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# **SPEAK ENGLISH LIKE AN AMERICAN**

**LEARN THE IDIOMS & EXPRESSIONS THAT  
WILL HELP YOU SPEAK LIKE A NATIVE!**

**A M Y G I L L E T T**

# **SPEAK ENGLISH LIKE AN AMERICAN**

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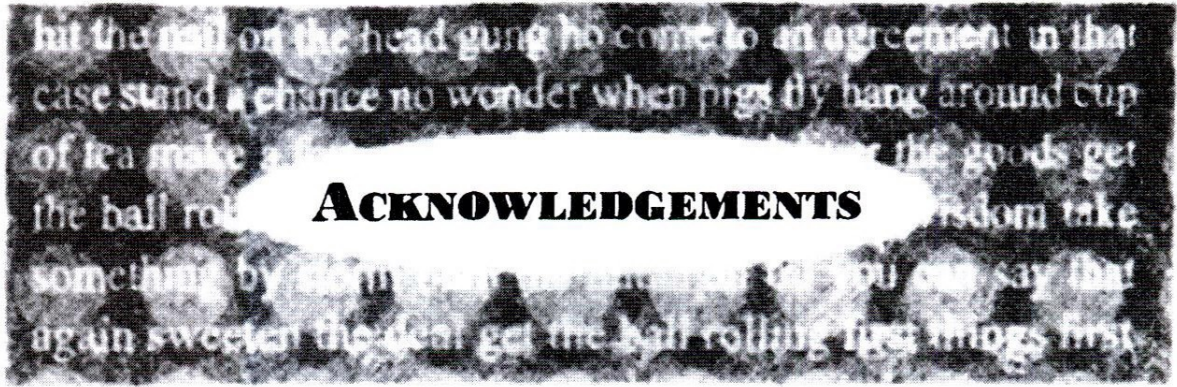
***YOU ALREADY SPEAK ENGLISH...  
NOW SPEAK IT EVEN BETTER!***

**DELUXE BOOK & CD SET**

**AMY GILLETT**







The author is very grateful to the following people for their collaboration and advice while preparing this book and CD set:

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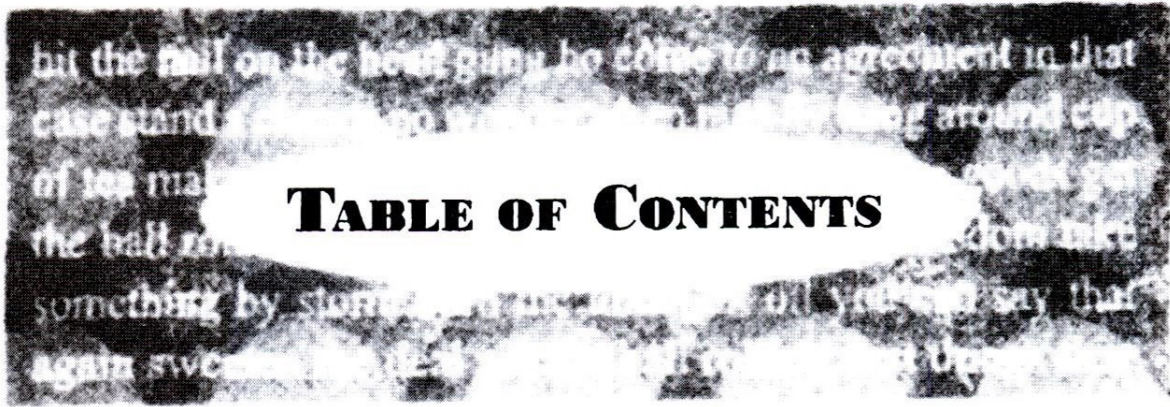
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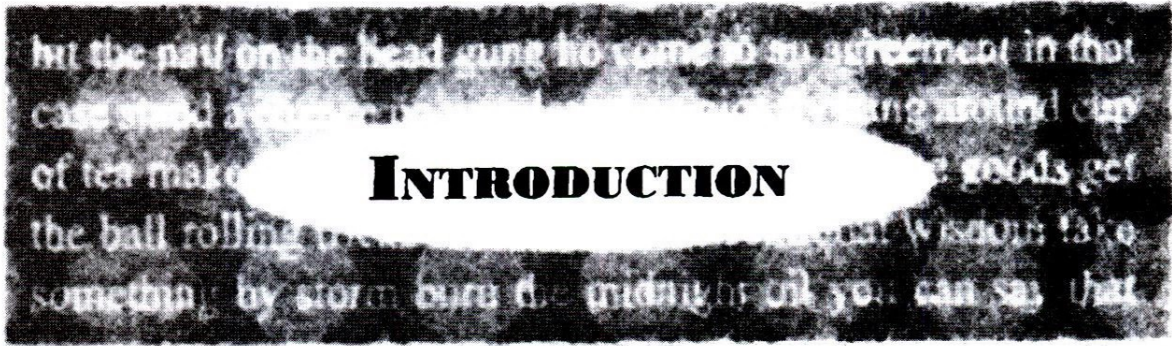
Manny José is an illustrator and graphic designer who has been doodling and sketching for as long as he can remember. He is from Toronto, Canada and currently lives in Brooklyn, New York. For more of Manny's illustrations, visit [www.mannytoons.com](http://www.mannytoons.com).





