YOU’RE PULLING MY LEG!
By Donna Latham

Synopsis: Jewel, Gramps, and Gram prepare with great excitement as they await the arrival of Rosa, Gram's cousin from Italy. Gramps and Jewel hang a banner, Gram picks beautiful flowers from her garden, and even Addie the dog plans a special greeting. She attempts to get Roscoe, the reticent parrot, to say, "Hello." As usual, Roscoe prefers to keep silent, prompting Addie to comment, "Cat's got his tongue!" When the usually buoyant Bill arrives home, looking green around the gills and down in the dumps, he relates his embarrassing experiences in giving what he believes is a poor performance during an audition for the school play. "I laid an egg!" Bill claims, as his supportive family soothes him. Soon, Rosa arrives and the family joyously greets her. Gram and Rosa prepare panini in the kitchen, while the others continue their discussion in the living room. By employing a series of idiomatic expressions, including "heart of gold," "light up the room," "grab the bull by the horn," "hold your horses," and "hit the books," the family manages to thoroughly befuddle Rosa, who interprets the idioms literally. Fortunately, the ever-helpful Jewel leads the family in explaining the use and meanings of idioms. Rosa demonstrates that she has grasped the concept when Roscoe bids Gramps and Bill farewell. Roscoe calls, "Ciao!" and Rosa responds with, "You're pulling my leg!"

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3 MEN, 4 WOMEN, FLEXIBLE)

JEWEL (F)........................a vibrant, inquisitive, and studious student
GRAM (F).........................her kind, gentle, and nurturing grandmother
GRAMPS (M)...................her courtly, proper grandfather, a retired British brigadier general
BILL (M) .......................her up-for-anything younger brother
ADDIE (M/F)....................their lovable lug of a talking dog
ROSCOE (M/F)...............their pet parrot
ROSA (F)......................Gram’s cousin, who is visiting from Italy
The Stratford Family
A tightly knit intergenerational family, the Stratfords are an energetic, verbally adept bunch. The family dynamic is chatty, nurturing, and supportive; together, they tackle problems that arise in their ongoing adventures with the English language. As Gramps says, "English is quite a sticky wicket of a language to master!"

Gramps is a retired British brigadier general, devoted to his bride, Gram, a kind, nurturing soul. Gramps is a lover of history and literature, while Gram enjoys tending to her garden and whipping up new recipes in the kitchen. A still-vigorous pair, Gramps and Gram remain young at heart with the presence of their grandchildren. Jewel, an industrious teenager, is a multi-talented multi-tasker! She aspires to be the next J.K. Rowling and is currently writing a whodunit. Bill, her spontaneous younger brother, is up for anything! Thoroughly living in the moment, he is not actively planning for the future, as Jewel is. In fact, he is consumed these days with teaching Roscoe, the world's most bashful parrot, to talk. Add a lovable, loyal talking dog, Addie, to the mix and the family is complete!

SETTING
The play uses a fixed set, with a cozy kitchen and an adjoining living room area. At left, is the kitchen, with a table and - - in this play - - five chairs. The table is set for five people. The kitchen includes a stove, sink, and several cabinets. A light switch is visible. At right, is a living room area, with a sofa, coffee table, and wing chair; an oversized cushion is on the floor. A comforter is folded over the back of the sofa. Jewel's schoolbooks and papers are on the coffee table. Windows appear at opposite sides of the stage; curtains hang from rods. In You're Pulling My Leg! Roscoe is housed in a birdcage in the living room area but may appear off stage in other plays. Addie's dog bed is currently in the living room but may appear elsewhere in other plays.

Staging Suggestions:
As You're Pulling My Leg opens, Jewel and Gramps are very carefully arranging a welcome banner as Addie watches in approval. Gram enters with flowers. A sense of high-spirited excitement pervades the environment; this
mood is in sharp contrast to the gloomy entrance of Bill, to come. By the
time Rosa enters, the same level of high spirits is restored. For the portion of
the play in which Rosa and Gram work in the kitchen and Rosa overhears the
other characters speaking, Rosa should be portrayed as growing
progressively more confused. She will run a gamut of reactions from
helpfulness to outright horror, and the sight gags should be played for
maximum comic effect. Since many of the gags are related to the items being
used for food preparation, actors should ensure that, as they use the items,
they are clearly displayed for the audience. In addition, the actors should
work to time their facial expressions and head movements when Roscoe
says, "Ciao." Actors should strive to move their heads in unison toward the
birdcage. In this play, Roscoe is most effectively played by a prop bird,
while an off stage actor voices his lines. You may wish to have one of the
actors, perhaps Rosa or Addie, hold Roscoe for the curtain call.

