



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

'Beating a Dead Horse' Is Pointless

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And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

On this program, we explore words and expressions in the English language. We give examples, notes on usage, and sometimes we even use them in short stories.

Today's idiom does not sound nice. In fact, it sounds quite **cruel**.

Today, we talk about beating a dead horse.

Why would anyone do something as pointless as beating a dead animal? Well, that is how we use the expression: to describe something that is a useless thing to do. You are just wasting your time. It is not productive. There is no point.

Merriam-Webster's online dictionary says this expression comes from the mid-19th century. Back then, some people may have beaten horses to make them go faster. At the time, this was often thought of as an acceptable practice.

But beating a dead horse would be pointless – because it's dead. No amount of beating will change that fact. We often use this expression in the **negative**. We say things like “I don't want to beat horse ...” or “Not to beat a dead horse...”

Now, if you are a horse lover and don't want to talk about beating one, please do not worry. We have many other expressions and idioms that have a similar meaning.

Let's say your friend talks about the same problem. They do not take your advice and they do not seem to want to accept any solution. If you don't want to say to them, “Now you're just beating a dead horse,” you can say, “Look, we've gone over the same ground and nothing has changed. So, can we please change the topic?”

When you go over the same ground, you talk about the same thing over and over again.

There is another expression with the word “ground” that means the same thing as “beat a dead horse.” If I have a problem and talk about it too much, I have run it into the ground. Running something into the ground means you have talked about to death. You have talked about it ad nauseam. This means you are making other people sick over it.

So, it is not a good idea to dwell on an old topic. Hearing about the same thing over and over again is tiring. Many people have lost good friends from belaboring a point or an issue.

And that is all the time we have for this Words and Their Stories.

But join us again! We explore so many expressions and idioms in this program. In fact, each week we teach new ones. Not to beat a dead horse, but we really are a great resource for learning English.

Until next time ... I'm Anna Matteo.

Anna Matteo wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

cruel – *adj.* ready to hurt others : without humane feelings

negative – *adj.* showing the opposite of something else

ad nauseam – *adv.* to a sickening or excessive degree

dwell on – *phrasal v.* to think or talk about (something) for a long time

belabor – *v.* to explain or insist on excessively

We want to hear from you. Do you have a similar expressions in your language? In the Comments section, you can also practice using any of the expressions from the story.

We have a new comment system. Here is how it works:

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