

## LEXICON OF COMMON FIGURATIVE UNITS VOLUME II

### ALPHABETICAL LIST OF WIDESPREAD IDIOMS

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#### A

*from A to Z* ‘from the beginning to the end, without exception; in every detail; over the entire range’ (I 2)

#### ACE

*to have an ace up one’s sleeve* ‘to find a surprising solution to a problem; to have an effective idea or argument of advantage in reserve that other people do not know about and that can be used as a final means in order to convince others’ (G 19)

#### ALARM BELLS

*(the) alarm bells are ringing (at someone)* ‘someone gets worried because of a warning sign that there may be a danger and the need for action’ (H 27a) / *to set (the) alarm bells ringing* ‘to warn or worry someone by means of a sign that there may be a danger and the need for action’ (H 27b)

#### AMEN

*\*sure as the Amen in the church* ‘as certain as can be’ (K 10) I’ve never heard this!

#### AREA

*gray area* ‘an area of law, behavior etc. which is not easy to deal with because it does not have clear rules of limits’ (O 20)

#### ARM

*the long/strong arm of the law* ‘the far-reaching and inescapable power of the law/justice’ (S 15)  
*to welcome/greet someone with open arms* ‘to accept, greet someone with great willingness; to show that one is very happy to see or meet someone or to have them as part of their group etc’ (P 11)

#### BACK

*(to do something) behind someone’s back* ‘(to do something) secretly, without the knowledge of another person or in his/her absence’ (P 13)

*to have one’s back against the wall* ‘to be in great distress, to be in a defensive or desperate situation without any way of escape; to have serious problems’ (H 14)

*to pat someone on the back* ‘to make a gesture of encouragement, appreciation, condescension, etc; to congratulate or praise someone’ (P 10)

*to turn one’s back on someone/something* ‘to turn away from someone, something; to refuse to help someone; to stop being involved in something’ to forsake or abandon someone/something’ (P 12)

#### BALM

*balm for the soul* ‘healing and soothing; felt to be beneficial if one is in an emotional slump’ (Q 27)

#### BANANA

*a Banana republic* ‘a small politically unstable country, ‘dependent on limited agriculture, ruled by a small wealthy and corrupt clique’ (H 12)

#### BANANA SKIN

*to slip on a banana skin* ‘to make a small error which is likely to cause embarrassing problems to oneself’ (Q 11)

#### BATTERIES

*to recharge one’s batteries* ‘to regain one’s energy after working hard for a long time; to have a long rest or a holiday so that you feel better’ (I 19)

#### BEE

*as busy as a bee / (to be) a busy bee* ‘(to be) very busy and very active; (to be) diligent, hardworking and industrious’ (N 29)

#### **BELT**

*to tighten one’s belt* ‘to make economies, live frugally and use less resources when food or money is scarce; to start in earnest on an activity’ (P 3)

#### **BIRD’S-EYE VIEW**

*from a bird’s-eye view* ‘from a very high place which makes it possible to see a large area from above or a pictorial representation of this; from a general point of view which provides a brief revealing glimpse or comprehension of something’ (N 23)

#### **BLACK**

*in black and white* 1. ‘reduced to writing; written down or in print, and therefore official; written proof of something’; 2. ‘written down or in print, and therefore very clear, in a comprehensive manner’ (I 1)

*to put/paint things in (crude) black and white* ‘to estimate everything as being either positive or negative; to have a simple and very certain opinion about something’ (O 15)

#### **BLINKERS/BLINDERS**

*to wear blinkers/blinders / to have blinkers/blinders on one’s eyes* ‘to have a limited viewpoint, to be narrow-minded; not to want to see reality as it is’ (G 14)

#### **BLOW**

*a blow below the belt* ‘a mean or unfair attack; an ill-mannered, hurtful activity or remark’ (G 10)

#### **BLUE-BLOODED**

*to be blue-blooded* ‘to be an aristocrat; to be born into a royal or aristocratic family, to be noble, socially superior’ (H 7)

#### **BOLT**

*like a bolt from the blue / out of a clear blue sky* ‘completely surprising, without warning or preparation, totally unexpectedly (especially of negative events, shattering news, etc.)’ (N 7)

#### **BOMBSHELL**

*to come as a (real) bombshell* ‘to come as a complete surprise or shock, leading to great astonishment (often said of unpleasant news, sudden events, sensations, etc.)’ (H 28)

#### **BOTTOM**

*from the bottom of one’s heart* ‘from the deepest inside (of one’s thoughts, convictions, etc.); with great sincerity and emotion’ (Q 24)

#### **BRAINWASH**

*to brainwash someone / to give someone a brainwashing* ‘to aim to destroy a person’s basic convictions and attitudes and replace them with an alternative set of fixed beliefs’ (S 6)

#### **BREAST**

*to beat one’s breast (about something)* ‘to regret something very much; to display one’s guilt or remorse publicly; to make a show of grief or sorrow’ (P 5)

#### **BREATH**

*to the last breath* ‘until the end’ (K 19)

#### **BRICK WALL**

*to talk to a brick wall* ‘not to be heard with advice, warnings, etc., not to achieve anything by means of talking to someone who refuses any advice or discussion’ (L 14)

#### **BUBBLE**

*to burst like a bubble* ‘to suddenly stop being successful and promising (‘of plans, hopes, ideas that looked great in the beginning but turned out to be completely worthless or fake’ (M 32)

**BUTTER**

*to melt like **butter** (in the sun)* ‘to be fading away, to dwindle away within a short time, to be used up quickly’ (M 16)

**CALM**

*the **calm** before the storm* ‘a peaceful and quiet period before a period of trouble or activity’

**CANDLE**

*to burn the **candle** at both ends* ‘to exhaust one’s energy recklessly, to allow oneself insufficient rest or sleep, getting up early for work and then working or partying hard, late into the night’ (M 30)

**CANNON FODDER**

***cannon fodder*** ‘poorly trained or poorly equipped soldiers who are sent senselessly into war, carrying out a nearly hopeless attack against an enemy and thus losing their lives’ (H 23)

**CANOSSA**

*\*to go to **Canossa*** ‘to humble oneself before an opponent or enemy, especially because of having a request that is felt to be self-effacing’ (H 8)

**CARD**

*to play one’s last **card*** ‘to use one’s last chance or advantage (at the most opportune moment); to exploit an advantageous position; to use the last means to try to reach a goal’ (G 18)

