

Know Your English Volume 1

Publisher : Orient Blackswan Author: S. Upendran

Idioms and their Stories is the first of the four-volume **Know Your English** series. It is based on the popular Know Your English column, which has been a regular feature of *The Hindu* since 1982.

The book begins by tracing the origin of the word 'idiom' to Latin 'idios', meaning 'peculiar'. As there is little connection between the words that make up the idiom and the actual meaning of the expression, they pose a challenge to second language learners.

Each entry has three parts: Meaning, Examples and Origin.

Let us look at a sample entry:

Naked Truth

Meaning : plain truth, unvarnished.

Examples : According to Augustine, what he had told the police was the naked truth.

If you go to Bala, don't expect any sugar coating; the naked truth is what you are going to get.

Origin : According to an ancient fable, Truth and Falsehood went to have a bath in a river. Falsehood came out first and put on Truth's clothes. When Truth came out and found her clothes missing, she walked away saying she'd rather go naked than wear Falsehood's clothes.

In cases where necessary, there are also hints on pronunciation.

(E.g.) Achilles' heel: The 'a' is like the 'a' in China, while the following 'ch' is like the 'k' in 'kiss' and 'kit'. The 'i' sounds like the 'i' in 'kit'. The final 'e' is like the 'ee' in 'feel' and 'feet'. The 's' sounds like the 'z' in 'zip'. The name is pronounced a-ki-leez with stress on the second syllable.

As you would have noticed, the language is crisp and simple. The author scrupulously avoids unnecessary verbiage so that "Anyone who is 16 years of age or older would find the book useful."

In some cases humorous pictures add colour. For example, in the illustration for 'In the doghouse', two ladies are seated and one of them remarks, "My husband forgot my birthday. He is in the doghouse again" (meaning 'in disfavour'). There are two pictures, one of the husband in the kennel, and the other of the dog outside the kennel, asking pathetically, "Does this mean I have to sleep in the open?"

The book should prove very useful to teachers as well as learners—for teachers who are not sure of their idioms and for learners, to keep them interested; and once they know the story behind the idiom and form associations, they would never forget it.