

Idioms describing people

A Positive and negative qualities

positive

She has **a heart of gold**. [very kind, generous]

He's **as good as gold**. [helpful, well-behaved; used generally for children]

negative

She's **as hard as nails**. [no sympathy for others]

He's **a nasty piece of work**. [unpleasant]

Note also:

Her **heart's in the right place**. [is a good and kind person even though they do not always seem so]

He's such **an awkward customer**. [difficult person to deal with]

She's **a pain in the neck**. Nobody likes her. [nuisance, difficult]

He **gets on everyone's nerves**. [irritates everybody]

B Idioms based on 'head'

You can learn idioms by associating them with a key word or words. Two of the idioms in A, for example, are based on *gold* and two on *heart*. Here is a set of idioms describing people based on the word *head*.

to have { **your head screwed on** [be sensible, informal]
a head for heights [not suffer from vertigo]
a head like a sieve [bad memory]
a good head for figures [be good at maths]
your head in the clouds [unaware of reality]

to be head and shoulders above someone [much better than]

to bury your head in the sand [refuse to think about a difficult situation in the hope you won't have to deal with it]

to keep your head [stay calm in a difficult situation]



C How people relate to the social norm

She's a bit of **an odd-ball**. [peculiar, strange]

He's really **over the top**. [very exaggerated in behaviour]

He's (gone) **round the bend**, if you ask me. [absolutely crazy/mad]

My politics are very **middle-of-the-road**. [very normal; no radical ideas; neither left- nor right-wing]

D Who's who in the class? Idioms for people in the classroom

Sam's **teacher's pet**. [teacher's favourite] Laura's **top of the class**.

Harry is **a real know-all**. [thinks he knows everything]

Ali's a bit of **a big-head**. [has a high opinion of him/herself] Anna's **a lazy-bones**.

The last three idioms are used of people outside the **classroom situation** too.

Exercises

9.1 Try to complete these idioms from memory if possible.

- 1 She does a lot of voluntary work; she has a heart ... *of gold.*
- 2 Don't expect any sympathy from the boss; she's as hard ...
- 3 I'm sure Ahmed will help you; he's as good ...
- 4 Although Florian sometimes seems a bit bad-tempered his heart is ...
- 5 I don't think you'll like him; he's a nasty ...
- 6 I try to avoid having much to do with Liam. He's rather an ...

9.2 What do we call ...

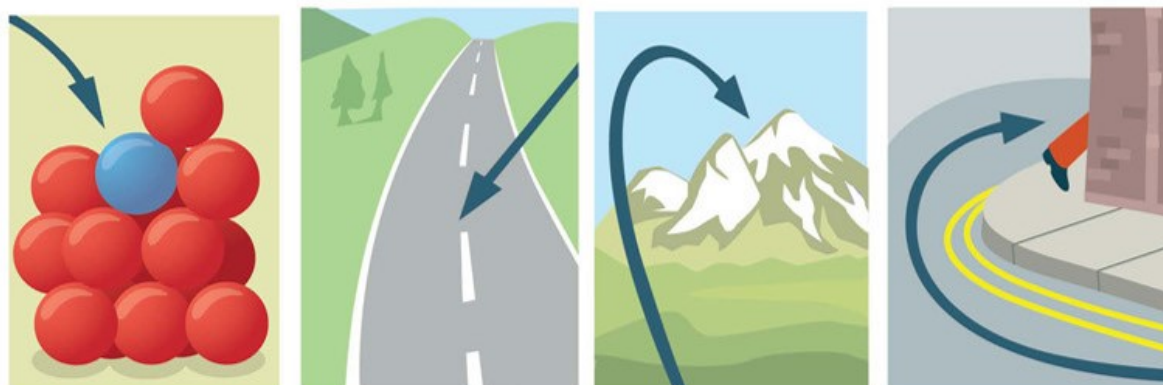
- 1 an irritating person who knows everything? *a know-all*
- 2 the person who is the teacher's favourite?
- 3 someone who thinks they are the best and says so?
- 4 the one who gets the best marks?
- 5 a person who is very lazy?

9.3 Complete the sentences using an idiom from B.

- 1 I'd better write it in my notebook. I have ... *a head like a sieve.*
- 2 Ask Martha to check those sums. She has ...
- 3 Don't ask me to go up that tower. I'm afraid I don't ...
- 4 She's very sensible and knows what she's doing. She ...
- 5 He's quite out of touch with reality. He really ...
- 6 The problem won't go away so there's no point ...
- 7 Max is top of the class, ... everyone else.
- 8 Even when others around him are panicking Raul always ...

9.4 Which part of the body might a difficult person (a) get on (b) be a pain in?

9.5 Which of the idioms opposite do you think these pictures represent?



1 *an odd-ball*

2

3

4

9.6

Over to you

Choose five idioms from this unit that you could use to describe people that you know.