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If you already speak some English and now would like to speak more like a native, you've found the right book. One of the keys to speaking like a native is the ability to use and understand casual expressions, or idioms. American English is full of idioms. You won't learn these expressions in a standard textbook. But you will hear them all the time in everyday conversations. You'll also meet them in books, newspapers, magazines, and TV shows. This book will help you understand and use idioms better. It contains over 300 of today's most common idioms.

Idioms add color to the language. Master idioms and your speech will be less awkward, less foreign. You'll also understand more of what you read and hear. Often a student of English tries to translate idioms word-for-word, or literally. If you do this, you can end up asking, "What could this possibly mean?" This is why idioms are difficult: they work as groups of words, not as individual words. If you translate each word on its own, you'll miss the meaning and in many cases end up with nonsense.

As an example, let's take one of the idioms presented in this book: "out of this world." This expression is often used to describe delicious food. If you have a party and you serve a delicious chicken dish, your American friend might tell you, "This chicken is out of this world!" Start translating the expression word-for-word and you'll have to ask yourself: "What world is it in?" and "Why is she even commenting on the chicken being in a world, *any* world?"

**Here's another example.** Let's say you're on a tennis team. Your team has won every single game for the past six months. You could tell your friend this without using an idiom: "Our team is lucky



because we keep winning game after game.” You can also express this with an idiom: “Our team is on a winning streak.” Sounds better, doesn’t it?

When using idioms, remember that their word order and structure are often *not* flexible. In other words, you will need to get the word order exactly right. Here’s an example of what I mean. Recently, I helped a student with his English homework. He then told me, “You’ve got a golden heart.” He was trying to speak idiomatic English, but the correct expression is: “You’ve got a heart of gold.”

This book includes a CD of all of the dialogues. The CD will help you with pronunciation and will also help you remember the idioms. Play it at home, at work, in the car, while traveling...before you know it, you’ll be speaking English like an American!

Try to “develop an ear” for idioms on your own. Don’t worry, I’m not suggesting you try to grow a third ear! “Develop an ear” is an idiom — it means to learn to listen for something. If you don’t know what an expression means, ask a native speaker of English. Here’s what you can say to your helper: *Excuse me, I ran across this expression and I’m not sure what it means. Can you please help me out?*

Add idioms to your speech and writing just as you add vocabulary. You may find it helpful to write all of the expressions in this book down on notecards and review them whenever you have a free moment.

Good luck adding idioms to your everyday speech. It’s fun, and you’ll enjoy speaking English much more. Like an American!