PROPS

Large banner reading "Welcome, Rosa"
Stuffed bear
Flowers, including roses
Vase
Five place settings, including plates, glasses, silverware, and napkins
Teakettle
Birdcage
Bird
Suitcase
Necklace with oversized gold heart
Dog bowl
Cake on a platter
Comforter
Frying pan
Platter of panini sandwiches
Bowl of bean salad
Jar of mustard
Italian-English dictionaries
Schoolbooks and papers
Telephone
**AT RISE:**

JEWEL and GRAMPS bustle around their cozy kitchen in which a table is set for five people. Together, they hang a banner reading "Welcome, Rosa!" JEWEL adjusts the banner so it hangs just so. ADDIE, playing with a stuffed bear, thumps her tail in approval.

GRAMPS: (Steps back to admire the banner, holds his hands together in a "frame," and peers through them.) Pat yourself on the back, Jewel! It's utterly perfect.

JEWEL: (Sighing.) Wow, Gramps, after hearing about Rosa my entire life, I'm finally going to meet her!

GRAMPS: Delightful, isn't it? Her cab should arrive momentarily.

GRAM: (Enters with an armful of fresh-cut flowers, including roses.) Jewel, I haven't seen my cousin in years. I miss her dreadfully.

GRAMPS: You and Rosa are cut from the same cloth. Two peas in a pod, by jumbo.

JEWEL: How sweet you are to arrange Rosa's visit.

GRAMPS: I'd bend over backwards for your grandmother.

GRAM: Rosa was a precious part of my youth! Her family visited from Amalfi every summer . . . oh, we girls rustled up plenty of mischief. Heavens, I seem to be chattering my head off.

JEWEL: These flowers are to die for. (Removes a vase from a cabinet; arranges flowers with GRAM.)

GRAMPS: Allow me to put the teakettle on, fair ladies. I'm sure Rosa would appreciate a cuppa'.

GRAM: (To GRAMPS, as she points to the arrangement.) Good?

GRAMPS: Splendid! You have a green thumb - - oops! (Drops the teakettle's lid.) I, in contrast, am all thumbs!

GRAM: (Pacing.) Oh, I'm all a-twitter!

ADDIE: (Pacing behind GRAM.) That's two of us! What else can I do to welcome Rosa? I've already perfected my happy dance. (Does a few steps; thinks.) Aha, I'll get Roscoe to finally say "hello." I've been after him 24-7, but he's the world's most bashful parrot. (Bounds to a birdcage in the living room area, opposite.) Hello, hello! C'mon, Roscoe.

ALL: (Coaxing ROSCOE.) Hello, hello. (Getting no reaction, all shrug in resignation.)
GRAM: Rosa will love you, Jewel. And wait 'til she meets Bill, with his radiant smile and infectious cheerfulness.

ADDIE yips and dashes to the front door as it opens.

ADDIE: Bill! Where've you been, buddy? I've been itching for you to take me for a walk!

BILL, dejected, drags into the room; his shoulders slump, his head hangs, and he wears a grim expression.

JEWEL: Look what the cat dragged in! You're green around the gills.
GRAM: You're certainly down in the dumps. Where's my sunshine?
BILL: (Plops into a chair and rests his head on the table.) Arggh!

GRAM stares at JEWEL questioningly over BILL's head. JEWEL raises her shoulders as if to indicate, "I don't know" and turns to ADDIE. ADDIE shakes her head and looks at GRAMPS.

GRAMPS: (Sits beside BILL.) What is it, old chap?
JEWEL: Spill your guts, bro.
BILL: (Head up.) Well, I, I guess I . . .
ADDIE: No beating around the bush! You can tell us. (Gives him her stuffed bear for comfort.)
BILL: Well, I wasn't planning on it, but I decided at the last minute to audition for the school play.
GRAMPS: Bravo!
GRAM: Good for you, dear.
BILL: It was a disaster! I must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed; I was a little grouchy all day. But I put my best foot forward and tried out anyway.
JEWEL: I know you don't like to toot your own horn, but that was really brave!
BILL: I had to do a cold reading from the script. At first, I walked onstage, cool as a cucumber. (Rises to re-enact his experience; saunters confidently.) Then, I peeked at the other kids waiting to try out. (Squints as if under bright lights and peers out; becomes
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goggle-eyed in terror.) Everyone's eyes were glued on me! I nearly got cold feet.

