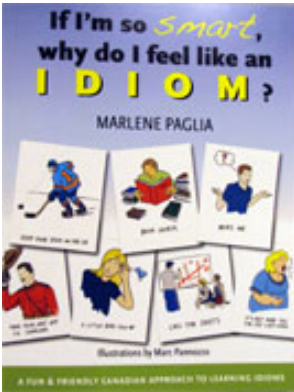


ESL Shop Interviews Marlene Paglia, author of *If I'm so Smart, why do I feel like an IDIOM?*



ESL SHOP: *What inspired you to write the book? I love the title. Is there a story behind it?*

MARLENE PAGLIA: Thank you. ESL students from places worldwide and from every educational and economic background have asked me the following question repeatedly in some form or another over the years. “.....If I'm as smart as

you say I am, or if I'm so smart..., then why can't I learn English idioms?” The question was often accompanied by facial expressions exhibiting frustration as a result of painstaking efforts to commit English idioms to memory – and to truly understand their meaning. It was the inspiration for this book and its title!

ESL: *What makes this book different from other books on idioms that you've used? What is specifically Canadian about the book?*

MP: Idiomatic expressions and phrases are difficult to learn. It's my belief that the following components are essential to a successful learning experience: **An element of fun** that excites and motivates increases the learning curve. Games, puzzles, humorous multiple choice questions, etc. all help.

The focus of this book is on the inclusion of numerous activities providing **creative repetition**. Repetition is the 'mother of skill' and when presented intermittently and creatively it conjures up feelings of comfort and thereby helps to solidify the meaning of the idiom in the learner's mind.

Finally, there isn't enough material available that reflects or has relevance to Canadian culture or society (**Canadian content**). Including Canadian references in every single dialogue and exercise (names, places, vocabulary, storylines, pronunciation and illustrations) that represent the many facets of Canada was important. I found that learning language and aspects of culture simultaneously, in this way, creates high interest and impact.

ESL: *525 idioms are a lot. How did you come up with the list? What were your criteria for your selection?*

MP: I often carried a notebook with me filled with loose leaf pages that included many themes listed at the top to which I added expressions and phrases as they came to me. This actually developed into a kind of brainstorming game with some family and friends while sipping on favourite cups of brew in coffee houses across the GTA. When I reached approximately 50+ idioms per theme, the dialogue writing process began. Exercises followed. After field-testing, editing and reviews; however, several expressions were deleted and others added according to like/dislike, and level of difficulty.

ESL: *There are a lot of different activities included. How did you test them?*

MP: The testing process began in increments in my classroom and in other classrooms around the Toronto area. This was eventually extended to several countries abroad. I received over 800 responses and testimonials. This aided in deciding what themes, expressions and exercises to keep and what to exclude.

ESL: *Could the book be used in large, multicultural classes? Could it also be used for self-study?*

MP: Yes on both counts. It would be up to the teacher to decide on exercises conducive to level. At the beginning of the book the instructor will find the activities listed in accordance to (CLB) Canadian Language Benchmarks. Other exercises may be given for homework and/or review to individual students or classes as a whole. Exercises may even be repeated in different groups at later dates as well.

The CDs, the Canadian reference guide, the pronunciation guide, the idiom usage guide, the answers at the back of the book and the easy to follow instructions for the activities all provide for self-study use.

ESL: *Which idioms do you think are most useful for learners? Which idioms are most difficult for learners to learn?*

MP: Idiomatic expressions are part of our daily speech. They are found in books, magazines, newspapers, radio and television programs and on TOEFL tests! Some idioms may be more useful than others depending on the learner's personal interests and needs.

Generally, all idioms/phrases are quite difficult to learn, but verb forms are probably more so because they require more effort to supply the correct tense.