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# Can You Believe It!

**Stories and Idioms from Real Life**

Book 3

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OXFORD



# To the Student

In this book you will enjoy learning everyday idiomatic American English through amazing true stories from around the world.

When you study vocabulary, it is not enough to learn individual words. Everyday English is filled with expressions that are two or more words long, such as *live through*, *go out on a limb*, and *on the house*. These expressions are essential to successful communication in English, and they need to be learned as individual units, in the same way as individual words. In this book you will find **idioms**, **fixed expressions** and **phrasal verbs**.

## What is an idiom?

An **idiom** is a group of words that has a meaning different from the meaning of its individual parts. In the example below, you probably know all the individual words, but you still may not understand the meaning of the expressions. This is because the expressions are idiomatic.

*Drop me a line if you break new ground in the experiment!*

*Drop me a line* means *write me a short letter*, and *break new ground* means *do something that has not been done before*.

## What is a fixed expression?

*Be enthusiastic about*, *take a bath*, and *year after year* are **fixed expressions**. You will understand the whole expression if you know the meaning of the parts. But the translation of a fixed expression into your language may not be word for word.

## What is a phrasal verb?

A **phrasal verb** is a verb followed by a particle such as *in*, *at*, *on*, *for*, *out*, *about*, etc. *Find out* and *search for* are phrasal verbs. *Find out* means *discover*, and *search for* means *try hard to find*. Phrasal verbs are usually idiomatic. You can learn more about phrasal verbs in Appendix D, page 111.

The steps to learning idioms in this book are as follows:

1. **Read quickly** to get the main idea.
2. **Listen to the story** several times while you look at pictures to get used to the idioms.
3. **Read the story** again and study the idioms.
4. **Listen** and **complete** the idioms.
5. **Match the idioms** with their definitions.
6. **Tell the story** using the idioms while looking only at pictures.
7. **Talk about the story** and then about yourself using the idioms.
8. **Take a dictation** that uses the idioms.
9. **Complete the idioms** in new sentences.
10. **Look at the grammar** of some of the idioms.
11. **Write a dialogue** using the unit idioms and **act it out**.
12. **Review the idioms** by filling in the blanks in a new story or dialogue.

Extra study aids include:

- A listening cassette
- **Appendix A:** An answer key (page 98)
- **Appendix B:** Dictations (page 102)
- **Appendix C:** An appendix that groups the idioms in the book in various ways to help you remember their form and meaning (page 104)
- **Appendix D:** An appendix that explains the grammar of phrasal verbs (page 111) and lists the phrasal verbs that appear in this book (page 112)
- **Lexicon:** A list of all the idioms in the book with definitions, examples, language notes, and idiomatic synonyms and antonyms (page 116).



# To the Teacher

## A General Introduction

The goal of *Can You Believe It? Book 3* is to teach high frequency idioms, phrasal verbs, and fixed expressions in the context of true, memorable stories to ESL/EFL students at an intermediate level. It is founded on two basic premises: 1) that everyone loves a good story, and 2) that vocabulary acquisition occurs more readily when new items are embedded in engaging, whole contexts and used in tasks that have meaning and purpose. The book is written for classroom use, but will also work well for self-study when used with the audio program.

Thanks in part to Michael Lewis's influential work on lexical issues, TESOL professionals are increasingly aware that idioms and fixed expressions form a significant part of the lexicon of English and are central to natural language use. These prefabricated multi-word expressions must be acquired as wholes in the same way as individual words. *Can You Believe It? Book 3* teaches the following kinds of high-frequency fixed lexical expressions:

- traditional, graphic idioms, such as *hungry as a bear*, *follow the crowd*, and *go out on a limb*;
- non-traditional idioms, such as *spend time doing something*, *have got to*, and *globe-trotting*;
- two- or three-word adverbial chunks, such as *by mistake*, *according to*, and *at present*;
- two- or three-word phrasal verbs, such as *come up*, *put up with* and *back off*; and,
- common expressions consisting of de-lexicalized verbs, such as *make* or *get* plus a noun or adjective (*make history*, *get together*), word partnerships that are likely to produce translation mistakes and need to be learned as chunks.

*Can You Believe It? Book 3* is compatible with comprehension approaches such as *The Natural Approach*. The picture sequences that correspond to the stories provide the basis for great “comprehensible input.” Hence, the book can be used for listening comprehension and general language acquisition at intermediate levels as well as for the specific mastery of idioms and expressions.