ADDIE: *(Rubbing paws together.)* Brrr, nobody likes cold feet! What happened then?

BILL: My heart was in my throat while I did a scene with Nick Longo. He ran rings around me! I laid an egg, but Nick was *(Imitating GRAMPS' British accent.)* spot on, as Gramps would say.

JEWEL: *(Soothingly.)* Maybe you’re being too hard on yourself . . .

BILL: Naw, Mrs. Poplachevski laughed at every one of Nick's lines and never even cracked a smile at mine.

JEWEL: Oh, don't worry about Mrs. Poplachevski. Her bark's worse than her bite.

ADDIE: *(Shivering.)* Oooh, I had a teacher like that in obedience school. *(Everyone laughs; BILL cracks a smile and tosses the bear; ADDIE bolts after it.)*

BILL: *(Moaning.)* I can never show my face again. The cast list goes up later, and I know one name that won't be on it -- mine!

GRAM: *(Arm around BILL's shoulder.)* I'm sure it seems unbearable, but there are probably other kids in the same boat.

GRAMPS: I recognize that you're in a pickle, Bill, but do try to cut yourself some slack. You attempted your best . . .

JEWEL: . . . and that's all anyone can do.

The doorbell rings. GRAM hurries to the door and throws it open.

GRAM: Rosa!

ROSA, wearing a necklace with an oversized gold heart, steps inside and puts down a suitcase.

ROSA: *(Embracing GRAM.)* Ciao!

ADDIE: Chow? *(Seizes her bowl and drops it at ROSA's feet.)* Oh, yeah! Pasta, please!

GRAM: *(Chuckling.)* Oh, Addie! Not CHOW *(Mimes eating.)* - - ciao. It's an Italian word meaning both "hello" and "good-bye."

ADDIE: *(Embarrassed.)* Is my face red!
GRAM: (Takes ROSA's arm.) Do come in, dear, and meet my grandchildren. I'd like to introduce Jewel and Bill. Of course, you know my husband.

ROSA: (Greeting everyone.) How do you do?

GRAMPS: Your English is impeccable, my dear.

ROSA: Grazie, I am still learning. You will help me practice, sì?

GRAM: Please, sit and relax, while I prepare tea and sandwiches. You must be famished from your long flight.

ROSA: Let me help. We will make panini!

As the women work together in the kitchen, GRAMPS, BILL, and JEWEL continue their conversation on a sofa, which has a comforter folded over the back. ADDIE sits at their feet. ROSA reacts to their conversation with a series of sight gags.

JEWEL: Bill, I know you feel terrible now, but hang on; things will look brighter tomorrow.

BILL: You have a heart of gold!

ROSA: (Showing her necklace.) Sì!

GRAMPS: You'll light up the room, as ever.

ROSA flips light switch.

ADDIE: Hey, Bill, wanna help? I've almost taught Roscoe to say "hello."

BILL: I've been trying for weeks! I thought it would be a piece of cake to teach him, (GRAM hands ROSA a platter with a cake, which ROSA admires.) but he just gives me the cold shoulder. (ROSA crosses to BILL, unfolds the comforter, and arranges it across his shoulders. He smiles in thanks; ROSA returns to the kitchen.)

ADDIE: (Indignantly.) Give me a break! Some parrot!

JEWEL: Don't blow your top, girl. Roscoe is sure to say "hello" in his own good time.

GRAM hands an oversized frying pan to ROSA.
BILL: I might as well jump out of the frying pan and into the fire. (ROSA looks alarmed and holds the frying pan protectively.) Addie, let's grab the bull by the horns and teach the little guy to talk.

JEWEL: (Applauding.) You go! Don't let that audition get your goat!

BILL exits.

ADDIE: (Chases after him.) Hold your horses! I'll show Roscoe what a real bag of wind sounds like! I've been yammering for years.

ROSA: (Confused.) Mi scusi, you have more animals? Bulls and goats and horses?

