

# Idioms from Shakespeare: a Matching Game

Some of the most colorful and expressive phrases in English are idioms from Shakespeare. We still use many of them in everyday conversation. They are like a shorthand way of expressing some of our deeply-held beliefs about human nature and experience. That makes them important (though often not easy) to understand.

## Idioms from Shakespeare Still Used Today

I used this infographic of Shakespeare idioms:

[https://twitter.com/esl\\_expressions/status/595048170138292224/photo/1](https://twitter.com/esl_expressions/status/595048170138292224/photo/1) to make the matching game below.

While checking some of the references, I found

<http://www.bbcamerica.com/anglophenia/2014/04/45-phrases-coined-shakespeare-450th-birthday/> with most of those expressions and others. It also gives the play each idiom was taken from. (In each case, when I checked, the BBC's came directly from Shakespeare. I've used their wording or spelling when the two sites disagreed. For example, 'baited' in the infographic is a misspelling.)

Shakespeare did not invent all of these expressions. Sometimes he 'borrowed' colorful phrases he heard or read. However, he is the first written source for most of them, and he made them popular. People found many of them useful ways to express their feelings or experiences, and so many of them are familiar to most native English speakers—a part of our heritage and our thinking patterns.

## Teaching Suggestions:

The matching game below is a chance for students to consider some of these idioms and try to work out their meanings in a low-pressure, game setting.

You can print just that one page for each student, or perhaps even better for pair or group work (possibly with mixed level pairs or teams of three.) The team with the most correct matches wins.

At the bottom of the answer page are some links to more resources for teaching Shakespeare to ELLs. If you would like live links, go to the interactive equivalent of this page on EnglishHints:

[www.englishhints.com/idioms-from-shakespeare.html](http://www.englishhints.com/idioms-from-shakespeare.html)

There are many more matching games on EnglishHints. Most of the interactive versions are linked from [www.englishhints.com/vocabulary-games.html](http://www.englishhints.com/vocabulary-games.html) (as well as a few from the Grammar Practice page).

Printable pdf classroom versions of games are on [www.englishhints.com/esl-classroom-games.html](http://www.englishhints.com/esl-classroom-games.html)

(See the sitemap on the nav bar if these links give you trouble.)



## Can you guess the meanings of these idioms from Shakespeare?

Match the Shakespeare idioms on the left with their meanings on the right. (The first one has been done for you.)

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. <u>A</u> green eyed monster       | A. jealousy  |
| 2. ___ set my teeth on edge          | B. stay out of sight, unnoticed                    |
| 3. ___ heart of gold                 | C. not good or bad                                 |
| 4. ___ faint hearted                 | D. glad something is over or gone                  |
| 5. ___ bated breath                  | E. kind and generous                               |
| 6. ___ so-so                         | F. whatever happens                                |
| 7. ___ good riddance                 | G. limited breathing due to tension, awaiting news |
| 8. ___ lie low                       | H. irritate or bother me                           |
| 9. ___ come what may                 | I. timid or afraid                                 |
| 10. ___ in a pickle                  | J. feelings can make us ignore obvious problems    |
| 11. ___ wear my heart upon my sleeve | K. I'll find a way to get what I want              |
| 12. ___ full circle                  | L. acting so foolishly that others mock you        |
| 13. ___ break the ice                | M. frightening                                     |
| 14. ___ wild goose chase             | N. in a difficult situation                        |
| 15. ___ the world is my oyster       | O. things have come back to where they started     |
| 16. ___ laughing stock               | P. a hopeless effort with no chance of success     |
| 17. ___ makes your hair stand on end | Q. whatever I feel is obvious to everyone          |
| 18. ___ love is blind                | R. start something                                 |

## Idiom Matching Answers

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <u>A</u> green eyed monster**            | A. jealousy  |
| 2. <u>H</u> set my teeth on edge            | H. irritate or bother me                           |
| 3. <u>E</u> heart of gold                   | E. kind and generous                               |
| 4. <u>I</u> faint hearted                   | I. timid or afraid                                 |
| 5. <u>G</u> baited breath                   | G. limited breathing due to tension, awaiting news |
| 6. <u>C</u> so-so                           | C. not good or bad                                 |
| 7. <u>D</u> good riddance*                  | D. glad something is over or gone                  |
| 8. <u>B</u> lie low                         | B. stay out of sight, unnoticed                    |
| 9. <u>F</u> come what may                   | F. whatever happens                                |
| 10. <u>N</u> in a pickle                    | N. in a difficult situation                        |
| 11. <u>Q</u> wear your heart on your sleeve | Q. whatever I feel is obvious to everyone          |
| 12. <u>O</u> full circle                    | O. things have come back to where they started     |
| 13. <u>R</u> break the ice                  | R. start something                                 |
| 14. <u>P</u> wild goose chase               | P. a hopeless effort with no chance of success     |
| 15. <u>K</u> the world is my oyster         | K. I'll find a way to get what I want              |
| 16. <u>L</u> laughing stock                 | L. acting so foolishly that others mock you        |
| 17. <u>M</u> makes your hair stand on end   | M. frightening                                     |
| 18. <u>S</u> love is blind                  | S. feelings can make us ignore obvious problems    |

### More background for those who are interested:

\*to get rid of means to throw away or put out of our home and life. If someone has been in a difficult romantic relationship and his or her partner leaves, he or she may say "Good riddance!"

\*\*In English we still talk about being "green with envy" (an expression used by American writer Mark Twain over 100 years ago), but the idea goes back at least as far as the ancient Greeks. Shakespeare used "green-eyed jealousy" in *The Merchant of Venice*, but it became a monster in *Othello*. Iago warned Othello in act 3, scene 3:

"O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; It is the green-ey'd monster, which doth mock The meat it feeds on."

Iago actually hated Othello and was trying to make him jealous. Iago created the green-eyed monster that led Othello to suspect and kill his wife—and then himself when he learned she was innocent.

Shakespeare's plays are full of powerful insights into human psychology and creative ways to express them.

Read them for yourself, with some help from modernized versions side by side with the original at

<http://nfs.sparknotes.com/> If you're wondering which one to try, look at

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/themes\\_index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/themes_index.shtml) . (They're written as if they were headlines in one of the scandal-loving tabloid newspapers.) For ideas on how to use those to teach Shakespeare, see <http://www.britishcouncil.org/blog/how-make-shakespeare-easy-english-language-learners> .

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