Cat Paragraphs

**A cat in gloves catches no mice** - *Sometimes you can't accomplish a goal by being careful and polite.*

An idiom attributed to Ben Franklin in *Poor Richard's Almanac*

**Acting like a cat on a hot tin roof** - *Someone with frayed nerves; jumpy*

The phrase originated in Tennessee Williams' play of the same name. As then, it indicates someone who is jumpy - behaving like a cat would if they were on a hot tin roof. A similar English phrase is "Nimble as a cat on a hot bake­ stone," which means in a hurry to get away (a bake-stone was a large stone on which bread was baked).

**All cats are gray in the dark** - *All persons are undistinguished until they have made* a *name.* English proverb

**Alley cat** - *A stray or homeless cat.*

The "alley" portion probably refers to prostitutes, who at one point literally carried a mattress around with them. The "cat" probably alludes to the mating habits of female cats.

**Another breed of cat** - *something different from anything else*

**As nervous as a cat in a room full of rocking chairs** -

*Someone with frayed nerves; jumpy*

The allusion, of course, is to the fact that cats don't like having their tails tromped upon. Where the phrase originated is unknown.

**Cat around** - *To live an aimless, immoral life*

(See **tomcat** and **alley cat)**

**Cat burglar** - *A nimble, silent, sneaky thief*

Refers to the way cats are able to sneak up and steal their prey

**Catcalls** - *Booing bad acting*

The expression goes back to the theatre of Shakespear's time, when men criticized the acting by making noises that sounded

like a fence full of cats.

**Caterwauling/ cat's melody** - *Making harsh* noises *or cries* Probably came from Shakespeare's play Twelfth Night: "What a caterwauling do you keep here!"

**Cat-eyed or cat eyes** - *Able to* see *in the dark*

Coined in recognition of a cat's ability to see in very low-light conditions.

**Cat got your tongue** - *Why aren't you talking?*

The phrase probably comes from a custom in the Mideast hundreds of years ago, when it was common to punish a thief by cutting off their right hand, and a liar by ripping out their tongue. These severed body parts were given to the king's pet cats as their daily food.

**Catgut** - *What tennis rackets and violin strings are made of* The word came about when the German word *"kitguf'* was translated into other languages. *Kitgut* was a small fiddle. The folk tale "cat and the fiddle" probably has something to do with the translation as well.

**Catkins** - *fluffy flower bracts of willow and birch trees*

The catkins look like small cats' tails. (Other plants refer to cats also: pussy willow and cat tails.)

**Catlap** - *Usually weak tea or milk; something fit only for* cats *to drink*

**Catnap** - *Sleeping for a short period of time*

Reference to the ability of a cat to sleep frequently and lightly

**Cat o'nine tails** - *A whip*

In olden days, people were flogged by a nasty device made up of three separate knottings of three stands attached to the whip's handle. While the strands may have been made from the hide of cats, the multiple of 9 had already been associated with cats; presumably if a person being flogged survived, they were as lucky as a cat with 9 lives.

**Cat's cradle** - *a string game played by children*

**Cat's eye** - *Precious or semi-precious* gems *that have* a *changing luster;* also *road markers which reflect car lights (invented by Englishman Percy Shaw)*

Refers to the coloring similar to a cat's and to the reflecting of light in a cat's eyes

**Cat's foot** - *To live under the cat's foot* is *to allow someone to control you.*

Phrase was coined in reference to the "toying" behavior of a cat with a mouse or other "toy."

**Cat's meow *I* Cat's whiskers** - *Something considered to be outstanding*

Coined by American cartoonist Thomas a. Dorgan (1877-

1929) whose work appears in many American newspapers.

**Cat's pajamas** - *Something considered to be outstanding* The term "cat's pajamas" comes from E.B. Katz, an English tailor of the late 1700's and early 1800's, who made the finest

silk pajamas for royalty and other wealth patrons. Nothing like a cat nap in Kat'z pjs. (from the book, "Cats out of the Bag" compiled by Terry, Don and Ken Beck)

**Cat's Paw** - *To be labeled a* "cat's *paw"* means *someone* has *taken advantage of you and you weren't* smart *enough to "cat"ch on.*

The phrase has its origins in an old folk tale in which a clever monkey tricks a cat into reaching into a fireplace to pull out some roasting chestnuts. The monkey got the chestnuts, but the cat got burned.

**Catty remarks** - *Comments made by a woman, usually about another woman*

The phrase came about when a man named Heywood, in the middle 1500's wrote "A woman hath nine lives like a cat." Soon, a woman who gossiped about other women was said to be making "catty" remarks about them.

**Catwalk** - *A narrow walkway*

Termed as such because of a cat's ability to balance in very narrow places

**Cool cat / Hep cat** - *Someone who keeps up with the latest trends.*

The terms came about in the Roaring 20's, and their meaning hasn't changed.

**Copycat** - *A person who copies others*

Probably a reference to the way kittens learn by copying their mother's actions.

**Curiosity killed the cat** - *Be cautious when investigating situations.*

The saying originally was "care kills a cat," and began in the

16th century. "Care" was a warning that worry is bad for your health and can lead to an early grave; the phrase was a recognition that cats seem to be very cautious and careful.

Over time, the word "care" evolved into "curiosity."

**Enough to make a cat laugh** - *Something that is ridiculously silly.*

Cats don't laugh.

**Fat cat** *-A wealthy and privileged person*

Cats that are well-fed and cared for are seldom skinny; hence, a person living the good life is a fat cat.

