

A Lesson on Food Idioms

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This is a lesson using food-idioms in context. Use it as a classroom handout and have learners work together to guess how these colourful expressions add flavour to our language and life experiences. This activity can be followed-up with a quiz on food idioms at <http://a4esl.org/q/h/id-lb-food.html> where you can find more food idioms.

There are some common idiomatic expressions which use food words. You may be able to hypothesize what these expressions mean but if not, start by guessing whether they carry positive or negative connotations. Then check your intuition by rewriting the text using the sentences in activity II.

Bringing Home the Bacon on the Gravy Train

Activity I) What do you think these expressions mean?

Bob works hard to **bring home the bacon**¹, and put **bread and butter**² on his family's table. Every morning, he drags himself to his desk at the bank and faces his tedious 10-hour-a-day job. His boss, Mark, is a **bad egg**³ but has somehow taken a liking to Bob so he always speaks well of Bob in front of Mr. Davies, the owner and **big cheese**⁴ of the company. Mark tells Mr. Davies that Bob's **the cream of the crop**⁵ and is **one smart cookie**⁶ who **uses his noodles**⁷. Mark likes to **chew the fat**⁸ with Bob during coffee break and discusses **half-baked**⁹ company plans with him because he trusts Bob and knows that Bob won't **spill the beans**¹⁰ behind his back. On these occasions, Bob tries to avoid any **hot potatoes**¹¹ and, even if Mark isn't **his cup of tea**¹², Bob makes an effort to **butter him up**¹³ by leading Mark into discussions about electronic gadgets which Mark **is nuts about**¹⁴. Bob really thinks that Mark is **out to lunch**¹⁵ and **nutty as a fruitcake**¹⁶, but **in a nutshell**¹⁷, if he **polishes the apple**¹⁸, his job could become a **piece of cake**¹⁹ and maybe one day he will find his **gravy train**²⁰.

This is definitely an exaggerated use of idiomatic expressions. But you can see how these expressions make spoken informal language much more colourful and jovial.

Activity II) How good is your food-idiom intuition?

Here are some non-food idiom expressions which you can use to substitute the food idioms in Activity I. Check answers with your teacher.

	NON-FOOD EXPRESSIONS	FOOD IDIOMS
A	boss	4 - big cheese
B	food	
C	very easy	
D	on the table but still unofficial	
E	the best	
F	continues to be servile and brown-nose his boss	
G	scoundrel	
H	make a living	

I	is an intelligent person	
J	show admiration	
K	basically	
L	share confidential information	
M	means to a big income with little effort	
N	chat	
O	thinks	
P	a little out of touch with reality	
Q	problematic issues	
R	a little crazy	
S	really likes	
T	the type of person he likes	

Answers:

A	4	E	5	I	6	M	20	Q	11
B	2	F	18	J	13	N	8	R	16
C	19	G	3	K	17	O	7	S	14
D	9	H	1	L	10	P	15	T	12

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<http://iteslj.org/>

<http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Ting-FoodIdioms.html>