**CAT**

*has the **cat** got your tongue?* ‘asked of someone rendered speechless to emphasize their inability to speak; why don’t you say anything?’ (L 16)

**CELLS**

*little gray **cells** / the gray matter* ‘the brain; the capacity for thought’ (Q 8)

**CHAPTER**

*a dark **chapter*** ‘an obscure matter, something that had better not be brought out into the open’ (O 17)

**CHEST**

*to beat one’s **chest** (about something)* ‘to regret something very much; to display one’s guilt or remorse publicly; to make a show of grief or sorrow’ (P 5)

**CHILD**

*to be a **child** of one’s times* ‘to be influenced by the given Zeitgeist; adapt to the latest developments in society’ (O 1)

*to be a dead born/still-born **child** / to be stillborn* ‘a hopeless matter, an undertaking with no hope for success’ (K 18)

*to be **child’s** play* ‘to be an easy and simple task that requires little or no effort; to be easily achieved or done’ (G 22)

**CIRCLE**

*a vicious **circle/cycle*** ‘a difficult situation that cannot be improved because one problem causes another problem that causes the first problem again’ (K 6)

**CLOCK**

*a race against the **clock*** ‘the necessity to work very fast in order to finish in time; an attempt to do something very quickly because of the short time available in which it can be done’ (G 16)

**CLOCKWORK**

*to go/run like **clockwork*** ‘(of arrangements etc.) to happen according to plan, to work efficiently, without any difficulty or trouble, functioning with the highest regularity and precision’ (I 11)

**COG**

*to be only a cog in the wheel/machine* ‘to be only one of many entities in a large business, organization, system (in a subordinate position, function, without personal responsibility)’ (I 12)

#### COIN

*\*to take something for pure coin* (German *etwas für bare Münze nehmen*, cf. English *to take something at face value*) ‘to take something (especially something that was said) for granted or without criticism even though it was not meant seriously’ (M 2)

*to pay someone in their own coin / to pay back in the same coin* ‘to treat someone in the same way that he or she has treated others, usually harshly or unjustly; to retaliate by using the same method’ (M 1)

#### COLUMN

*the fifth column* ‘those people (in an occupied country) who collaborate with the invaders’ (Q 7)

#### COMEDY

*\*to play comedy (to someone)* (German *Theater/ Komödie spielen (vor jmdm.)*; cf. English *to play-act / to put on an act*) ‘to fool, cheat, and mislead someone, to try to deceive someone by acting out a farce to him/her; to behave in a deliberately silly or playful way’ (G 3)

#### CORPSE

*to look like a walking corpse* ‘to look very pale and miserable; to be utterly exhausted, to feel ghastly’ (Q 5)

#### COST

*cost what it may* ‘under all circumstances, no matter what it costs or what difficulties are involved’

#### COUNTER

*to buy/sell something under the counter* ‘to buy or sell something secretly, surreptitiously, preferring chosen customers (of things in short supply or an illegal transaction, with the implication that the law is being broken)’ (M 12)

#### COW

*the/a sacred cow* ‘a belief, opinion or tradition that is untouchable, treated with much respect and usually may not be criticized’ (K 15)

#### CRADLE

*from the cradle to the grave* ‘from the beginning to the end of someone’s life, from birth to death; during the whole life’ (K 17)

#### CURTAIN

*the Iron Curtain* ‘the political or ideological barrier between nations, especially the former border between Western Europe and the communist countries of Eastern Europe, 1946–1989’ (G 5)

#### DAY

*a black day* ‘a day full of failures or disasters, when something very sad or unpleasant happens’ (K 11)

*as different as day and night* ‘very different, showing a striking difference; being absolutely incompatible’ (O 7)

*one fine day* ‘one day, some time’ (O 8)

*someone’s days are numbered* ‘someone is approaching the end of their life or existence; they will not exist for much longer’ (O 10)

*to have seen better days* ‘to have fallen into a state of decline, to be worn out (said of things that are not valuable any more)’ (O 9)

#### DEATH

*\*not to be afraid of death or devil* (cf. German *weder Tod noch Teufel fürchten*) ‘to be afraid of nobody and nothing’ (K 1)

*the Black Death* ‘the plague, pestilence’ (K 20)

*to frighten someone to **death*** ‘to frighten someone severely’ (R 4)

#### **DELUGE**

*after me the **deluge!*** ‘what comes after that is indifferent to me, I don’t worry about the future’ (Q 2)

#### **DENOMINATOR**

*to find a/the common **denominator*** ‘to succeed in agreeing on the basic principles; to mutually adapt one’s ideas so that unity will be achieved’ (I 6)

#### **DESCRIPTION**

*to beggar/defy (all) description* ‘to be so remarkable or appalling that no words can describe it’ (L 17)

#### **DEVIL**

*to play (the) **devil’s** advocate* ‘to pretend to argue against an idea or plan supported by the majority of people in order to make them discuss it in more detail and help determine its validity; to present a hypothetical argument to a suggestion that challenges the view one actually holds’ (H 9)

*go to the **devil!*** ‘go to everlasting torment, ruin or perdition! (typically used as an angry imperative)’ (K 4)

*speak/talk of the **devil** (and he will appear)* ‘when someone who was being discussed in conversation enters the area of those conversing’ (K 2)

*the **devil** is/lies in the detail* ‘small things in plans and schemes that are often overlooked can cause serious problems later on’ (K 5)

*to paint the **devil** on the wall (as he will appear)* ‘to think the worst and to evoke a disaster’ (K 3)

#### **DOG DAYS**

*dog days* ‘hot period of summer weather’ (K 13)

#### **DOOR**

*to force an open **door*** ‘to stand up for something that is supported anyway’ (M 28)

*to shut/slam the **door** in someone’s face* ‘to reject someone harshly, to terminate any further negotiations’ (M 29)

*all **doors** are open / every **door** is open to someone* ‘someone has the best possibilities, chance of making a career or the like’ (M 27)

*behind closed/locked **doors*** ‘in complete privacy, in secret, often in the sense of denying a hearing to an interested party’ (M 26)

#### **DOUCHE**

*to be like a **douche** of cold water (on someone)* ‘to be a surprisingly chilly reception, reaction, or response; to be a disappointment to someone’ (R 11)

