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What's the origin of the phrase 'Cat got your tongue?'?

The origin of the phrase 'has the cat got your tongue?' isn't known. What is certain is that it isn't derived as a reference to the cat o' nine tails or people's tongues being fed to cats in ancient Egypt. Both of these have been suggested and there's no shred of evidence to support either of them.

'Cat got your tongue?' is the shortened form of the query 'Has the cat got your tongue?' and it is the short form that is more often used. It is somewhat archaic now but was in common use until the 1960/70s. It was directed at anyone who was quiet when they were expected to speak, and often to children who were being suspiciously unobtrusive.

time flies

used to mean that time passes surprisingly quickly:

Time flies when you're having fun.

What's the meaning of the phrase 'Spill the beans'?

To divulge a secret, especially to do so inadvertently or maliciously.

What's the origin of the phrase 'Spill the beans'?



The derivation of this expression is sometimes said to be a voting system used in ancient Greece. The story goes that white beans indicated positive votes and black beans negative. Votes had to be unanimous, so if the collector 'spilled the beans' before the vote was complete and a black bean was seen, the vote was halted. That's plausible, but doesn't account for the fact that the phrase is first found in the early 20th century. It's probably best if we concentrate our search there and ignore ancient Greece.

'Spill' has been used as a verb with the meaning of 'divulge' or 'let out' since at least the 16th century.

"

What's the meaning of the phrase 'Neither fish nor flesh, nor good red herring'?

A deliberate misleading and diverting of attention from the real issue.

What's the origin of the phrase 'Neither fish nor flesh, nor good red herring'?



Red herrings are salted herrings that turn a reddish colour during the smoking process. They have come to be synonymous with the deliberate false trails that are the stock in trade of 'who done it' thrillers.

The term has been used to refer to people as well as to fish for some centuries. John Heywood's 1546 glossary, *A dialogue conteinyng the nomber in effect of all the prouerbes in the Englishe tongue* includes the expression: She is nother fyshe nor fleshe, nor good red hearyng.

What's the meaning of the phrase 'Kick the bucket'?

'Kick the bucket' is a colloquial expression for 'die'.

What's the origin of the phrase 'Kick the bucket'?

We all know what a bucket is - and so this phrase appears rather odd. Why should kicking one be associated with dying?

The link between buckets and death was made by at least 1785, when the phrase was defined in Grose's *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*: kick the bucket, to die.

What's the meaning of the phrase 'Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth'?

To be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth is to be born into a wealthy and privileged family.

What's the origin of the phrase 'Born with a silver spoon in one's mouth'?

This is commonly thought to be an English phrase and to refer to the British aristocracy. That may well be the case, but the earliest citation in print is from the USA.

Deb. U.S. Congress, 1801:

"It was a common proverb that few lawyers were born with silver spoons in their mouths."

What's the meaning of the phrase 'Tie the knot'?

Get married.

What's the origin of the phrase 'Tie the knot'?



There is a suggestion that this expression derives from the nets of knotted string which supported beds prior to the introduction of metal-sprung bedframes. The theory goes that, in order to make a marriage bed, you needed to 'tie the knot'. Like many such folk-etymological explanations, there's not a shred of evidence to support this idea.

It isn't clear whether this expression derives from an actual knot used in marriage ceremonies or whether the knot is merely symbolic of a lasting unity.

put all your eggs in one basket

to depend for your success on a single person or plan of action:

I'm applying for several jobs because I don't really want to put all my eggs in one basket.

you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs



Alternative forms: you've got to crack a few eggs to make an omelette

Etymology: 1796 in English, from French, on ne saurait faire d'omelette sans casser des œufs (1742 and earlier), attributed François de Charette.

Meaning: In order to achieve something, it is inevitable and necessary that some mistakes are made or some sacrifices must occur.

The joker in the pack

If something or someone is **the joker in the pack**, they are different from the other things or people in a situation and no one knows how they will behave.

He's seen very much as the wild boy of Italian fashion — the joker in the pack.

Note: The joker in a pack of playing cards is the card which does not belong to any of the four suits.

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What's the meaning of the phrase 'Piece of cake'?

A straightforward task that can easily be accomplished.

What's the origin of the phrase 'Piece of cake'?

This phrase is of American origin. At least, the earliest citation of it that I can



find is from the American poet and humorist Ogden

Nash's *Primrose Path*, 1936:

"Her picture's in the papers now,
And life's a piece of cake."

The choice of cake or pie as a symbol of ease and pleasantries is

well represented in the language. Other phrases along the same lines include:

As easy as pie

Pie in the sky

A cake-walk

That takes the cake/biscuit'.

,get cold feet (also have cold feet)

to feel too frightened to do something that you had planned to do:

I was going to try bungee jumping, but I got cold feet.

(Definition of get cold feet from the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary

© Cambridge University Press)

keep/hold your cards close to your chest

to keep your intended actions secret:

You never quite know what Barry's going to do next - he keeps his cards very close to his chest.

(Definition of keep/hold your cards close to your chest from the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus © Cambridge University Press)

An **earworm**, sometimes known as a **brainworm**, **sticky music**, **stuck song syndrome**, or **Involuntary Musical Imagery (IMI)**, is a catchy piece of music that continually repeats through a person's mind after it is no longer playing. Phrases used to describe an earworm include "musical imagery repetition", "involuntary musical imagery", "cognitive itch", and "stuck song syndrome".

If you hold a cat by the tail you learn things you cannot learn any other way.

Mark Twain

What's the meaning of the phrase 'Wear your heart on your sleeve'?

To wear your heart on your sleeve is to display your emotions openly.

What's the origin of the phrase 'Wear your heart on your sleeve'?

This phrase may derive from the custom at Middle Ages' jousting matches. Knights are said to have worn the colours of the lady they were supporting, in cloths or ribbons tied to their arms.



The term doesn't date from that period though and is first recorded in Shakespeare's *Othello*, 1604.

birdbrain

1: a stupid person

2: SCATTERBRAIN

What's the meaning of the phrase 'In a nutshell'?

In a few words; concisely stated.

What's the origin of the phrase 'In a nutshell'?



The meaning of the phrase 'in a nutshell' is fairly easy to deduce. Anything that could be written in so few words that it would fit into a nutshell would have to be brief and to the point.

The first text that was supposed to be enclosed in a nutshell was far from small. Pliny the Elder recorded an event, which he apparently believed to be genuine, in *Natural History*, the original of which was written in AD 77 and was translated into English in 1601 by Philemon Holland, who included explanatory notes, like this:

We find in Histories almost incredible examples of sharpness of the eyes. Cicero hath recorded, that the poem of Homer called the Iliad, written on parchment, was enclosed within a nutshell. The same writer maketh mention of one who could see to the distance of 135 Miles.

the cherry on the cake

the final thing that makes something perfect

The fabulous weather on the day was the cherry on the cake.

be/live in someone's shadow

to feel or seem unsuccessful in comparison to someone who is very successful

He's always lived in the shadow of his brother.

bird's-eye view noun

1: a view from a high angle as if seen by a bird in flight

2: an overall or cursory look at something

the boot/shoe is on the other foot

the situation is now the opposite of what it was, especially because someone who was weak now has power