



a4AdIN

Art-Based Learning of Heritage
Languages through Didactic Innovation

Proverbidioms

Key elements of all languages, proverbs and idioms, largely or exclusively, have a figurative meaning rather than making any literal sense. By drawing inspiration from great painters, this activity intends to help young heritage speakers to familiarise themselves with them by painting or drawing them to the letter.





Proverbidioms

Participants' Profile : age 6 or above

Maximum Number of Participants: 20 participants

Total Duration: 90 min

Materials: painting or drawing utensils, drawing or colouring paper, a list of proverbs or idioms.

Language Skills: vocabulary, oral expression, spelling, listening.

Other Skills: fine motor skills, drawing or painting, art history

Levels: B1 or above

Developed by / Origin / Original language: Katarzyna Wlusek & Rupert Hasterok, Comparative Research Network e. V. – English & Polish

FAMOUS PAINTINGS OF PROVERBS AND IDIOMS



Time required: 15-20 min

Materials: illustrations of relevant paintings, a list of proverbs or idioms, paper and pens



Activity 1 Step-by-Step

1. Welcome the participants

Welcome everyone to the workshop and explain its nature and purpose. If the participants don't know each other yet, you may want to organise a short icebreaker during which they have an opportunity to present themselves and get to know each other. As a warm-up exercise, use Polish tongue twisters.

2. Introducing proverbs and idioms in the history of painting

The title of this learning module, based on Dobrochna Futro's 'Playing with idioms' (2019), is the same as that of a 1975 oil painting by the US-American artist T. E. Breitenbach, in which he illustrated more than 300 common proverbs, catchphrases and clichés, such as 'You are what you eat' (depicting a carrot eating a carrot). Breitenbach was a great fan of the mid-16th century Dutch painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder who, in 1559, finished his painting 'Nederlandse Spreekwoorden' (Dutch Proverbs, or Idioms), a detail of which is shown on the right. Art historians have identified some 126 popular sayings in this painting, some of them still well-known, such as 'Armed to the teeth' and 'Swimming against the tide', while many others are no longer in use, such as 'To find the dog in the pot', which meant 'to arrive too late for dinner and find that all the food has been eaten'. The painting was highly popular and gave rise to many copies, at least 16 by his son Pieter Brueghel the Younger, that sometimes differ in detail.



'Banging one's head against a brick wall', detail of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 'Dutch Proverbs' (1559)



Another no less famous artist who often used idioms in his paintings was Marc Chagall (1887-1985), born into a Jewish family near Vitebsk (today in Belarus).* His 'Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers' (1912-1913) thus refers to the Yiddish saying 'mit ale zibn finger' – literally 'with all seven fingers' –, which means 'to do one's best'. Similarly, 'The Fiddler' (1913), shown on the opening page of this learning unit, has been seen as illustrating the phrase 'Meshugener, arop fun dakh' – 'Lunatic, get off the roof!' (or 'come down to earth') –, an idiom that alludes to a lunatic in the positive sense of a creative genius. 'Over Vitebsk' (1915–1920), reproduced on a Belarussian stamp, depicts a beggar carrying a bag and walking above the houses of the town, an illustration of 'er gayt iber di Haizer' – 'He walks over the houses', that is 'from house to house'. And 'Red Cow in the Sky' (1965) has been understood as a reference to the Yiddish 'a ku iz gefloygn ibern dakh un geleygt an ey' – 'a cow flew over the roof and laid an egg', designating a person who imagines unreal, impossible, fantastic things.



* Reproductions of Chagall's painting are still protected by the artist's copyright but can be easily found online.

4. Collecting idioms (optional)

In this activity we are focussing on idioms common in the heritage language rather than proverbs. If appropriate or if you wish to save time, you can skip this step and directly begin with the second activity.

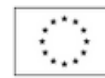
Start by asking participants if they know any idioms and can explain their meaning or indicate the context in which they may be used. This will give you an idea how well versed they are. Suggest that they write them down so that might serve as a subject for their paintings or drawings. Consider adding some other common idioms and let participants guess their figurative meaning. If necessary, provide some examples for their usage.



PAINTING OR DRAWING IDIOMS

Time required: 45–50 min

Materials: painting or drawing utensils of choice, drawing or colouring paper; sample of idioms or proverbs (optional)