## MAIN CHARACTERS

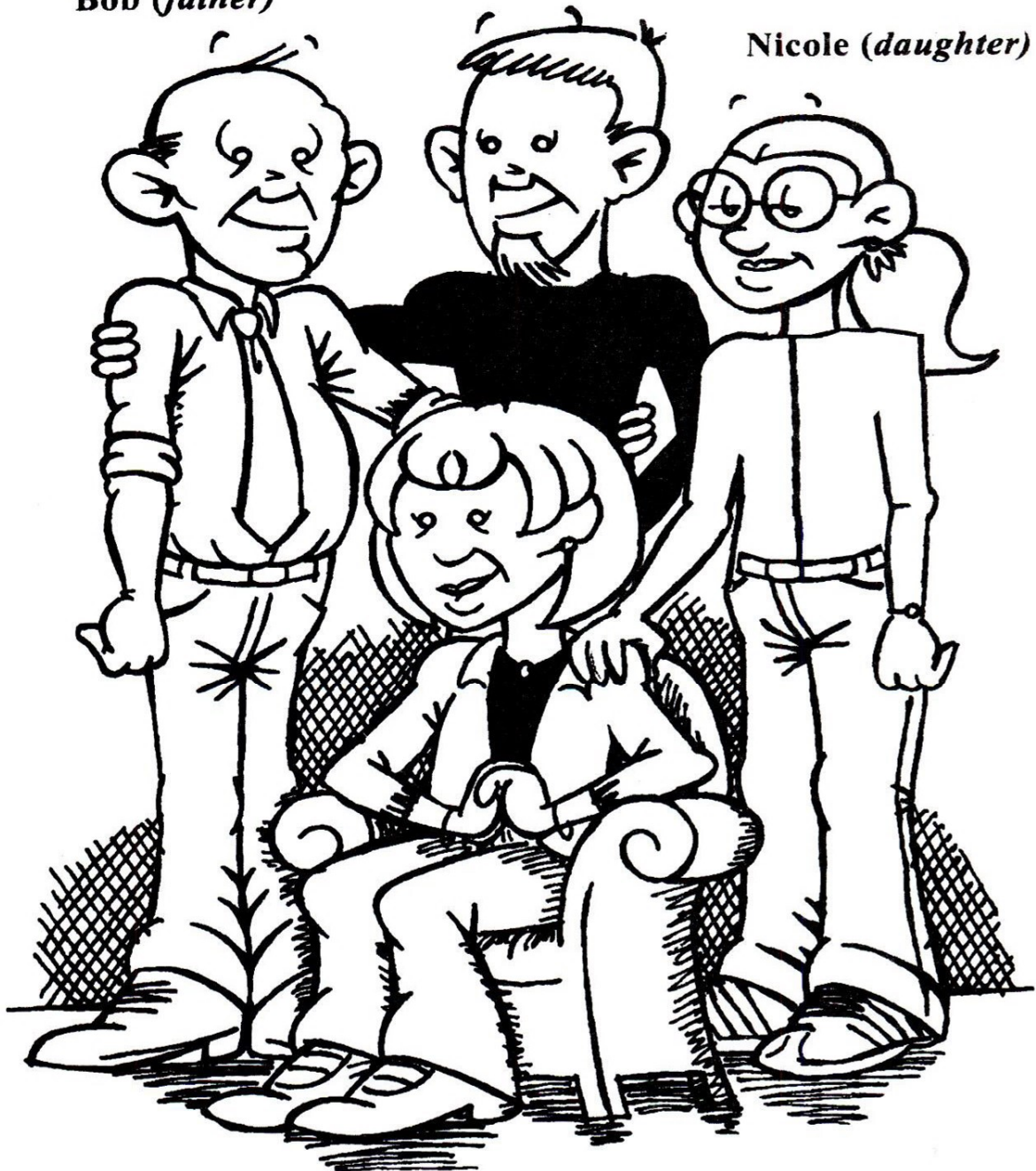
The author would like to thank the Johnson family for graciously agreeing to appear in this book.

### The Johnson Family

Ted (son)

Bob (father)

Nicole (daughter)



Susan (mother)



Good-bye to  
you and good-bye  
to this dead-end  
job!





**LESSON 1****BOB'S DAY AT WORK**

*Bob works as a manager in a furniture store. Peter, his boss, is not happy about sales. Bob's new advertising campaign hasn't helped. Peter decides to fire him.*

*Peter:* Bob, I hate to **break the news**, but our sales were down again last month.

*Bob:* Down again, Peter?

*Peter:* Yeah. These days, everybody's shopping at our competition, Honest Abe's Furniture Store.

*Bob:* But everything in there **costs an arm and a leg!**

*Peter:* That's true. They do charge **top dollar**.

*Bob:* And their salespeople are very strange. They really **give me the creeps!**

*Peter:* Well, they must be doing something right over there. Meanwhile, we're **about to go belly-up**.

*Bob:* I'm sorry to hear that. I thought my new advertising campaign would **save the day**.

*Peter:* **Let's face it:** your advertising campaign was a **real flop**.

*Bob:* Well then I'll **go back to the drawing board**.

*Peter:* It's too late for that. You're fired!



**Bob:** What? You're **giving me the ax**?

**Peter:** Yes. I've already found a new manager. She's as **sharp as a tack**.

**Bob:** Can't we even **talk this over**? **After all**, I've been working here for 10 years!

**Peter:** There's **no point in** arguing, Bob. I've already **made up my mind**.

**Bob:** Oh well, **at least** I won't have to **put up with** your non-sense anymore! Good-bye to you and good-bye to this **dead-end job**.

**Peter:** Please leave before I **lose my temper**!



## IDIOMS – LESSON 1

**about to** – ready to; on the verge of

EXAMPLE 1: It's a good thing Bob left the furniture store when he did. Peter was so angry, he was **about to** throw a dining room chair at him.

EXAMPLE 2: I'm glad you're finally home. I was just **about to** have dinner without you.

**after all** – despite everything; when everything has been considered; the fact is

EXAMPLE 1: You'd better invite Ed to your party. **After all**, he's a good friend.

