

A Tough Cookie: 4 Idioms to Describe Character

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

93 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Julia, I found your notes for the new community project.

Is something wrong with them?

They say: Maya, gold.

Daniel, cookie.

Eva, book.

Amir, horse.

Those are not shopping notes, Martin.

They are four idioms about character.

That is a relief.

I was wondering why Amir needed a horse.

Today we will make every note clear.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox and Practice Arena Five-Minute English.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

This week in our free Idiom Toolbox course, we have reached lesson eleven: idioms about character.

Go to yourenglishtoolbox.com, open Idioms and choose lesson eleven.

You will find the slow dialogue, clear examples, multilingual support and retrieval practice there.

The direct lesson link is also in the episode description.

Now, let us meet the people behind your unusual notes.

First, Maya has a heart of gold.

To have a heart of gold means to be extremely kind and generous.

Maya stays after every event to help, and she quietly pays for materials when somebody cannot afford them.

She has a heart of gold.

The image is warm and positive.



We often use it when someone's kindness is more important than their appearance or manner.

For example: He looks serious, but he has a heart of gold.

Or: Our neighbour has a heart of gold and checks on everyone during winter.

So the note gold means kind and generous.

Exactly.

Our second expression is a tough cookie.

A tough cookie is a strong person who handles difficulty well.

Daniel organised an outdoor event in heavy rain, solved three problems and never gave up.

Daniel is a tough cookie.

The expression is informal but positive in this context.

We often use it for someone resilient, determined or emotionally strong.

For example: After everything she has experienced, she is still a tough cookie.

Or: You need to be a tough cookie in that demanding job.

Why a cookie?

Because idioms enjoy making ordinary food sound dramatic.

Fair enough.

Our third expression is an open book.

An open book is a person whose thoughts and feelings are easy to understand.

Eva always says what she thinks, and her face shows exactly how she feels.

Then Eva is an open book.

We use the verb be: I am an open book.

She is an open book.

You can also say: His face is an open book.

For example: Ask me anything.

I am an open book.

The expression does not mean that the person tells every private detail.

It means they are generally easy to read or understand.

And our final expression is a dark horse.

A dark horse is a person with unexpected abilities or an unexpected chance of success.

Amir is quiet, and nobody knew he could design.



Then he created the best poster in the group.

He was the dark horse of the team.

This expression is especially common in competitions, elections or situations where someone surprises people.

For example: Nobody expected her to reach the final, but she became the dark horse of the tournament.

A dark horse is not necessarily secretive or dishonest.

Correct.

The important idea is unexpected potential or success.

Let us compare all four idioms.

Someone who has a heart of gold is extremely kind and generous.

A tough cookie handles difficulty well.

An open book is easy to understand emotionally.

And a dark horse has abilities or chances of success that people did not expect.

Time for a quick challenge.

Situation one.

A colleague seems strict, but spends every weekend helping at a food bank.

She has a heart of gold.

Situation two.

A friend faces a difficult recovery with patience and determination.

He is a tough cookie.

Situation three.

You always know when your sister is happy, worried or annoyed.

She is an open book.

Situation four.

The quietest person in the competition suddenly produces the best work.

That person is the dark horse.

Now complete one sentence about someone you know.

Choose: has a heart of gold, is a tough cookie, is an open book or is a dark horse.

Continue with lesson eleven in the free Idiom Toolbox course at yourenglishtoolbox.com.

Use the retrieval practice to recall all four expressions without looking at the answers.

The direct link is in the episode description.



Martin, are my notes clear now?

Perfectly.

Maya is kind, Daniel is resilient, Eva is easy to read and Amir has unexpected talent.

Much better.

Although I may keep the original notes.

Why?

They sound like the beginning of a very unusual shopping list.

See you next time, friends.

Goodbye.

