

A Lucky Break

Skills: Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, Visual Arts

Objective: Students identify and decipher some common phrases in the English language related to poultry.

Background

The chicken is probably the most common bird in the world. It is raised for meat, eggs and byproducts such as feathers. Some people even raise chickens as a hobby. The chickens we know today came from red jungle fowl of southeast Asia, which were first tamed around 2300 BC. Chickens were kept for their eggs, and when the birds grew too old to lay, they were used for meat.

The tradition of pulling apart the wishbone, or clavicle, may be as much as 2,500 years old. Ancient Etruscans in what is now Italy kept chickens in their temples to aid priests in interpreting signs of the future. When one of the sacred birds died, the collarbone was dried and saved. Believers would stroke the bone and then make a wish.

The ancient Romans, who came to live in Italy after the Etruscans, believed chickens had special powers. When sacred chicken bones from the temple became scarce, the people began breaking the collarbone of the chicken in half to create more bones for others.

The Romans carried the custom with them when they conquered the British Isles. The British were the first to believe good luck would come to the person left with the head of the bone still attached, or the “lucky break.”

China raises more chickens than any other country in the world. The largest number of chickens grown in the US are grown on commercial broiler farms. Broilers are seven- to eight-week-old chickens raised for their heavy meat content.

The major broiler-producing states are Arkansas, Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, Mississippi, Texas, Delaware and Maryland. Oklahoma ranks number 10 in broiler production. Poultry and eggs are the third most valuable agricultural product in Oklahoma, behind cattle and hogs.

Most chickens weigh between seven and 10 pounds. Hens start laying at 22 weeks of age. A good layer will lay 206-280 eggs a year during her most productive period. Eggs hatch in 21 days.

Language Arts

1. Read and discuss background information.
2. If you have several wishbones available, let students try their luck at

P.A.S.S.

GRADE 3

Reading—5.3

GRADE 4

Reading—1.1; 4.3b

Writing—2.2,5a

Oral Language—1.3

Science Process—2.1

Life Science—3.2

Social Studies—1.1

Visual Arts—3.1

GRADE 5

Reading—1.1b; 4.3b

Writing—2.1

Science Process—2.1

Social Studies—1.1

Visual Arts—3.1,2

GRADE 6

Reading—1.1ab; 4.3ad

Writing—1.4 2.7

**Science Process—1.1; 2.1;
4.1,4**

**Social Studies—1.1,3;
3.1,2**

Visual Arts—3.1,2

Materials

wishbones from chickens,
cleaned and dried

dried chicken bones from a
large broiler

glue

wire

pulling them apart.

—One student holds each end.

—Each makes a wish and pulls.

—The one with the “head” of the bone still attached gets his or her wish.

—If you don’t have enough wishbones, students may count off by ones and twos. One student will represent one group and one the other.

Members of the group whose representative gets the head get their wishes.

—Explain that the “lucky break” is only one of many idioms in the English language that are related to poultry.

—Ask students what it means to call someone a “chicken” and why.

—Ask students if they are familiar with any other sayings related to chickens.

—Use the idiom reading sheet and worksheet included with this lesson to discuss idioms.

3. Divide students into groups of four or five or use this activity in a language center.

—Make one copy each of the “Idiom Cards” and “Idiom Meanings” sheets for each group. Cut up the pages to make cards.

—Students work together to pair the idioms with the correct explanations.

—After students have had time to put the cards together, read each idiom aloud, and have students give their answers.

4. Discuss possible origins of the idioms, and provide students with the information on the “Poultry-Related Idioms and Their Origins” sheet.
5. Each group will write a story using as many of the idioms as possible.
—Students will read their stories to the class.
5. Students write their own idioms based on things with which they are very familiar.

Science

1. Boil a large broiler chicken, and retrieve the bones.

—Boil the bones again to remove all the fat.

—Dry the bones, and bury them in sand or plaster of paris.

—Students will carefully dig the bones out with spoons.