#### **DROP**

*(to be) a **drop** of bitterness (in one’s cup)* ‘to dampen the joy a little bit’ (Q 26)

*a **drop** in the ocean* ‘only a very tiny fraction of what is needed, a negligible quantity, something too small or insignificant to have any effect’ (N 4)

*the last **drop** that makes the cup run over* ‘the last bit that leads to a negative development’ (N 5)

#### **DUST**

*to kick up **dust*** ‘to cause disturbance, to make trouble’ (Q 18)

#### **EARS**

*to be all **ears*** ‘to be listening very carefully and with great interest’ (S 12a) / *to be all **ears** and eyes* ‘to be watching very closely, showing intense interest in listening or hearing about something’ (S 12b)

#### **EGGS**

*to put all one's eggs in/into one basket* 'to stake everything on one chance, to invest all one's money in one thing, without spreading one's risks' (M 17)

#### EMINENCE

*eminence grise/gray eminence* 'someone who has significant influence over rulers or people who make decisions without an official position; a powerful adviser or decision-maker who operates secretly or unofficially' (H 10)

#### END

*at the end of the world* 'very far away; at the back of beyond; in a remote place' (Q 25)

#### ENEMY

*I would not wish that on my worst enemy* 'this is an incredibly unpleasant experience, something very bad' (H 19)

#### ENGLISH

*in plain English* (cf. German *auf gut Deutsch*, etc.) 'using simpler words or a clearer expression; to be frank, putting it bluntly' (I 5)

#### EVIL

*to cut the evil at the root* 'to tackle a bad thing by attacking the causes vigorously' (Q 29)

#### EXCEPTION

*the exception to the rule / the exception that proves the rule* 'an exception, that confirms the rule; although it does not support the statement one has made, the statement itself is true' (Q 17)

#### EYE

*to cast an eye / one's eyes over something* 'to look at something quickly, without looking at details' (S 10)

*(not be able to see something) with the naked eye* '(not be able to see something) without the use of an optical instrument' (S 11)

*to hit someone in the eye / to fall/leap into someone's eyes* 'to be so obvious as to be noticed by people' (S 9)

*\*(to talk to someone) between four eyes* (cf. German *unter vier Augen (mit jemandem sprechen)*) 'to talk to someone in private, without the presence of other people' (L 4)

*if eyes could kill* 'comment when someone is looking at someone in a very hostile way' (P 16)

*not to believe one's eyes* 'to be shocked or dumbfounded at what one is seeing; to doubt the credibility of something unusual' (S 8)

#### FACE

*(it is) written all over someone's face* '(something is) very evident and can be easily detected when looking at someone's face' (Q 15)

*\*to make a good face to the bad game* (German *gute Miene zum bösen Spiel machen*, cf. English *to put a good face on it*) 'to act as if something unpleasant or upsetting is not as bad as it really is; not to show one's annoyance; to overlook something or accept it willingly or not' (G 20)

*to lose (one's) face* 'to be embarrassed or humiliated, especially publicly; to do something which makes other people stop respecting you' (P 17a) / *to save (one's) face* 'to avoid humiliation or embarrassment, to preserve dignity; to do something so that people will continue to respect you' (P 17b)

*to tell someone something (straight) to their face* 'to tell someone something ruthlessly, without any inhibition' (L 7)

#### FEET

*to always fall/land on one's feet* 'to adjust oneself to new conditions (after a setback) with unexpected success; to be restored to a sound or stable condition, to experience a fortunate outcome from difficult circumstances unscathed' (N 18)

*to be dead on one's feet / not to be able to stay on one's feet* 'to be very exhausted, to be on the point of collapse by tiredness, feebleness etc.' (R 13)

*to stand with both feet on the ground* 'to have a sensible and practical attitude to life; to be able to cope with life' (R 15)

*to stand on one's own (two) feet* 'to act or behave independently, to be self reliant, in an economic or emotional sense' (R 16)

*to vote with one's feet* 'to indicate an opinion by being present or absent; to show one's disapproval by walking out, departing or emigrating' (L 10)

#### **FIDDLE**

*to play the first fiddle to someone/something* 'to be the most important person, to dominate, be superior to someone or something else' (G 6a) / *to play the second fiddle to someone/something* 'to play a subsidiary role to someone or something else; to take a subordinate part (but next of the leader)' (G 6b)

#### **FIG LEAF**

*(to be) a fig leaf for something* '(to be) a means of concealing or veiling negative facts and events abashedly' (Q 19)

#### **FINGER**

*not to lift a finger (to help someone)* 'not to make the slightest effort, not to give any assistance; to refuse to exert oneself to help or perform an action' (P 9)

*to point the finger/an accusing finger at someone* 'to blame someone for a mistake or blunder they have made' (P 8)

*to touch the/put one's finger on the sore point* 'to refer to a particularly sensitive matter that will upset someone; to speak about reality, even if it is hard' (R 7)

*one can count something on the fingers (of one hand)* 'it is a very small number, there are surprisingly few of certain things' (I 5)

*to burn one's fingers / to get one's fingers burned/burnt* 'to harm oneself, to suffer the unpleasant results of something that one has done so that one never wants to do it again' (R 9)

#### **FINISHING STRAIGHT**

*to be on the finishing straight* 'to come near the winning post, to be just about to reach one's goal successfully after a period of great effort' (G 15)

#### **FIRE**

*as different as fire and water* 'very different, making for the greatest possible, unbridgeable contrast' (N 2)

*to be caught between two fires* 'to be confronted by two equally threatening dangers, pressed from two sides simultaneously; to have a dilemma, to be involved in a conflict without the possibility of choosing one of two sides' (N 1)

#### **FIRING LINE**

*to come in the firing line* 'to be strongly criticized for something; to be exposed to violent attacks' (H 24)

#### **FISH**

*\*as mute/dumb as a fish* (German *stumm wie ein Fisch*) 'very silent, obstinately refusing to speak, especially about a specific topic' (Q 13)

*\*to be/feel like a fish in the water* (German *sich wohlfühlen wie ein Fisch im Wasser*) 'to be in one's preferred environment where one feels comfortable, where one can realize one's abilities, etc.' (N 28a) / *\*to be healthy/cheerful like a fish in the water* (German *gesund wie ein Fisch im Wasser*) 'to be very healthy and cheerful; to be in fine fettle' (N 28b)

