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Idioms and Figurative Phrases

Writers combine words. Sometimes these word phrases take on new meanings. These phrases are called **idioms**. For example, you may say that someone has “ants in his pants.” This is an idiom that means the person can’t sit still. It has nothing to do with *ants* or *pants*.

Figurative phrases are sometimes called idioms, too. They are colorful ways of saying things. For example, you may hear that “it is raining cats and dogs.” The *literal* meaning is that cats and dogs are coming down from the clouds. But you know this could never be true. So this phrase must be *figurative*. It tells the reader that it is raining very hard.

Read the passage. Then answer the question that follows.

Deborah Sampson was one tough cookie. She lived during the Revolutionary War. When the war started, she helped get food to the American soldiers. But she also wanted to be a part of the army.

In those days, women could not join the army. People wanted to protect women from the danger of war. But the danger did not seem to bother Deborah Sampson. She made a plan to join the army.

Deborah Sampson dressed like a man. She called herself “Robert Shurtleff” and joined the army. Everyone liked “Robert.” Nobody thought he was a woman. Deborah fought in many battles. In one battle, she was hurt very badly. She was put into the hospital. Now it was time for her to face the music. The doctors said, “I think you should go home now, Ms. Sampson.”

One tough cookie is an idiom that means—

- A a soft person
- B a sweet person
- C a strong person
- D a funny person

The whole passage tells how strong Deborah Sampson was. So the answer must be choice C.

Idioms
and Figurative
Phrases

And all of a sudden the great, big, lumbering Donkey broke loose from his halter. He began to dance and prance just like a little lap dog. *Splash!* He knocked over a pail of water. He banged into the master's bench. He knocked over a milking stool as he copied the little dog.

"What is this monkey business?" the master howled in surprise to the Donkey. The little Dog ran away with his heart in his mouth.

Then the great, big, clumsy Donkey came leaping and jumping along like a circus act. Suddenly he sat himself down right on the farmer's lap, just as the Lap Dog had done.

"Ee-aw, I want to be petted. Ee-aw! Ee-aw!" he said.

The Farmer began to laugh.

"You great, big clown!" he cried. "Go back to your stall and eat hay. If you want me to love you, you must be yourself and not act like anyone else."

And he led the Donkey back to his stall and stroked and petted him. "You're no good when you play the lap dog. But you're a wonderful donkey," he said.

Idioms
and Figurative
Phrases

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- 1 Write the idioms in the story that have the same meaning as the phrases below.

silly or crazy actions _____

got jealous of _____

to be very nervous or scared _____

- 2 What are *Ee-aw!* and *Splash!* examples of?

A metaphors

C onomatopoeia

B similes

D idioms

3 What is ironic about the title of this story?

Daisies

by Frank Dempster Sherman

Frank Dempster Sherman (1860–1916) was born in New York. He was a poet and a professor of architecture.

At evening when I go to bed,
I see the stars shine overhead;
They are the little daisies white
That dot the meadow of the night.

And often while I'm dreaming so,
Across the sky the moon will go;
It is a lady, sweet and fair,
Who comes to gather daisies there.

For, when at morning I arise,
There's not a star left in the skies;
She's picked them all and dropped them down
Into the meadows of the town.

1 The lines “I see the stars shine overhead/They are the little daisies white” have an example of which type of figurative language?

- A a simile B a metaphor C an idiom D personification

2 What sense does this poem appeal to most?

- A touch B smell C sight D hearing