—Students will determine which part of the chicken each bone came from.

2. Place drumsticks and wishbones in a glass jar.

—Cover the bones with vinegar, and screw the lid on the jar.

—Students will hypothesize what will happen to the bones after two weeks in the vinegar.

—After two weeks, take them out.

—Students will observe and describe the changes.

Visual Arts

1. Bring boiled, dried chicken bones to class along with glue, wire and other materials.
 - Students will work in groups to construct imaginary creatures.
 - Students will write stories about their imaginary creatures.

Social Studies

1. Have students research on the internet or in the library to find more information about the ancient Etruscans (See background).

Extra Reading

Coville, Bruce, *Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1991.

McGowan, Christopher, *T-Rex to Go: Build Your Own from Chicken Bones*, HarperCollins, 1999.

Vocabulary

broiler chicken—A tender young chicken suitable for broiling.

clavicle—A bone found in fowl, often called a wish-bone.

Etruscans—People who lived in ancient Etruria, in what is now Tuscany and parts of Umbria in western Italy.

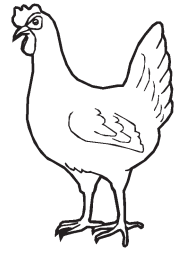
fowl—A bird, such as the duck, goose, turkey, or pheasant, that is used as food or hunted as game.

roost—A perch on which domestic fowl or other birds rest or sleep.

Name _____

Which Came First, the Chicken or the Idiom?

Idioms are sayings that have hidden meanings. The expressions mean more than what the words actually say. Many of the idioms come from a time when most people were involved in agriculture. One example is “like a chicken on a June bug.” This phrase is used to describe someone doing something very quickly. It refers to the quick way chickens pounce on all kinds of bugs in order to catch them before they fly away.



Since most Americans no longer live or work on farms, many of these words and phrases have no meaning, apart from the way we have come to understand them. For example, most people know that the phrase “chicken feed,” means “a small sum of money.” They may not know that it comes from a time when table scraps and inferior grain was used to feed chickens.

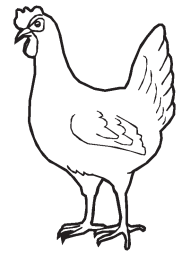
Match the following idioms with their meanings. Write the correct letter on the line.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ___1. spring chicken | a. In a hurried or disorganized way. |
| ___2. walking on egg shells | b. A young woman. |
| ___3. like a chicken with his head cut off | c. Behaving in a careful manner so as not to offend someone. |
| ___4. chicken feed | d. A small sum of money |
| ___5. lucky break | e. The way people are ranked in relation to each other |
| ___6. egg on the face | f. Unexpected good fortune |
| ___7. counting your chickens before they hatch | g. Embarrassed |
| ___8. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. | h. Very angry |
| ___9. mad as a wet hen | i. Depending on getting something before you actually get it |
| ___10. pecking order | j. Don't risk all you have on just one thing. |

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(answers)