#### **FIST**

*to rule with an iron fist* ‘to rule with unrelenting severity; to control a group of people very firmly, having complete power over everything that they do’ (H 18)

#### **FLASH**

*as quick as a flash* ‘extremely quickly or suddenly, in one quick movement’ (N 8)

#### **FLEA MARKET**

*flea market* ‘a market, usually held outdoors, where second-hand goods and antiques are sold’ (M 13)

#### **FLIES**

*to die/to be dropping like flies / to go down like flies* ‘to rapidly collapse, die, or drop out in great numbers within a short period of time, usually for the same reason (referring to a group rather than an individual)’ (N 25)

#### **FOREHEAD**

*(it is) written in/on someone’s forehead* ‘(something is) very evident and can be easily detected when looking at someone’s face’ (Q 15)

#### **GAUNTLET**

*to throw down the gauntlet* ‘to do or say something that challenges someone to a contest; to take action or to compete against someone; to declare war’ (H 13a) / *to pick up/take up the gauntlet* ‘to accept the challenge’ (H 13b)

#### **GIFT**

*like a gift of heaven / to be sent from above* ‘an unexpected stroke of good luck, like a windfall, godsend’ (Q 21a)

#### **GLASS**

*the glass is half full* ‘the situation is seen optimistically or hopefully due to a person’s individual optimistic perception’ (M 31a) / *the glass is half empty* ‘the situation is seen pessimistically or hopeless due to a person’s individual pessimistic perception’ (M 31b)

#### **GLASS CEILING**

*the/a glass ceiling* ‘the invisible barrier formed by such things as attitudes and traditions which can prevent a woman, or, people from ethnic or religious minorities, from being promoted to the most important jobs’ (M 20)

#### **GLASSES**

*to see/look through rose-colored glasses* ‘to take a too optimistic and therefore unrealistic view on something; to think of only the good parts of a situation and pretend that the bad parts do not exist’ (O 21)

#### **GOAL**

*to score an own goal* ‘to misjudge a future outcome and harm one’s own interests by means of a thoughtless action; to try to get an advantage by doing something while actually making the situation worse; to do something that causes self-inflicted damage’ (G 17)

#### **GOLD MINE**

*to be a real gold mine* ‘to be a lucrative and inexhaustible source of income, to constantly generate a lot of money; to be a treasure trove, e.g. a source of rich information’ (M 9)

#### **GOOD**

*this is too good to be true* ‘this is so beautiful that one cannot believe it’ (L 2)

#### **GRAVE**

*as quiet/silent as the grave* ‘completely quiet or silent’ (K 21)

*someone would turn in his/her grave* ‘someone (a dead person) would be very angry or upset about something which is happening now, if they knew about it’ (K 23)



*to dig one's own **grave*** 'to seriously harm oneself, cause one's own ruin or downfall' (K 22)

#### **GREEK**

*to be all **Greek** to someone* 'to be completely unintelligible for someone, to be beyond comprehension, making no sense at all' (L 13)

#### **GRIST**

*to be **grist** to someone's mill / to bring **grist** to the mill* 'to turn good advantage to someone, to bring profitable business or gain; to help to inspire someone' (M 21)

#### **GROUND**

*the **ground** burns/becomes too hot under someone's feet* 1. 'it will become too dangerous for someone (at his/her residence), someone wishes to escape, especially from justice'; 2. 'to be in great haste, to be eager, impatient to get away' (R 10)

*to stand on firm **ground*** 'to have a stable position, to be sure about one's beliefs, knowledge, etc.; to regain firm ground again (economically etc.)' (R 14)

#### **GUN**

*to hold/put a **gun** to someone's head* 'to exert great pressure on someone, to ultimately force someone to act or to make a decision' (H 21)

*to bring up/out the big **guns*** 'to try to defeat an opponent (in an argument, a debate, a competition, etc.); to make great efforts or give strong counter-arguments in order to achieve something; to bring up the most influential people as opposition' (H 25)

#### **GUN POWDER**

*\*not to have invented the **gun powder*** (German *das Pulver/Schießpulver nicht (gerade) erfunden haben*) 'not to be very intelligent, to be rather silly, simple-minded' (I 8)

*to keep one's **gunpowder** dry* 'to hold oneself ready for an action in case the need arises, to be ready to fight back or to defend one's position at all times; to not prematurely consume one's forces' (H 22)

#### **HAIR**

*(to escape/to be saved) by a **hair's** breath / hairbreadth* 'to escape, to be saved very narrowly, by a tiny distance' (S 19)

*not to get gray **hair** from something* 'not to be worried or upset by something' (R 3)

*\*to pull something by the **hairs*** 'to refer to something, e.g. an argument, which is far-fetched, beside the point' (S 20)

#### **HAND**

*(at) first **hand*** 'from your own experience or knowledge, rather than from someone else; directly; from a reliable source; from the first owner' (S 16)

***hand** on the heart* 'I promise you, I am telling you the truth' (P 4)

*to come away / to return empty-**handed*** 'to return with nothing to show for one's efforts' (S 17)

*to eat out of someone's **hand*** 'to be very obedient, submissive and compliant (more or less forced), to be manipulated or dominated by another; to do everything they ask' (N 21)

*to rub one's **hands*** 'to feel or express pleased anticipation or self-satisfaction; to show eager expectation of something pleasant or interesting' (P 6)

*to rule with an iron **hand*** 'to rule with unrelenting severity; to control a group of people very firmly, having complete power over everything that they do' (H 18)

*someone's **hands** are tied / to be tied/bound **hand** and foot* 'to be unable to act because of some restrictions or hindrances, to have obligations which severely restrict one's unable to free oneself' (R 17)

#### **HAT**

*to take off one's **hat** to someone* 'to have great respect for someone and express one's admiration for what he or she has done' (P 1)

## HEAD

*to hang one's head* 'to be very discouraged; to be dejected, despondent, melancholy' (P 14)

*to keep one's head above water* 'to stay out of trouble, especially out of financial difficulties, to keep away from insolvency; to efficiently fight for survival, to avoid being overwhelmed by one's tasks or commitments' (N 3)

*to lose one's head* 'to lose one's power of reasoning, to become so excited or confused that one behaves irrationally' (S 4)

