tattle Tail  
Don't say anything to him unless you want the whole office to  
know. He's quite a **blabbermouth.**



A very talkative person—especially one who says things that  
should be kept secret: Gossip  
Don't say anything to him unless you want the whole office to  
know. He's quite a **blabbermouth.**

Take responsibility for more than one can manage: (Overwhelmed)  
I'm really behind with my project. Can you help me? I'm afraid I **bit off  
more than I could chew.** (Overwhelmed)

Take responsibility for more than one can manage: (above)  
I'm really behind with my project. Can you help me? I'm afraid I **bit off  
more than I could chew.** (Higher)

A very talkative person—especially one who says things that should be kept secret: (Tattle  
Tail)  
Don't say anything to him unless you want the whole office to know. He's quite a  
**blabbermouth.** (Tattletale)

A very talkative person—especially one who says things that should be kept secret: (gossip)  
Don't say anything to him unless you want the whole office to know. He's quite a  
**blabbermouth.** (Gossip)

Lesson 01 - B



A very talkative person—especially one who says things that should be kept secret: Tail barer  
Don't say anything to him unless you want the whole office to know. He's quite a **blabbermouth**.



Source of illicit goods (which should be rationed or unobtainable):  
Good quality jeans are only available in the **black market** in Russia.



Persons of the same family are closer to one another than to others; relatives are favored or chosen over outsiders  
Mr. Jones always sides with his brother when we have an argument. I guess **blood is thicker than water**.



A very talkative person—especially one who says things that should be kept secret: (Tail barer)

Don't say anything to him unless you want the whole office to know. He's quite a **blabbermouth**. (Comments)

Source of illicit goods (which should be rationed or unobtainable)  
Good quality jeans are only available in the **black market** in Russia.  
(Cover/shady Illegal)

Persons of the same family are closer to one another than to others;  
relatives are favored or chosen over outsiders  
Mr. Jones always sides with his brother when we have an argument. I  
guess **blood is thicker than water**. (Priority family first)