

## It's written in the stars! by Dimitra Eleftheriou-Ernst

**Age:** Teenagers / Adults  
**Level:** Intermediate / Advanced  
**Time:** 45 min+  
**Objective:** to introduce students to the concept of idioms as figurative language; to make students aware of the transparency and opacity of idioms  
**Key skills:** speaking, listening, reading, writing  
**Materials:** Worksheets 1-3; two flashcards, cut out; illustrations sheet; board; markers; postcards / pictures (optional)

### Procedure

1. Ask students if they know what their star sign is. Encourage a couple of students to share this information with the class.
2. Tell students to mingle and pair up with somebody that has a different star sign to theirs.  
**Note:** If some students don't know their star signs, ask them their birthday and tell them based on the dates given on Worksheet 1.
3. Write 'horoscope' on the board. Ask students if they know what this means and listen to their ideas. Then ask students to discuss the following questions with their partner:
  - Do they read horoscopes? Why? Why not?
  - Do they believe what horoscopes say? Why? Why not?
  - What subjects do horoscopes usually cover?

Get feedback from several pairs and elicit that most horoscopes talk about personal and professional matters.
4. Hand out Worksheet 1 and ask students to ONLY read their own horoscope and none of the others at the moment. Tell them not to worry about understanding every word.
5. When they have finished reading, tell the students that you are going to be studying idioms and there

are a lot of idioms used in horoscopes. Tell them there is one idiom in their horoscope. They must find it and highlight / underline it. Stress again that they should not read any of the others yet and ask them to turn the page over when they are done.

6. Elicit that some idioms give away their meaning, i.e. they are 'transparent', while others are 'opaque' and cannot be deciphered easily. To demonstrate this, show the flashcards with the idioms *kick the bucket* and *make your mind up*. Ask the students whether they know or can guess the meaning of either. Turn over each card separately to reveal the meaning and ask students to tell you which has a transparent meaning and which has an opaque meaning.

#### KEY:

*kick the bucket* – opaque  
*make your mind up* – transparent

7. Hand out Worksheet 2 and the Illustrations sheet. Ask students to work in pairs to fill in the second and third columns of the table. In the second column, they should write a number to match the idiom to the correct illustration (showing the literal meaning of the idiom). In the third column, they should guess the true meaning of the idiom.

#### KEY:

Idiom	Picture Number
to tie yourself up in knots	12
to bite somebody's head off	2
the big picture	9
to be snowed under at work	7
to drive someone up the wall	5
a back-seat driver	1
a hot ticket	6
to bite the dust	3
to spend money like water	8
the other half	10
to think big	11
to have a change of heart	4

8. When they have completed this task, ask students if these idioms can be used in formal or informal contexts, before feeding back that they are informal.
9. Tell students to change pairs and share their ideas with their new partner about the meanings of the idioms. Alternatively, pairs can share their findings with the rest of the class.
10. Ask students to return to Worksheet 1, skim-read the horoscope texts and decide whether they want to alter their answers on Worksheet 2.
11. Hand out Worksheet 3 and tell students to match the idioms with their correct meanings. Give them a few minutes to do this and feed back with the answers.

**KEY:**

1. e; 2. l; 3. j; 4. d; 5. h; 6. k; 7. i; 8. c; 9. f; 10. a; 11. g; 12. b

12. Tell the students to revisit the table on Worksheet 2 and swap it with their current partner. Each student should then mark the table with ticks (✓) and crosses (x) depending on whether their first guess of the idiom meaning was correct. The students should then hand Worksheet 2 back to its owner. Ask some members of the class to feed back on how many they guessed correctly.
13. Test the students on whether they think the idioms are transparent (T) or opaque (O).  
**Note:** There is a fine line between what is determined as a transparent or opaque idiom so your students may challenge the answers.

**KEY:**

*to tie yourself up in knots (T); to bite somebody's head off (T); the big picture (T); to be snowed under at work (T); to drive someone up the wall (O); a back-seat driver (T); a hot ticket (O); to bite the dust (O); to spend money like water (T); the other half (T); to think big (T); to have a change of heart (O)*

14. Tell students to go back to their original pairs. One

student should read aloud a horoscope at random without saying the idiom – they should mime its literal meaning or paraphrase it. Their partner then has to guess it. Then, they exchange roles.

