



American Expression E1916 As nice as ninepence

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The idiom "as nice as ninepence" is an English expression that is used to describe someone who is exceptionally well-behaved, polite, neat, or meticulous in their appearance and conduct. This phrase is often used to praise individuals who exhibit good manners, tidiness, and a generally pleasant demeanor.

The origin of the idiom "as nice as ninepence" is not entirely clear, but it likely dates back to the 18th or 19th century. In this context, "nice" does not refer to something merely pleasant but instead conveys a sense of precision, orderliness, and correctness. The use of "ninepence" in the expression may refer to a sum of money that was considered valuable or significant during that period.

When someone is described as "as nice as ninepence," it implies that they are meticulous in their behavior and appearance. They pay careful attention to details, follow social etiquette, and present themselves in a neat and tidy manner. Such individuals are often seen as pleasant to be around, as their courteous and considerate demeanor contributes to a positive social atmosphere.

This idiom is typically used to commend individuals for their exemplary conduct and manners. For instance, if someone consistently shows kindness, consideration, and politeness to others, they might be described as "as nice as ninepence." Similarly, a well-groomed and impeccably dressed person who takes pride in their appearance may also receive this compliment.

Furthermore, "as nice as ninepence" can be applied to various aspects of life, such as a neatly organized and well-maintained living space, a tidy and well-kept garden, or even a meticulous attention to detail in one's work or craft. It underscores the value of orderliness, precision, and consideration for others.

In literary works and storytelling, characters who embody the qualities of being "as nice as ninepence" are often depicted as virtuous and likable. Their good manners and pleasant disposition contribute to the overall moral and social themes of the narrative, making them stand out as role models or admirable figures.

It's worth noting that, while the idiom is generally used positively, there can be instances where it may carry a slightly sarcastic tone if used in a context where someone's excessive attention to detail or meticulousness is perceived as overly rigid or fastidious.

In conclusion, "as nice as ninepence" is an idiomatic expression that praises individuals for their exceptional manners, tidiness, and considerate behavior. It signifies a high level of attention to detail and a commitment to presenting oneself and one's surroundings in an orderly and pleasant manner. This idiom reflects the value placed on courtesy and good conduct in society and is used to commend those who exemplify these qualities.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the idiom "as nice as ninepence" reflect societal values and expectations regarding manners, etiquette, and overall conduct, and how have these expectations evolved over time?
 2. Can you provide examples from literature or film where characters are portrayed as "as nice as ninepence," and how does their behavior contribute to the storyline or themes of the work?
 3. In what ways can being "as nice as ninepence" enhance interpersonal relationships and social interactions, and are there cultural variations in how politeness and courtesy are expressed?
 4. Are there situations or contexts where the phrase "as nice as ninepence" might carry a slightly sarcastic or critical undertone, and how can we navigate such nuances in communication?
 5. How does the concept of being "as nice as ninepence" intersect with the broader themes of personal values, ethics, and the pursuit of excellence in various aspects of life, such as work, appearance, and personal relationships?
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