LITERARY CARDINALS

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Numbers are not just for counting!

The cardinal numbers (1, 2, 3, 4 and so on) are learnt fairly early on in life and, for the most part, seem to be used in a fairly mundane way by most people. There is nothing startling about such everyday items as "one man", "two dogs", "three cars", "four shops", "five trains", and so forth. This is what the cardinal numbers were originally meant for and this is, indeed, how most people use them.

The logologist, ever-aware of the flexibility of the English language, has discovered, though, that numbers have been put to a wide range of uses at different times and places by many different people, these uses not generally being recognized by devotees of the English language. For example, FIVE is a slang name for a Jew; THIRTEEN is a slang term used in shops, factories, etc. to indicate that the boss is around; TWENTY-THREE is a railway telegraph signal used for a message of the greatest urgency; FORTY-ONE is a pool game; and FORTY-NINE is something trite.

When we became aware of just how many different meanings that numbers could have, we set about collecting these meanings. In the list presented here, there is a meaning for each of the cardinal numbers from 0 to 50, with 37, 39, 43 and 47 being the only exceptions. Perhaps readers might be able to plug these four gaps; or maybe they would care to start work on the numbers 51 to 100, taking over where we left off. We do know for sure that many of the numbers in this range do have additional meanings. For example, SIXTY-SIX is a two-handed card game; SEVENTY-FOUR is a South African food fish; EIGHTY-SIX means nothing; and NINETY-FIVE is a lunch-counter customer who doesn't pay. Who will fill the gaps?

0: a place in Lauderdale County, Mississippi
1: the ultimate being
2: a two-dollar bill
3: a rugby three-quarter
4: the crew of a four-oared racing boat
5: a basketball team
6: arsphenamine
7: the rower behind the stroke in an eight-oared boat
8: an octosyllabic line of verse
9: a ba...
10: a m...
11: a fo...
12: a st...
13: an i...
14: a sq...
15: the...
16: a pl...
17: a cc...
18: the...
19: a sc...
20: a tw...
21: lim...
22: a ri...
23: the...
24: a da...
25: a vz...
26: a gi...
27: thre...
28: a W...
29: an i...
30: a m...
31: any...
32: a pi...
33: an o...
34: go i...
35: a gi...
36: a sp...
37: ...
38: a pi...
39: ...
40: a cu...
41: a sn...
42: a gi...
43: ...
44: a pi...
45: a m...
46: an i...
47: ...
48: a fl...
49: a lv...
50: the...

The numbers are defined in various dictionaries or in Webster's American Slang Dictionary, but none of them is Marketing.
9: a baseball team
10: a measure of coal, from 48 to 50 tons
11: a football team
12: a shilling
13: an English shilling
14: a special order
15: the first score in a game of tennis
16: a place in Meagher County, Montana
17: a corpse
18: the size of a piece of paper cut eighteen from a sheet
19: a score of zero in cribbage
20: a twenty-dollar bill
21: limeade
22: a rifle or pistol with a .22 caliber
23: the end
24: a day
25: a variety of spoil-five
26: a gambling game involving dice
27: three 9 cards
28: a West Australian parakeet
29: an article of clothing in the 29th size
30: a mark or sign of completion
31: any of various card games
32: a pistol with a .32 caliber
33: an order of ground beef steak
34: go away!
35: a gambling game for from two to five players
36: a spotlight with a 36-inch lens
37: limeade
38: a pistol with a .38 caliber
39: a crook
40: a small glass of milk
41: a game played with dominoes
42: a prostitute
43: a microgroove phonograph record
44: an auctioneer's signal
45: a flower pot of the third smallest size
46: a 17th-century name for a kind of liquor
47: the letter L