

For Review Only



Teacher Josh English Idioms

Definitions in English and Mandarin

英文成语手册

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Josh Bobley

Peter A Bobley, Mingxia Ma and Patrick Carlson

Idioms are expressions that are used every day but they don't mean what the words seem to indicate. *No spring chicken*, for example, has nothing to do with chickens. Rather, it means not being young any more.

Teacher Josh: English Idioms explains 300 of the most widely used English idioms in a fun, memorable way. Each entry features a cartoon that depicts how it is used, plus an example and explanation in English and Mandarin. Readers can also scan a QR code to access a video by Teacher Josh, further explaining the idiom in English and Mandarin.

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Teacher Josh

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Published by Marshall Cavendish Editions
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International



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E-mail: genref@sg.marshallcavendish.com
Website: www.marshallcavendish.com/genref

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Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 800 Westchester Ave, Suite N-641,
Rye Brook, NY 10573, USA • Marshall Cavendish International (Thailand)
Co Ltd, 253 Asoke, 16th Floor, Sukhumvit 21 Road, Klongtoey Nua, Wattana,
Bangkok 10110, Thailand • Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Times
Subang, Lot 46, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga, 40000 Shah Alam,
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

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National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data

Name(s): Bobley, Josh. | Bobley, Peter A., author. | Ma, Mingxia, 1988-
translator. | Carlson, Patrick (Patrick W.), illustrator.

Title: Teacher Josh English idioms : with definitions in English and Chinese
= Ying wen cheng yu shou ce / Josh Bobley, Peter A Bobley, Mingxia Ma and
Patrick Carlson.

Description: Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Editions, [2020] | Includes index. |
In English and Chinese.

Identifier(s): OCN 1176175811 | ISBN 978-981-48-9338-1 (paperback)

Subject(s): LCSH: English language--Idioms. | English language--Textbooks for
foreign speakers--Chinese.

Classification: DDC 428.24951--dc23

Printed in Singapore

Introduction

Having taught English to thousands of students in Shanghai for many years, my priority has been teaching colloquial English — slang and phraseology used every day by native speakers. Formal grammar, proper pronunciation and excellent writing techniques are important, but from a practical point of view, familiarity with vernacular used by native speakers is indispensable. If one doesn't understand common expressions like “I'm zonked” or “It's no big deal” or “I want to make a lot of moolah,” it hampers one's ability to communicate with English speakers.

Recently my uncle, Peter Bobley, a well-known New York entrepreneur, author and former book publisher, asked whether my students know English idioms. Do they understand the meaning of “cry uncle” or “everything but the kitchen sink?” I told him that for the most part, no. He suggested that we put together a compilation of English idioms for a Chinese audience. I thought that was a great idea, and the result is this book.

English idioms are spoken by millions of speakers around the world. Quite a few idioms and expressions were invented by New Yorkers, many by Jewish immigrants. For example, “There's a glitch in this computer program;” glitch, meaning “minor malfunction,” comes from the Yiddish word, *gletshn*. And the word “klutz,” as in “You're such a klutz,” meaning “clumsy person,” also derives from Yiddish. Since I was born and raised in New York, and considering the city's

world influence, quite a few New York expressions have been included in this volume.

English idioms books abound, but *Teacher Josh English Idioms* is different; each entry is accompanied by a humorous illustration drawn by famous American cartoonist Patrick Carlson (a.k.a. Cartoonboy), and includes a detailed explanation in Chinese written by my colleague, Ms. Mingxia Ma (马铭霞), a graduate of Qingdao University and a prominent educator. Also included is access to audio recordings of me enunciating the idioms, along with sample sentences, edited by Al Campbell, to whom I am grateful. With this, I hope to encourage students to read aloud at home to perfect their pronunciation.

Ever heard of the idiom, “practice makes perfect” (熟能生巧)? It may be an exaggeration since true perfection is unobtainable, yet it's an important reminder that hard work pays off. When I began studying Mandarin years ago, I never dreamed I'd be able to converse effortlessly in that language with people in China. But I persevered and now in my older age, I feel thankful that I put in the hard work. I hope my students will study diligently too — slowly and steadily — and utilize their knowledge in ways to realize their dreams. As the famous ancient Greek storyteller, Aesop, once said, slow but sure wins the race!

Teacher Josh
Shanghai, 2020

For Review Only

In a pickle

陷入困境



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He's in a pickle because he only has ten minutes to clean the store before customers start arriving.

