



IDIOTIC IDIOMS - 3

WHERE DOES THE SAYING "CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE" COME FROM?

THE MOST SURPRISING THING ABOUT "CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE" MAY BE THAT IT SEEMS TO BE A QUITE RECENT EXPRESSION. WHILE IT CERTAINLY SOUNDS AS IF IT MUST HAVE BEEN DREAMT UP BACK IN THE MIDDLE AGES, THE EARLIEST WRITTEN EXAMPLE LISTED IN THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY IS FROM 1911. ALSO, THERE IS SOME CONFUSION ABOUT ITS ORIGIN.

THE RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY SAYS IT IS FROM THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY AND WAS USED WHEN TALKING TO A CHILD WHO REFUSED TO ANSWER A PARENT'S QUESTIONS AFTER DOING SOMETHING BAD.

HOWEVER, OTHER SOURCES SUGGEST THAT IT COMES FROM THE ENGLISH SAILING SHIP DAYS, AND REFERS TO THE CAT OF NINE TAILS. (A WHIP) IF THE CAPTAIN OR OTHER OFFICER TOLD SOMEONE SOMETHING IN SECRECY, HE WOULD 'GET THE CAT' IF HE WAS TO TELL THE OTHERS. OF COURSE, IF THE OTHERS WANTED TO KNOW WHAT HAD BEEN SAID THEY WOULD SAY, "TELL US, OR ARE YOU AFRAID!!! ~ HAS THE CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE!!"