

Common Idioms, Adages, and Proverbs

Key Terms

- **figurative language:** words and phrases that mean one thing but are used for effect to describe something else
- **idiom:** a phrase or a fixed expression that has a nonliteral meaning
- **adage/proverb:** a traditional saying expressing a common experience, observation, or piece of advice

Instruction

Writers often use colorful words or phrases to keep readers interested. They do this by using **figurative language** and other phrases that add more detail to their writing.

Idioms

Idioms are one type of figurative language. Idioms are common phrases or short expressions that often do not use the literal meanings of words. The table below shows a few examples. Which idioms have you heard?

Idiom	Meaning
give it a shot	to try
get cold feet	to get nervous
cost an arm and a leg	to be expensive
speak your mind	to say what you really feel
get a kick out of	to enjoy
slipped my mind	to forget
give someone the cold shoulder	to ignore
out of the blue	without warning
see eye to eye	to agree



Adages and Proverbs

Other types of colorful phrases are **adages** and **proverbs**. While idioms are used for expressions or actions, adages and proverbs are used to give advice or state general truths. Adages and proverbs sometimes have more literal meanings than idioms do.

The table below shows some examples of adages and proverbs.

Adage/Proverb	Meaning
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.	It's better to be happy with what you have than to risk losing everything by seeking more.
A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.	Level of knowledge makes two people see the same thing in different ways.
A hard beginning makes a good ending.	Hard work pays off in the end.
You can bring a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.	You can give someone a chance to do something, but you can't make them take part if they don't want to.
A friend in need is a friend indeed.	True friends will be there for each other in times of hardship.
Beggars can't be choosers.	People with no other options should be happy with what is offered.
A penny saved is a penny earned.	You will get richer by saving money than by spending it right away.
Two wrongs don't make a right.	Someone treating you badly doesn't make it okay to treat them badly.

Adages and proverbs are simpler ways of giving advice or wisdom. These phrases are often considered "rules to live by." They usually focus on how we treat other people or how we should act.



Activity #1

Read the following story and identify the meaning of the underlined idioms, adages, and proverbs.

The Talent Show

“The school talent show will be held next month,” Principal Lewis said to the students. “I hope each one of you signs up and shows off your hidden talents. After all, every dog has its day.”

Monica was excited. She couldn’t wait to perform her stand-up comedy routine in front of her classmates. She made sure she was the first person to sign up so she could be the opening act. The early bird gets the worm, she thought.

Monica’s classmate Lucia saw her sign up. “You’re performing in the talent show?” Lucia asked in surprise. “In class, you’re always so quiet.”

“Don’t judge a book by its cover,” Monica replied.

Lucia nodded. “You’re right. I’m sorry.” Then she added: “Hey, maybe I can help you with your act? Two heads are better than one!”

Monica smiled. “Sure!”

1. “Every dog has its day.”

2. “The early bird gets the worm.”

3. “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

4. “Two heads are better than one.”

Activity #2

Now it’s your turn! Write a short, one-paragraph story that includes at least three idioms, proverbs, or adages with which you are familiar.
