13 READING

A Skim the article. Match the pictures 1, 2, and 3 to the paragraphs.

UNDERSTANDING IDIOMS

Idioms can be a problem for language learners. They often seem to make absolutely no sense at all. For example, imagine your English friend Sam tells you his math exam was "a piece of cake." Do you imagine him at school, sitting in front of a sweet dessert with nothing but a pen to eat it with? In fact, he's saying that the exam was really easy. It's important to learn useful English idioms and knowing their origins helps us to remember them. Here are stories of three English idioms.

1

2

3

___ **A** If you ask a friend to hang out, you might hear, "Sorry, I can't tonight. I'm feeling a little under the weather." It may sound like rain is coming, but really, it means that your friend feels sick. This expression came from sailors, who often got seasick when bad weather tossed the ship from side to side. The sailors went down to the bottom part of the ship, away from the storm and where the ship's rocking was gentler.

___ **B** If you have a difficult roommate, you might say, "My roommate has loud parties every night, but last night was the last straw. They played music till 5 A.M.! I'm moving out." A "last straw" is a final problem that makes someone take action. This expression is a short form of the phrase "the straw that broke the camel's back." The idea is that even though a single piece of straw is very light, many pieces added together will be too heavy for the camel to carry.

___ **C** Have you ever asked someone if they know something, and they reply, "That rings a bell"? They're not hearing music! They mean that what you're saying sounds familiar, and they think they've heard it before. This idiom comes from the fact that bells are used to remind people of many things. Traditionally, bells would toll for an important event, like a wedding. School bells tell you that class is starting, and even the alarm chime on your phone reminds you that it's time to get up.

B Read the article and correct the false statements below.

1. You can guess the meaning of an idiom if you understand each word.

   _____

2. In the past, people knew about important events when they heard shouting.

   _____

3. A camel falls down if it has to carry too much water.

   _____

4. Sailors used to feel sicker when they went to the bottom of the ship.

   _____

C Complete the sentences with the correct form of one of the idioms.

1. Julie has a bad cold at the moment, and she's _____.
2. I don't remember his face, but his name _____.
3. When the neighbors' noisy kids broke my window with their ball, it _____.

D What idioms are commonly used in your country? Where do you think they come from?

LIVEWORKSHEETS