**Possible extension tasks**

- Give students postcards / photos of people. Put them in pairs and ask them to make up a short story about the photo they have chosen to talk about. They will have to use one or more of the idioms presented in the classroom. Monitor and facilitate, if necessary.  
**Note:** You could either buy some postcards for this purpose, use some pictures of your own or find some on the internet.
- Ask students to associate idioms with personal experiences: e.g. When was the last time you were *snowed under at work*? Do they have an L1 idiom equivalent with a similar meaning?
- Ask the students to write each other's horoscope forecasts using the idioms presented in class or others they know or they find in idiom dictionaries.



**ARIES**  
**MARCH 21 - APRIL 19**

In trying to express your feelings, you will tie yourself up in knots. Why don't you show how you feel instead? With Mercury in your horoscope you have nothing to fear.



**TAURUS**  
**APRIL 20 - MAY 20**

You've played love's game and you're a winner. So it's a shame that you and your partner are biting each other's heads off this week. Professionally, you are going to impress everybody with your skills.



**GEMINI**  
**MAY 21 - JUNE 21**

Someone close to you isn't telling you everything – but don't worry – it may not be a life-changing secret. You may not even care when you do find out! Always have the big picture in mind.



**CANCER**  
**JUNE 22 - JULY 22**

If you're singing on the way to the office, good for you! However, enjoy it while it lasts because you'll soon be snowed under at work. Personally - you will meet a really interesting character very soon.



**LEO**  
**JULY 23 - AUGUST 22**

Recently, there have been times when you have driven people up the wall and there have been times when you are really sweet to everybody. These are indications that you're reorganizing your life – decide what you want and who you want in it.



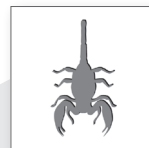
**VIRGO**  
**AUGUST 23 - SEPTEMBER 22**

Your brain is filled with what to do next and next and next, making you extremely attractive to new romantic prospects. Your back-seat driver, you-know-who, may cause you problems ...



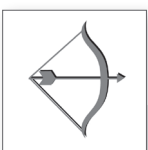
**LIBRA**  
**SEPTEMBER 23 - OCTOBER 22**

Communicate what you need. You are capable of being the perfect partner for someone. You will look like a hot ticket next weekend so plan and dress accordingly.



**SCORPIO**  
**OCTOBER 23 - NOVEMBER 21**

Unfortunately, any big plans you had for this week may bite the dust. When the angry boss at work or your unhappy partner cause you problems, you will need to decide which crisis you're going to handle first ...



**SAGITTARIUS**  
**NOVEMBER 22 - DECEMBER 21**

Venus is in your horoscope's cash sector and will allow you to charm bank managers and spend money like water. This may be a problem but a charismatic Aquarius will help you find a solution.



**CAPRICORN**  
**DECEMBER 22 - JANUARY 19**

Making connections is important this week. Call upon your charm and good looks. If you are having problems with your other half, it's only because she/he needs your full attention. Will you give it to them?



**AQUARIUS**  
**JANUARY 20 - FEBRUARY 18**

When it comes to friends and lovers, remember that everyone is allowed a change of heart; them and you alike. This is not the week for forming new relationships. Why don't you try meeting up with an old friend – or your ex?



**PISCES**  
**FEBRUARY 19 - MARCH 20**

This week's planetary activity will help you start thinking big. Someone is desperately trying to get your attention. Slow down and let them do it. Waiting for news? Here it comes ...

Idiom	Picture Number	Meaning	Right (✓)	Wrong (x)
to tie yourself up in knots				
to bite somebody's head off				
the big picture				
to be snowed under at work				
to drive someone up the wall				
a back-seat driver				
a hot ticket				
to bite the dust				
to spend money like water				
the other half				
to think big				
to have a change of heart				

**Match the idioms with their correct meaning.**

## If you ...

1. are snowed under at work
2. are somebody's other half
3. tie yourself up in knots
4. think big
5. see the big picture
6. drive somebody up the wall
7. bite somebody's head off
8. are somebody's back-seat driver
9. are a hot ticket
10. bite the dust
11. spend money like water
12. have a change of heart

## ... then you ...

- a. die, fail or lose.
- b. change your mind about something.
- c. are somebody who offers unwanted advice to the person in charge.
- d. have big plans and ideas.
- e. have so much work to do that you have problems dealing with it.
- f. are very popular.
- g. spend a lot of money without thinking.
- h. are able to view a situation completely and understand the effects of that situation on other things.
- i. speak to someone angrily.
- j. become very confused or worried.
- k. make someone very angry.
- l. are someone's girlfriend / boyfriend or wife / husband.

Opaque idiom



kick the  
bucket

Transparent idiom



make up  
your mind



to die



make a  
decision

