

PUT YOUR SHOULDER TO THE WHEEL • RAINING CATS AND DOGS
By Carole L. Cooney

The first idiom appeared in the 1600s. Imagine a wagon stuck in the mud. As the horse pulled, the driver would have to put his shoulder to one of the back wheels and push to get the wagon rolling again. Starting in the 1700s, the saying included any kind of hard labor necessary to accomplish a task.

The second idiom goes back to the 1700s in England. It is based on Norse mythology, in which dogs were associated with windy storms and cats were associated with rain. Today it means raining very heavily.

Setting: Out on the Western prairie

Characters:

Narrator

Clem

Roy

Little John

Sarah Sue

Elsie, school marm

Narrator: It was a cool day when the children of the Little Yellow Brick School were going on an outing to the flatlands. There they would find interesting rocks and plants, a snake and a lizard or two. Laughing and giggling, they jumped up onto the back of the hay wagon.

Elsie: All right now, children. We can have fun but remember this is still school.

All: Yes, Ma'am.

Narrator: The wagon driver started the wagon down the bumpy road as the children began to sing, "Old McDonald Had A Farm". Suddenly the sun broke through the clouds and the children cheered.

All: Hooray! The sun has come out! Hooray!

Clem: Ma'am, what are we going to see this morning?

Elsie: I'm not going to tell you until we get there. I want it to be a surprise.

Roy: Aw... please, Ma'am, tell us. I can hardly wait.

Sarah Sue: My brother said we would see snakes and spiders and things like that. I don't want to see those things. Is that true, Ma'am?

Elsie: Well, now. You're all just going to have to wait. It won't take but 5 minutes more.

Little John: I'm getting tired of sitting. I think I'll stand up a while.

Sarah Sue: Little brother, if you don't sit down I'll make you do it! You know we're not supposed to stand in the hay wagon while it's a-moving.

Little John: Aw... shucks! I can't do anything!

Narrator: Just then the sun disappeared and the clouds began to gather into large black balls. The wind grew strong and colder.

Clem: Wahoo! Look at those clouds! They look like they're ready to drop buckets of rain.

Roy: Ma'am, don't you think we should start heading back?

Little John: Hey! I just felt a rain drop on my face.

Narrator: Out of nowhere, the rain dropped heavily.

Elsie: My, oh, my! It's raining cats and dogs! Quick, get under the tarpaulin.

Narrator: The children rapidly spread the canvas over their heads. They started to laugh but stopped abruptly as the wagon came to a stand still. The wagon tilted to the left. Elsie knew what the problem was.

Elsie: Everyone stay quiet. Clem and Roy, come with me. You're going to put your shoulder to the wheel and get this wagon out of the mud.

Clem and Roy: Yes, Ma'am.

Narrator: The wagon driver gave the reins to Elsie while he helped the boys at the wheel. With a big heave-ho the wagon began to move. Little Joe and Sarah Sue let out a squeal of delight as they felt the movement. Just as suddenly as it came, the rain stopped. Of course the sun came out again!

Elsie: Now, children. I think we've had enough excitement for one day. We must return to the school house and put our shoulders to the wheel as we study for tomorrow's math test.

Little John: Do we have to?

Sarah Sue: Can't it wait until tomorrow?

Clem: We've been extra good today, haven't we?

Roy: What do you say, Ma'am?

Elsie: Well... since you've been so good and put your shoulder to the wheel of our wagon, I'll let you put your shoulder to the wheel for the math test *tomorrow*.

All: Hooray! Thank you, Ma'am!