Idioms describing people

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

INTERMEDIATE | B1-B2

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1 Match each head idiom with its meaning.

1 have a head like a sieve	____	a stay calm in difficulty
2 have a good head for figures	____	b be sensible and practical
3 have your head in the clouds	____	c be much better than others
4 have your head screwed on	____	d be comfortable in high places
5 have a head for heights	____	e refuse to face a problem
6 keep your head	____	f be good with numbers
7 bury your head in the sand	____	g have a very bad memory
8 be head and shoulders above	____	h be unaware of practical reality

2 Complete each idiom with one word.

1 have a head like a _____

2 have a good head for _____

3 keep your _____

4 bury your head in the _____

5 have your head in the _____

6 be head and _____ above someone

7 have a head for _____

8 have your head _____ on

3 Choose the idiom that fits the situation.

1 Maja forgot her keys again. She *has a head like a sieve / keeps her head*.

2 Ask Leon to check the budget; he *has a good head for figures / has his head in the clouds*.

3 Tina stayed calm during the emergency. She *kept her head / buried her head in the sand*.

4 Jan ignores every warning about the debt. He *has a head for heights / buries his head in the sand*.

5 Sara is practical and sensible. She *has her head screwed on / has a head like a sieve*.

6 The new violinist is much better than the rest. She is *head and shoulders above them / in the clouds*.

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4 Complete the story with idioms from the box.

an awkward customer | a heart of gold | a pain in the neck | get on my nerves | has her head screwed on | head and shoulders above | keep his head | the right place

Our volunteer coordinator, Bina, **1** _____: she is sensible and plans carefully. She can seem strict, but her heart is in **2** _____, and she truly has **3** _____. One supplier is **4** _____ who changes every agreement. His long messages sometimes **5** _____. Another volunteer can be **6** _____ because he interrupts constantly. Fortunately, our driver can **7** _____ when problems occur. In an emergency, he is **8** _____ everyone else.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Why idioms need context

Idioms can make a description vivid, but they often express the speaker's attitude as well as information about a person. Calling someone a pain in the neck is more critical than saying that their behaviour is inconvenient. Teacher's pet may be playful among friends but hurtful when used to exclude a classmate. Some expressions are also strongly informal, so they may sound unsuitable in a report or formal appraisal. A careful speaker considers the relationship, setting and likely effect. It is usually fairer to connect an idiom to specific behaviour instead of presenting it as the whole truth about a person.

1 What two things can an idiom express? _____

2 Why is *a pain in the neck* strongly critical? _____

3 When might *teacher's pet* become hurtful? _____

4 Where may strongly informal idioms be unsuitable? _____

5 Which three factors should a careful speaker consider? _____

6 How can a speaker use a person idiom more fairly? _____

6 Rewrite each sentence using the word in capitals.

1 I forget things very easily. **SIEVE** _____

2 Eva is far better than the other candidates. **SHOULDERS** _____

3 Mark refuses to think about the problem. **SAND** _____

4 Nina remained calm when the alarm rang. **HEAD** _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a **100-120 word** profile of a team or class using at least five idioms. Explain what each idiom means in context and vary positive and negative descriptions.

[ ] Use complete idiom patterns. [ ] Match register to context. [ ] Focus on behaviour rather than insults.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Head idioms

1 **g** 2 **f** 3 **h** 4 **b** 5 **d** 6 **a** 7 **e** 8 **c**

2 Complete the idioms

1 **sieve** 2 **figures** 3 **head** 4 **sand** 5 **clouds** 6 **shoulders** 7 **heights** 8 **screwed**

3 Choose the idiom

1 **has a head like a sieve** 2 **has a good head for figures** 3 **kept her head** 4 **buries his head in the sand** 5 **has her head screwed on** 6 **head and shoulders above them**

4 Volunteer team

1 **has her head screwed on** 2 **the right place** 3 **a heart of gold** 4 **an awkward customer** 5 **get on my nerves** 6 **a pain in the neck** 7 **keep his head** 8 **head and shoulders above**

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Information and the speaker's attitude.
2 It is more critical than describing the behaviour as inconvenient.
3 When it is used to exclude a classmate.
4 In a report or formal appraisal.
5 Relationship, setting and likely effect.
6 Connect it to specific behaviour rather than the whole person.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 I **have a head like a sieve**. 2 Eva is **head and shoulders above** the other candidates. 3 Mark **buries his head in the sand**. 4 Nina **kept her head** when the alarm rang.

Over to you: Answers will vary. Check form, register, explanation and considerate use.