



Idioms around the world

Idioms express small bits of wisdom. They are natural to specific languages and locations. Without cultural context, it can be difficult to understand an idiom, even if you know what the words literally mean.

TED Translators overcome this challenge each time they subtitle TED Talks. Translators provide a cultural frame for speakers' words, which allows big ideas to traverse languages and borders.

This booklet showcases idioms contributed by TED Translators around the world. Each idiom has been turned into an illustrated sticker. Here's how to collect the stickers:

Step 1: Find a TED Translator.

Step 2: Talk to them! Make a new friend!

Step 3: Ask for a sticker and what it means.

Bonus: Drop the idiom into a conversation!



どんぐりの背比べ
Japanese

Acorns comparing
their heights



Жерден жеті қоян табу
Kazakh

To find seven rabbits
from the earth



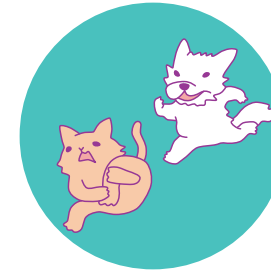
Էշի ականջում քնած
Armenian

Sleeping in the donkey's ear



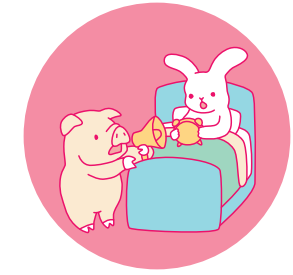
موش بخورت
Persian

A mouse should eat you



Ņemt kājas pār pleciem
Latvian

Take legs over shoulders



у свiнiя галасы
Belarusian

With the pigs' voices



বামুন গেল ঘর তো লাঙল তুলে ধর।
Bengali

When the cat's away,
the mice will play



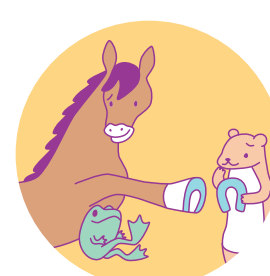
Andare a letto con le galline
Italian

Going to bed with chickens



ناچ نہ جانے آنگن ٹیڑھا
پکانا نہ جانے بینگن ٹیڑھا
Urdu

You don't know dancing and
think the dance floor is tilted.
You don't know cooking and
think eggplant is slanted.



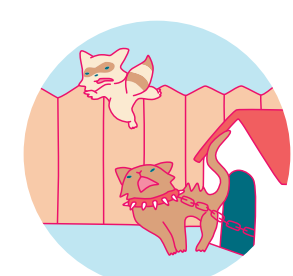
Videla žaba da se konj
potkiva, pa i ona digla nogu
Serbian

The frog saw a horse
getting a shoe, so it put
its leg up too



Ahogarse en un vaso
de agua
Spanish

To drown oneself
in a glass of water



უძალლო ქვეყანაში
კატებს აყეფებდნენ
Georgian

In a country with no dogs,
cats are forced to bark



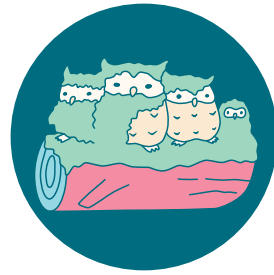
Udělat kozla zahradníkem
Czech

To make a goat be
the gardener



Haar op de tanden hebben
Dutch

To have hair on one's teeth



Ugler i mosen
Norwegian (Bokmål)

Owls in the moss



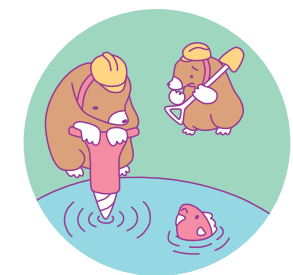
പലതുള്ളി പെരുവെള്ളം
Malayalam

Many drops make a large
pool. Little drops make the
mighty ocean.