*to take something into one's head* 'to resolve to do something, usually something considered to be foolish or uncharacteristic' (S 3)

## HEART

*one heart and one soul* 'to be inseparable, very close friends; to be soul mates' (Q 30)

*to have a heart of gold* 'to be extremely kind and helpful, to be of a generous and noble nature' (S 1)

## HELL

*go to hell!* 'go to everlasting torment, ruin or perdition! (typically used as an angry imperative)' (K 4)

## HOME STRETCH

*to be on the home stretch* 'to come near the winning post, to be just about to reach one's goal successfully after a period of great effort' (G 15)

## HORNS

*to give someone (the husband) horns / to plant horns on someone* 'to cuckold someone (the husband)' (K 7)

## HORSE

*\*to back / to bet on the right horse* (cf. German *aufs richtige Pferd setzen*) 'to judge the situation in the right way; to put all one's trust in the right affair or person' (G 12a); *to back the wrong horse* 'to make an error of judgment, to decide in favor of something that turns out to be the wrong choice later; to give all your support to a person or thing that fails' (G 12b)

*a dark horse* 'a person about whom little is known or who reveals little about himself, especially one with potential as a competitor; a surprise candidate, an unexpectedly successful person or thing that emerges to prominence' (G 13)

## HOST

*to reckon without one's host* 'to resolve an issue only from one's own standpoint; to fail with something because one acted without considering what another person might do or decide' (M 6)

## HOUR

*someone's (last) hour has come* 'someone's death is close' (O 11)

## HOUSE

*the common European house* '(the idea of) Europe as a continent where different nations live together in peace' (M 24)

*to collapse like a house of cards* '(of a plan, idea, organization etc.) to prove to be unrealistic or weak, to have no foundation, to be fragile' (G 21)

## ICE

*to put something on ice* 'to defer a project, plan, etc. for the time being while preserving it for future use' (M 20)

## IRONY

*the irony of fate* 'if something is surprisingly differently than planned, when the opposite of what one had hoped occurs' (Q 4)

## JUICE

*to let someone stew in his/her own **juice*** ‘to let someone worry about something, especially something they have done wrong, without doing anything to help them’ (M 14)

#### **KID GLOVES**

*to treat/handle someone/something with **kid gloves*** ‘to treat someone with the utmost gentleness and care, so as not to cause offence; to handle a situation or an object delicately and gingerly’ (R 12)

#### **KNIFE**

*to hold a **knife** to the throat of someone* ‘to exert great pressure on someone, to ultimately force someone to act or to make a decision’ (H 21)

#### **KNOT**

*to cut the Gordian **knot*** ‘to solve an intractable problem in an amazingly simple, unexpected, and effective way; to make a quick and courageous decision in order to gain one’s ends; to resolve a difficult situation by force’ (H 3)

#### **LAMB**

*(to be) as meek/gentle as a **lamb*** ‘(to be) very meek, kind and gentle’ (N 26)

#### **LAURELS**

*to rest on one’s **laurels*** ‘to live off one’s reputation; to become complacent or uninspired in the wake of previous success or achievements, especially as a way of refraining from further effort, avoiding the work needed to advance one’s status’ (H 2)

#### **LEGEND**

*to become a **legend** in one’s own lifetime* ‘to have achieved a level of fame and respect and be recognized of it during one’s lifetime (rather than posthumously)’ (Q 6)

#### **LEGS**

*to stand with both **legs** on the ground* ‘to have a sensible and practical attitude to life; to be able to cope with life’ (R 15)

#### **LICENSE**

*poetic **license** / artistic **license*** ‘fanciful exaggeration or harmless dishonesty in describing something or stating a case; stylistic deviation from the norm aiming to produce greater artistic effect’ (Q 16)

#### **LIFE**

*to frighten the **life** out of someone* ‘to frighten someone severely’ (R 4)

#### **LIGHT**

*to bring something to **light*** ‘to reveal or disclose something previously hidden or secret; to make something known that others would prefer remained unknown’ (O 12)

*to give someone the green **light*** ‘to encourage or allow someone to proceed, to give someone permission to do something that they were planning to do or have asked to do’ (I 16)

*to see the **light** / to see the **light** of day* ‘1. to be brought out, published (said of writing, literature, music, etc.); 2. to be discovered, to become well-known: 3. to be born’ (O 13)

*to see the **light** at the end of the tunnel* ‘to have an indication that a long period of hardship or adversity is nearing its end; to gain hope for the future and for the end of a difficult or unpleasant situation’ (I 17)

#### **LIGHTNING SPEED**

*at **lightning speed*** ‘extremely quickly or suddenly, in one quick movement’ (N 8)

#### **LINE**

*to come in the **line** of fire* ‘to be strongly criticized for something; to be exposed to violent attacks’ (H 24)

*to take/follow the **line** of least resistance* ‘to chose the easiest but not necessary the best way to do something, to avoid opposition of any kind and to submit to other people’s demands’ (R 18)

#### LINEN

*to wash one’s dirty **linen** in public* ‘to reveal something discreditable that should be kept private; to expose private matters to public view, especially unsavory secrets’ (M 22)

#### LINES

*to read between the **lines*** ‘to understand or deduce the real meaning of something; to perceive a hidden message or additional information, even though it is not stated explicitly’ (I 3)

#### LIPS

*to hang on the **lips** of someone / to hang upon someone’s **lips*** ‘to listen to sb. attentively, to listen eagerly to every word a person is saying or eagerly await their word or command’ (Q 14)

#### LIST

*the/a black **list*** ‘a list of persons or things considered undesirable or deserving punishment’ (O 16)

#### LOOKS

*if **looks** could kill* ‘comment when someone is looking at someone in an extremely hostile way’ (P 16)

#### LUCK

*to have more **luck** than brains* ‘to have incredible good luck’ (S 5)

#### MAJORITY

*the silent **majority*** ‘a group that makes up a majority of people, regarded as holding moderate opinions but rarely expressing them’ (L 12)

#### MANNA

*to come/fall like **manna** from heaven* ‘to have fallen to someone without effort’ (Q 21b)

#### MARK

*to overshoot the **mark*** ‘to act with excessive zeal, to do something to a greater extent than is necessary or desirable; to go beyond what is acceptable’ (H 16)

#### MARKET

*the black **market*** ‘source of illegal goods or currencies; illegal buying and selling of products that have been rationed by the government or are unobtainable for other reasons’ (M 10)