EXAMPLE 2: It doesn't matter what your boss thinks of you. **After all**, you're going to quit your job anyway.

**at least** – anyway; the *good* thing is that...

EXAMPLE 1: We've run out of coffee, but **at least** we still have tea.

EXAMPLE 2: Tracy can't afford to buy a car, but **at least** she has a good bicycle.

NOTE: The second definition of this phrase is "no less than": There were **at least** 300 people waiting in line to buy concert tickets.



**(to) break the news** – to make something known

EXAMPLE 1: Samantha and Michael are getting married, but they haven't yet **broken the news** to their parents.

EXAMPLE 2: You'd better **break the news** to your father carefully. After all, you don't want him to have a heart attack!

**(to) cost an arm and a leg** – to be very expensive

EXAMPLE 1: A college education in America **costs an arm and a leg**.

EXAMPLE 2: All of the furniture at Honest Abe's **costs an arm and a leg!**

**dead-end job** – a job that won't lead to anything else

EXAMPLE 1: Diane realized that working as a cashier was a **dead-end job**.

EXAMPLE 2: Jim worked many **dead-end jobs** before finally deciding to start his own business.

**(let's) face it** – accept a difficult reality

EXAMPLE 1: **Let's face it**, if Ted spent more time studying, he wouldn't be failing so many of his classes!

EXAMPLE 2: **Let's face it**, if you don't have a college degree, it can be difficult to find a high-paying job.

**(to) give one the creeps** – to create a feeling of disgust or horror

EXAMPLE 1: Ted's friend Matt has seven earrings in each ear and an "I Love Mom" tattoo on his arm. He really **gives Nicole the creeps**.

EXAMPLE 2: There was a strange man following me around the grocery store. He was **giving me the creeps!**

**(to) go back to the drawing board** – to start a task over because the last try failed; to start again from the beginning

EXAMPLE 1: Frank's new business failed, so he had to **go back to the drawing board**.

EXAMPLE 2: The president didn't agree with our new ideas for the company, so we had to **go back to the drawing board**.

**(to) go belly-up** – to go bankrupt

EXAMPLE 1: Many people lost their jobs when Enron **went belly-up**.

EXAMPLE 2: My company lost \$3 million last year. We might go **belly-up**.

**(to) give someone the ax** – to fire someone

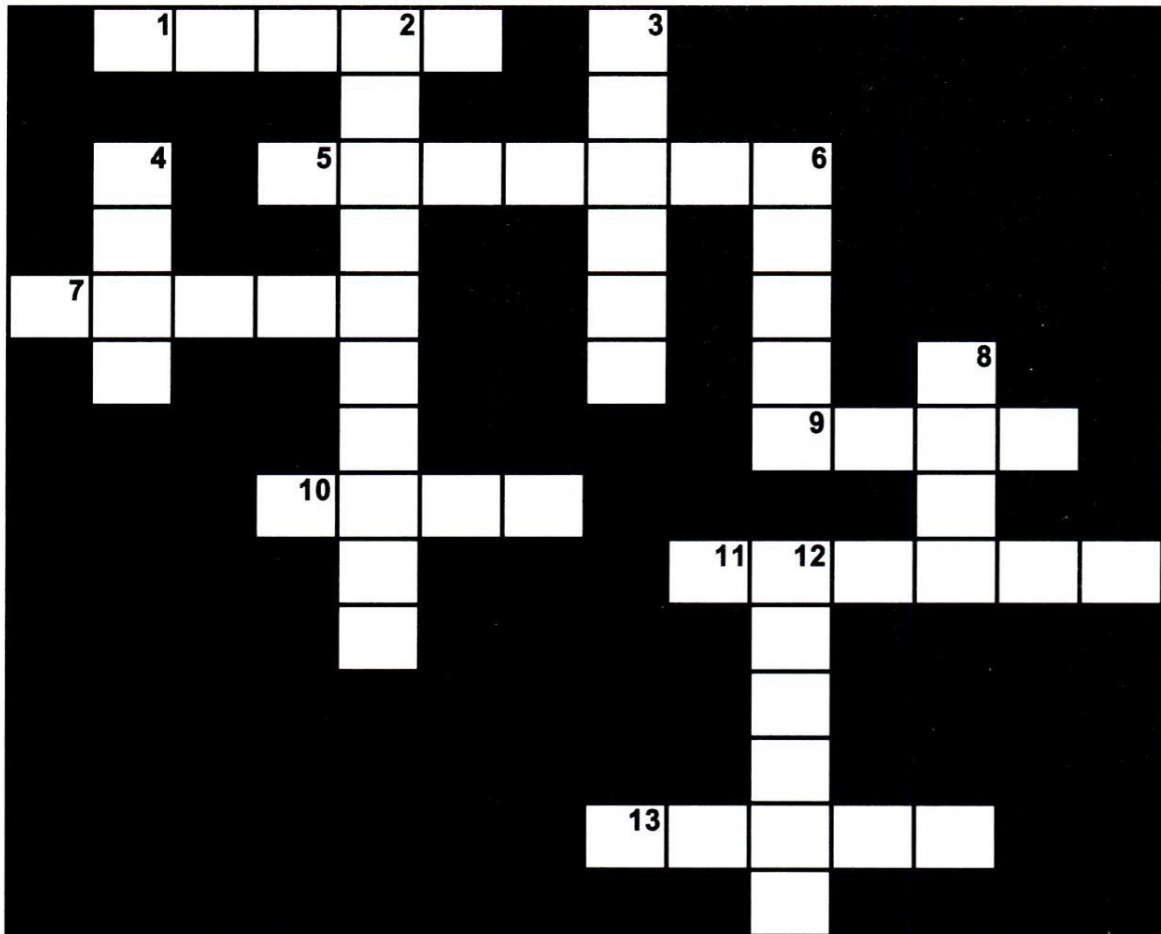
EXAMPLE 1: Mary used to talk to her friends on the phone all day at work, until one day her boss finally **gave her the ax**.