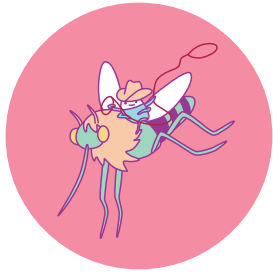
چ روڤڤييه
Kurdish

What a fox!



Bëri një vrimë në ujë
Albanian

Making a hole in water



Nu face din țânțar armăsar
Romanian

Don't make a stallion
out of a mosquito



Teško žabu u vodu natjerati
Croatian

It's difficult to get
a frog in water



손이 크다
Korean

The hands are big



Einen Kater haben
German

To have a tomcat



鬼五馬六
Cantonese

Ghost and horse



Знати, де раки зимують
Ukrainian

To know where the crawfish
spends winter



Uczepić się jak rzep
psiego ogona
Polish

Stuck like a burr
on a dog's tail



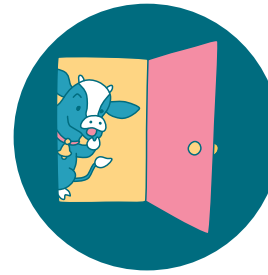
Tatli dil yilani deliginden
cikarir
Turkish

Sweet talk would get
a snake out of its hole



虎头蛇尾
Mandarin

Tiger head and snake tail



Strmeti kot tele v nova vrata
Slovenian

To stare like a calf into
a new door



Крушата не пада
по-далеч от дървото
Bulgarian

The pear doesn't fall far
from the tree



मांजर उंदराला साक्षीदार
Marathi

The cat as witness for the rat



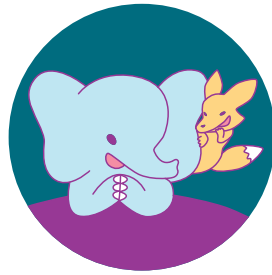
ความวัวไม่ทันหายความควาย
เข้ามาแทรก
Thai

Cowness hasn't gone,
buffalonesse intervened



Tele van a hócipőm
Hungarian

My snow boots are full



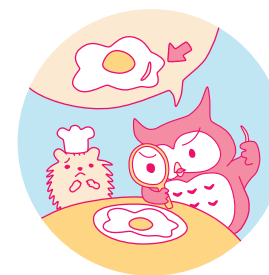
En räb bakom örat
Swedish

A fox behind the ear



Kwi vide
Mauritian Creole

Cook and pour



Бара влакно во јајце
Macedonian

Trying to find a hair
in an egg



Segurar vela
Brazilian Portuguese

To hold candles



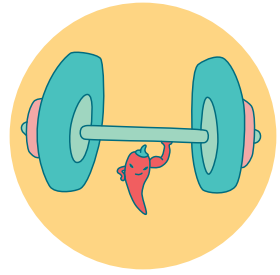
**Хүний гараар могой
барилгах**
Mongolian

To make someone catch
a snake for you



Les carottes sont cuites
French

The carrots are cooked



Kecil-kecil cabe rawit
Indonesian

Small, but very strong chili



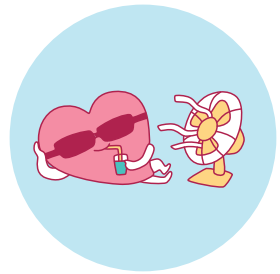
**אינגלב ארטסיא
אירק שיק שיק**
Hebrew

A vase with one coin can
make a lot of noise



Il n'y a pas le feu au lac
Swiss French

There's no fire on the lake



هذا الخبر أثلج صدري
Arabic

This news made
my heart cool



Det er ingen ko på isen
Danish

There's no cow on the ice

TED Translators

TED Translators are volunteers who subtitle TED Talks to help extraordinary ideas flow across languages and borders. The program launched in 2009. Today there are nearly 100,000 translations published in 112 languages.

About the illustrator

Masahito Leo Takeuchi is an illustrator based in London, specialising in playful illustrations inspired by nature, daydreams and the Japanese kawaii culture.

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