



American Expression E1415 In the cards

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

The phrase "in the cards" is a common idiom used to suggest that something is likely or foreseeable. It implies that an event, outcome, or possibility is within the realm of possibility and has a reasonable chance of occurring based on the circumstances or current trajectory. This idiomatic expression draws its origins from the practice of reading playing cards, particularly in divination and fortune-telling.

The phrase "in the cards" is often used in a predictive or speculative context. It indicates that there are factors or indicators that make a particular scenario or outcome seem probable, even though it is not guaranteed. It conveys a sense of anticipation or expectation, suggesting that the odds are favorable for a specific event or development.

For example, if someone says, "It's in the cards for them to succeed in their new venture," they are expressing confidence that the circumstances, skills, and efforts involved make success likely, though not guaranteed. It acknowledges the existence of favorable conditions or signs that point toward a positive outcome.

Conversely, "not in the cards" or "out of the cards" implies that something is unlikely or improbable given the current circumstances. For instance, if someone says, "It's just not in the cards for me to become a professional musician," they are conveying a sense of resignation or acceptance that the necessary conditions or talents are not present to achieve that particular goal.

The origin of the phrase can be traced back to the practice of cartomancy, which is the art of divination or fortune-telling using playing cards. In this practice, individuals would use a deck of cards to gain insights into future events or to seek guidance. Certain cards were associated with specific meanings, and the way they were laid out and interpreted provided insight into a person's fate or potential future.

Over time, the concept of "the cards" came to symbolize the idea of fate, destiny, or the unfolding of events beyond one's control. Therefore, when someone uses the phrase "in the cards," they are drawing on this historical association, suggesting that the outcome in question is influenced by factors that are beyond immediate control but are nonetheless likely to occur based on current circumstances.

While "in the cards" is often used in a speculative or anticipatory manner, it is essential to recognize that it does not guarantee a specific outcome. Life is filled with uncertainty, and numerous unforeseen variables can affect the course of events. The phrase serves as a way to express probability or likelihood but should be understood within the context of unpredictability and the potential for unexpected twists and turns.

In summary, "in the cards" is an idiomatic expression used to convey the likelihood or foreseeability of a particular event or outcome based on current circumstances. It draws its origins from the practice of reading playing cards in divination and signifies that a particular scenario is within the realm of possibility, though not necessarily guaranteed. It underscores the idea that life is filled with both predictable and unpredictable elements, and the phrase is a way to acknowledge the former while recognizing the latter.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the phrase "in the cards" influence the way individuals perceive and anticipate future events, and what role does it play in shaping expectations and attitudes?
2. Can you share a personal experience where you believed that a particular outcome was "in the cards," and how did this belief affect your actions and decision-making leading up to that event?
3. In what situations do you think people are more likely to use the phrase "in the cards" to express confidence in a future outcome, and how can this expression impact their mindset and approach to challenges or opportunities?
4. How does the idea of events being "in the cards" relate to the concepts of fate, destiny, and free will, and how do individuals navigate these philosophical aspects when making decisions and setting goals?
5. Can you think of examples in literature, film, or popular culture where characters or narratives revolve around the notion that certain events or outcomes were "in the cards," and how did this concept shape the plot or character development in those stories?