

Idiom by Lon Yan

慘不忍睹

can3 bu4 ren3 du3

A disgruntled shareholder of a zoo in Jiangsu province hired men to throw a donkey into a tiger enclosure after trying in vain to take the animal away for selling. Zoo visitors watched in horror as two big cats toyed with the poor donkey, tortured it for half an hour before killing it.

The horrifying scene was captured on video and sparked an outcry to stop cruelty to animals and to shut down the zoo. A netizen said seeing the animal suffered 30 minutes of torture “really hurts me.” This is what is called “慘不忍睹” (*can3 bu4 ren3 du3*).

“慘” (*can3*) is “tragic,” “pathetic,” “wretched,” “miserable,” “不忍” (*bu4 ren3*) “cannot bear to,” “to have not the heart to,” and “睹” (*du3*) “to see,” “to observe,” “to notice.” Literally, “慘不

忍睹” (*can3 bu4 ren3 du3*) is “so tragic that one cannot bear to look at,” “spectacle too horrible to endure.”

The idiom means “too ghastly to look at,” “a tragic sight,” “appalling,” “scenes of devastation.”

The bloody aftermath of a terrorist attack is “慘不忍睹” (*can3 bu4 ren3 du3*), so is the devastation of natural disasters.

The idiom can be used to describe disastrous events big or small, public or personal. When you failed miserably in an examination, your report card is, of course, “慘不忍睹” (*can3 bu4 ren3 du3*). When a colleague is being chewed up by a mean boss, you can say the scene is also “慘不忍睹” (*can3 bu4 ren3 du3*)!

Terms containing the character “慘” (*can3*) include:

慘劇 (*can3 ju4*) – a tragic case; tragedy

悽慘 (*qi1 can3*) – tragic; heartbreaking; wretched

慘敗 (*can3 bai4*) – a crushing defeat; a debacle

慘死 (*can3 si3*) – to die a tragic death