

Animal Idioms

Animal Idioms List with Meanings and Examples

Idiom / Phrase	Meaning	Example Sentence
a little bird told me	someone told me a secret	A little bird told me that you're getting married.
ants in your pants	anxious or nervous	Frank had ants in his pants before taking his exam.
bark up the wrong tree	look in the wrong place or falsely accuse	He asked me if I broke his laptop. I said he was barking up the wrong tree.
beast of burden	someone carries another person's problems	I will never be your beast of burden. You have got to deal with your own problems.
beat a dead horse	dwelt on a topic beyond resolution	I told you several times that I won't do it. Don't beat a dead horse!
black sheep	unaccepted group member	Tom was the black sheep of the family and preferred to do things on his own.
cat nap	a short sleep	My father always takes a cat nap after work.
cat got your tongue	said when someone doesn't speak	What's wrong? Cat got your tongue? You haven't said a word since we arrived.
chicken out	avoid doing something because of fear	Mary was going to go skydiving, but she chickened out.
clam up	become quiet	Tom always clams up when you ask him about his ex-girlfriend.
copy cat	someone who copies another	You're such a copy cat! Do your own work!
crocodile tears	fake tears	Her little daughter always cries crocodile tears to get whatever she wants.
dog days	very hot days	The dog days of summer are really humid and uncomfortable.
don't count chickens before they hatch	don't plan for something that may not happen	Zoe bought the dress before anyone asked her to the prom. I told her not to count her chickens before they hatch.

drop like flies	die or give up quickly	The other candidates dropped like flies at the end of the election.
eager beaver	someone who is excited about something	She's such an eager beaver when checking updates on Instagram.
early bird	someone who likes to wake up early	Sara is such an early bird. She gets up before the sun rises.
elephant in the room	a sensitive unaddressed issue	The couple's money problem was an elephant in the room. They never talk about finances.
fishy	strange or suspicious	Something fishy is going on. He takes his wedding ring off whenever he leaves the house.
have a cow	get upset	Don't have a cow! It's not like I scratched the car on purpose!
hold your horses	wait and be patient	Hold your horses! I'll be ready in a minute.
holy cow	that is surprising	Holy cow! Did she really dye her hair blue?
horse around	play roughly	Stop horsing around kids. You're in the library.
in the dog house	in trouble	The coach won't let me play. I'm in the dog house.
kill two birds with one stone	accomplish two things at once	Why not kill two birds with one stone and brush your teeth in the shower?
kitty corner	diagonally across from	Starbucks is kitty corner to the gas station.
let the cat out of the bag	reveal a secret	Don't let the cat out of the bag about the birthday party.
lion's share	the majority of something	You took the lion's share of the money. All I got was a couple pennies.
monkey see, monkey do	silly people copy each other	Monkey see, monkey do. Your brother spilt ketchup on his shirt too.
nest egg	saved money	She has a huge nest egg, so she doesn't have to work anymore.
pig out	eat a lot	Last night, I pigged out on a bag of potato chips.
plenty of other fish in the sea	there are many other available partners	Don't worry. You'll find another girl. There are plenty of other fish in the sea.

raining cats and dogs	raining heavily	It's raining cats and dogs. Remember your umbrella.
rat race	competitive struggle	I escaped the rat race in the office and moved to Hawaii.
screw the pooch	fail	Carl really screwed the pooch on the exam. He's the only one who failed.
shooting fish in a barrel	easy or not challenging	For my brilliant little brother, setting up the WiFi connection is like shooting fish in a barrel.
sleep with the fishes	die	Before pulling the trigger, he told the gangster to sleep with the fishes.
smell a rat	suspect deception	I smell a rat. I know I left my wallet on my desk, but it's gone.
straight from the horse's mouth	directly from the source	The boss said we're bankrupt. The news came straight from the horse's mouth.
take the bull by the horns	be brave and face a challenge	If you want to be rich, take the bull by the horns and work harder.
the birds and the bees	sex education	I remember learning about the birds and the bees in middle school.
the lion's share	the majority	She was upset because her sister got the lion's share of the inheritance.
until the cows come home	for a long time	She can watch Netflix until the cows come home.
water off a duck's back	a harmful remark that has no effect on someone	She insulted me but I didn't care. It was like water off a duck's back.
wild goose chase	lengthy undertaking that accomplishes little	Making the playoffs is now a wild goose chase. The team should focus on player development.

Animal Idioms - Worksheet A

Instructions: Write the meanings of the idioms and create sentences.

