

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 ...

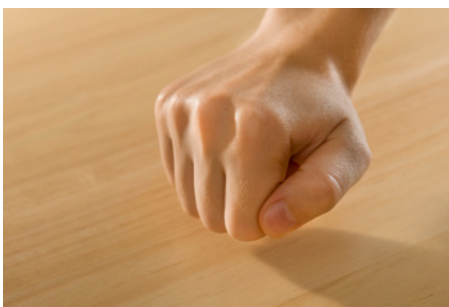


3. Unlucky number four

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.