



American Expression E2187 Dog in the manger

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

The phrase "dog in the manger" originates from an ancient Greek fable attributed to the storyteller Aesop. In this fable, a dog lies in a manger filled with hay, preventing the oxen from eating. Despite the fact that the dog has no use for the hay, it selfishly guards the manger, denying access to the hungry oxen.

Metaphorically, the expression "dog in the manger" describes someone who selfishly withholds something that they themselves do not need or cannot use, simply to prevent others from benefiting from it. It conveys a sense of possessiveness, spitefulness, or jealousy, where an individual's actions serve to hinder or obstruct others, even if it brings no benefit to themselves.

The fable of the dog in the manger illustrates the concept of possessiveness and the irrationality of selfish behavior. The dog's actions are driven by a sense of territoriality rather than genuine need or utility. It chooses to deprive others of resources out of spite or jealousy, even though it gains nothing from doing so.

In everyday life, the expression "dog in the manger" is often used to describe individuals or entities that hoard resources or opportunities without utilizing them, solely to prevent others from accessing or benefiting from them. This behavior can manifest in various contexts, such as workplace dynamics, interpersonal relationships, or political disputes.

For example, imagine a coworker who refuses to share important information or resources with their colleagues, not because they need it themselves, but simply to maintain a sense of control or superiority. This behavior can create tension and resentment within the team, hindering collaboration and productivity.

Similarly, the concept of the "dog in the manger" can apply to larger-scale scenarios, such as governments or organizations that withhold resources or opportunities from marginalized communities out of fear or prejudice, rather than genuine necessity or efficiency. This kind of behavior perpetuates inequality and stifles progress, ultimately harming society as a whole.

The fable of the dog in the manger serves as a cautionary tale against selfishness and possessiveness, urging individuals to consider the greater good rather than acting solely in their own self-interest. It highlights the irrationality of hoarding resources or opportunities out of spite or jealousy, emphasizing the importance of generosity, empathy, and cooperation in fostering a harmonious and equitable society.

In conclusion, the expression "dog in the manger" derives from an ancient fable about a dog selfishly guarding a manger of hay, preventing oxen from eating even though it has no use for the food itself. Metaphorically, it describes individuals or entities that withhold resources or opportunities from others out of spite or jealousy, even though they themselves gain nothing from doing so. This behavior is irrational and harmful, perpetuating inequality and hindering progress. The fable serves as a reminder of the importance of generosity, empathy, and cooperation in building a more harmonious and equitable society.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever encountered a situation where someone exhibited "dog in the manger" behavior? How did this behavior impact the dynamics of the situation, and what were the consequences for those involved?
 2. In your opinion, what motivates individuals or entities to engage in "dog in the manger" behavior? Is it driven by insecurity, competitiveness, or a desire for control? How does the fear of losing something or someone factor into this behavior?
 3. Can you think of examples from history or current events where governments or organizations have acted as a "dog in the manger," withholding resources or opportunities from certain groups or communities? What were the underlying motivations behind these actions, and what were the broader implications for society?
 4. How can individuals or groups effectively address "dog in the manger" behavior when they encounter it in their personal or professional lives? What strategies can be employed to encourage cooperation, generosity, and empathy, even in the face of selfishness or possessiveness?
 5. Reflecting on the fable of the dog in the manger, what lessons can we draw from this story in terms of human behavior and societal dynamics? How can we apply these lessons to foster a more inclusive, equitable, and collaborative environment in our communities and institutions?
-