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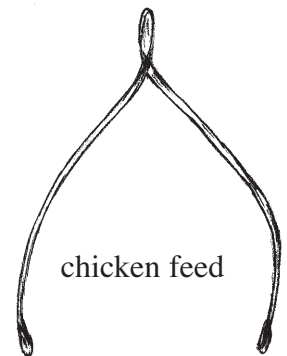
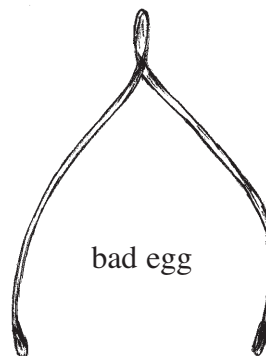
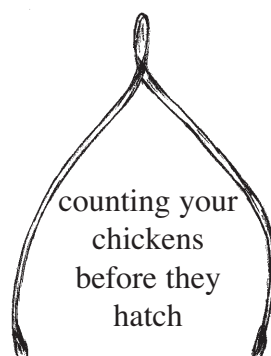
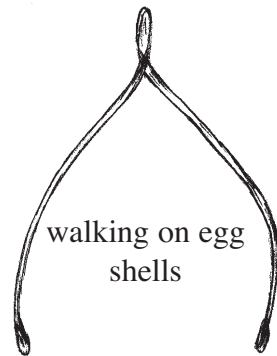
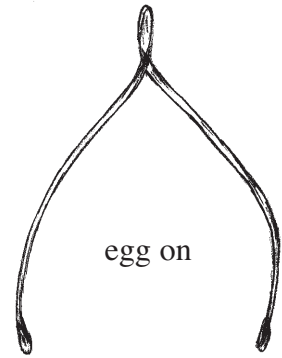
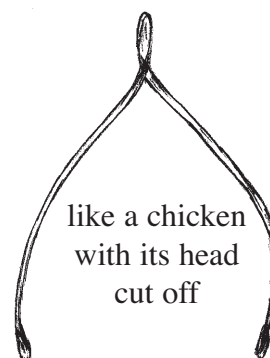
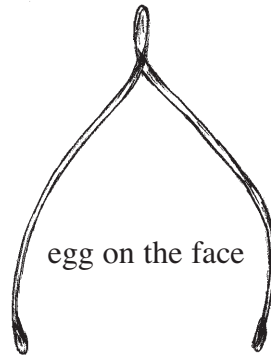
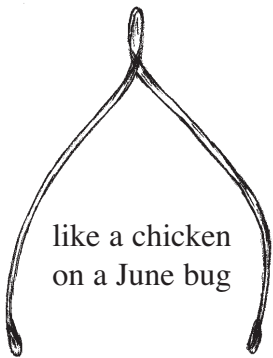
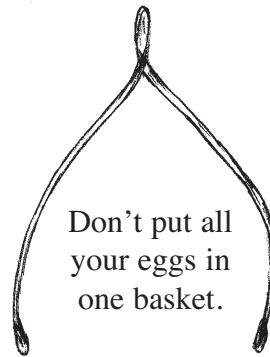
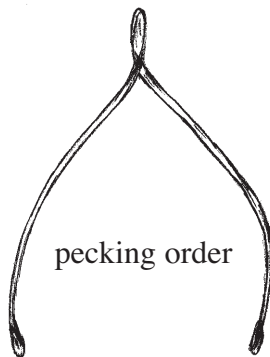
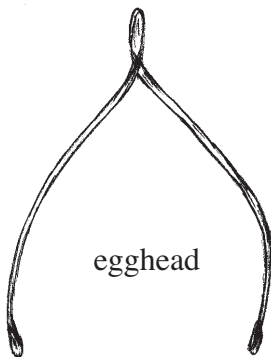
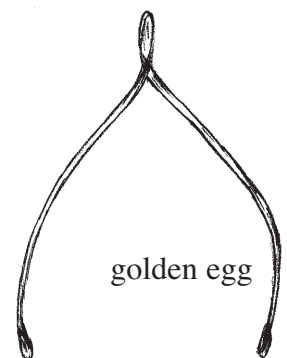
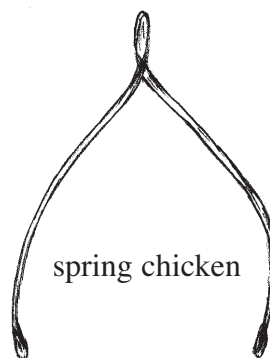
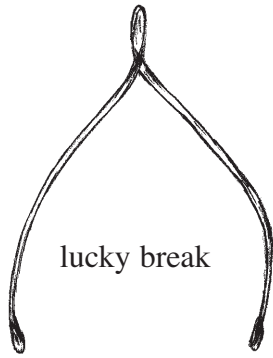