Idiom / Phrase	Meaning	Example Sentence
a little bird told me		
ants in your pants		
bark up the wrong tree		
beast of burden		
beat a dead horse		
black sheep		
cat nap		
cat got your tongue		
chicken out		
clam up		
copy cat		

crocodile tears		
dog days		
don't count chickens before they hatch		
drop like flies		
eager beaver		
early bird		
elephant in the room		
fishy		
have a cow		
hold your horses		
holy cow		
horse around		
in the dog house		

kill two birds with one stone		
kitty corner		
let the cat out of the bag		
lion's share		
monkey see, monkey do		
nest egg		
pig out		
plenty of other fish in the sea		
raining cats and dogs		
rat race		
screw the pooch		
shooting fish in a barrel		
sleep with the fishes		

smell a rat		
straight from the horse's mouth		
take the bull by the horns		
the birds and the bees		
the lion's share		
until the cows come home		
water off a duck's back		
wild goose chase		

Animal Idioms - Worksheet B

Instructions: Underline the idioms in the sentences and write the meanings.

Sentences with Idioms / Phrases	Meaning
A little bird told me that you're getting married.	
Frank had ants in his pants before taking his exam.	
He asked me if I broke his laptop. I said he was barking up the wrong tree.	
I will never be your beast of burden. You have got to deal with your own problems.	
I told you several times that I won't do it. Don't beat a dead horse!	
Tom was the black sheep of the family and preferred to do things on his own.	
My father always takes a cat nap after work.	
What's wrong? Cat got your tongue? You haven't said a word since we arrived.	
Mary was going to go skydiving, but she chickened out.	
Tom always clams up when you ask him about his ex-girlfriend.	
You're such a copy cat! Do your own work!	

Her little daughter always cries crocodile tears to get whatever she wants.	
The dog days of summer are really humid and uncomfortable.	
Zoe bought the dress before anyone asked her to the prom. I told her not to count her chickens before they hatch.	
The other candidates dropped like flies at the end of the election.	
She's such an eager beaver when checking updates on Instagram.	
Sara is such an early bird. She gets up before the sun rises.	
The couple's money problem was an elephant in the room. They never talk about finances.	
Something fishy is going on. He takes his wedding ring off whenever he leaves the house.	
Don't have a cow! It's not like I scratched the car on purpose!	
Hold your horses! I'll be ready in a minute.	
Holy cow! Did she really dye her hair blue?	
Stop horsing around kids. You're in the library.	
The coach won't let me play. I'm in the dog house.	

Why not kill two birds with one stone and brush your teeth in the shower?	
Starbucks is kitty corner to the gas station.	
Don't let the cat out of the bag about the birthday party.	
You took the lion's share of the money. All I got was a couple pennies.	
Monkey see, monkey do. Your brother spilt ketchup on his shirt too.	
She has a huge nest egg, so she doesn't have to work anymore.	
Last night, I pigged out on a bag of potato chips.	
Don't worry. You'll find another girl. There are plenty of other fish in the sea.	
It's raining cats and dogs. Remember your umbrella.	
I escaped the rat race in the office and moved to Hawaii.	
Carl really screwed the pooch on the exam. He's the only one who failed.	
For my brilliant little brother, setting up the WiFi connection is like shooting fish in a barrel.	
Before pulling the trigger, he told the gangster to sleep with the fishes.	

I smell a rat. I know I left my wallet on my desk, but it's gone.	
The boss said we're bankrupt. The news came straight from the horse's mouth.	
If you want to be rich, take the bull by the horns and work harder.	
I remember learning about the birds and the bees in middle school.	
She was upset because her sister got the lion's share of the inheritance.	
She can watch Netflix until the cows come home.	
She insulted me but I didn't care. It was like water off a duck's back.	
Making the playoffs is now a wild goose chase. The team should focus on player development.	

Animal Idioms - Worksheet C

Instructions: Read the meanings and write the correct idioms.

