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101 American English Idioms

Harry Collis

Illustrated by Mario Risso

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 4



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Foreword

Nonnative speakers of English can reach a point in their knowledge of the language where they feel comfortable with standard literary speech; however, they're liable to find themselves in hot water when confronted with idiomatic expressions. When hearing an idiom or colloquialism they may feel frustrated and confused, since the true meaning of the idiom generally cannot be determined by a knowledge of its component parts. In many cases an attempt on the part of the learner to tie down a definition of an idiom that would work in all instances is a futile undertaking.

When used by native speakers, idioms sound natural and fit the occasion, since Americans instinctively feel the imagery and impact of what they are saying. A nonnative speaker of English, on the other hand, may know the basic meaning of such expressions, as "I gave it my best shot" or "dressed to kill," but will not be able to use them appropriately. For example, if at a formal gathering an American says to the wife of a foreign diplomat that her gown is elegant, or that she looks lovely, and in appreciation for the compliment her answer is, "Thank you, I gave it my best shot!" or "Thanks, I dressed to kill!", the chances are that the American would be trying his hardest to hold back peals of laughter. Even with a fairly accurate idea of the meaning of an idiomatic expression, the nonnative lacks the intuitive feel for its impact or for the "picture" it creates.

101 American English Idioms is designed to help bridge the gap between "meaning" and "thrust" of American colloquialisms by providing a situation and a graphic illustration of that situation, so that the image created by the expression can be felt, rather than simply learned as a stock definition.

The book is divided into nine sections. The title of each section reflects a notion or a manifestation of the physical world, the world of behavior, or the world of the senses with which the reader may easily identify.

It is hoped that the natural tone of the language of the situations in which the idiom is presented will help to convey the *feeling* of the idiom and the circumstances under which it may be used. The illustrations graphically depicting the meaning of the components of the expressions not only add an element of humor, but also serve to highlight the contrast between the literal and actual meaning of the idioms as presented in the text.

An index is included to facilitate recall and location of the expressions.

101 American English Idioms is intended primarily for all students of English. Nevertheless, because of the graphic humor of the idioms in caricature, native speakers of English will also find the book refreshingly entertaining.