The approach thoroughly integrates the four skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Activities are sequenced so that input precedes output. The initial activities rely heavily on listening and use picture sequences as visual supports for comprehension. It is through this richly contextualized (and repeated) listening that students begin to make hypotheses about the new expressions and develop a feel for their use. Students then go on to read the story—an essential step that will provide welcome written reinforcement for visually oriented learners and will help all students with their literacy skills. After students' pumps have been primed, so to speak, with the listening and reading input, they are ready to begin producing the idioms in speaking and writing. The output activities become progressively more demanding; these include story retelling, thought-provoking personal questions, dictation, personalized sentence completions, and dialogue production.

Researchers contend that we acquire new lexical items by meeting them a number of times (seven times, some say). Thus, in *Can You Believe It? Book 3*, students will revisit the idioms and expressions many times within each unit as well as in review units and, to some extent, from unit to unit. (The idioms that are recycled between units are listed in the Table of Contents as well as in The New Idioms and Expressions box which follows each reading.)

## Extra Features

### Listening Cassette

The cassette features dramatic readings of all the stories and provides the **Dictations** for each unit (see **Appendix B**). The stories are read by different actors with varying voices and styles so students are exposed to language variety.

### Answer Key (Appendix A)

Students who use the book independently will especially appreciate this feature, though classroom teachers will also find it handy.



## Idiom Groups (Appendix C)

This appendix is a rich resource for those students who would like a better sense of how the idioms in *Can You Believe It? Book 3* can be grouped together semantically.

## Phrasal Verbs (Appendix D)

Simple but detailed grammar explanations of phrasal verbs are included here for students who feel ready for this information.

## Lexicon

The Lexicon gives extra information about each idiom and fixed expression in the book. Definitions, additional examples, grammar information, more collocations, and idiomatic synonyms and antonyms are included.

## Specific Teaching Suggestions

The exercises and activities in each unit can be used in a variety of ways, and you are encouraged to experiment and adapt them as you see fit. The suggested sequence can be changed, depending on your goals and your specific class needs.

### 1. Quick Reading

Before students read the story quickly to get the gist, have them do one of the following prediction activities:

- Cover the story and look at the picture sequence on the opposite page. Discuss (in pairs or small groups) what the story seems to be about.
- Cover the story. Look at the title and the picture on the story page. Make predictions about the story.

Then ask students to read the story quickly just to get the main idea or the basic story line. You might give them a time limit for this. (The details of the story will become clear during Exercise 2 as they listen to it repeatedly while looking at the picture sequence.) Previewing the story in this manner will allow students—especially those who are stronger visual than oral/aural learners—to relax and better comprehend the story and the new idioms in context during the listening “input” stage. It is best to have students read silently at this stage since they will want to process the text in their own way.

### 2. Listen

Ask students to cover the story. Play the cassette or, if you prefer, read the story to the students. If you are not using the cassette, be sure to say the numbers as you move from picture to picture so students can follow (at least during the first listening). Tell the story at a natural speed, pausing somewhat longer than usual at the end of breath groups and sentences. This will give students important processing time. The goal of this activity is to provide students with truly “comprehensible input,” i.e., an acquisition stage in which a high degree of contextualization will allow them to formulate hypotheses and discover meaning in language they are hearing for the first time. Making inferences and hypotheses about new language in context is a skill that all language learners need to feel comfortable with; this exercise thus develops good learning strategies while helping students acquire new language. During a second or third telling of the story, you may want to write the new idioms on the board, as reinforcement for your visually oriented students. (The easiest thing would be to write them on the board prior to the retelling and point to them as they occur.)

As an assessment technique (to see how well students have understood and internalized the new expressions in the story), tell students you are going to talk about the pictures out of order. They should point to the picture you are describing. Or, as an alternative, retell the story making some major “mistakes.” Have students signal somehow (by raising their hands, making a face, or make a buzzing sound) when they hear a mistake.



### 3. Read the Story

Your more visual learners will be especially eager to take a closer look at the story at this point, double-checking their hypotheses with the New Idioms and Expressions box. After students have had some silent time for re-reading, you might want to have them read aloud for pronunciation practice. Volunteers could take turns reading to the whole class, or pairs could read to each other, helping each other with pronunciation. You may want to do part or all of Exercise 6 at this point (see suggestions below).

For a bit of extra practice with the idioms, and as a good lead-in to Exercise 4, you could conduct the following matching activity: Write the unit idioms on slips of paper or index cards. Cut the idioms in half. Give a half to each student. Tell students to stand up, walk around the room, and find the other half of their idiom. As a check, have the pairs say their idioms aloud to the whole class.