#### MASTER

*to be one’s own **master*** ‘to act or think independently, not to be guided by other people’ (R 19)

#### MEASURES

*\*to measure with two **measures*** (German *mit zweierlei Maß messen*) ‘to apply different sets of standards and thus judge unjustly’ (Q 22)

#### MILCH COW

*a **milch cow*** ‘a universal provider, one from whom it is easy to obtain money, a dependable source of profits’ (M 15)

#### MONEY

*to launder (black/dirty) **money** (into white)* ‘to make illegal money legal; to reinvest money from illegal activities in a legal activity to hide the existence of trafficking’ (M 11)

#### MOUTH

*someone’s **mouth** waters* ‘someone gets a big appetite, a great desire for something (that is very attractive or appealing)’ (N 19a) / *to make someone’s **mouth water*** ‘to whet someone’s appetite for something; to cause someone to eagerly anticipate or long for something (that is very attractive or appealing)’ (N 19b)

## MUSHROOMS

*to shoot up/spring up like mushrooms* ‘to grow rapidly; to suddenly come into existence in great numbers’ (N 16)

## NAIL

*to hit the nail on the head* ‘to find the right answer to a problem in a few words or describe something in exactly the right way; to find the optimal solution to a problem’ (H 15)

## NAME

*to call something by its name* ‘to use realistic, proper and truthful language, to give a truthful account of things as they are and make no attempt to spare the feelings of one's audience’ (L 3)

## NAVEL

*\*the navel of the world* (German *der Nabel der Welt*, cf. English *the center of the world, the hub of the universe*) ‘the center around which everything revolves, the essential or only decisive element (often of a person who imagines being the most important, the center of everything)’ (H 1)

*to gaze at one's navel / to contemplate one's own navel* ‘to behave excessively introspectively, to waste time in self-absorption, concentrating on one's own problems or a single issue at the cost of ignoring other important issues’ (K 14)

## NERVES

*to get on someone's nerves* ‘to annoy or disturb someone constantly; to exasperate someone by the repetition of some irritating action’ (S 7)

## NICE

*this is too nice to be true* ‘this is so beautiful that one cannot believe it’ (L 2)

## NIGHT

*as different as night and day* ‘very different, showing a striking difference; being absolutely incompatible’ (O 7)

## NOSE

*not to see beyond one's nose / not to see beyond/further than the end of one's nose* ‘to be narrow-minded; not to look beyond one's immediate surroundings’ (S 14)

*to poke/thrust/stick one's nose into something/everything* ‘to meddle in other persons' affairs; to take an inquisitive interest in something and become absorbed in it’ (S 13)

*with one's nose in the air / to hold up one's nose* ‘to be haughtily or stuck-up, to assume an air of superiority; to be haughty or disdainful’ (P 15)

## NOW

*now or never* ‘let us seize on the opportunity now (exclamation to express urgency)’ (O 4)

## NUT

*a hard/tough nut to crack* ‘a very difficult problem or task to solve; a very difficult person to deal with’ (M 18)

## OPIUM

*the opium of the masses* ‘an ideology which ensures that the population does not recognize the truth but stays calm’ (Q 3)

## PAPER

*not worth the paper it is written on* ‘(of a document, undertaking, etc.) meaningless or without validity; of no value, absolutely useless’ (I 4)

## PAPER TIGER

*a paper tiger* ‘a person or thing that seems strong, forceful or powerful, but that is feeble or ineffective’ (Q 10)

## PEACOCK

*as proud as a peacock* ‘very proud and conceited, having a very good opinion of oneself’ (N 27)

#### PICTURE

*to paint a black picture of someone/something* ‘to describe someone or something in an extremely negative way’ (O 14)

#### PILL

*to sugar/sweeten the pill / to gild the pill for someone* ‘to try to make bad news or an unpleasant situation more acceptable for someone by telling them something pleasant at the same time’ (R 1)

*to swallow the/a bitter pill / to be a bitter pill to swallow* ‘to have to accept a difficult or unpleasant fact or situation’ (R 1)

#### PINS

*to be on pins and needles* ‘to be very nervous and excited because one is waiting for something to happen, with respect to anxious expectation; to feel most uncomfortable because of one’s impatience’ (R 8)

#### PISTOL

*to hold/put a pistol to someone’s head* ‘to exert great pressure on someone, to ultimately force someone to act or to make a decision’ (H 21)

#### POINT

*\*the/a dead point* (German *der tote Punkt/ein toter Punkt*, cf. English *the dead center*) ‘a stage when no progress can be made; a state of greatest exhaustion or stagnancy; at a standstill’ (I 13)

*a dark point* ‘a very unpleasant affair (in someone’s life, in the past)’ (O 18)

#### POWDER

*to keep one’s powder dry* ‘to hold oneself ready for an action in case the need arises, to be ready to fight back or to defend one’s position at all times; to not prematurely consume one’s forces’ (H 22)

#### POWDER KEG

*to be sitting on a powder keg* ‘to be in a very dangerous situation in which something could suddenly go seriously wrong at any time’ (H 26)

#### PRICE

*at any price* ‘under all circumstances, at any rate, regardless of the costs and other disadvantages’ (M 4a) / *at no price* ‘under no circumstances, by no means (said of something that one does not want at all or adamantly refuses to do)’ (M 4b)

#### RACE

*a race against time* ‘the necessity to work very fast in order to finish in time; an attempt to do something very quickly because of the short time available in which it can be done’ (G 16)

#### RATS

*like rats leaving the sinking ship* ‘like traitors who desert the losing side in a contest, abandon a failing enterprise before it is too late’ (N 22a) / *the rats leave the sinking ship* ‘said of persons who retire from something, e.g. a company, organization, because they know that it is threatened by a disaster’ (N 22b)

#### RECORD

*to play the same old record* ‘to repeat things constantly, to continue to express the same ideas or opinions that one has expressed before; to complain constantly about the same thing’ (G 8b)

#### REINS

*to take the reins* ‘to take on the leading position; to keep things firmly under control, to provide proof of one’s authority by exercise of power’ (H 20)

#### ROLE

*to play a **role** (for someone/something)* ‘to be of some importance (for someone/something); to be involved (in something), to have a specific effect (on someone/something)’ (G 2a) / *to play no role (for someone/something)* ‘to be of no importance (for someone/something); not to be involved (in something), to have no specific effect (on someone/something)’ (G 2b)