EXAMPLE 2: Poor Paul! He was **given the ax** two days before Christmas.



- 8) Bob worked out the nuts and \_\_\_\_\_ of the agreement with the National Cookie Company.
- a) details                      b) bolts                      c) tacks
- 9) After Martha's neighbor chopped down her apple tree, she held a grudge \_\_\_\_\_ him for years.
- a) from                      b) against                      c) for
- 10) I arrived late to the stadium. The baseball game was already \_\_\_\_\_ progress.
- a) through                      b) in                      c) at
- 11) My friend invited me out for a drink, but I told her I'd first need to wrap \_\_\_\_\_ some things at the office.
- a) through                      b) along                      c) up
- 12) I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and tired of telemarketers calling me in the evening trying to sell me stuff I don't want.
- a) sick                      b) ill                      c) angry
- 13) Kristen's boss paid her a compliment. He said she was the best salesperson in the company. That really \_\_\_\_\_ her day.
- a) made                      b) created                      c) ruined
- 14) The person seated behind me on the airplane kept on kicking my seat. Finally, I told him to \_\_\_\_\_ it out.
- a) stop                      b) cut                      c) fly
- 15) Amber hopes to break \_\_\_\_\_ the modeling business after she graduates from high school. She can definitely model nose rings and tattoos!
- a) into                      b) in                      c) around

## CROSSWORD PUZZLE



### Across

1. First things \_\_\_\_\_. Before we start wandering around the streets of Paris, let's look at a map and plan our route.
5. Nicole was really looking \_\_\_\_\_ to her school trip to Spain.
7. Ken is an engineer. He tries to understand the nuts and \_\_\_\_\_ of how things work.
9. When the stock market collapsed, Bob lost his \_\_\_\_\_ and sold everything.
10. Nicole's fiancé forgot his wallet, so she had to foot the \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Bob no longer shops at the Village Market. He holds a \_\_\_\_\_ against them.
13. I was sick and \_\_\_\_\_ of watching my co-worker flirt with our boss.