### 4. Listen and Complete

This is an oral exercise. Students listen to the story. The tape pauses in the middle of each idiom for a few seconds, allowing students to call out the second half of the idiom. If you do not use the tape, and are reading the story to students, pause after the first part of the idiom and let students call out the rest.

### 5. Match

This activity functions as an assessment of sorts, ensuring that students (a) can put the parts of the idioms together and (b) understand their meanings before they have to use the idioms in the story-retelling activity in Exercise 6. As an alternative to this activity, give each student a card on which half of an idiom has been written, and ask them to mingle with their classmates to find their “match.”

### 6. Tell the Story

At this point, the exercises move away from recognition into production. Elicit the story orally from the whole class first. Encourage students to call out the ideas of the story in chronological order. They can, of course, look at the picture sequence during this activity, but the story should be covered. The retelling will be a paraphrase of the original story, but students will probably reuse most of the new idioms. (You could have the idioms listed on the board to give students a bit of extra help). You may want to run this activity as a variation on *Language Experience*, writing down sentences and phrases on the board as students suggest them. Underlining the idioms and fixed expressions that students generate will help to highlight them.

Next, ask students to work in pairs or small groups to retell the story to each other. Once again, make sure they cover the story. One way for them to work is with *Talking Chips*, communication regulators used in *Cooperative Learning*. Working in pairs or groups of three, each student takes four or five *Talking Chips* (e.g., tokens, such as buttons, poker chips, or paint chips). Together, they reconstruct the story. As each student contributes a sentence, he or she puts in a token. (The chips ensure that each student speaks and that all have an equal opportunity to participate.)

### 7. Answer the Questions

The questions in this section either use an idiom from the unit or elicit one in the answer. As an alternative to the traditional whole-class-question-answer technique here, you might want to try using *Numbered Heads Together*, a *Cooperative Learning* activity.

The steps to *Numbered Heads Together* are as follows:

- a. Students get into teams of four and number off from one to four.
- b. The teacher asks a question.
- c. Students on each team literally put their heads together and reach a consensus on the answer and the phrasing of the answer.
- d. The teacher calls a number at random. Students with that number raise their hands (or stand up) and report on their team’s answer. You will probably want to get each team’s answer, as there will be variations to discuss and comment on.



The advantages of this questioning technique over the traditional whole-class-question-answer technique are the following: all students are involved since no one knows who will be called on; stronger students help weaker ones; students have “think time” and “rehearsal time” in small groups before they have to respond in front of the whole class; and a wrong response is not so embarrassing because it comes from a team rather than an individual.

The “About You” questions can be answered orally, either in a whole class setting or in small groups. These questions are also good springboards for paragraph writing. Allow students to choose their favorite ones to respond to, and to share their writing with partners.

### 8. Take a Dictation

Play the cassette or use **Appendix B** to read students the dictation. A recommended procedure is as follows:

- a. Read the dictation once at normal speed. Students should not write at this stage.
- b. Read the dictation again, this time pausing long enough after each breath group or sentence for students to write.
- c. Read the dictation a third time, at near-normal speed, allowing students to check their writing.

Students can correct their own work or the work of a partner using **Appendix B**. Students might also like to try peer dictation, where one student dictates to another.

### 9. Complete the Idioms

This exercise introduces completely new contexts in which students have to produce the unit idioms. (They should not have to look back at the New Idioms box at this point.)

### 10. Look at Grammar

This section deals in depth with three or four of the unit idioms and draws attention to the types of words and phrases which can follow the idioms, or, in the case of phrasal verbs, to their special grammatical properties. Students may check the Lexicon on pages 116-150 for grammatical information on other idioms not treated here. The sentence completions in this section ask students to write true, personal sentences. Students can share their sentences in small groups, and you might ask volunteers to put their sentences on the board afterwards. Be sure that the volunteers understand that their contributions may need correction!

### 11. Write a Dialogue

This activity encourages students to produce the unit idioms in creative and novel contexts. It asks students to work in pairs to write short dialogues, using at least four unit idioms. Give students time in pairs not only to create the dialogues, but also to rehearse them (and, ideally, to memorize them). Depending on the time you can devote to this activity, you may want to have pairs perform for other pairs and then for the whole class, or you may want to simply call on a few volunteers to perform for the class. If you can keep a small stash of props (hats, scarves, sunglasses, and other odd items) available for this activity and ask students to use some props as well as appropriate body language as they perform, this task will be greatly enlivened.

### 12. Complete the Dialogue or Story

After students work individually, in pairs, or in groups to fill in the blanks with the appropriate expressions from the box, they can check their answers in **Appendix A**.