Painting or drawing idioms

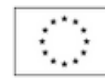
Activity 2 Step-by-Step

1. Explaining the task

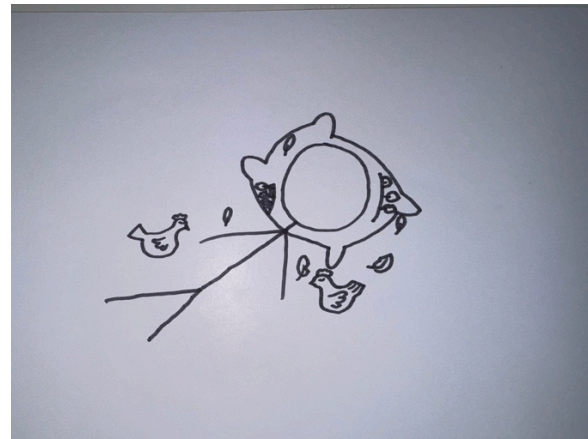
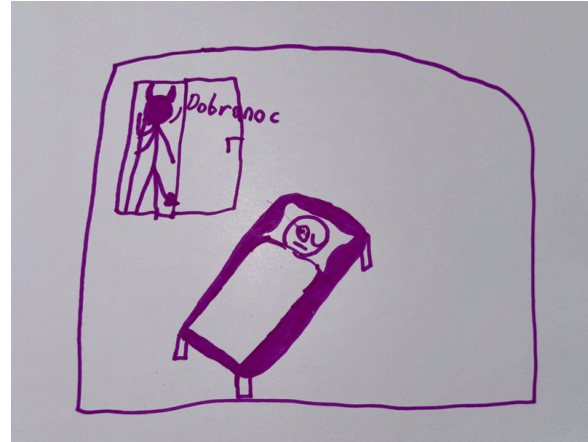
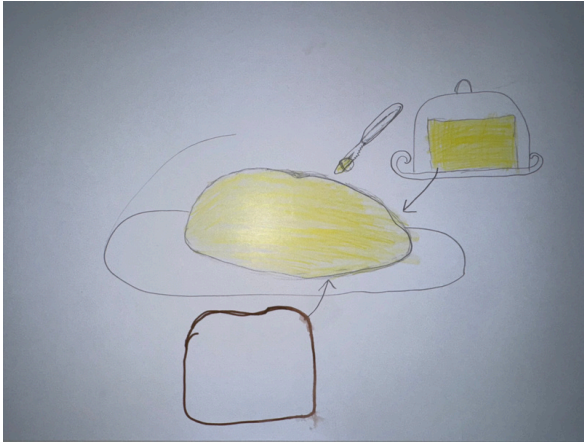
Ask participants to make a drawing (or painting) of an idiom. Let them either freely choose one or, better, especially for younger children; assign an idiom to each of them. In our testing workshop with children aged 6 to 12, the idioms were written on small strips of paper and then, to their great delight, hidden in empty commercial plastic ‘surprise eggs’ collected ahead of the workshop, before being randomly distributed. Among the Polish idioms used were the following: ‘pogoda pod psem’, literally ‘the weather under a dog’ (see the preceding page), which means ‘rotten, gloomy weather’, when it is, for example, ‘raining cats and dogs’. Another one was ‘bulka z masłem’ – ‘a bun with butter’, a phrase used to say that something is easy, a piece of cake. A third one, ‘gwóźdź do trumny’, also exists in English: to put a final nail in the coffin refers to a last event or action that seals the outcome and makes it irreversible. Yet another one, ‘gdzie diabeł mówi dobranoc’, designates a place in the middle of nowhere, where, in Polish, ‘the devil says goodnight’. (See the next page for some examples of drawings.)

2. Presenting and discussing the art works

Once the drawings (or paintings) are finished within the timeframe indicated earlier, lay them out on a table or pin them to the wall. Then ask participants in turn to present them. If appropriate, use some guiding questions, such as whether they were already familiar with the idiom, could give an example of its usage or have already used it themselves.



Selection of drawings from the Proverbidioms testing workshop



Kupować kota w worku

Obiecywać gruszki na wierzbie

szana godzinę

Wypchać się anem

Urwanie głowy

Pogoda pod psem

Bądź mądry i pisz wiersze

Gdzie diabeł mówi dobranoc

Mieć klapki na oczach

Ręka rękę myje

Psie pieniądze

Spać z księżycą

Włosy stają dęba

Dumny jak paw

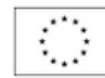
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND TEACHERS

wity jak mrówka

Być w proszku

Chodzić na rżęsach

Mieć węża w kieszeni



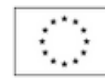
Recommendations for educators and teachers

Preparation:

- Gather printed or digital illustrations of Pieter de Bruegel the Elder's and Marc Chagall's paintings relating to proverbs and idioms.
- Assemble a sample of idioms (or proverbs) and write them down or print them on individual strips or cards for distribution.
- Choose a mixture of idioms (or proverbs), some specific to the heritage language and others also present in the majority language.
- If necessary, prepare a cheat sheet with paraphrases, translations or usage examples for the idioms (or proverbs)
- Think of some guiding questions that help participants to explain the meaning of the idioms (or proverbs).
- Ensure that participants bring their own drawing or painting materials or provide them.

Expected output:

- Learners familiarise themselves with idioms (or proverbs) in the heritage language and their usage.
- These expressions are better memorised through the accompanying creative activity.
- Participants practise their drawing (or painting) skills and learn to transpose short texts into images.
- Enhanced creativity, peer learning and communication skills.



Adaptation/Application of the method

- **a group with varied language proficiency**

The workshop can be held in the heritage or the majority language with elements of the former, depending on proficiency levels. If these vary considerably, consider letting participants work in tandems or small groups (incl. children and their parents). Consider using cut-out letters and words from newspapers and magazines for participants with weak writing skills.

