

## Metaphor: parts of the body

Some of the first words that you learn in English are the parts of the body: *hand, head, eye, heart*, and so on. In sentence **a** and **b**, the word *hand* is used with its literal meaning, the part of your body that you use for holding things:

- a** *He was holding a mug of coffee in his left **hand**.*
- b** *Mrs Bennet put her **hands** over her ears to shut out the noise.*

But now take a look at the following sentences:

- c** *Would you like a **hand** with the cleaning up?*
- d** *He scored a goal, and had a **hand** in two other goals.*

In these sentences, *hand* is used metaphorically to talk about helping someone with something (**c**), or taking part in making something happen (**d**). In sentence **c**, the speaker is offering to help with the cleaning. In sentence **d**, the meaning is that the player had a part in the two goals, as well as scoring one of his own. We use our hands to do things, so to help someone is to **give** them a **hand**, and to take part in something is to **have a hand in** it.

### ► Activity 1

Decide whether the following sentences use literal (L) or metaphorical (M) meanings of the word *hand*, and tick the correct box. If you need help, look up the word *hand* in your dictionary.

- |   | L                        | M                                   |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>a</b> Can you <b>give</b> me a <b>hand</b> with these boxes?                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>b</b> To her total surprise the ball was pulled <b>out of</b> her <b>hands</b> .                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| <b>c</b> He had his <b>hands full</b> of pieces of cardboard, balls of string and tape.               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| <b>d</b> It won't be long before she catches a cold, and then I'll really have my <b>hands full</b> . | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| <b>e</b> I knew that the dog was <b>in safe hands</b> with my parents.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| <b>f</b> 'It's <b>out of</b> my <b>hands</b> ,' said McRae. 'I've done what I'm paid to do.'          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

### ► Activity 2

Most English words have more than one meaning, and these other meanings are often connected to the main meaning in metaphorical ways. Here are definitions for some metaphorical meanings involving parts of the body. Match a word from the box to each definition. Check your answers in the dictionary.

face foot ~~head~~ heart (x2) to eye to face to head (x2)

- a** the leader or most important person in a group head
- b** the way that something appears to people \_\_\_\_\_
- c** your feelings when they are considered as part of your character \_\_\_\_\_
- d** the central part of something \_\_\_\_\_
- e** the bottom or far end of something \_\_\_\_\_
- f** to be in control of a group or an organization \_\_\_\_\_
- g** to look at someone or something carefully \_\_\_\_\_
- h** to be first on a list, or first in a line of people \_\_\_\_\_
- i** to talk to someone when this is difficult or embarrassing \_\_\_\_\_

► **Activity 3**

Read the definitions for these metaphorical expressions based on parts of the body. Fill in the gaps in the sentences.

- a** an **eye** for something: a natural ability for seeing or noticing something
- b** go **hand in hand**: to happen or exist together
- c** off your **hands**: if something is off your hands, you are no longer responsible for it
- d** go over someone's **head**: if an idea or joke goes over someone's head, they cannot understand it
- e** keep your **head** down: to try not to be noticed by anyone, when there is trouble around you
- f** wash your **hands** of: to say or show that you do not want to be involved with something
- g** keep your **head** above water: to manage to live even though you are not earning much money

- 1** If Rose wants to behave like an irresponsible teenager, that's her affair. I've decided to wash my hand of her.
- 2** He doesn't understand. It's all \_\_\_\_\_ his \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3** I earn enough to \_\_\_\_\_ my \_\_\_\_\_ and to pay my way in life.
- 4** I have got to \_\_\_\_\_ my \_\_\_\_\_ and play it as it comes.
- 5** His feelings of guilt \_\_\_\_\_ with a genuine concern for his boss.
- 6** My friend is a very economical shopper with a keen \_\_\_\_\_ a bargain.
- 7** I'll never forget how she took so much \_\_\_\_\_ my \_\_\_\_\_ when I just couldn't cope.

► **Extension activity 1**

Think of some names for body parts in your own language and answer these questions.

**a** Do any of them have metaphorical meanings?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**b** Are these the same as the metaphorical uses in English that we looked at in Activities 1, 2 and 3, or different?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

► **Extension activity 2**

Many other areas of English are rich in metaphor. Words associated with weather and the climate have many metaphorical meanings associated with them. For example, *warm*, *cold*, *icy* and *stormy* all have metaphorical as well as literal meanings.

Write down some more 'weather' words in English, and see if you can find out what their metaphorical associations are.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_