Six of the fourteen units have a dialogue exercise. Students can practice the dialogue in pairs, perhaps preparing for an expressive reading of the dialogue for the whole class.

The remaining eight units have a story exercise. After filling in the blanks, students can either practice reading the story to each other in pairs or paraphrase it to each other, being sure to use the idioms from the box in the retelling.



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# Engineer Is Enthusiastic About Odd New Home

## 1. Quick Reading

Look at the pictures on page 3.  
What is the story about?

Now read quickly to get the main idea.



*Bruce Campbell cleaning his new home.*

**PORTLAND, OR, USA** <sup>1</sup>Bruce Campbell recently bought his dream home. Campbell, 49, is not someone who **follows the crowd. Instead of** a traditional house in the suburbs, he got a 727! <sup>2</sup>He **paid** \$100,000 **for** his new home, which used to **belong to** the Greek airline Olympic Airways.

<sup>3</sup>Campbell's unusual home is parked on his rural property near the city of Portland. <sup>4</sup>He cleaned the cabin and **took out** most of the seats. "Now it's a palace in here!" he says. <sup>5</sup>The cabin *is* huge, but the bathrooms, **on the other hand**, are tiny. <sup>6</sup>Campbell **plans on** using the cockpit as his office.

<sup>7</sup>Campbell, an engineer, **is enthusiastic about** his new home. The plane is much stronger than most homes, he **points out**. And the roof will never leak!

<sup>8</sup>**At present**, Mr. Campbell is a bachelor. But **what if** he meets his **soul mate**? Then, he jokes, he'll buy a huge 747!

727: a large jet airplane made by Boeing

rural: in the countryside

cockpit: the place where the pilot sits to fly the plane



## New idioms and expressions

<b>be enthusiastic about something</b> .....	like something very much
<b>follow the crowd</b> .....	do what everyone else does
<b>instead of (doing) something</b> .....	in the place of (doing) something
<b>pay for something*</b> .....	give money for something
<b>belong to someone*</b> .....	be the property of someone
<b>take something out*</b> .....	remove something
<b>on the other hand</b> .....	however; in contrast
<b>plan on (doing) something*</b> .....	expect (to do) something in the future
<b>point something out*</b> .....	explain something; show something
<b>at present</b> .....	now
<b>what if</b> .....	what will happen if
<b>soul mate</b> .....	perfect life partner

Words in parentheses ( ) can occur with an idiom, but don't have to.

\*phrasal verb (see Lexicon, pp.116–150 and Appendix D, pp.111–115)

### 2. Listen

Cover the story and look only at these pictures. Listen to the story two or three times.

**Note:** As the tape or your teacher says a number, look at the corresponding picture.





### 3. Read the Story

Now read the story carefully. Pay special attention to the idioms so that you're ready for Exercise 4.

### 4. Listen and Complete

Close your book. Listen to the story again. When the tape or your teacher pauses, try to complete the idiom.

### 5. Match

Complete the idioms using the words in the box. Then write the number of the matching definition.

<b>of</b>	<b>mate</b>	<b>the crowd</b>	<b>present</b>
<b>hand</b>	<b>out</b>	<b>about</b>	

  

<p><u>5</u> a. on the other <u>hand</u></p> <p>___ b. at _____</p> <p>___ c. follow _____</p> <p>___ d. instead _____</p> <p>___ e. be enthusiastic _____</p> <p>___ f. take _____</p> <p>___ g. soul _____</p>	<p>1. do what everyone else does</p> <p>2. remove</p> <p>3. like very much</p> <p>4. perfect life partner</p> <p>5. however</p> <p>6. in the place of</p> <p>7. now</p>
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### 6. Tell the Story

Look only at the pictures and the New Idioms box on page 3. Tell the story using as many idioms as you can.

- a. First, work with the whole class to retell the story.
- b. Then tell the story to a partner or small group.



## 7. Answer the Questions

### About the story

- How much did Campbell pay for his new home?
- Who did the plane belong to before Campbell bought it?
- What did he do to the cabin?
- What does he plan on doing with the cockpit?
- Why is Campbell enthusiastic about his new home?
- What is his marital status at present?
- What if he meets his soul mate?
- Do you think Campbell will easily find a soul mate? Why or why not?
- Would you be enthusiastic about living in a plane? Why or why not?

### About you

- What are you enthusiastic about?
- Do you like to follow the crowd? (In fashion? In music?)
- What kind of person would be a soul mate for you?
- What things do you have to pay for every month?
- Where are you living at present?
- What do you plan on doing this weekend?