在客人到来之前，他只有十分钟打扫卫生，这让他陷入困境。

Teacher
Josh

To be in a pickle means to be in a difficult position. The word "pickle" comes from the Dutch word "pekel" which referred to spiced vinegar, a preservative. It was later used to refer to preserved cucumbers. This idiom likens being caught in a dilemma with vegetables that are mixed up in a jar.

In a pickle 从字面上翻译为在泡菜里，其实这个词最早来自荷兰。荷兰语 pickle 指的是腌制醋，是一种防腐剂。泡菜一般放在罐子里的，各种蔬菜混在一起很难区分，而且盐卤本身很咸，并不很好受，所以词义延伸为乱七八糟，处境困难。

Bite off more than you can chew

贪多嚼不烂

He thought he could learn to ski in an hour, but he could barely get down the bunny slope; he bit off more than he could chew.

他以为一个小时能学会滑雪，可是他几乎不能从初级滑雪道上滑下来，他有点贪多嚼不烂。



Teacher Josh

This idiom, which means to take on more than you can handle, could have come from the 1800s, when tobacco chewing was common in America and chewers would bite off more tobacco than they could chew. Another theory is that it was used to describe those who stuffed their mouths with more food than they could swallow.

Bite off 意为“咬下”; chew 为“嚼”的意思，习语的字面意思为“咬下的比所能嚼的还多。”这个习语可以追溯到19世纪美国，当人们咀嚼烟草时，有时往嘴里放的超过他们的承受范围。有时也说孩子满嘴塞满食物不能下咽。现在指接受的任务超过自身的能力。

Chip off the old block

相貌品性酷似父亲(或母亲)的人



Teacher Josh

The idea behind this idiom is that a child looks or acts a lot like his or her father or mother. It is said to have been first used by the Greek poet Theocritus in 270 B.C., to describe a piece of wood or stone that resembled the piece from which it was cut.

I can hardly tell the difference between Tom and his father; he's a real chip off the old block.

我很难说出汤姆和他爸爸的不同，他们长得太像了。

这个成语指某人在行为、外貌、爱好和性格方面与他的父亲(或母亲)很像。这个短语源自古希腊，block 指大块的木材或石头，如果从中切取一小部分称为 chip，这一小块和大的看上去也很像。同理，若把孩子比喻成小部分，家长比喻成大块部分，孩子在行为和相貌方面和家长很像。

Actions speak louder than words

事实胜于雄辩



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That guy says he's going to give lots of money to charity, but so far, he hasn't given a dime. Actions speak louder than words!

那个人说他要给慈善团体捐助很多钱，但是到目前为止他连一毛钱都没有捐。事实胜于雄辩！

Teacher
Josh

This idiom means that people's actions show their real intentions, not what they say. Some of the first variations of this saying are found in the Bible which teaches that people should show love by their actions and not just words.

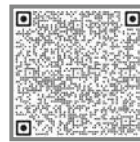
这个成语有几百年历史了，最早在《圣经》一文中出现，讲述一个人强调说爱另一个人，但实际上不做任何彰显爱意的事情。美国林肯总统于1860年在库珀联合学院演讲中使用该成语，多指一个人做什么比说什么更重要，最好是做事而不只是说说。

At the drop of a hat

立刻，马上

That dog is really annoying. It barks at the drop of a hat.

那只狗很讨厌，一看到人就马上喊叫。



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Teacher
Josh

This idiom means at once, without delay. It is said to come from the practice of waving a hat to mark the start of a race or fight. The phrase was further popularized in the mid-1950s when British entertainers Michael Flanders and Donald Swann named their debut album "At the Drop of a Hat."

中世纪，在欧洲社会中，流行着决斗的风气。一些骑士或武士们为了自己的心上人，往往采取决斗的方式，如俄国的大诗人普希金就死于决斗之中。这些人们在决斗之前，往往把帽子狠狠地往地下一摔，这就意味着决斗马上开始。寓意一有信号马上就可以行动，指脾气很暴躁的人一触即发。

For Review Only

Hit the sack

就寝；上床睡觉



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He was so exhausted that he hit the sack ten hours ago and is still asleep.

他太累了，所以他上床睡了十个小时后，现在还在熟睡。

Teacher
Josh

To hit the sack means to go to sleep. This saying dates back to the late nineteenth century when beds were made of sacks stuffed with hay. Before going to sleep, people would literally hit the sacks to make them more comfortable and ensure there were no bugs inside.

