

# APB Rembau e-Bulletin

e-ISSN: 2682-776X

Edition: 14/2024

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(March to October 2024)

# THE GREAT APPEAL OF CAT IDIOMS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Written by: Assoc. Prof Dr. Carolyn Soo



## Introduction

Languages reflect the culture, history, and values of the people who communicate in them. Among the most popular sources of idiomatic expressions in languages are those related to animals, and not many have inspired as many idioms as cats. Idioms related to cats not only reveal our fascination with these creatures but also provide insight into human emotions and experiences.

## The History of Cats and their Connection to Humans

The initial domestication of cats took place thousands of years ago, mainly in Egypt, where they were worshipped for their prowess in pest control and even connected to gods. Cats gained symbolic meaning as they traveled the globe, representing slyness, independence, and cunning. Humans have long studied their actions, using them as symbols for characteristics of the human race, from aloofness to cunning hunting.

This deep connection between humans and cats is what makes cat idioms so prevalent and relatable. Whether reflecting a cat's physical agility or the sometimes unpredictable nature of their behavior, these idioms provide vivid ways to describe both everyday and complex human experiences.

## Common Cat Idioms

### 1. Cat Nap

A "cat nap" refers to a short, light sleep, much like the quick, frequent naps cats are known for. It captures the idea of taking a brief moment of rest, often between tasks or during a busy day.

### 2. Cat Fight

A "cat fight" refers to a heated argument or physical altercation, typically between women. The term draws on the image of cats hissing and clawing at each other during a confrontation.

### 3. Curiosity Killed the Cat

This idiom is a cautionary phrase warning against unnecessary or dangerous investigation. Cats are naturally curious, often getting into trouble by exploring things they shouldn't, hence the metaphor for human curiosity that could lead to harm.

### 4. The Cat's Out of the Bag

When "the cat's out of the bag," a secret has been revealed.

### 5. Look What the Cat Dragged In

This humorous or sarcastic phrase is used to describe someone's appearance when

they arrive looking disheveled or unexpectedly, as if they were dragged in by a cat after an adventure.

### **6. Cat Got Your Tongue?**

This expression is used when someone is unusually quiet or at a loss for words. It playfully suggests that a cat has stolen their ability to speak.

### **7. Raining Cats and Dogs**

This idiom describes heavy rain, though the origin is unclear. It might stem from ancient myths where cats and dogs were associated with stormy weather, or it may simply refer to the chaos of such a downpour.

### **8. Copycat**

A "copycat" is someone who mimics or imitates another, often without adding originality. The idiom reflects how cats are often seen mimicking certain behaviors or copying movements.

### **9. Fat cat**

A "fat cat" refers to a wealthy person who gained his wealth through ill-begotten means.

### **10. There is more than one way to skin a cat**

This idiom refers to multiple ways to complete a job instead of just one way.

### **11. A cat has nine lives**

This refers to the agility of a cat. A cat may be presumed dead because it took dangerous risks but it can scrape through it and survive due to its agility.

### **12. Fight like cats and dogs**

This idiom came about as cats and dogs are known as sworn enemies and can have nasty fights.

### **13. Catwalk**

The way a cat walks can be somewhat elegant and this is usually related to models at the walkway doing the "catwalk."

### **14. When the cat is away, the mouse comes out to play**

This refers to the situation when the boss is away, the workers can relax and be less fearful.

### **15. Cat burglar**

This refers to a thief who steals your things from your house just like a cat who comes to your house and steals your food.



### **Why Cat Idioms Are So Effective**

Cat idioms are not just a linguistic curiosity, they serve several important

functions in

communication. First, they provide *visual imagery* that captures complex ideas succinctly. For example, saying someone is "like a fat cat" evokes a much clearer and stronger picture of a rich cat with ill-begotten gains. These expressions can create an emotional connection with the listener by painting a vivid picture.

Second, cat idioms often incorporate elements of *humor* and playfulness, making them memorable and relatable. Phrases like "cat got your tongue?" or "look what the cat dragged in" are lighthearted ways to comment on someone's behavior or appearance without sounding harsh or critical. The whimsy of these idioms softens the blow of what might otherwise be negative observations.

Finally, many cat idioms reflect aspects of *human nature* that are universally understood, such as curiosity, secrecy, restlessness, and rivalry. By using cats, creatures known for their independence, sneakiness, and playfulness as metaphors for human behavior, these idioms bridge the gap between human experience and the natural world, offering a way to describe feelings or situations that might otherwise be hard to articulate.

## **Conclusion**

Cat idioms have become an indispensable part of the English language, reflecting our enduring fascination with these creatures and their behaviors. These expressions add color and character to our conversations, offering humorous, vivid, and often relatable ways to describe human emotions and actions. Whether it's the simplicity of a "cat nap" or the complexity of "curiosity killed the cat," cat idioms capture timeless truths about both cats and people. So, the next

time someone asks if "the cat's got your tongue," don't be afraid to let a few cat idioms loose.