### Down

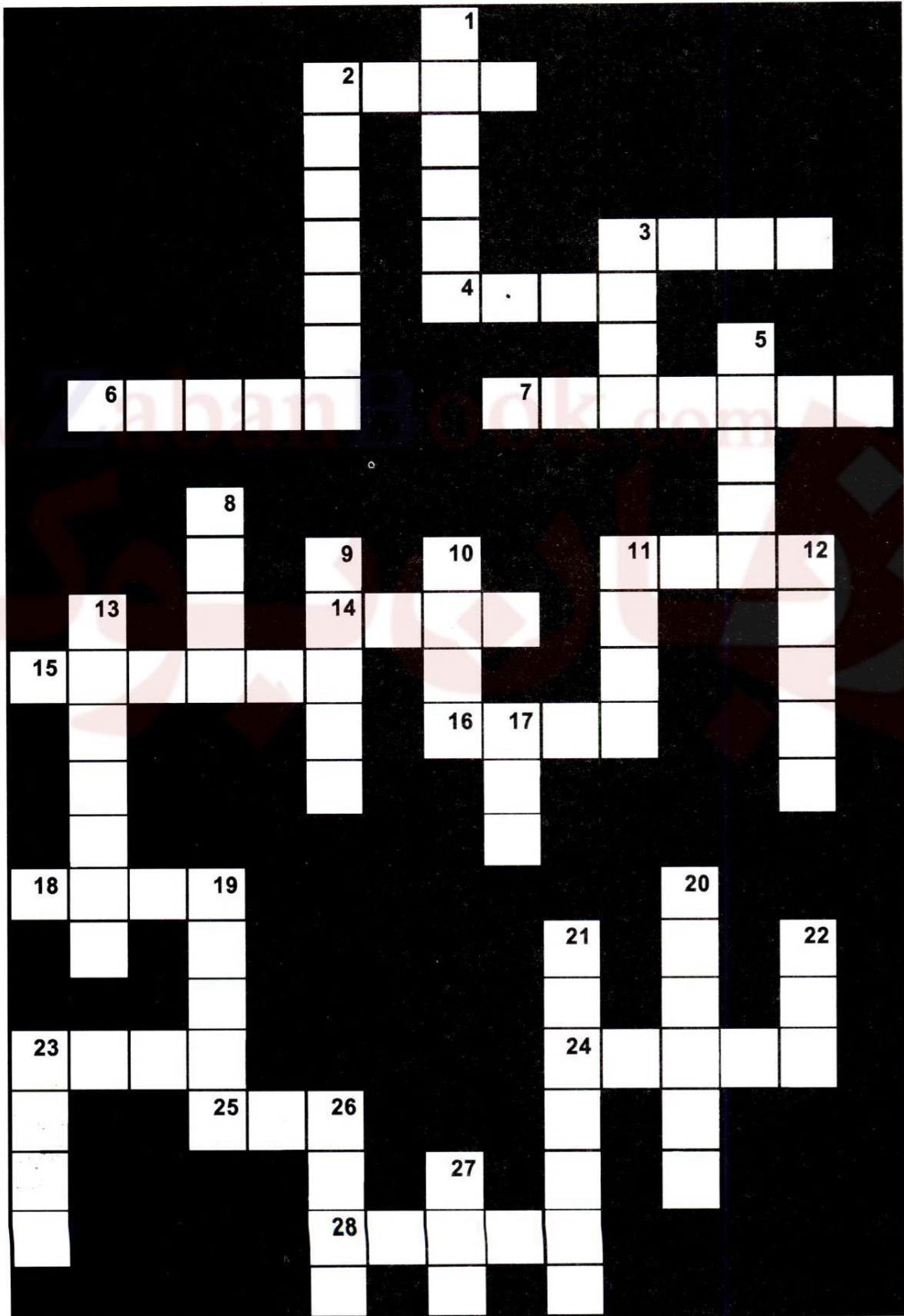
2. We can't afford a new computer for the office. We're running on a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Bette may have been a great actress, but she was a \_\_\_\_\_ lady in real life.
4. Musicians from the Juilliard School of Music are the cream of the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Diane and Mike just bought a mansion. They're rolling in \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Mary left her husband George for a younger man. She told George, "I hope there are no \_\_\_\_\_ feelings about this."
12. Stephen King has a long track \_\_\_\_\_ of writing bestsellers.

*ANSWERS TO REVIEW, p. 167*



# CHALLENGE CROSSWORD PUZZLE

How well have you learned the idioms in this book? This crossword puzzle will test you. Idioms are taken from throughout the entire book. If you can solve the whole puzzle, *good for you!*



**Across**

2. The US team did not win the World Cup, but they gave it their best \_\_\_\_\_.
3. You think Al should tell his boss that she's wrong? Easier said than \_\_\_\_\_!
4. The English teacher gave her students a useful \_\_\_\_\_ of thumb. She told them not to repeat the same adjectives too many times in one essay.
6. You have an exam tomorrow morning? You'd better start hitting the \_\_\_\_\_!
7. Todd doesn't like reading. It's like \_\_\_\_\_ teeth to get him to read anything.
11. Julie was very upset when her landlord increased her rent by 25 percent. Now she doesn't know how she'll make ends \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Eva loves to travel. She's traveled all \_\_\_\_\_ the world.
15. Stop jumping up and down on the bed! If it breaks, it'll be no laughing \_\_\_\_\_.
16. I wanted to buy *The New York Times* this morning, but by the time I got to the store, they had already \_\_\_\_\_ out.
18. Good luck at the casino. Hopefully you'll strike it \_\_\_\_\_!
23. Jay didn't cheat during the Scrabble game. He won \_\_\_\_\_ and square.
24. You look very tired. We'd better call it a \_\_\_\_\_ and go home.
25. You paid \$900 for that cappuccino maker? That's really \_\_\_\_\_ dollar!
28. You're going on vacation to Aruba? I'm \_\_\_\_\_ with envy.

