"Adding feet to a drawing of a snake" – to ruin the effect of something by adding something superfluous.

Adding Feet to a Drawing of a Snake
An official in the ancient State of Chu gave a pot of wine to his men to celebrate the Spring Sacrifice ceremony. One of the men said: "We have only one pot of wine, and it's only enough for one. So, let's play for it. The first one to finish drawing a snake in the ground wins the pot of wine."
The others agreed and started drawing their snakes in the ground.
Then, there was a winner, or so he thought. He had finished his drawing and reached for the pot of wine.
But, when he saw that the others hadn't finished their drawings, he arrogantly said to them: "How slow you are! The way you're going, I can add feet to my snake and still win the pot of wine."
So, he did. He added feet to his snake. But before he could finish, another man grabbed the pot of wine and said: "What snake has feet? That's not a snake! So, I win!"
The moral of the story is that sometimes going too far can be as bad, or worse, than not going far enough.

Stuffing His Ears for the Purpose of Stealing a Bell
Once upon a time, a thief stole a bell and tried to carry it away on his back. But the bell was too big and heavy. So, he decided to break it into pieces with a hammer to make it easier to carry. When he hit the bell, it made a loud noise. Afraid that someone might hear him breaking the bell, and try to steal it from him, he decided to plug his ears. If he couldn't hear anything, nobody else could either. A decision as foolish as this is sometimes compared with burying one's head in the sand.

Three at Dawn and Four at Dusk
In the state of Song, there was a man who reared monkeys. He was very fond of monkeys and kept a large number of them. He had a strong bond with the monkeys; he understood them and they understood him. He loved his monkeys so much that he went as far as reducing the amount of food for his own family in order to satisfy the monkeys. There then came a time when his family didn't have enough to eat. He had no choice but to cut down on the monkeys' food. But he was afraid that the monkeys would not submit to him as a result. So, he decided to trick them into accepting less food. He asked them, "If I gave you three chestnuts in the morning and four in the evening, would that be enough?" The monkeys were furious and refused to accept his proposal. A short while later, he asked them, "If I gave you four chestnuts in the morning and three in the evening, would that be enough?"
This, the monkeys accepted and rolled around happily on the ground.

The fox borrows the tiger's ferocity
One day, a tiger caught a fox and was about to devour it. The quick-witted fox stopped the tiger, saying: "How dare you eat me? You should know that I was sent by the heavens to be the king of beasts. If you don't believe me, come with me and see for yourself that there is not animal that isn't afraid of me!" The tiger agreed.

The fox walked ahead of the tiger through the forest. All the animals that they passed - the rabbits, the deer and all the others - ran for cover upon seeing the fox and the tiger.

The tiger was amazed! The other animals really were afraid of the fox! In fact, the tiger thought that he, too, ought to be afraid of the fox and decided not to eat him after all.

**Huà lóng diǎn jīng**

*To bring a painted dragon to life by drawing in the pupils of its eyes*

During the Southern and Northern Dynasties Period (420-589), there was a Chinese painter called Zhang Sengyao. Once, he visited a temple and painted four dragons on the wall, but he gave none of them eyes. Onlookers thought this odd, and asked why he hadn't painted in the eyes. He answered: "Eyes are crucial for dragons. With the eyes painted in, the dragons would fly away." Nobody believed this, so Zhang Sengyao took up his brush and added eyes to two of the dragons. No sooner had he finished than the two dragons flew into the sky amid a thunderstorm. The two without eyes remained paintings on the wall.

This idiom is used to describe how, when painting, writing or speaking, the addition of just one or two key brushstrokes, sentences, words or phrases could enhance the content.

**Bá miáo zhù zhāng**

*Helping seedlings to grow by pulling them up*

There once was a farmer who lived during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD). He was a very impatient man. The anxious farmer measured the size his crops every day. One day, he found that his crops were growing much slower than expected, which upset him a great deal.

The farmer racked his brains trying to find ways to get quicker results. One day, he came up with a solution. He would physically pull the crops out of the ground, thereby making them taller. The farmer worked very hard and at day's end was exhausted but extremely proud of himself because his plan had produced the desired results.

When the farmer went home, he excitedly told his son of his "brilliant" idea. His son went to the fields only to discover that all of his crops had died.

**Duì niú tán qín**

*Fiddling while Rome burns*
Play the lute to a cow

In ancient times, there lived a musician named Gong Mingyi. He was a master of the Zheng, a plucked string instrument. Unfortunately, his rash behavior often led him astray.

One day, he saw a cow grazing in a field near his house. He was inspired by the scene and ran outside to play a tune for the cow. Gong Mingyi played beautifully, finding himself intoxicated by the music. But the cow paid no heed to the elegant sounds, simply focusing its attention on eating the grass. Gong Mingyi was surprised at this and could not comprehend the cow's flippant indifference. He felt that since his performance had been masterful, this means that the cow neither understood nor appreciated his elegant music!

From that story comes the idiom "To play the lute to a cow", which implies that someone speaks or writes without considering his audience. Generally speaking, it means the speaker or writer has over-estimated his listeners or readers. In these cases, the idiom mocks the audience rather than the speaker.

塞翁失马

The old frontiersman loses his horse

Once upon a time, there lived an old man on the northern frontiers of China. One day, his horse disappeared. His neighbors came to comfort him. But the old man was not at all upset. He said his loss might turn out to be a good thing. And he was right. A few months later, not only did his horse find its way back, it also brought with it another horse, one that was even better. His neighbors came around again, this time to congratulate him on his gain. But again, the old man viewed the situation differently, and said that this "good luck" might bring about misfortune in the end. Strangely, he was right again. A few days later, his son fell from the new horse and broke his leg. However, as a result of the accident, his lame son was not conscripted to fight in the war and remained with his family.

Nowadays, people refer to the idiom when comforting someone who has experienced ill fortune. However, although it does imply that bad luck can sometimes transform into good luck, the reverse is also true; good luck can sometimes give rise to bad.

守株待兔

Waiting for a Hare to Turn up

One day in ancient times, a peasant was working in his field. A hare dashed up, unfortunately knocked against a tree in the field and fell dead with its neck broken. Then the peasant put down his hoe and waited by the tree for another hare to turn up. No more hares appeared, however, but he became the laughing-stock of the land.