What’s So Funny
Idiom and Joke

Andy Martin

IDIOM - FLY THE COOP

**Origin:** The expression probably goes back at least to the late 18th century. The “coop” in the idiom could be referring to either a chicken coop which is a caged enclosure where chickens are kept on a chicken farm; or could refer to an 18th century slang term for jail, in the sense of escaping from jail. Undoubtedly the slang word has the same origin as a chicken coop. The word “coop” itself goes back to Old English and the 14th century. Obviously, “fly” can sometimes be synonymous with “flee”, to escape. Flying is something birds do, though chickens are not particularly good at it.

**Usage:** Informal, spoken, general English, mostly American

**Idiomatic Meaning:** To escape or get away from jail or any confining place or situation.

**Literal Meaning:** The verb “fly” can be transitive or intransitive. In the idiom, it is intransitive. It just means to flap your wings and hopefully fly in the air. Most birds do this well, but chickens can’t really fly. However, as a transitive verb, taking a direct object, to fly something refers to piloting something motorized with wings, such as an airplane. So a literal meaning of fly the coop would be to drive or pilot the coop, flying in the air.

**Why is this funny?** We have a very talented and creative chicken in this cartoon who “flies the coop” by flying the coop. She has converted her old coop, where she lived with the other chickens, into an airplane by adding wings, a motor and a propeller. Both the literal and idiomatic meanings are shown very neatly in the cartoon.

**Sample sentence:** Once our daughter got her PhD, she was finally able to “fly to coop.”
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Fly the Coop- Worksheet

YOUR IDIOMS

Is there an idiom in your language similar to fly the coop? Write it in English and explain it to your class. Write your idiom here:

________________________________________________________________

GRAMMAR

A transitive verb is a verb that takes one or more objects. Intransitive verbs, do not have objects. Some verbs, such as fly can be both transitive and intransitive, depending on the context. For example, when fly is a transitive verb (takes an object), it means to operate a flying vehicle. When fly is intransitive (there is no object), then the subject of the sentence is doing the flying. Some other verbs which can be both are: spoil, cook, and develop.

Label the following verbs T for transitive or I for intransitive.

_____She flew home.  _____We’re cooking tonight.
_____He cooked supper.  _____They spoiled the child.
_____It’s a developing news story.  _____The pilot flew the plane.
_____They spoiled the broth.  _____The chicken flew the coop.

RELATED IDIOMS

Write the definition of these idioms (look them up or ask your teacher)

Cooped up_____________________________________________________

Chickens come home to roost ___________________________________
Match these idioms with these situations: fly the coop, chickens come home to roost, cooped up,

- The people finally voted the corrupt governor out of office
- I left home to join the army when I was eighteen years old.
- I was stuck in the house and couldn’t go out to play because I was sick

DISCUSSIONS

- Find pictures of chickens in coops as well as people in jail online or in print. Bring them to class to discuss. Should chickens be cooped up? Should people be put in jail?
- What is the right age for a child to leave home permanently and why? If you are an adult, how old were you when you flew the coop?
- Explain the related expression “cooped up.” Make sure your Ss understand the full meaning of this idiom by having them give or show examples of other situations when “fly the coop” is appropriate, such as escaping from jail.

PERSONAL CONNECTION

Write about leaving home permanently or escaping from jail. If there have been any escaped prisoners in the news lately, refer to them, or use plots from TV shows and movies. Also listen to the song Leaving on a Jet Plane by Peter Paul and Mary. What is the song about?
JOKE - WHAT DID DRACULA SAY WHEN HE TURNED DOWN A KISS FROM HIS GIRL FRIEND? - ALL MY LOVE’S IN VEIN

(Listen to the podcast - https://audioboom.com/boos/2247825-bloody-good-pun)

Transcript: What’s so funny about this? - This joke started out with my wife and I going out to give a blood sample. They couldn’t find a vein in my wife’s arm to take blood and finally had to switch arms. They were looking for a vein in vain. As we were leaving, I commented to my wife that her trip had almost been in vain. That got me to thinking about the pun possibilities. I didn’t think the actual story was funny enough but I knew that blood is always a good topic to joke about as are most bodily fluids, though I can’t joke about them all, at least not in this audioboo blog. When it comes to blood, vampires usually come to mind, at least to my mind and they do like to get their daily dose from veins or arteries, in a pinch. “Vain” is an old and interesting word, going back to the 14th century and coming from French. It means to be worthless, empty, but it also means to be conceited, self-involved. I guess they were making a value judgment. But when it’s paired with the preposition “in” it means unsuccessful, a waste of time. There is also a famous blues song by Robert Johnson, entitled, “Love in Vain”. The word “love” got me thinking about how Dracula, the most famous vampire, would seduce women by kissing them on the neck. At least that’s what I thought when I first saw the movies. I was eight or so. It was a couple of years later that I realized he was biting them to suck out their blood. But then I couldn’t understand the attraction of the women to him; why they offered their necks so readily. There seem to be two kinds of actors who have played Dracula: either they’ve been suave, debonair, and good looking, or they’ve been hideous monsters.
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The handsome ones seem to have won the day. In the joke, the heroine wants to be more traditional and tries to kiss Dracula on the lips; but he’s not interested in foreplay, he wants to get right down to it. He might also be confessing that he’s incapable of true love or that it’s only his stomach that he loves. He tells her his love is in vein, hers. And THAT’s what’s so funny.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION - This joke is a pun on the expression in vain. Dracula makes love to women by biting their necks and drinking blood from their veins. This is what you see in the photo The word vein, spelled v-e-i-n. I means “blood vessel” and sounds exactly like another vain spelled v-a-i-n, which means egotistical and self-involved. These two words are HOMOPHONES. They sound alike but are spelled differently. If we add the preposition in to vain, we get the phrase in vain meaning a “waste of time.” If Dracula were to try to love a woman normally it would be in vain, since he can’t do it. But, it happens that there is a lot of blood in vein in her neck. That’s why we can make a pun and say that Dracula’s love is in vein.

Dracula- Worksheet

COMPREHENSION CHECK

- This joke was inspired by a real-life incident. What happened and how did it become a joke? _____________________________________________________________
  
- What is the difference between the words vain and vein? ___
  
- Who is Dracula and what is a vampire? ________________________________
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VOCABULARY - This podcast used a number of common expressions, phrases and words which you may not know. Look up the definitions and write them here:

1. Daily dose __________________________________________________
2. In a pinch __________________________________________________
3. Value judgement _____________________________________________
4. Suave, debonair _____________________________________________
5. Hideous monsters ____________________________________________
6. Won the day _________________________________________________
7. Get right down to it __________________________________________

USING LANGUAGE - Complete these sentences using the correct word(s):

Vain, vein, in vain
1. The ____________ on your neck is pulsing
2. Your fishing is ______________. The fish have all died off in this lake.
3. He had a heart attack because his ________________ was blocked
4. I can’t believe you won’t go out without your hat. You’re so __________.
5. He’ll never change. Your nagging is ______________.

Sometimes a word’s meaning is changed by adding a preposition in front of it. List some examples:

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<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>Prepositional phrase</th>
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WRITE OR DISCUSS

• What’s your favorite movie about vampires and/or zombies? What do you like about it?
• Listen to the song You’re So Vain by Carly Simon. Can you understand all the words? What is the song about?