



CONNECT | ENRICH | TRANSFORM

## Idioms and the Ocean

### Introduction:

People who work on boats often have a different vocabulary than people who don't spend a lot of time on boats (landlubbers). Some of this boat specific vocabulary comes from words that are only used to describe parts, places, or actions done on boats, some of it comes from sailors long ago and the words they used to describe their experiences on ships.

Idioms are words, phrases or combinations of words that are used to mean something different than the literal definition. For example, "it's raining cats and dogs" is used to mean "there is heavy rain," not its literal meaning: that cats and dogs are falling from the sky. For more examples of idioms, check out this video (<https://youtu.be/Ls5Ew9PJcO8>). Many idioms originally came from words or phrases used by sailors, but today they often have nothing to do with boats or sailing.

Sometimes the connection between idioms and boats or sailing is easier to see, such as "being in the same boat"; people don't have to literally be in a boat for that expression to be used, just in the same situation or circumstance. However, sometimes the connection is harder to see. For example, a person who is "aloof" is someone who is physically and/or emotionally distant, but originally "to keep aloof" was used by sailing ships to mean: sailing into the wind in order to avoid running into the shore or something dangerous (so they were keeping a distance).

In this activity you'll learn the meaning of, to recognize, and to use some idioms with nautical origins.

## Part One: Conversation

Find the idioms in the following conversation. Write the idioms in the space provided and explain in your own words what you think they mean based on how they are used in the conversation.

I'm feeling blue today. 😞

Why!? What happened? Did the new cookie recipe you tried not work out??

Yeah, I knew it was a long shot, but I was still a little taken aback when they tasted like dirt.

I might have some news that will cheer you up. The scuttlebutt around town is that a new bakery is opening! Maybe that can tide you over until you figure out what went wrong.

Maybe...

I'm grounded right now so I'll need to toe the line to get back on my parents' good side.

Well then I guess you better pipe down and get your homework done.

Find the idioms and explain what they mean in your own words.

## Part Two: Matching

Can you match the idioms with their meaning to learn about their nautical origins? Draw a line to connect each idiom to the definition you think best match.

## Idioms

Feeling Blue

Long Shot

Pipe Down

Scuttlebutt

Taken Aback

Tide Over

Toe the Line

## Meanings & Origins

### Gossip or rumors

A “butt” is a barrel and to “scuttle” is to drill a hole in the barrel. The scuttlebutt on a ship was a barrel with drinking water and crew members would gossip while waiting for their day’s water.

### An instruction to be quiet

A pipe (or whistle) was used on ship to give instructions. The signal “piping down the hammocks,” meant the crew should go to bed (and be quiet).

### To follow the rules or meet a standard

Sailors in the British Royal Navy stood side by side with their toes along a line to be inspected to make sure they were properly dressed and ready for work.

### Something that would take a lot of luck

A shot from a ship’s cannon or gun aimed at something a long way away needed a lot of luck to hit the target because early cannons were inaccurate.

### To be feeling sad or melancholy

Ships’ crews would fly blue flags and paint a blue line on the side of the ship if the captain or an officer died while the ship was at sea.

### Startled or surprised

If the wind blew the sails of a ship back, flat against the masts, they were described as being “aback.” Sailors tried to avoid this, but if the wind changed suddenly it could take them by surprise.

### To make a small amount last temporarily

If there was no wind, sailing ships couldn’t move, so they would drift with the tides. All sailors could do in this situation was wait for the wind to come back.

### Part Three: Visualization

Use the space provided to draw the literal (what it sounds like it means) and figurative (what it really means) meanings for each idiom.

| <b>Idiom: Feeling blue</b>               |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Literally (what it sounds like it means) | Figuratively (what it really means) |
|  |                                     |

**Idiom: Long shot**

Literally (what it sounds like it means)

Figuratively (what it really means)

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

**Idiom: Pipe down**

Literally (what it sounds like it means)

Figuratively (what it really means)

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

**Idiom: Tide over**

Literally (what it sounds like it means)

Figuratively (what it really means)

### **Part three: Creative Writing**

Write a story or conversation using idioms. Try to use the idioms you've learned in the previous parts as well as any other idioms you know or have heard before.



## Bonus: "Fortune teller" Activity

Fill in the idiom meanings in the "fortune teller" template below. Look up the meanings of new idioms you don't know. Follow the instructions to cut out and fold your "fortune teller", get permission and/or help from an adult if necessary. Test your friends' and family's knowledge of Some Fun Nautical Idioms.

Step by step instructions for folding the "fortune teller" are on the following pages, followed by instructions for using the "fortune teller."