#### **ROOT**

*to get to the **root** of evil* ‘to tackle a bad thing by attacking the causes vigorously’ (Q 29)

*to put down **roots** / to strike/take **root*** ‘to settle somewhere, to become securely or permanently established; to show that one wants to stay in a (new) place’ (N 1)

#### **ROULETTE**

*to play Russian **roulette*** ‘to take big risks, in a way that is very dangerous; to take a dangerous or foolish chance’ (G 23)

#### **RUBICON**

*to cross the **Rubicon*** ‘to make a final irrevocable decision which will have important or fatal consequences’ (H 6)

#### **SADDLE**

*to be firmly in the saddle* ‘to be in a very secure position, to be in full control; to be superior, in a position of power’ (H 19)

#### **SALT**

*to rub **salt** in/into the wound* ‘to intentionally increase someone’s pain or shame; to make a difficult situation even worse for someone’ (R 6)

#### **SARDINES**

*to be packed (in) like **sardines*** ‘(of people) to be pressed tightly together in a small space in a way that is uncomfortable or unpleasant, extremely crowded’ (M 19)

#### **SAUCER**

*a flying **saucer*** ‘flying object of unknown type and origin’ (Q 9)

#### **SCENES**

*behind the **scenes*** ‘secretly, out of the public view; done in seclusion rather than in public’ (G 1)

#### **SCORE**

*to have a **score** to settle with someone / to pay off an old **score*** ‘to pay something back for someone which dates back a long time; to get revenge on someone for some grievance, to requite’ (M 7)

#### **SENSE**

*to have a sixth **sense** (for something)* ‘to have a supernatural sense, a special intuition in addition to the five senses’ (R 5)

#### **SHADE**

*to put someone/something in the **shade*** ‘to be so impressive that they make the other person or thing seem unimportant by comparison; to surpass someone’s success, to surpass the quality of something’ (N 15)

#### **SHADOW**

*to be frightened of/to fear one's own **shadow*** ‘to be extremely nervous or timorous, shy and fearful, to get frightened very easily’ (Q 12)

#### **SHARE PRICE**

*\*someone’s **share price** is rising* (German *jemandes Aktien steigen*) ‘someone’s reputation, popularity, prospects of success, etc. are getting better’ (M 8a) / *\*someone’s **share price** is falling* (German *jemandes Aktien fallen*) ‘someone’s reputation, popularity, prospects of success, etc. are getting worse’ (M 8b)

#### **SHOWER**

*to be like a cold **shower** (on someone)* ‘to be a surprisingly chilly reception, reaction, or response; to be a disappointment to someone’ (R 11)

#### **SIDE**

*the other **side** of the coin* ‘a completely different and perhaps contradictory aspect or attitude of a subject or situation; one of two differing views, showing the disadvantages of something that is actually advantageous’ (M 3)

#### **SILENCE**

*to wrap oneself in **silence*** ‘to take refuge in silence, to say nothing’ (299)

#### **SKIN**

*to save one’s own **skin*** ‘to protect oneself from danger or difficulties, without worrying about other people’ (S 18)

#### **SLEEVE**

*to roll up one’s **sleeves*** ‘to be ready and willing to set about hard work; to prepare oneself for a difficult task’ (P 2)

#### **SLOWLY**

***slowly** but surely* ‘slowly but consistently, constantly’ (O 6)

#### **SNAIL**

*at a **snail’s** pace / at a **snail-like** pace* ‘extremely slowly, deliberate of movement’ (N 24)

#### **SNOW**

*(to be) as white as **snow*** ‘(to be) very pure and innocent’ (O 19)

*to melt like **snow** in the sun* ‘to be fading away, to dwindle away within a short time, to be used up quickly’ (N 14)

#### **SOAP**

*a **soap** opera / a **soap*** ‘a television or radio serial in popular style, usually noted for being sentimental and melodramatic’ (G 9)

#### **SONG**

*to sing the same (old) **song*** ‘to repeat things constantly, to continue to express the same ideas or opinions that one has expressed before; to complain constantly about the same thing’ (G 8a)

#### **SPONGE**

*to throw (in/up) the **sponge*** ‘to give up or lose all hope, especially in a challenging or conflict situation; to abandon a plan or idea because it has been too difficult’ (G 11)

#### **SPOT**

*\*the/a dead **spot*** (German *der tote Punkt/ein toter Punkt*, cf. English *the dead center*) ‘a stage when no progress can be made; a state of greatest exhaustion or stagnancy; at a standstill’ (I 13)

#### **SPOTLIGHT**

*to be in the **spotlight** / \*to be in the footlight / floodlight* (German *im Rampenlicht stehen*, cf. English *to be in the limelight*) ‘to be at the center of public attention or to have gained notoriety, especially in the media, due to being famous or having done something important’ (G 4)

#### **SQUARING**

*the **squaring** of the circle* ‘something impossible, a problem that seems to be unsolvable; a logically or intuitively hopeless task’ (I 7)

#### **STARS**

*that’s written in the **stars*** 1. ‘this is completely uncertain’; 2. ‘that is predetermined by fate’ (K 12)

#### **STEAM**



*at full steam* ‘proceeding with all speed and vigor; with very great effort; with a lot of energy, as fast and as strongly as possible’ (I 15)

*to let off/blow off steam* ‘to abreact, work off one’s anger, tension or frustrations; to get rid of pent-up energy or emotion’ (I 14)

#### STONE

\**a stone falls from someone’s heart* (cf. German *jmdm. fällt ein Stein vom Herzen*) ‘someone feels relief, is freed from a great concern’ (S 2)

#### STRAW

*to draw/pick the short straw* ‘to come off worst, second-best; to be the person chosen to do something difficult or unpleasant’ (K 9)

#### TABLE

*round table* ‘an assembly for discussion, especially at a conference’ (L 8)

*to buy/sell something under the table* ‘to buy or sell something secretly, surreptitiously, preferring chosen customers (of things in short supply or an illegal transaction, with the implication that the law is being broken)’ (M 12)

#### THEATER

\**to play theater (to someone)* (German *Theater/ Komödie spielen (vor jmdm.)*); cf. English *to play-act / to put on an act* ‘to fool, cheat, and mislead someone, to try to deceive someone by acting out a farce to him/her; to behave in a deliberately silly or playful way’ (G 3)

