

Idioms from Colors



Reading

Read the story. Then discuss the questions.

In the Red

The letter came **out of the blue**! I wasn't expecting it. But there it was **in black and white**, signed by the bank manager. I had no money in my checking account. I was **in the red**.

I couldn't believe it. So I went to see the manager. We looked at the problem together. The bank had made a mistake. It had put ten dollars into my account instead of one thousand dollars!

Because it was the bank's mistake, there was no delay reopening my account. The manager cut through all the **red tape**. Now I had money in my account. And I had **the green light** to write checks again.

1. Does **in the red** mean to have enough money or to not have enough money? When a company is in the red, is it in trouble?
2. When you learn something **out of the blue**, is it a surprise?

3. If doing something takes a lot of **red tape**, is it easy to do? Sometimes getting papers from the government takes a lot of red tape. Can you think of some examples of things that take red tape?

Meanings

Each example has an idiom with a color word. Read the example carefully to find the meaning of the idiom. Then look at the definitions that follow the examples. Write the idiom next to its definition.

the black market	You can go to the bank to change dollars. But if you change money on the black market , you often get more money for each dollar.
to feel blue	I was alone on my birthday and feeling blue . Then Anny called and invited me out, and I felt better.
the green light	The bank has given us the money. Now we have the green light to start the project.
green with envy	I was green with envy when I learned that Luis had won a trip to Europe.
in black and white	I couldn't believe it, but there it was in black and white , as clear as it could be. The letter said that I had won a trip to Europe.
in the black	Theo earns a thousand dollars a week. He doesn't have to worry about having enough money. He's always in the black .
in the red	I never have enough money to pay my bills. I'm always in the red .
out of the blue	The news of the factory's closing came out of the blue . No one was expecting it.
the red carpet	When the movie star visited, our town rolled out the red carpet . There was a parade and a special dinner in her honor.
red tape	Every time you want to get a new passport, you have to go through a lot of red tape . It's not easy and it takes a lot of time.
a white lie	I didn't feel like going out. So I told a white lie , and I said I didn't feel well.

1. _____ by surprise, unexpectedly

2. _____ very clear and easy to understand

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| 3. _____ | owing money, in debt |
| 4. _____ | complicated official procedures and forms |
| 5. _____ | the okay to start something |
| 6. _____ | special honors for a special or important person |
| 7. _____ | the market not controlled by the government, where things are sold in private and often against the law |
| 8. _____ | something that is not true but that causes no harm |
| 9. _____ | jealous of someone else's good fortune |
| 10. _____ | to feel sad |
| 11. _____ | having money |

Practice

A. Answer each question with **yes** or **no**. Explain your answer.

1. My boss just gave me a raise in salary. Am I feeling blue?
2. I took my driver's test and passed. Then in less than half an hour I had my driver's license in my hand. Was there a lot of red tape?
3. My friend Jack asked if I liked his new purple tie. I didn't really like it, but I said that the tie was nice. Did I tell a white lie?
4. I always like to keep some extra money in the bank for an emergency. Am I in the black?
5. My boss said he had to talk to two other managers about my project. Did I get the green light?
6. They said it was in the contract, but I never saw it. Was the contract in black and white?
7. If I write this check, I won't have enough money in my account to cover it. Will I be in the red?
8. We had no idea at all. He told us he was leaving the company. Was the news out of the blue?
9. When the famous general came to town last year, we even had a special parade and fireworks show. Did the town roll out the red carpet?

10. When I exchange foreign currency at the bank, do I get it on the black market?

11. Sam wanted the job as manager of the store, but another employee got it. Might Sam be green with envy?



B. Each example has the correct idiom, but there is one error with each idiom. Find the error and correct it.

1. I got the news from the blue.

2. The rules for the contest were in black or white.

3. They were green for envy when their friend won the lottery.

4. Tony loves to shop, so he is always on the red.

5. You must go through a lot of red tapes to get a visa in some countries.

6. They rolled out the red carpets when he came.

7. Yuri does not have a problem with money. He's in black.

8. Pam was feeling in blue because she had to stay home.

9. I told white lie. I said I couldn't come to the party because I had other plans.

10. The city has the green lights to build a new highway.

11. The tourists bought some money on the black.

Conversation

Practice each conversation with a partner.

SITUATION 1

Tom is talking to his friend.

TOM: I just got a call from my brother.

CAROL: How is he?

TOM: Out of the blue he told me he just got married.

SITUATION 2

Jenny is feeling lonely.

LUCIA: You don't look very happy, Jenny.

JENNY: I'm just feeling blue. I guess I feel lonely.

LUCIA: Don't feel lonely. I'm your friend! That's why I came to take you out.

SITUATION 3

Nancy is talking to her husband.

NANCY: Let's go to a nice restaurant for supper.

MATT: Is there something special to celebrate?

NANCY: No, but I just finished doing our expenses for the month, and we're in the black. Let's spend some of our extra money.

On Your Own

Work with a partner. Choose three idioms. Write a short conversation for each idiom. Then act out your conversations.

Discussion

Work with a partner or in a small group. Do the following activities.

1. The idioms in this unit all use color words. What other idioms with color words in English do you know?
2. Are there idioms with colors in your native language? Are any idioms like the ones in English?
3. We use **out of the blue** when something unexpected happens. Tell a story using this idiom.