古代，当人们上床睡觉时，他们会垫上千草，使床垫更舒适，并确保里面没有虫子，sack指装满干草的麻袋。二战期间，美国士兵也称睡袋为sack。Sack在俚语中指床，而hit是“打击、碰撞”的意思，但“hit the sack”可不是打床，一般指结束了一天的工作和学习之后，去上床睡觉。

For Review Only

Raining cats and dogs

倾盆大雨



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The storm was so bad, I had to run inside. It was raining cats and dogs.

暴风雨天气糟糕，所以我不得不避雨。外面下着倾盆大雨。

Teacher
Josh

While it is not possible for it to rain cats and dogs, this phrase is used to refer to heavy rain. Although we do not know its origins, this idiom is thought to date back to times when heavy rain would wash rubbish — including dead cats and dogs on the streets — away.

这个习语来源不详，据说可能是几百年以前在英格兰，每逢下大雨，很多垃圾冲入道路下的排水沟，包括一些死掉的猫和狗。它们的尸体在街上随处可见，好像和雨一起从天而降。现多用来形容雨下的很大。

For Review Only

A penny for your thoughts

告诉我你在想什么

Noticing that Sam was in a pensive mood, Lily said, "A penny for your thoughts, Sam."
莉莉发现山姆情绪低落，便问道：“山姆，请告诉我你的想法。”



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Teacher
Josh

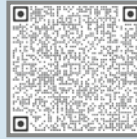
This phrase is used when someone looks lost in thought and you want to know what that person is thinking. It appears in Sir Thomas More's book, *Four Last Things* (1522), where an intelligent man keeps his wisdom to himself and the townspeople offer him money to share his thoughts.

这个成语来源于Thomas More出版的书籍《*Four Last Things*》，书中讲述了对死亡、上帝和精神疾病的沉思，其中有一篇文章使用这个成语用来描述一种情形，城镇中有一位非常有智慧的男士，村民很想知道他是怎么想的，乡亲们甚至愿意付费给他。那时候一便士值很多钱。如果你想知道某人在想什么，你会乐意付巨额费用给他们。

Get in on the ground floor

早期入股；及早下手

Tom got in on the ground floor by buying Apple stock when Apple first went public.
当苹果公司刚上市，汤姆便及早下手购买股票。



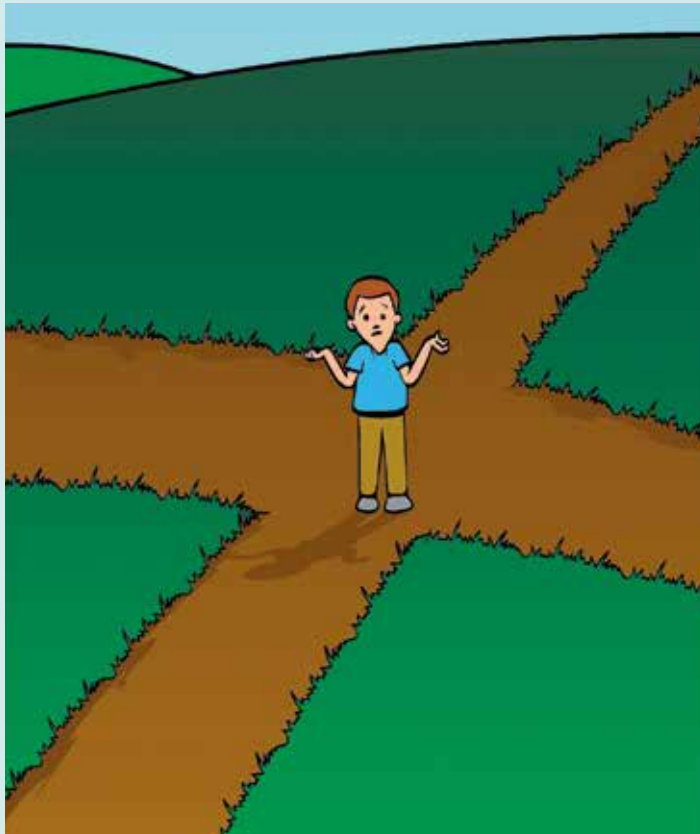
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Teacher
Josh

This idiom means to take part in an enterprise from the start and thereby gain advantage. It is often used with reference to new investments, and probably originated in the financial world in the late nineteenth century.

“Get in on the ground floor”这个习语可能来源于19世纪的美国金融圈，通常指商人和企业家在公司发展初期投资入股，然后获得巨大成功，通常指进行新的投资。

For Review Only
The ball is in your court
决定权在你



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Whether or not you respond is up to you; the ball is in your court.

