

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 13th – 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.

EVERYDAY LIFE

SUPERSTITIONS

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.