

# EVERYDAY LIFE

## SUPERSTITIONS

**Age:** Teen/Adult

**Level:** Pre-intermediate + (B1)

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Activity:** In this lesson, students will:

1. discuss and read about superstitions and their origins;
2. practise using first conditional sentences in the context of superstitions.

**Language focus:** First conditional, vocabulary related to superstitions

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student; one reading text per student; one copy of the Warmer handout if using option 1 of the warmer, or blank paper if using option 2.

## PROCEDURE

### Warmer

Both option 1 and 2 are designed to activate students' prior knowledge of the topic.

**Option 1:** Give students the Warmer handout with images on it. Students discuss the images together and decide what the theme of the lesson is. Answers might vary, but they will likely conclude that 'luck', or 'good/bad luck' is the theme. At this point, you can teach the word 'superstition' if it is unknown.

The Macmillan English dictionary definition of superstition: *a belief that things such as magic or luck have the power to affect your life.*

Once the theme of the lesson has been elicited/explained, ask the students to see if they can divide up the images into those which are lucky and those which are unlucky. (Be careful – some images represent both good and bad luck, depending on the country).

### Key:

*umbrella* – opening an umbrella inside a building is considered unlucky

*broken mirror* – unlucky

*rabbit* – lucky

*salt* – lucky

*mixed images photo* – the single magpie, black cat, broken mirror, walking across cracks in the pavement and walking under a ladder are all considered unlucky (though a black cat is also considered lucky in some countries, including the UK)

*Friday 13<sup>th</sup>* – unlucky

*knocking on wood* – lucky

*four-leafed clover* – lucky

*horse shoe* – depending on the country/culture, and which way up it is placed, this can be either lucky or unlucky

**Option 2:** Dictate the following words to students. Students write them in their notebook, or on blank paper provided.

*umbrella, rabbit, salt, black cat, mirror, thirteen, ladder, bird poo*

Clarify the meaning of any unknown words, and check spelling if necessary.

In pairs, ask students to see if they can divide the words into two categories. Don't say what the categories are (i.e. don't mention good or bad luck). They might come up with different, creative categories, or they might notice the topic of the lesson.

### Key (possible answers):

#### Good luck signs/symbols

*Rabbit* – saying rabbit on the first day of the month

*Bird poo* – being pooped on by a bird

*Salt* – throwing spilt salt over your shoulder

#### Bad luck signs/symbols

*Umbrella* – opening an umbrella indoors

*Black cat* – a black cat crossing your path (this is also good luck in some cultures)

*Mirror* – breaking a mirror is seven years bad luck

*Thirteen* – an unlucky number in some cultures

*Ladder* – walking under a ladder

After feeding back on the students categories, announce the correct answer / theme of the lesson: superstitions.

### Exercise 1

**Part a** is a prediction task. Tell students that they will read a text about superstitions and their origins ('how they started'). They should read the heading of each paragraph, but no further information. Then, they work with a partner to predict where each superstition comes from.

*Example:*

*'You get seven years bad luck if you smash a mirror.'*  
*Hmmm, maybe this comes from an old fairy tale.*

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## TEACHER'S NOTES

### Process language:

Maybe ...      Perhaps ...      It might come from ...  
I wonder if it comes from ...

**Part b** is a gist reading task. Students read the text and see if their predictions were correct.

In **Part c**, a detailed reading task, students complete the short comprehension exercise.

### Key:

Why were umbrellas so dangerous? *They were not designed well; parts would come loose and fire at people.*

According to Romans, what happened every seven years? *Your body was renewed.*

Does the writer believe in the 'broken mirror' superstition? Why/why not? *The author suggests that the superstition is silly by saying that 'you [could] just buy a new mirror'.*

How are the words 'four' and 'death' related in Chinese? *They sound similar.*

### Exercise 2

**Part a** is a review of the meaning and form of the first conditional. Tell students to look at the example sentence. Ask them if they have seen this sentence structure before – if so, elicit what they already know. Students complete the meaning and form activities.

### Key:

#### Meaning

We use the first conditional to talk about future events that are **possible**.

We use the first conditional to talk about future events that are **likely** to happen.

#### Form

If + **subject + present simple ...** , **subject + will/won't + infinitive (without to) ...**

### Pronunciation

Generally, the intonation rises on the 'if' clause when it comes first in the sentence. Intonation then falls on the 'result' clause.

If you smash a mirror ↑, you'll get seven years bad luck ↓.

**Part b** gives students the chance to practise using the first conditional. Students complete each first conditional sentence with their own ideas. They then use these phrases as a springboard for some creative dialogues. Instructions and examples are provided on the worksheet, or alternatively the teacher can model this activity with a student to the rest of the class.