**Down**

1. On a hot day like today, an ice cream stick is just what the \_\_\_\_\_ ordered!
2. We've only got two hours to finish this project. Let's roll up our \_\_\_\_\_ and start working.
3. Pfizer really wanted to Tanya to accept their job offer, so they agreed to sweeten the \_\_\_\_\_.
5. If you studied your idioms, this crossword puzzle should be a \_\_\_\_\_ of cake.
8. Ted \_\_\_\_\_ around the bush before telling his parents that he failed his test.
9. Mmmm, this chocolate cake is out of this \_\_\_\_\_!
10. Joe wants to join the army, but he hasn't yet broken the \_\_\_\_\_ to his mom.
11. Oh, you're finally home. That's a load off my \_\_\_\_\_!
12. Frank, our best salesman, hasn't made a sale all week. I'm afraid he's lost his \_\_\_\_\_!
13. Mark drove a hard \_\_\_\_\_ and got two T-shirts for the price of one.
17. Vivian is a night \_\_\_\_\_. She never goes to sleep before midnight.
19. I know you had your \_\_\_\_\_ set on going skiing this weekend, but I'm afraid there won't be enough snow.
20. You'd better get up \_\_\_\_\_ and early to finish your homework.
21. Your team won four soccer games in a row? You're on a \_\_\_\_\_ streak.
22. All of Brianna's after-school activities cost money. Her parents are tired of shelling \_\_\_\_\_ so much money.
23. Judy made a list of books for the book club to read, but she told members to feel \_\_\_\_\_ to make other suggestions.
26. Will Democrats and Republicans every stop fighting? When \_\_\_\_\_ fly!
27. Tom doesn't want to go to the pop concert. Classical music is more his cup of \_\_\_\_\_.



hit the nail on the head gung ho come to an agreement in that  
case stand a chance to be by hang around cup  
of tea make the goods get  
the ball rolling national wisdom take  
something by storm burn the midnight oil no laughing matter

## ANSWER KEY

### LESSON 1: BOB'S DAY AT WORK

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. b | 5. b |
| 2. a | 6. a |
| 3. c | 7. c |
| 4. a | 8. c |

### LESSON 2: BOB RETURNS HOME WITH BAD NEWS

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. c | 5. a |
| 2. b | 6. c |
| 3. c | 7. a |
| 4. c | 8. b |

### LESSON 3: TED'S DAY AT SCHOOL

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. c | 5. c |
| 2. a | 6. a |
| 3. a | 7. b |
| 4. b | 8. a |

### LESSON 4: NICOLE'S DAY AT SCHOOL

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. b | 5. c |
| 2. c | 6. a |
| 3. b | 7. c |
| 4. b | 8. a |