## 8. Take a Dictation

Listen to the tape or your teacher and write the dictation in your notebook.

## 9. Complete the Idioms



- a. Sam certainly does not follow the crowd in fashion.  
At \_\_\_\_\_, his favorite outfit is a tuxedo jacket with shorts. He wears it every day.

- b. Mira is enthusiastic \_\_\_\_\_ her studies and plans \_\_\_\_\_ becoming a judge.



- c. Luka decided to pay \_\_\_\_\_ dinner with cash instead \_\_\_\_\_ with a credit card.



## 10. Look at Grammar

**be enthusiastic about something**

**be enthusiastic about doing something**

*Henry's enthusiastic about soccer.*

*He's enthusiastic about playing soccer.*

**pay for something**

**pay money for something**

*I paid for dinner last night.*

*I paid \$50 for dinner last night.*

**Note:** You *pay* rent, *pay* bills, and *pay* tuition; but you *pay for* dinner, clothes, a car, and most other things.

**take out something (from a place)**

**take something out (of a place)**

*I often take out books from the library.*

*I often take books out of the library.*

**Note:** *Take out* is a transitive, separable phrasal verb. For further explanation on phrasal verbs, see Appendix D, pp. 111–115.

Complete the sentences with help from the grammar box above. Make sure they are true for you.

- I paid \_\_\_\_\_ food last week.
- I also paid for \_\_\_\_\_ last week.
- Yesterday, I paid \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- I'm very enthusiastic \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_.
- I like to take \_\_\_\_\_ of the library.

## 11. Write a Dialogue

Work with a partner. Write a dialogue using at least four idioms from the unit.

Act it out for the class.



**12. Complete the Story**

- a. Fill in the blanks in this true story with idioms from the box. Put the verbs in the correct form and tense.

- on the other hand
- point out (v)
- what if
- instead of
- plan on (v)
- be enthusiastic about (v)
- pay...for (v)

## Tired of Waste

**Carlton, WA, USA** Doug and Michelle Wilcox's dream house is good to the environment. The couple built their home from recycled materials (1) instead of wood or brick. They used 1,600 old tires and thousands of tin cans. "There are six billion people on our planet, and we can't **keep on**\* wasting precious natural resources," Doug Wilcox (2) \_\_\_\_\_.

The walls are made of old tires packed with dirt. Tin cans fill the walls between the tires. There are large windows on the south side of the house, which **take advantage of**\*\* the sun to generate electricity.

The Wilcoxes built the house themselves. It was very hard work, but they (3) \_\_\_\_\_ only \$20 a square foot \_\_\_\_\_ it. Traditional houses, (4) \_\_\_\_\_, cost between \$45 and \$65 a square foot.

(5) \_\_\_\_\_ there is an earthquake? Tom Griepentrog, a civil engineer, says, "The house is earthquake-proof. It's extremely safe and stable."

The Wilcoxes (6) \_\_\_\_\_ their tire house. "For us it feels right," says Michelle. In the future, they (7) \_\_\_\_\_ helping other people to build tire houses. "We want to teach people to respect the Earth," they say.



\*keep on doing something: continue to do something  
\*\*take advantage of something: use something well

- b. Read or tell the story to a partner.



# Man Eats Out and Gets More Than He Ordered



## 1. Quick Reading

Look at the pictures on page 9.  
What is the story about?

Now read quickly to get the main idea.

**DELTONA, FL, USA** <sup>1</sup>Henry Snowden, 31, decided to **eat out** one Friday night. He **pulled into** a drive-up window at Burger King. **Hungry as a bear**, he ordered a large burger, large fries, and a king-size drink. <sup>2</sup>Snowden got his fast food **as well as** a big surprise. Stuffed inside one of the paper bags was \$4,170!

<sup>3</sup>"I **looked at** the money as I ate. I knew immediately I should **give it back**," Snowden said. <sup>4</sup>But Snowden did not return the money **right off the bat**. He went home to **sleep on it**. "I've got to say I was tempted to keep it," he admitted.

<sup>5</sup>Snowden **went back to** Burger King the next day to give back the money. <sup>6</sup>Restaurant workers greeted him with tears in their eyes and gave him lunch **on the house**. <sup>7</sup>They explained that the restaurant puts its bank deposits in paper bags to prevent robberies. **By mistake**, a clerk gave Snowden the wrong paper bag.

<sup>8</sup>Burger King may offer Snowden a reward. But Snowden says there's something even better—he **has a clear conscience**. "I'm glad I did the right thing. I feel better than I've ever felt."

be tempted: be strongly attracted to an idea



# Can You Believe It?

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