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| c 2. walking on egg shells | b. A young woman. |
| a 3. like a chicken with his head cut off | c. Behaving in a careful manner so as not to offend someone. |
| d 4. chicken feed | d. A small sum of money |
| f 5. lucky break | e. The way people are ranked in relation to each other |
| g 6. egg on the face | f. Unexpected good fortune |
| e 7. counting your chickens before they hatch | g. Embarrassed |
| i 8. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. | h. Very angry |
| h 9. mad as a wet hen | i. Depending on getting something before you actually get it |
| j 10. pecking order | j. Don't risk all you have on just one thing. |

Idiom Cards



Idiom Meaning Cards

an intellectual

great profit

a young woman

A person's words
or acts come back
to cause trouble

very quickly

very angry

Don't risk all you
have on just one
thing.

The way people are
ranked in relation to
each other.

behaving in a care-
ful manner so as
not to offend some-
one

urge someone on

in a hurried or dis-
organized way

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unexpected good
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a small sum of
money

a person who dis-
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tions

depending on get-
ting something
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Some Common Poultry-Related Idioms and Their Meanings

bad egg—a person who disappoints expectations

A rotten egg looks fine from the outside.

chickens coming home to roost—someone's words or acts come back to cause trouble for them

Chickens which stray during the day return to their roost at night.

chicken feed—a small sum of money

In pioneer days table scraps and inferior grain were used to feed chickens.

counting your chickens before they are hatched—depending on getting something before you actually get it.

One of Aesop's fables describes a market woman saying she will get so much for her eggs that with the money she will buy a goose; the goose in time will bring her so much, with which she will buy a cow, and so on; but in her excitement she kicks over her basket, and all her eggs are broken.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket.—Don't risk all you have on just one thing.

See above.

egg on—urge someone on

The origin of this phrase actually has nothing to do with chickens or eggs. It is a corruption of the Saxon word eggian, which means "to incite."

egg on the face—embarrassed

egghead—an intellectual

At one time large foreheads were considered a sign of great intelligence. Because heads with this characteristic resembled eggs, people with great intelligence came to be called "eggheads." During the 1952 presidential campaign between Dwight D. Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson, the Eisenhower campaign brought the word into common usage by using it to describe Stevenson and his supporters. Stevenson was considered an intellectual. He was also bald, which made the term seem even more appropriate. Although great intelligence is normally considered a good thing, in this case Stevenson's critics used it against him by claiming it meant he was out of touch with the common people.

golden egg—great profit

From the story of Jack and the Beanstalk.

like a chicken on a June bug—very quickly

Chickens eat all kinds of bugs and pounce on them very quickly in order to catch them before they fly away.

like a chicken with its head cut off—in a hurried or disorganized way

Killing a chicken involves taking its head off. A decapitated chicken often continues to flutter its wings and flap about wildly for several seconds before dying. When people kept chickens in their yards for eggs and meat, this was a familiar sight.

lucky break—unexpected good fortune

From the practice of breaking the wishbone of the chicken for good luck. The English believed good luck would come to the person left with the head of the bone still attached, or the “lucky break.”

mad as a wet hen—very angry

This phrase has no basis in fact, since hens do not get particularly excited when wet. Hens are known to cluck angrily and peck when provoked, however.

pecking order—The way people are ranked in relation to each other.

Among animals, the stronger animal in a group always asserts dominance over the weaker ones. In a chicken yard, the most dominant chickens peck at the the weaker ones without fear the weaker ones will peck back.

spring chicken—a young woman

Chicken was once a seasonal meat, produced from spring eggs, hence the term “spring chicken.” Today's spring chicken may not be hatched in spring at all, but the term still applies to a young bird, from two to ten months old, with tender flesh. Likewise, chickens were formerly raised mostly for eggs and were not cooked for their meat until they were no longer able to lay eggs. Since their diets were fairly lean, their meat tended to be tough—”a tough old bird.” In slang this phrase refers to a tough old woman.

walking on eggshells—behaving in a careful manner so as not to offend someone

This refers to people who are easily offended, like eggshells are easily broken.