**Idioms**

Aloof

"Aloof" meaning

In the doldrums

"In the doldrums" meaning  
Depressed, listless,  
in a slump



**Nautical**

Scuttlebutt

"Scuttlebutt" meaning

In the same boat

"In the same boat" meaning

**Some**

Pipe down

"Pipe down" meaning

Tide over

"Tide over" meaning

**Fun**

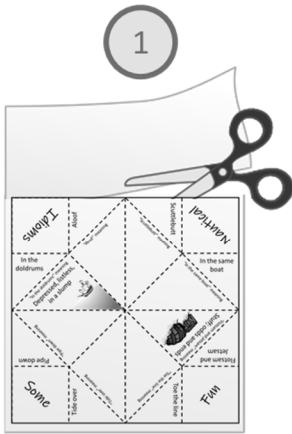
Flotsam and jetsam

Stuff, odds and ends

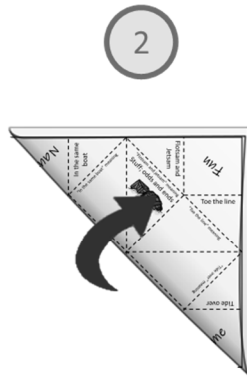
"Flotsam and jetsam" meaning

Toe the line

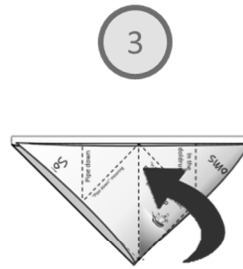
"Toe the line" meaning



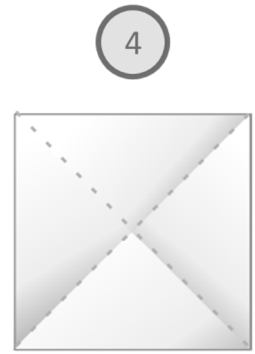
1  
Cut out the "fortune teller" along the SOLID line, do not cut along dashed lines



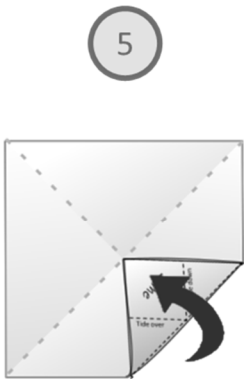
2  
Fold the square in half along the diagonal (bring lower left corner up to meet upper right corner)



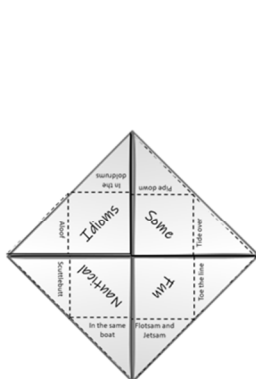
3  
Fold in half diagonally again (bring lower right point of the triangle up to meet upper left point)



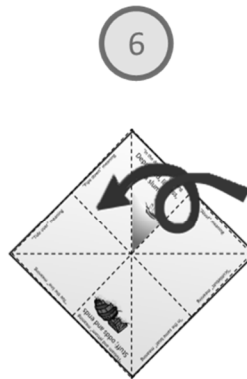
4  
Unfold and place right side down



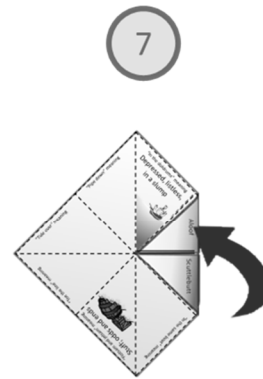
5  
Using dashed lines as guides, fold each corner in to touch the center of the square



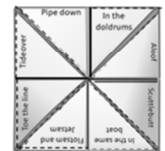
6  
This creates a smaller square



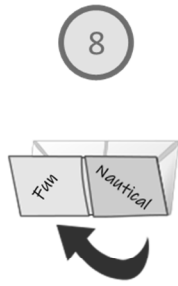
7  
Flip the new smaller square over



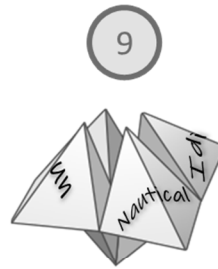
8  
Using dashed lines as guides, fold each corner in to touch the center of the square



9  
This creates an even smaller square



Fold the square in half by bringing the bottom edge up to meet top edge



Insert fingers and thumbs under outer flaps (labelled “Some”, “Fun”, “Nautical”, and “Idioms”) to create the “fortune teller” shape

To use the Fun Nautical Idioms “fortune teller”:

- 1) Ask someone to choose one of the words on an outer flap (“Some”, “Fun”, “Nautical”, or “Idioms”).
- 2) Open and close fingers and thumbs once for each letter of the chosen word.
- 3) Choose one of the idioms displayed inside the “fortune teller” when counting is finished.
- 4) Have the person guess the meaning of the idiom.
- 5) Unfold the flap to see the answer.

## Answers

### Part One:

I'm **feeling blue** today 😞

Why!? What happened? Did the new recipe you tried not work out??

