

Idiom by Lon Yan

雞飛狗走

ji1 fei1 gou3 zou3

The worst nightmare happened at a zoo in Germany – a bear broke out of its cage.

Visitors ran for their lives. Some took refuge in a monkey cage. Angry monkeys can be dangerous too, but they probably won't kill you. A fully-grown bear most likely would.

The incident ended with no casualty on the human side. But Taps the Bear paid the ultimate price for a few moments of freedom. It was shot dead by a zookeeper.

One might describe the chaotic scene as visitors scurrying for cover with the idiom “雞飛狗走” (*ji1 fei1 gou3 zou3*). “雞” (*ji1*) is “a chicken,” “飛” (*fei1*) “to fly,” “狗” (*gou3*) “a dog” and “走” (*zou3*) “to walk,” “to run.” Literally, “雞飛狗走” (*ji1 fei1 gou3 zou3*) is “chickens fly, dogs run.”

When a wolf burst into a farm, all the

domesticated animals would be frightened. Chickens will run, wings flapping, and dogs would scamper. “雞飛狗走” (*ji1 fei1 gou3 zou3*) depicts such a scene. So figuratively, “雞飛狗走” (*ji1 fei1 gou3 zou3*) means “everyone is running away,” “in turmoil.”

A situation of “雞飛狗走” (*ji1 fei1 gou3 zou3*) does not necessarily involve chickens and dogs. In fact, the idiom is used most often to describe people's behavior.

But it is generally not appropriate to use it in a serious situation, such as people running from real danger, like a bomb or a gun-toting assailant, as it would be considered flippant. The idiom should also not be used in the zoo incident had it resulted in death or injury of people.

Terms containing the character “雞” (*ji1*) include:

雞蛋 (*ji1 dan4*) – egg

雞毛 (*ji1 mao2*) – chicken feather

雞毛掃 (*ji1 mao2 sao3*) – feather duster

雞尾酒 (*ji1 wei3 jiu3*) – a cocktail