Words and Their Stories: Number Phrases

Now, the VOA Special English program WORDS AND THEIR STORIES.

Last week, I told about the number one. Today, I will tell about expressions using other numbers.

Some problems are difficult to solve. But there are a lot of number expressions that can help. For example, if we put **two and two together**, we might come up with the right answer. We know that **two heads are better than one**. It is always better to work with another person to solve a problem.

Sometimes **there are no two ways about it**. Some problems have only one solution. You cannot be **of two minds** over this.

But with any luck, we could solve the problem in **two shakes of a lamb's tail**. We could have our answers quickly and easily.

Sometimes we can **kill two birds with one stone.** That is, we can complete two goals with only one effort or action. But we must remember that **two wrongs don't make a right.** If someone does something bad to you, you should not do the same to him.

If you are going out with your girlfriend, or boyfriend, you do not want another friend to go along on your date. You can just say to your friend: **two's company, three's a crowd**.

When I was a young child in school, I had to learn **the three R's**. These important skills are reading, writing and arithmetic. These three words do not all start with the letter "R." But they have the sound of "R." My teachers used to **give three cheers** when I did well in math. They gave praise and approval for a job well done.

Some of my friends were confused and did not understand their schoolwork. They were **at sixes and sevens.** In fact, they did not care if they finished high school. They saw little difference between the two choices. **Six of one, half a dozen the other** – that was their position. But they were really happy when they completed their studies and graduated from high school. They were in **seventh heaven.** They were **on cloud nine**.

Nine times out of ten, students who do well in school find good jobs. Some work in an office doing the same things every day at **nine-to-five** jobs. You do not have to **dress to the nines,** or wear your best clothes, for this kind of work.

Last year, one of my friends applied for a better job at her office. I did not think she would get it. I thought she had **a hundred to one shot** at the job. Other people at her office thought her chances were **a million to one**. One reason was that she had been caught catching **forty winks** at the office. She slept at her desk for short periods during the day. But her supervisor appointed her to the new job at the **eleventh hour** -- at the very last minute.

I guess her **lucky number came up.**