



American Expression E1495 Stink to high heaven

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

The phrase "stink to high heaven" is an idiomatic expression that vividly describes something as emitting a strong, unpleasant odor or having a foul and offensive quality. When an object, situation, or action "stinks to high heaven," it conveys a sense of extreme disgust or disapproval due to the overwhelming and offensive nature of the odor or the situation in question.

The origin of this idiom can be traced to the association between bad smells and negative emotions. Throughout history, strong and unpleasant odors have been linked to decay, pollution, and unsanitary conditions, all of which are typically viewed as undesirable or repugnant.

In its figurative sense, "stink to high heaven" extends beyond literal odors and is used to describe situations, behaviors, or actions that are morally or ethically offensive. This implies that the "stench" goes beyond a physical smell and represents a deep-seated wrongdoing or unethical behavior.

For instance, if someone discovers evidence of corruption, fraud, or dishonesty in a business or political context, they might say that the situation "stinks to high heaven." In this case, the idiom emphasizes not only the moral repugnance of the behavior but also the sense that it is so blatant and offensive that it cannot be easily ignored or dismissed.

"Stink to high heaven" can also be used to describe a situation that is extremely suspicious or fishy, suggesting that there may be underlying problems or wrongdoing that needs to be investigated further. This usage highlights the sense that something is not right and merits closer scrutiny.

In everyday conversations, this phrase can be employed to express strong disapproval or to emphasize the gravity of a situation. For example, if someone learns about a company's unethical business practices, they might declare that the company's actions "stink to high heaven" to convey their outrage and condemnation.

It's important to note that "stink to high heaven" is a strong expression that implies a high level of negativity and condemnation. It is often used when the situation or behavior under scrutiny is considered particularly egregious or morally reprehensible.

In summary, "stink to high heaven" is an idiomatic expression that conveys a strong sense of disapproval, disgust, or condemnation. Whether referring to a foul odor or a morally offensive situation, this phrase vividly captures the idea of something being so repugnant or problematic that it cannot be ignored or dismissed lightly. It serves as a colorful and impactful way to convey the intensity of one's negative feelings or concerns about a situation or behavior.

Questions for Discussion

1. Can you think of recent examples from the news or your own experiences where a situation or behavior truly "stank to high heaven"? What specific aspects or actions in these cases led to such a strong reaction?
2. In what ways can the use of the phrase "stink to high heaven" impact the perception of a situation or individual? How does the intensity of the expression influence the gravity and seriousness of the matter at hand?
3. Are there cultural or societal factors that influence the perception of what actions or behaviors "stink to high heaven"? How do different cultures or communities define and respond to moral or ethical wrongdoing?
4. Can "stinking to high heaven" be a subjective assessment, and if so, how can individuals and communities navigate differing opinions about what is morally offensive or ethically wrong? Are there universal standards for such judgments?
5. How can the use of strong language like "stink to high heaven" affect communication and discussions about sensitive or controversial topics? Are there situations where using such strong expressions is more appropriate or less advisable?