

Sayings About Card Games

(Story word: language)

Whether you like to play cards or not, you will find that there are many sayings in our language that relate to card games. In poker people compete and bet on their “hands” (made up of a number of cards). Showing your hand to the opponent would be a big mistake. You will hear people say, “Let’s not show our hand just yet,” to express the idea of keeping some plans a secret.

In poker, people take turns betting, putting chips in the middle of the table which is called “the pot.” If a player thinks he has a weaker hand than his opponents, he may stop betting and “fold” (thus, giving up his claim to the pot). Sometimes players with weak hands will keep betting as if they have a fantastic hand in the hopes that all the other players will fold, letting them win the pot with a weak hand. This is called “bluffing,” and it sometimes works! If the other players suspect that an opponent is “just bluffing,”

they may keep betting and say, “I am going to call your bluff.”

As you might think, people use the phrase “bluffing” and “calling your bluff” in many contexts. For example, I might say, “Mike says he won’t go out to lunch unless we go to Taco Bell. Well, I am going to call his bluff.” This means that I think Mike will go for lunch even without picking the lunch spot. People also talk about folding when a person gives up in a sudden way: “Yesterday, Abigail seemed so intent on winning the contract, but today she just folded.”

At the end of the rounds of betting, it will be time for all players who have not folded to “lay their cards on the table” to see who has the best hand. A rude way to express this moment is “Put up or shut up.” This is the time when whoever has the best cards will win. People might say, “Let’s lay our cards on the table,” to indicate that the time for debating is over and that they want come to an agreement or settle a dispute.

Metaphors about games (and sports) may make discussing everyday things more fun. Speakers may be reminded of fun times they have had playing games while discussing more mundane subjects.