GRAM: (Confused in response.) Pardon me, dear? (Places a platter of panini on the table; JEWEL crosses to the kitchen, picks up a bowl of bean salad and a jar of mustard, and places them on the table.)

ROSA: I fear my English is not so good, after all.

ROSA crosses to her suitcase and removes Italian-English dictionaries; she takes them to the table, where everyone, including BILL, has gathered. All begin eating.

JEWEL: Your English is fabulous! Will you help me learn Italian? I can hit the books all day, but when a native speaker walks me through a lesson, it makes all the difference. It becomes a bed of roses!

ROSA: (Moves books out of reach.) Bella donna, don't! You'll hurt your hand. (JEWEL is confused; ROSA admires the vase of flowers.) But such lovely roses!

GRAMPS: Yes, my wife truly possesses a true green thumb. (ROSA lifts GRAM's hand, and looks at it, baffled. GRAM warmly squeezes ROSA's hand in response.)

JEWEL: I was so excited about Rosa's visit that I had butterflies in my stomach all day! (ROSA is horrified.)

GRAMPS: Rosa, you must regale us tonight with tales about your trek to the ruins of Pompeii. (ROSA nods.)

GRAM: Another panini, Bill?
BILL: You have eyes in the back of your head! How did you know I was finished? (GRAM passes the platter; ROSA surreptitiously studies the back of GRAM's head.)

GRAM: Jewel?

JEWEL: No, thanks. My eyes were bigger than my stomach! (Trying not to be rude, ROSA surreptitiously glances from JEWEL's eyes to her stomach.)

GRAM: (Teasing.) Rosa, it costs an arm and a leg to feed these kids!

JEWEL: (Teasing back.) Sorry, Gram, your complaint just doesn't cut the mustard! (ROSA brandishes the mustard questioningly.) No, thanks. I hope you'll excuse me. I'll be in major hot water if I don't make tracks on my homework.

GRAM: Go right ahead, dear.

JEWEL: I'll shake a leg, or I'll have to face the music. (Clears her place and begins to gather her books and papers)

ROSA: (Shaking her leg.) We're dancing now?

ADDIE: Dance? Did you say dance? (Does her happy dance.)

GRAMPS: Well, we can dance if you like . . . (Trails off as the phone rings; he answers it.) Hello? One moment, please. Bill, it's for you.

BILL: (Takes phone.) Hello! Hey, Nick. (Listens in disbelief.) Get outta town! (JEWEL stops gathering books and watches BILL.) Come clean, are you pulling my leg? 'Cuz I'm falling for it hook, line, and sinker. (Listens.) Great! See ya!

BILL hangs up, grins enormously, and does a happy dance; ADDIE joins him.

JEWEL: What's up?

ROSA looks quizzically upwards around the stage.

ADDIE: Spill the beans.

ROSA grabs the bean salad and moves it from harm's way.

BILL: The cat's out of the bag!

ROSA: (Glancing under table.) You have a cat, too?
ADDIE: Not on my watch!
BILL: Mrs. Poplachevski posted the cast list - - and I got a part.
JEWEL: Yahoo!
BILL: *(Shaking head.)* I just can't believe it. I've been sitting here with egg on my face all evening.
ROSA: No, no! You have no egg on your face!
JEWEL: Oh, Rosa, I think we have been confusing you with our idioms. "Egg on my face" is an idiom.
ROSA: Idiom?
GRAMPS: Ah, yes, as I always say, English is a sticky wicket of a language to master! One reason is that it is positively resplendent with idioms.
ROSA: Come?
GRAMPS: Idioms are vivid expressions whose individual words are not meant to be taken literally. Word-by-word, idioms may seem peculiar . . .
JEWEL: . . . Yet, they are truly colorful ways of saying things. You can paint memorable pictures in your mind when you listen to someone speak idiomatically.
ROSA: Examples, please?
GRAMPS: My pleasure! Bill was down in the dumps earlier; the dear boy was depressed.
BILL: Yep, I got up on the wrong side of the bed, which means I wasn't feeling like myself.
ROSA: Mi scusi?
BILL: Oops, I'm using an idiom to explain an idiom!
GRAMPS: Sticky wicket! We're opening a can of worms here.
ROSA: *(Horrified and jumping back.)* Aii!
GRAM: Now, dear, that means we're tackling a difficult subject.
BILL: I nearly got cold feet at an audition. It doesn't mean that my feet got cold; it means I almost changed my mind and ran off.
GRAM: However, he put his best foot forward - - he went ahead and tried his hardest.
BILL: Well, I laid an egg! *(ROSA is horrified; BILL chuckles)* I didn't actually lay an egg; it means I totally failed. I felt like I had egg on my face - - embarrassed in front of everyone.
JEWEL: Now, we can clean up those eggs and wish him, "Break a leg!"

