

To Kill A Mockingbird Idioms

Idiom: an expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but that has a separate meaning of its own

Chapter 5 - Idioms

acid tongue in her head: Acid is very bitter in taste. Someone with an acid tongue is someone who tends to speak bitterly or sharply.

get Miss Maudie's goat: To get one's goat is to make a person disgusted or angry.

Chapter 7 - Idioms

walked on eggs: To walk on eggs is to walk very carefully or to be very careful in someone's presence.

Chapter 9 - Idioms

as sure as eggs: Something that is as sure as eggs is a sure thing; it's bound to happen; just as chickens are sure to lay eggs.

bowed to the inevitable: An event or occurrence that is inevitable is one that cannot be stopped from occurring. To bow to the inevitable is to realize this fact and resist fighting it. Atticus realizes that, sooner or later, Scout and Jem would be given guns and be taught how to shoot, so he doesn't try to fight it.

drew a bead on him: To draw a bead on someone is to aim at or focus on that person.

on tenterhooks: To be on tenterhooks is to be filled with suspense or anxiety.

set my teeth permanently on edge: To set one's teeth on edge is to annoy someone or make them feel nervous the way in which Aunt Alexandra tends to annoy Scout

Chapter 10 - Idioms

break camp: pack up; move on. In Scout's case, Atticus is telling her to put her gun away and quit her game.

tooth and nail: To fight someone tooth and nail is to fight that person as fiercely as possible (literally with teeth and fingernails if necessary).

tribal curse: a family curse or, more aptly, an affliction shared by members of a family. Apparently, many members of the Finch family have had problems with their left eyes.

Chapter 11 - Idioms

'druthers: a contraction of the phrase "I'd rather." Your 'druthers is your choice or preference; it's what you'd rather do or have.

slow fuse: A person with a slow fuse is someone who is not easily upset or angered.

stood as much guff: Guff is foolish or brash talk. Jem has had enough of all the foolish, rude talk about Atticus.

when the chips are down: at the most important time. [In gambling games, a person puts chips or money down in front of him to show that he is willing to risk an amount in a bet.]

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Chapter 12 - Idioms

to scrape a few barnacles off the ship of state: Barnacles are a form of shellfish that attach themselves to stationary items such as ships that have been standing still in the water for a long time. In order to maintain a boat or a ship, the barnacles must be scraped off. The ship of state, in this case, refers to the state government. The governor is saying that it is necessary to maintain and update (scrape a few barnacles off) the workings of the government (the ship of state).

Chapter 13 - Idioms

traveled in state: To travel in state is to do so in the position of a person of great wealth and rank.

Chapter 15 - Idioms

he had seen the light: In this case to have seen the light means to have become religious.

Chapter 16 - Idioms

blind spots: a prejudice or area of ignorance that someone has but is unaware of. Mr. Cunningham's blind spot is his prejudice against Tom Robinson.

Chapter 17 - Idioms

counting his chickens: Scout is referring to the first half of the proverb: "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," which means "don't be too sure that something will happen before it does." Although Jem seems to be certain that Atticus has won his case, Scout thinks he is counting his chickens, that is, he is too sure of something that may not happen.

guests of the county: on public assistance or welfare

Chapter 18 - Idioms

took advantage of me: In this instance, the phrase to take advantage of means to have sexual intercourse with.

Chapter 19 - Idioms

looked daggers: A dagger is a type of knife. To look daggers at someone is to look sharply at that person.

Chapter 22 - Idioms

give the lie: To give the lie to something is to prove that thing to be false or untrue. Scout is saying that the way in which Miss Stephanie and Miss Rachel are acting proves that Dill's statements about them are not untrue.

runner: chicken leg

Chapter 24 - Idioms

blue in the face: angry and upset; excited and emotional

fighting the good fight: In the case of the ladies of the missionary circle, the good fight would be their work to aid missionaries around the world in their cause of converting people to Christianity.

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their time came: Although this could be a reference to childbirth, it is more likely a reference to a woman's menstrual cycle.

wool: Mrs. Merriweather is referring to her maid's head or, more specifically, her hair. "It's never entered that wool of hers" is Mrs. Merriweather's way of saying, "It's never entered that head of hers."

Chapter 30 - Idioms

into the limelight: In the theater, the limelight is an intense light thrown on stage in order to highlight an actor, etc. To be in the limelight is to be put in a prominent position before the public.