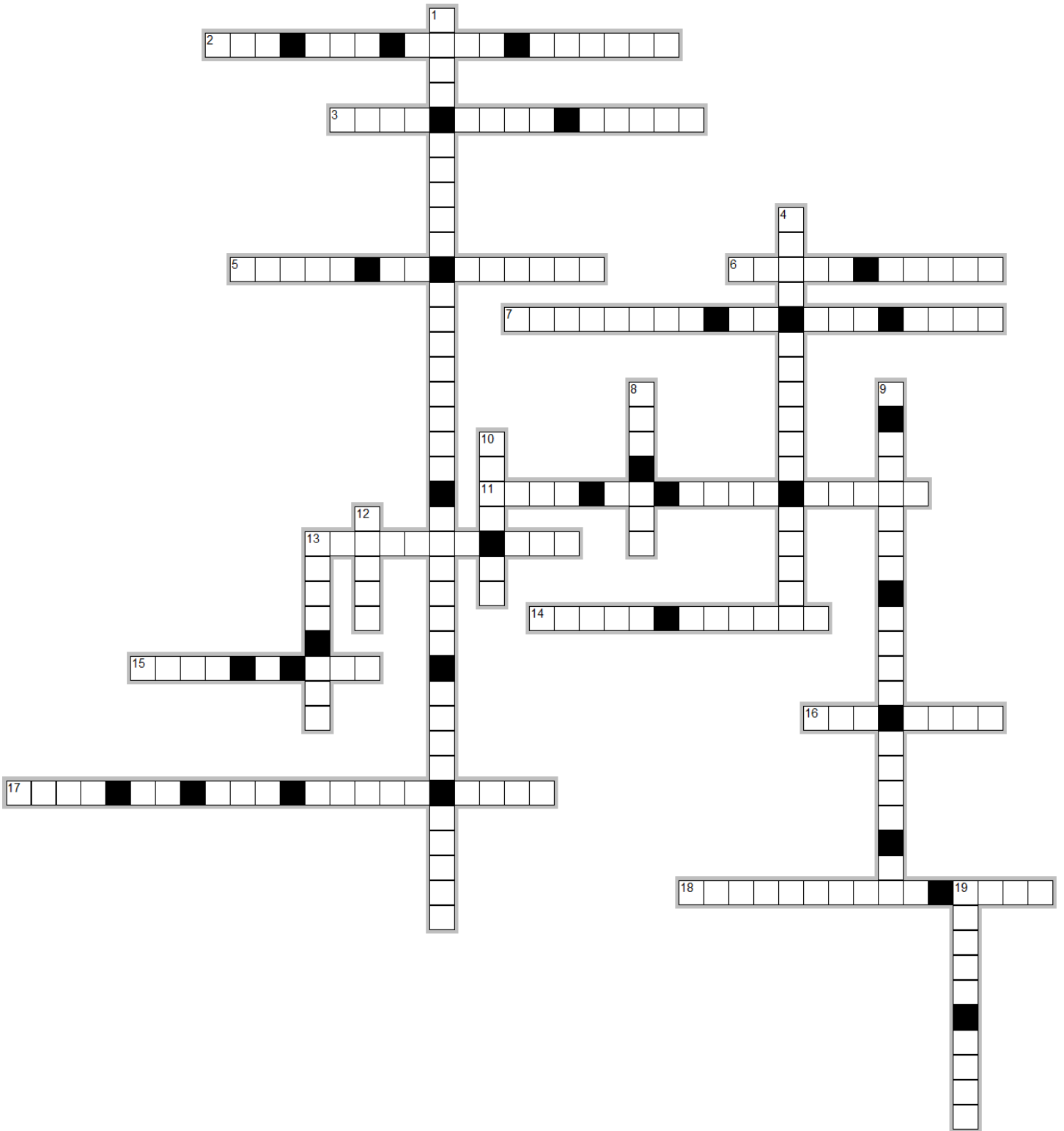
Meaning	Idiom / Phrase
someone told me a secret	
anxious or nervous	
look in the wrong place or falsely accuse	
someone carries another person's problems	
dwell on a topic beyond resolution	
unaccepted group member	
a short sleep	
said when someone doesn't speak	
avoid doing something because of fear	
become quiet	
someone who copies another	

fake tears	
very hot days	
don't plan for something that may not happen	
die or give up quickly	
someone who is excited about something	
someone who likes to wake up early	
a sensitive unaddressed issue	
strange or suspicious	
get upset	
wait and be patient	
that is surprising	
play roughly	
in trouble	

accomplish two things at once	
diagonally across from	
reveal a secret	
the majority of something	
silly people copy each other	
saved money	
eat a lot	
there are many other available partners	
raining heavily	
competitive struggle	
fail	
easy or not challenging	
die	

suspect deception	
directly from the source	
be brave and face a challenge	
sex education	
the majority	
for a long time	
a harmful remark that has no effect on someone	
lengthy undertaking that accomplishes little	

Animal Idioms Crossword



Crossword Clues

Across

2. said when someone doesn't speak
3. dye or give up quickly
5. someone carries another person's problems
6. unaccepted group member
7. a sensitive unaddressed issue
11. anxious or nervous
13. avoid doing something because of fear
14. someone who is excited about something
15. get upset
16. very hot days
17. look in the wrong place or falsely accuse
18. fake tears

Down

1. don't plan for something that may not happen
4. dwell on a topic beyond resolution
8. a short sleep
9. someone told me a secret
10. become quiet
12. strange or suspicious
13. someone who copies another
19. someone who likes to wake up early

Answer Key

Across

2. CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE
3. DROP LIKE FLIES
5. BEAST OF BURDEN
6. BLACK SHEEP
7. ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM
11. ANTS IN YOUR PANTS
13. CHICKEN OUT
14. EAGER BEAVER
15. HAVE A COW
16. DOG DAYS
17. BARK UP THE WRONG TREE
18. CROCODILE TEARS

Down

1. DON'T COUNT CHICKENS BEFORE THEY HATCH
4. BEAT A DEAD HORSE
8. CAT NAP
9. A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME
10. CLAM UP
12. FISHY
13. COPY CAT
19. EARLY BIRD

Order the Book

Did you enjoy the sample of activities provided in this PDF?

Order the book via the *ESL Expat* website – or directly from Amazon.



Visit *ESL Expat* online for updated materials, new games, activity books and more resources for teaching English language learners.

ESLexpat.com