Yeah, I knew it was a **long shot**, but I was still a little **taken aback** when the whole thing tasted like dirt

I might have some news that will cheer you up. The **scuttlebutt** around town is that a new restaurant is opening! Maybe that can **tide you over** until you figure out what went wrong

Maybe...

I'm grounded right now so I'll need to **toe the line** to get back on my parents' good side

Well then I guess you better **pipe down** and get your homework done

Feeling blue: feeling sad

Long shot: something improbable/needs a lot of luck

Taken aback: surprised or startled

Scuttlebutt: rumor or gossip

Tide you over (tide over): make last or survive for a time

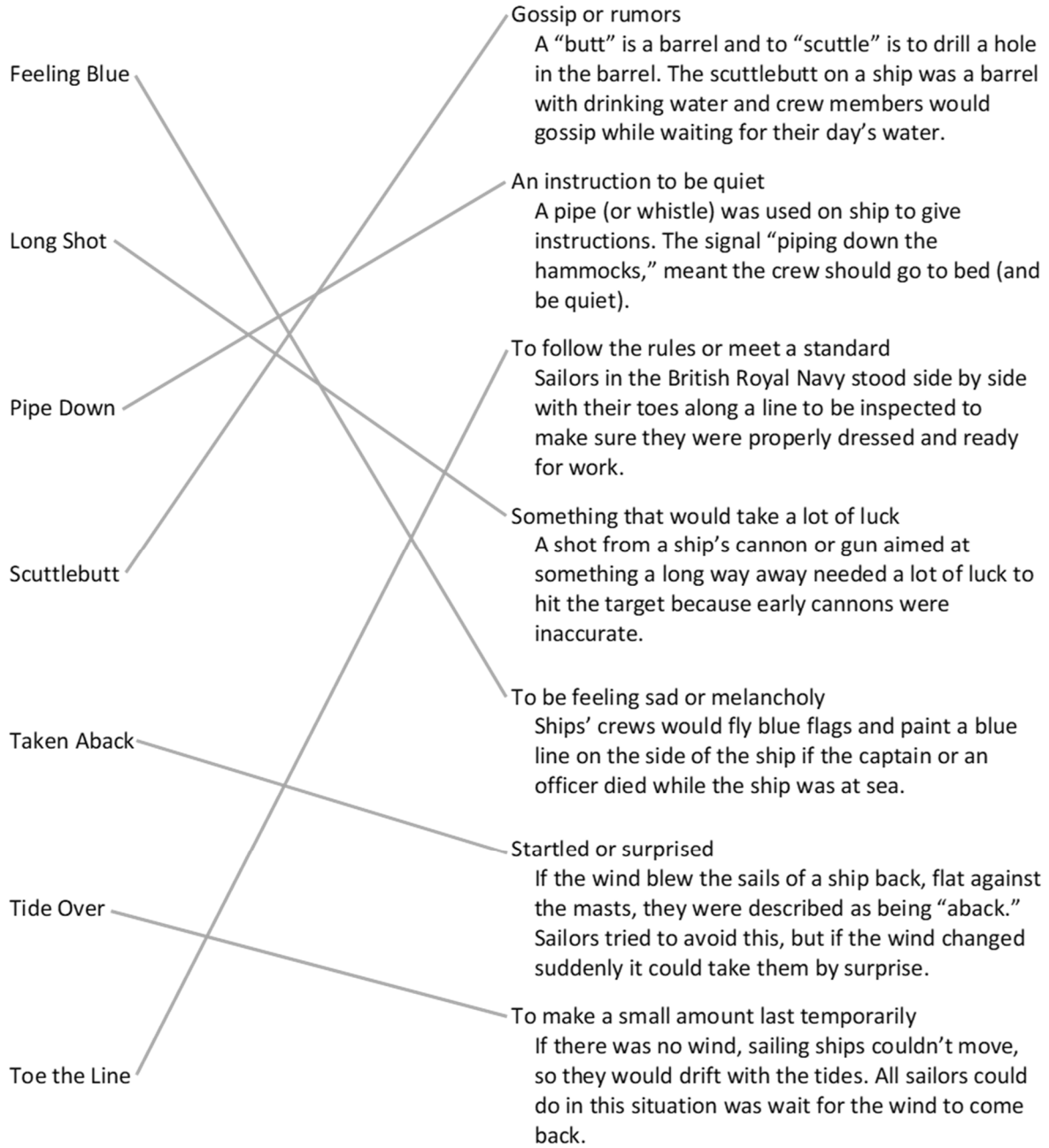
Toe the line: behave or follow rules or conform to standards

Pipe down: be quiet (or stop texting)

**Part Two:**

**Idioms**

**Meanings & Origins**



**Bonus: “Fortune teller”**

Alloof: physically and/or emotionally removed or distant

In the same boat: in the same situation or circumstance