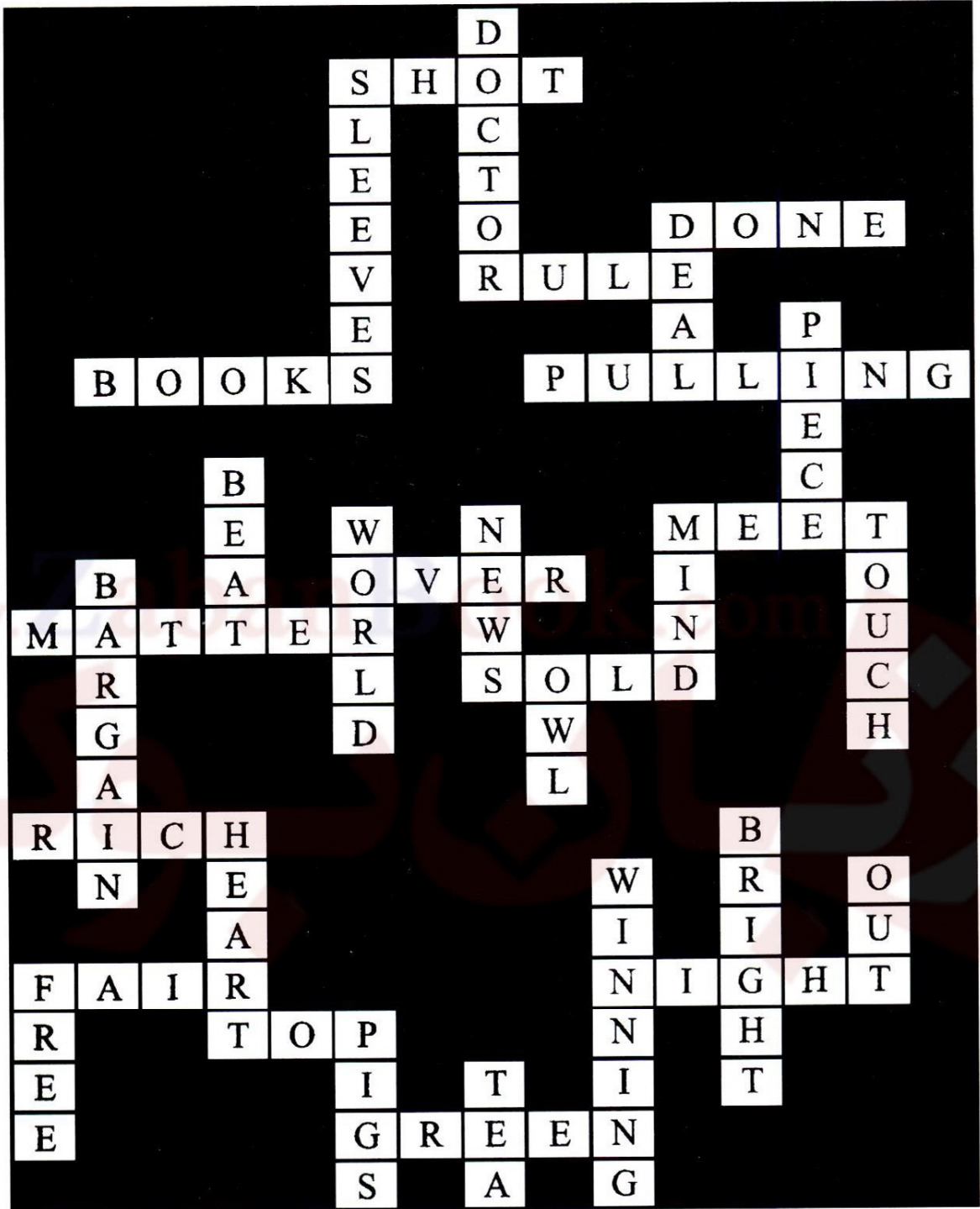
### BONUS PRACTICE

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. c | 4. b |
| 2. a | 5. c |
| 3. b | 6. b |

### LESSON 5: TED GOES OUT FOR THE EVENING

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. b | 5. a |
| 2. a | 6. b |
| 3. c | 7. b |
| 4. b | 8. c |

# CHALLENGE CROSSWORD PUZZLE





**S**

save the day, 14  
 second nature, 103  
 sell like hotcakes, 107  
 set eyes on, 20  
 set the record straight, 119  
 shake in one's shoes, 29  
 sharp as a tack, 14  
 shell out, 54  
 shut up, 29  
 sick and tired of, 147  
 sit tight, 65  
 sitting pretty, 107  
 slack off, 25

**T**

take a break, 84  
 take it easy, 35  
 take it or leave it, 73  
 take off, 107  
 take over, 84  
 take something by storm, 54  
 take something the wrong way, 35  
 taken aback, 124  
 talk into, 60  
 talk over, 14  
 tall order, 107  
 tell off, 20  
 thank goodness, 20  
 that's the way the cookie crumbles, 135

**U**

under one's breath, 35  
 up in the air, 35

**W**

way to go!, 29  
 well off, 142  
 what's the matter?, 20  
 what's up?, 65  
 when pigs fly, 20  
 winning streak, 153

**Y**

you can say that again, 65  
 you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, 60  
 your guess is as good as mine, 103

small fortune, 142  
 sold out, 107  
 spending money, 153  
 stab someone in the back, 20  
 stand a chance, 25  
 stay up, 113  
 stop by, 142  
 stressed out, 20  
 strike it rich, 135  
 sure thing, 119  
 sweep something under the rug, 123  
 sweet tooth, 84  
 sweeten the deal, 73

the breaks (those are *or* that's), 54  
 there's no accounting for taste, 35  
 things are looking up, 77  
 think big, 20  
 throw the book at someone, 124  
 to tell you the truth, 103  
 too many cooks spoil the broth, 84  
 top dollar, 14  
 track record, 131  
 treat someone like dirt, 90  
 tricks of the trade, 84  
 turn off, 96  
 twist someone's arm, 73

wise guy, 54  
 work like a dog, 49  
 work one's tail off, 84  
 work out, 131  
 worth one's while, 73  
 wrap up, 153



# WHAT'S THE SECRET TO SPEAKING ENGLISH FLUENTLY?

It's mastery of those tricky idioms and phrases that are so common in English. And learning these idioms and phrases will not only help you speak better, it'll help you understand Americans better!

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- *The Norwalk Hour*

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