ROSA: Oh!

JEWEL: That means good luck on stage.

ROSA: And all those animals you mentioned?

ADDIE: "Hold your horses" means to wait.

GRAM: "Get your goat" is to let something upset you.

GRAMPS: "Grab the bull by the horns" means to confront the problem that's troubling you.

ROSA: Si, such a confusion over idioms!

BILL: Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to dash back to school and eyeball my name on the cast list.

GRAMPS: Allow me to escort you.

BILL AND GRAMPS: Bye!

ROSCEO: (Fluttering and rustling in the cage; off stage voice.)

   Awwwwwk, ciao!

All, stunned, remain still for a beat. Then, in unison, they turn their heads toward ROSCEO's cage.

ROSA: You're pulling my leg!

All laugh. CURTAIN.

THE END
MINI-LESSON: IDIOMS

Not sure what idioms are? Don’t lose your head! Let’s grab the bull by the horns. Learning about idioms is a piece of cake.

Definition:
A type of figurative language in which words are not used literally, idioms are vivid and commonly used expressions. Several words may be combined to make up an idiom. However, the idiom's intended meaning differs from the individual meanings of its words. For example, in the idiom The cat's out of the bag!, the references to cat and bag are not literal; no kitty has been released from a sack! Instead, the expression as a whole means, "The news has been revealed!"

Examples:
- Lenore broke the ice and introduced herself. (Meaning: Lenore was the first to speak.)
- Dad and I didn't see eye to eye about that situation. (Meaning: Dad and I didn’t agree.)
- She tried to pull the wool over my eyes with a fake. (Meaning: She tried to deceive me.)

Common Idioms and their Meanings:
- Cold shoulder: a frosty response; unfriendly
- Down in the dumps: feeling depressed
- Egg on my face: feeling embarrassed or looking foolish
- Face the music: deal with unpleasant consequences
- Have a cow: to get upset or angry
- Hit the nail on the head: get it precisely right
- In a pickle: in a mess or in trouble
- Pat on the back: to congratulate or praise
- Raining cats and dogs: raining very heavily
- Toot your own horn: to brag about yourself
MINI-TEST

Directions: Read each sentence from the play You're Pulling My Leg! Choose the answer that best states the meaning of the boldfaced idiom.

1. I, in contrast, am all thumbs!
   a. talented gardeners
   b. awkward and clumsy
   c. having only thumbs
   d. in need of a ride

2. You're green around the gills.
   a. skillfully swimming
   b. fish with greenish coloring
   c. looking ill or nauseated
   d. envious and jealous

3. Everyone's eyes were glued on me!
   a. were focused attentively
   b. were laughing
   c. were glaring
   d. were attached to a sleeve

4. You have a heart of gold!
   a. golden necklace
   b. great deal of money
   c. heart condition
   d. caring and kind personality

5. It costs an arm and a leg to feed these kids!
   a. hurts limbs
   b. is very tiring
   c. is extremely expensive
   d. requires lots of cooking
Answers:
1. b.
2. c.
3. a.
4. d.
5. c.

Activities:
- **Idiom Illustrations**: Choose an idiom from *You’re Pulling My Leg!* Create a wacky illustration that shows its literal meaning. Then, share your completed illustration with a partner. Have him or her guess the idiom shown. Next, work with your partner to discuss the intended meaning of the idiom. Finally, draw a new illustration to show what the idiom actually means.
- **Idiom Emporium**: Keep your eyes peeled for idioms in your reading. Be all ears for idioms you hear in daily life, on TV, or in movies. Make an Idiom Emporium at home or at school to write and display the idioms.

Read All About It:
*Scholastic Dictionary of Idioms*, by Marvin Terban. Scholastic Reference, 1998. In this delightful resource, Terban explores the origins and intended meanings of over 600 idiomatic expressions.