- **other languages**

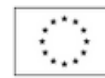
All heritage languages have idioms and proverbs with a similar semantic structure, i.e. literal and figurative meanings.

- **bilingual/multilingual options**

Both settings are possible. In a multilingual classroom, leave enough room for discussing cross-cultural parallels and provide enough translations or explanations in easy language for participants to follow the content of the workshop.

- **cultural context**

Idioms and proverbs are often particular to a specific language and culture, but many of them can be found across languages.



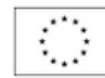
- **other age groups**

The activity can be conducted with members of all age groups, provided participants have a sufficient grasp of the language.

- **outdoor version**

The activity can take place outdoors, at a table in a garden or park, under favourable weather conditions.

- **distance-learning option**
- Online or blended settings are possible but will require adaptation and produce less interaction between participants.
- To avoid lengthy online sessions, activities should be split and some of the tasks be conceived as individual homework. Participants would only meet online for presentations by the facilitator and to discuss individual results in a plenary session.
- Younger children are likely to need parental support for uploading visual documents and additional explanations.



- **challenges**

- Participants with low proficiency levels in the heritage language may have difficulties with the meaning and usage of idioms (or proverbs) to work with a much reduced vocabulary but can have recourse to a dictionary to identify relevant words and phrases.
- To avoid difficulties less advanced learners in a group with different language proficiency levels, pair them with more proficient heritage speakers and favour peer learning or provide sufficient additional information in easy language or through translations.

- **options for parents**

- Parents who are native speakers of the heritage language can easily organise this activity for their child or children but need to be present to provide linguistic support.
- The same is true for a parent with at least a sound knowledge of the heritage language (B1 or above) and an ability to conduct online research, who will at the same time have an opportunity to improve his or her skills in this language.

Tags:

reading, spelling, writing, speaking, pronunciation, listening, vocabulary, syntax, creativity, artistic skills, organisation, orientation, non-verbal expression, cultural skills, self-confidence, intergenerational, science-related, body movements, drawing, painting, singing, theatre, collage, 1 kid activity, 2 and + kids activity

Lesen, Rechtschreibung, Schreiben, Sprechen, Aussprache, Zuhören, Wortschatz, Syntax, Kreativität, künstlerische Fähigkeiten, Organisation, Orientierung, nonverbaler Ausdruck, kulturelle, interkulturelle, digitale Fähigkeiten, Selbstvertrauen, generationsübergreifend, wissenschaftsbezogen, Körperbewegungen, Malerei, Gesang, Theater, Collage,

lecture, orthographe, écriture, expression orale, prononciation, écoute, vocabulaire, syntaxe, créativité, compétences artistiques, organisation, orientation, expression non verbale, culturelle, interculturelle, numérique, confiance en soi, intergénérationnel, scientifique, gestuelle, peinture, chant, théâtre, collage

czytanie, ortografia, pisanie, mówienie, wymowa, słuchanie, słownictwo, składnia, kreatywność, zdolności artystyczne, organizacja, orientacja, ekspresja niewerbalna, kulturowe, międzykulturowe, umiejętności cyfrowe, pewność siebie, międzypokoleniowe, związane z nauką, ruchy ciała, malarstwo, śpiew, teatr, kolaż,

citire, ortografie, scris, vorbire, pronunție, ascultare, vocabular, sintaxă, creativitate, abilități artistice, organizare, orientare, exprimare non-verbală, culturale, interculturale, abilități digitale, încredere în sine, intergeneraționale, legate de știință, mișcări ale corpului, pictură, cânt, teatru, colaj, olvasás, helyesírás, írás, beszéd, kiejtés, hallgatás, szókincs, szintaxis, kreativitás, művészi készségek, szervezés, tájékozódás, non-verbális kifejezés, kulturális, interkulturális, digitális készségek, önbizalom, generációk közötti, tudományhoz kapcsolódó, testmozgások, festészet, éneklés, színház, kollázs,

القراءة، التهجئة، الكتابة، التحدث، النطق، الاستماع، المفردات، بناء الجملة، الإبداع، المهارات الفنية، التنظيم، التوجيه، التعبير غير اللفظي، الثقافية، بين الثقافات، المهارات الرقمية، الثقة بالنفس، بين الأجيال، المتعلقة بالعلم، حركات الجسم، الرسم، الغناء، المسرح، الكولاج،

читання, правопис, письмо, говоріння, вимова, аудіювання, словниковий запас, синтаксис, креативність, художні навички, організація, орієнтація, невербальне вираження, культурні, міжкультурні, цифрові навички, впевненість у собі, між поколіннями, пов'язані з наукою, рухи, тіла, живопис, спів, театр, колаж

Image Credits

All images, except those from the testing workshop (drawings, strips with idioms), have been published under a Creative Commons Licence and can be freely used on condition of proper acknowledgement.

Images from our testing workshop:

© Katarzyna Włusek (Comparative Research Network e. V.)