要不要回复，决定权在你手里。

Teacher
Josh

This idiom means that it is now one's turn to make a decision. While it is said that the phrase was first coined in the twentieth century by someone with a sporting background, views differ on whether it comes from tennis or basketball.

The ball is in your court 字面意思是球到你的场地上，需要马上作出反应。很显然，这个习语是来自体育界，关于是来自网球界还是篮球界有争议。不管来自哪个领域，首次使用是在20世纪。美国的生意人和律师经常用这个习语来告诉对方，他们已经提出建议，现在是对方做决定的时候了。

For Review Only

A diamond in the rough

未经雕琢的钻石；璞玉

Her singing voice is unique, but she still needs practice. She's a diamond in the rough.

她的唱歌声音非常独一无二，但是她还需要练习。她是一块未经雕琢的璞玉。



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Teacher
Josh

This phrase refers to a person or an item that has good qualities, but requires refining. A similar term was used in John Fletcher's play, *A Wife for a Month* (1624), where the character was described as being "very honest, and will be as hard to cut as a rough diamond."

Diamond指钻石，rough意思是粗糙的，未经雕琢的。这个成语字面意思是指一颗未经雕琢的钻石，最初指那些没有经过雕琢的，特别是那些可能被打造成高贵珠宝的宝石。现在也用来形容那些非常有潜力的人和物品。



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Fit as a fiddle

身体健康

She practices gymnastics six hours every day and is in great shape. She's fit as a fiddle.

她每天坚持锻炼体操六个小时，体型很棒，身体健康。

Teacher
Josh

This phrase literally means, "in just as good condition as a fine-tuned violin." It is used to describe someone who keeps himself in good shape through proper exercise and diet.

Fit指身体好，fiddle是小提琴。一把好琴的弦和音调都很好，才可以弹出美妙的音乐。如果形容一个人 fit as a fiddle，是指这个人的身体状况很好。



Josh Bobley, known as Teacher Josh, was born and raised in New York. He is a renowned educator based in Shanghai. His expertise is English language instruction; journalism; and public speaking, which he teaches

to students ranging in age from five to fifty.

He offers classes at various local schools, provides private tutorials and is frequently invited to host major events at museums and government-sponsored events, including a national English language competition for young journalists honing their skills in preparation for the 2022 Beijing Winter Games. He has tens of thousands of followers on his English studies page on KuaiShou (快手), a popular social media site in China.

Since his first trip to China in 1981, Josh has been keenly interested in its language and culture, and speaks fluent Mandarin. He holds a master's degree in Chinese studies from Yale (1991) and a master's from Columbia University's School of Journalism (1998). He is an accomplished classical pianist, having studied at the Manhattan School of Music, and has made several recordings of his interpretations of J.S. Bach, his favorite composer.

Mingxia Ma, 马铭霞, is a bilingual educator born and raised in Weifang, China, and currently teaches hospitality management at Shandong Vocational College of Economics and Business. Ms. Ma holds a bachelor of arts degree in English literature from Qingdao University, a second bachelor's in business from IMC Fachhochschule Krems (University of Applied Science) in Austria, and a master's in

Business Management from Bohai University. She translated this book's English explanations to Chinese.

Having traveled to the US several times, where she worked and studied, she has been interested in American culture for many years, and is equally interested in Chinese history, art and literature. Ms. Ma is a connoisseur of Chinese cuisine and prides herself on her knowledge of the traditional Chinese tea ceremony.

Peter A Bobley is a 76-year-old entrepreneur, author and Broadway play producer. He lives on Long Island, New York, with his wife. He has five children and five grandchildren. Peter has been a copywriter for 50 years and has written hundreds of commercials and brochures. He is known for the way he employs punchy, New York language and idioms. He is the author of two books, *Nobody Asked Me, But...* and *"Mom, We're Black!": Humankind's Journey*. He produced *The First* on Broadway, a musical biography of Jackie Robinson, the first black baseball player to play in the major leagues.

Patrick Carlson is a cartoonist and illustrator from Valdosta, GA. He discovered his love for drawing as a child and began freelancing in college. With a degree in early childhood education, Patrick used his experience in teaching to create cartoons and illustrations for logos, apparel and children's books. In 2004, Patrick quit his teaching position, created bbqlogos.com, and began a full-time career as a cartoonist and illustrator. Today, he has illustrated dozens of children's books and thousands of cartoons for businesses and logos around the world. He lives with his wife, Jennifer, and twin sons, Alex and Ben.