

Political Hot Potatoes by Alice Rodgers

Age:	Adult
Level:	Advanced
Duration:	Up to 60 minutes
Objective:	By the end of the lesson, students will be able to understand and use a set of ten idioms related to politics.
Language / Skill:	Reading, Vocabulary, Speaking
Materials:	One copy of the worksheet per student

Procedure

1. Warmer

- a. Ask the students to look at the picture of the potatoes and the definition of the idiom “hot potato” and discuss the questions.

Key:

1. Probably try to move out of the way
2. You avoid touching hot potatoes and also avoid difficult issues.
3. They are more enjoyable and more memorable

Explain that hot potato is an *idiom*, and that an idiom is a group of words that, when looked at together, have a different meaning from the one they would have when looked at individually.

- b. Students will have different opinions on what topics people do not like to discuss. Some common examples are: money, religion, politics, illegal immigration, gun control, global warming, gene editing, and vegetarianism. Later, students will choose one of these topics to discuss, so make sure that they are not offended by the idea of discussing any of the topics. Remember that students will vary in their feelings towards the topics, so be sensitive to their opinions.

2. Language focus

- a. Ask students to read the text and underline all the idioms they find.

Key:

hot potato, get on your soapbox, spin doctor, champagne socialists, two-horse race, strange bedfellows, toe the line, economical with the truth, political suicide, vote with your feet

Try to avoid defining the idioms as they will be defining the idioms in the next exercise.

- b. Ask the students to match the idioms on the left with their definitions on the right. Once they have finished, get students to check their answers in pairs, then feedback to them as a group. Stronger students can use Answer Sheet 2 to check their own answers, and then support any students who don't understand the definitions. Go through the idioms and ask for examples from the students e.g. *What topics do you get on your soapbox about?*

Key:

1. i, 2. g, 3. f, 4. e, 5. d, 6. c, 7. b, 8. a, 9. j, 10. h

- c. Check students' understanding of the idioms in the lesson by asking them to re-write the sentences by using the new idioms.

Hand out Answer Sheet 2 to students who finish quickly. Alternatively, for online classes, send the answers to students via the chat function. Once finished, get students to check their answers in pairs, then feedback as a group.

Key: (Answers can vary)

1. When the cost of a small coffee doubled in price, customers voted with their feet (and stopped going to that café).
2. In the press interview, she knew she had to toe the company line because, if she hadn't, she would have lost her job.
3. He's always getting on his soapbox about climate change.
4. Oh, I can't take those activists very seriously. They're nothing but champagne socialists!
5. The politician and the priest were strange bedfellows, but they worked together on a peace mission.

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6. When my landlords told me they would not increase my rent over the next five years, they were being very economical with the truth.
7. After watching all the party leaders speak, it was extremely clear that it was a two-horse race.
8. In the USA, the issue of gun control is a real political hot potato.
9. As soon as the debate finished, the spin doctors from both parties were saying that their candidates had won.
10. Years later, it was clear that the President's decision to go to war had been political suicide.

3. Language practice

- a. Put students into pairs and ask them to choose one topic from the list of "hot potatoes" they came up with in the warmer, and then tell them to discuss that topic with their partner. Encourage them to use as many of the idioms as possible. If there is one group of three, ask students to create a dialogue between three people. Ensure students understand the task by modelling a short dialogue with a stronger student.

Once finished, invite two students to act out their dialogue to the class and provide corrective feedback.

Key: *Students' answers will vary.*

4. Extension activity: discussion

- a. If time permits (or for more advanced students), have students discuss the questions given in pairs.

Monitor the students' discussions and note down a few examples of effective language and a few examples of language that needs to be analysed. Provide brief, corrective feedback to the whole class before the lesson ends.

Key: *Students' answers will vary.*