#### THREAD

*to lose/miss the thread (of) /to lose one’s thread* ‘to get confused or forget what one wants to say, especially if it is long and complicated’ (M 32)

#### THUMBS

*to twiddle one’s thumbs* ‘to be bored, to be idle, to have nothing to do’ (P 7)

#### THUNDERBOLT

*like struck by a thunderbolt / as if thunderstruck* ‘totally confused, showing no reaction because something unexpected has happened; paralyzed with fright, horror or completely surprised’ (N 9)

#### TIME

*from time to time* ‘occasionally’ (O 3)

*to kill time* ‘to do something which is not very useful or interesting while you are waiting for time to pass’ (K 24)

#### TIME BOMB

*a time bomb is ticking* ‘a hidden danger is about to manifest itself; a situation threatens to have severe consequences at some future time’ (H 29)

#### TIP

*something/a word is on the tip of someone’s tongue* ‘someone wants to utter something, to bring a particular word, name etc. to mind, but is unable to remember it at the moment’ (L 15)

#### TONE

*to set the tone off/for something* ‘to have the greatest say, to determine what will happen or what the norms or rules within a given group are’ (G 7)

#### TOWEL

*to throw in the towel* ‘to give up or lose all hope, especially in a challenging or conflict situation; to abandon a plan or idea because it has been too difficult’ (G 11)

#### TRUMP

*to play one’s last trump / trump card* ‘to use one’s last chance or advantage (at the most opportune moment); to exploit an advantageous position; to use the last means to try to reach a goal’ (G 18)

## TUNE

*to sing the same (old) tune* ‘to repeat things constantly, to continue to express the same ideas or opinions that they have expressed before; to complain constantly about the same thing’ (G 8a)

## TWICE

*not need to be asked twice / no need to tell someone twice* ‘to be happy to oblige a request’ (L 1)

## TWINKLING

*in the twinkling of an eye* ‘in an instant, in a very short time’ (Q 28)

## UMBILICAL CORD

*to cut the umbilical cord* ‘to gain material and psychological independence (from once strong emotional bonds, to stop needing someone else to look after oneself and start acting independently)’ (K 16)

## VICTORY

*a Pyrrhic victory* ‘a victory won at such a great cost that it is tantamount to a defeat; a victory not worth winning because one has suffered so much to achieve it’ (H 5)

## VILLAGES

*Potemkin villages* ‘false pretences; a deceptive front that conceals the miserable state of affairs behind the external splendor; something that appears elaborate and impressive but in actual fact lacks substance’ (H 11)

## WALL

*to talk to a wall* ‘not to be heard with advice, warnings, etc., not to achieve anything by means of talking to someone who refuses any advice or discussion’ (L 14)

*within one’s four walls* ‘at home, in the privacy of one’s own home’ (M 25)

## WAR

*a cold war* ‘a state of tension, distrust, and mutual hostility between states or groups of countries that stops short of armed conflict’ (H 30a) / *the cold war* ‘the political, ideological, and economic struggle between the Soviet-bloc countries and the Western world from the end of World War II until 1990, especially the relationship between the USA and USSR from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s’ (H 30b)

## WATER

*a lot of water will have flowed under the bridge* ‘a lot of time will pass since an event one is referring to; many things will have taken place by then; this will not happen quickly’ (N 6a) / *\*a lot of water has flowed under the bridge* ‘it is a long time since then; a lot has happened in the meantime, it is over and done with’ (N 6b)

## WAVELENGTH

*to be on the same wavelength as someone* ‘to have similar ideas, interests, and opinions (to another person’s); to understand each other very well’ (I 18)

## WAY

*to go one’s own way* ‘to become completely independent and self-reliant; to concentrate on one’s own life and not interfere with other people’s affairs’ (R 20)

## WEAPONS

*to beat others with their own weapons* ‘to defeat or refute others using the same arguments or methods that they use so that these arguments or methods turn against them’ (H 17)

## WHEEL

*to reinvent the wheel* ‘to waste time and effort in creating something that already exists or redoing work when it has already been done satisfactorily; to rethink an already working system, method, etc. that has long been accepted and even taken for granted’ (I 9)

*to roll back the **wheel** of history* ‘to restore former conditions, to reverse historical trends, undo historical developments’ (I 10)

#### **WIND**

*the **wind** has changed* ‘the circumstances or conditions have changed’ (N 10)

*to know how the **wind** is blowing / to know which **way** the wind is blowing* ‘to know what is going on; to understand the real causes, to be well aware of how a situation is developing and to use this in deciding what to do’ (N 11)

*to take the **wind** out of someone’s sails* ‘to compromise the force or effectiveness of a person’s words or actions by anticipating them in some way; to deprive someone of an advantage’ (N 13)

#### **WISH**

*your **wish** is my command* ‘whatever you want, I will fully comply with your wishes’ (Q 1)

#### **WIVES**

*old **wives’ tale*** ‘legendary lore or a story usually involving the marvelous and accepted only by the credulous; traditional belief or piece of wisdom, usually foolish’ (K 8)

#### **WORD**

*to have the last **word** (on something)* ‘to make the last statement in a discussion or argument; to speak as the last one, the one who makes the final decision about something’ (L 6)

#### **WORLD**

*it’s a small **world*** ‘said when someone is surprised because they have met someone they know when it was very unlikely, or when they find out that someone is connected to them in an unexpected way’

#### **WORLD WONDER**

*the eighth **wonder** of the **world*** ‘something wonderful or exciting, especially an innovation (e.g. a great architectural construction), or a place, work, etc. that deserves to be ranked among the greatest achievements of mankind’ (H 4)

#### **WOUNDS**

*to lick one’s **wounds*** ‘to feel sorry for oneself after being thoroughly defeated or humiliated; to recuperate from injuries or hurt feelings’ (N 20)

#### **YEAR**

*sabbatical **year*** ‘a period of time where one is liberated from professional activity’ (Q 20)

#### **YESTERDAY**

*not to be born **yesterday*** ‘not to be easily deceived, manipulated or exploited; to be more experienced and less naïve than one appears to be’ (O 5)

#### **ZERO TIME**

*in less than no time / in **zero time*** ‘very quickly, in next to no time’ (O 2)