### Exercise 3

There are three options for the follow-up task. You can choose which is the most appropriate for your learners. Alternatively, you can allow your learners to choose. For task 1, students could also choose one of the images from the warmer that hasn't yet been discussed.

## Origins of popular superstitions from around the world

We've all heard that certain numbers are unlucky, or that breaking a mirror brings bad luck. But have you ever wondered where these superstitions come from? Here's an interesting list of popular superstitions and their possible origins.



### 1. 'It's bad luck to open an umbrella inside'

This is a common superstition in the UK. Many experts believe that it became popular around 150 years ago. Back then, umbrellas weren't made very well, and they would sometimes break or suddenly pop open. Parts of the umbrella would even come loose and fire at people! This meant that it could be dangerous to open them inside – there was more chance that they would hit somebody and cause injuries.



### 2. 'If you smash a mirror, you'll get seven years bad luck'

The 'seven-years' superstition began in Roman times. Romans believed that our bodies renewed themselves every seven years. If you look into a broken mirror, your reflection will look bad, which means you are in bad health. Our life cycles mean that it will take seven years to return to good health. Unless, I guess, you just buy a new mirror ...

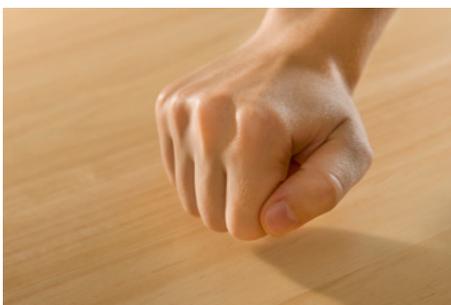


### 3. Unlucky number four

The number four is extremely unlucky in many Asian cultures. Why? Because the words for 'four' and 'death' in Cantonese sound similar. This means the belief is common in China, but also in Japan and Korea. Japanese and Korean languages include a number system which is based on Cantonese numbers, so the sounds are similar.

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Look at the pictures and guess: what's the theme of today's lesson?



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## SUPERSTITIONS

## WORKSHEET

### EXERCISE 1

a. You will read a text about superstitions and how they started.

Work with a partner. Read the paragraph headings from the text (below). Guess what you will read about each superstition and how it started.

- *'It's bad luck to open an umbrella inside'*
- *'If you smash a mirror, you'll get seven years bad luck'*
- *Unlucky number four*

#### Example and useful language:

*'You get seven years bad luck if you smash a mirror'. Hmmm, maybe this comes from an old fairy tale.*

*Maybe ...          Perhaps ...          It might come from ...          I wonder if it comes from ...*

b. Now read the text. Were your ideas correct?

c. Read the text again. Answer the questions.

1. Why were umbrellas so dangerous?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. According to Romans, what happened every seven years?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Does the writer believe in the 'broken mirror' superstition? Why / Why not?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. How are the words 'four' and 'death' related in Chinese?

\_\_\_\_\_

### EXERCISE 2

a. Read the example sentence from the text in the box below. Then choose the correct option to complete each statement about first conditional sentences.

**'If you smash a mirror, you'll get 7 years bad luck.'**

We use the first conditional to talk about future events that are **possible / impossible**.

We use the first conditional to talk about future events that are **likely / unlikely** to happen.

Look at the example sentence again. Complete the form of first conditional sentences.

If + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ..., subject + \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ...

Listen to your teacher say the example phrase. Mark the intonation used in each clause.

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b. Complete these sentences with your own ideas.

1. It's minus five degrees outside! If you don't wear a warmer jacket, \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Hurry up! If we don't leave soon, \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Watch out! If you walk under that ladder, \_\_\_\_\_.
4. That meat is really undercooked. If you eat it, \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Don't press that button! If you do, \_\_\_\_\_.
6. If I get time today, \_\_\_\_\_.

**Work with a partner. Discuss who might say each of the phrases above, and who are they speaking to. Then, use each phrase to start an imaginary conversation.**

*Example – a general conversation between two friends*

A: Watch out! If you walk under that ladder, you'll get bad luck.

B: Oh, come on! Don't be so superstitious!

A: It's true!

## EXERCISE 3

Choose one of the following tasks to complete.

### Task 1

Think of another superstition you know. Try and explain this using a first conditional sentence: *If you walk under a ladder, you'll get bad luck.*

Work with a partner. Try to predict where/how this superstition started. Then search online for the answer.

Report what you found out to the class.

### Task 2

Make a list of superstitions either from your own country or from another country. You may need to use the internet for research. Include one extra superstition that you have created.

Share your superstitions with a partner who is not from that country. See if they can guess which of the superstitions is not real.

### Task 3

Create your own superstition (using the first conditional). Create an imaginary story behind this superstition.

Share your ideas with the rest of the class. Then decide which student's superstition is the most believable.