**Glamour puss** - *A glamorous lady*

Probably derived from the ancient word "buss" which means "face,1' esp. the lips. Over time, the word began to be pronounced as "puss," associating it with the cat. A reference to the sleek pose of a cat

**Grinning like a cheshire cat** - *Displaying a silly grin* From the Lewis Carroll novel (written in 1865), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

**Hellcat** - *A bad-tempered woman*

Refers to the hissing and spitting of an angry feline

**I smell a rat** - *Thinking there* is *something hidden or concealed*

The allusion, according to Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,* is to a cat smelling a rat.

**It's raining cats and dogs** - *It's raining very hard*

The dog, an attendant of the storm king Odin, was a symbol of wind. Cats came to symbolize down-pouring rain, and dogs to symbolize strong gusts of wind. A very heavy storm, therefore, indicated that both cats and dogs were involved. Another explanation is that the phrase came about in early 17th­ century London, when cats hunted mice on the rooftops - during a rainstorm, the cats were washed off the roofs and fell on passersby.

**Let sleeping cats lie** - *Leave things as they are*

A French proverb

... **like herding cats** - *An effort that will likely be futile or at least very, very difficult to accomplish.*

**Looking like a cat that swallowed a canary** *-Displaying a self-satisfied grin*

**Look what the cat dragged in** *-A slightly derogatory comment on someone's arrival*

Origin unknown, but an obvious reference to cats' tendency to bring home its prey, tattered and torn after "playing" with it for a while.

**Make the fur fly** - *Start* a *fight*

Possibly a reference to the nursery rhyme The Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat; certainly a reference to a cat and dog fighting

**Playing cat and mouse** - *Playing a game of strategy and stealth*

**Pussyfooting around** - *To tread or move warily or stealthily or to refrain from committing oneself*

This phrase started out as a comment that cats are stealthy and somewhat sneaky when hunting.

**Put the cat among the pigeons** *-A British term which means to cause an enormous fight or flap, usually by revealing* a *controversial fact or secret.*

When Britain governed India, a popular past time was to put a wild cat in a pen with pigeons - bets were then taken to see how many birds the cat would bring down with one paw-swipe.

**Rub someone's fur the wrong way** - *To irritate or upset someone*

Reference to the annoyance a cat displays if his fur is stroked backwards.

**Scaredy-cat / Fraidy cat** - *A person who won't act on a dare, or who is afraid to try something new.*

The phrase was coined in recognition of a cat's trait of not standing up against a dog many times its size.

**See which way the cat jumps** - *Wait and see what happens* A cruel sport in the olden days was to place a cat in a tree as a target; the "sportsman" would wait to see which way the cat jumped before pulling the trigger.

**Sitting in the cat bird seat** - *Being in an advantageous position*

Phrase coined by Red Barber (a sports announcer) by James

Thurber in his book, *The Catbird Seat*

**Sourpuss** - *Someone who* is *cranky*

Probably derived from the ancient word "buss" which means "face," esp. the lips. Over time, the word began to be pronounced as "puss," associating it with the cat.

**Tabby** *-A domestic cat with* a *striped and mottled coat*

The silks created by weavers in Baghdad, Iraq, were inspired by the varied colors and markings of cat coats. These fabrics

were called "tabby" by European traders.

**The cat may look at a king** - *An insolent remark of insubordination, meaning, "I am* as *good* as *you".*

An English proverb, or possibly originated from the nursery rhyme.

**The cat's out of the bag** - *To pass along a secret.*

In medieval England, piglets were sold in the open marketplace. The seller usually kept the pig in a bag, so it would be easier for the buyer to take it home. But shady sellers often tried to trick their buyers by putting a large cat in the bag. If a shrewd shopper looked in the bag - then the cat was literally out of the bag. (By the way, the bag was called a "poke," which is likely where the phrase "a pig in a poke," which nowadays means buying an unknown, came from.)

An additional interpretation was submitted by a reader:

In nautical lore, a cat-o-nine had to be made new for each flogging. The whip was made, then put into a bag and held while the charges were listed. Then, just before the flogging, the cat would be brought out of the bag. In this usage, the phrase "the cat's out of the bag" meant something akin to "punishment is about to begin" or "the belt's off."

**There's more than one way to skin a cat** - *There* is *more than one way to accomplish* a *task.*

The reference is to preparing a catfish (named as such because of its long whiskers) for cooking, which must be skinned because the skin is tough.

**There's not enough room to swing a cat** - *The room is very cramped and crowded.*

In the olden days, sailors were punished by being whipped

with a cat o'nine tails (see above). Below deck, there wasn't enough room to lash the whip, so the punishment was given on deck, where there was "enough room to swing the cat."

**To bell a cat** - *To do the impossible. It is easily suggested, but once suggested, no one will volunteer to do it.*

From Aesop's fable, *The Belling of the Cat*

**To get one's back up** - *Showing anger or annoyance*

The allusion is to a cat, which sets its back up when attacked by a dog or other animal.

**To live a cat and dog life** - *To always be arguing*

Phrase was coined by Carlysle in his book *Frederick the Great:* "There will be jealousies, and a cat-and-dog life over yonder worse than ever."

**Tomcat** *-A male who enjoys the favors of many women.*

The expression comes from a book written in the mid-1700s in England called *The Life and Adventures of a Cat.* The "hero" of the book, a male cat who enjoyed the favors of many female cats, was named Tom.

**When the cat's away, the mice will play** - *Without supervision, people misbehave.*