

SUPERSTITIONS



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Introduction

What superstitions exist in your country?

Do you believe in any superstitions?

Where do superstitions come from?

Reading

Sarah's life is filled with so much concern and worry. Every day she has many things to think of and to check.

Why?

Because Sarah is obsessed with superstitions.

"I don't regard them as superstitions at all," she says. "I think they are real. If I don't pay attention to them, then I know something bad will happen."

We asked Sarah to give us an example.

"Well, take last week. It was Friday the 13th. I didn't leave the house that day. I stayed at home and just read a book. I didn't even turn on the news or answer the phone."

Isn't that a little extreme?

"I just have to be on the safe side," she said. "Better to be safe than sorry."

Okay, fair enough. Tell us about some other superstitions — sorry, precautions, you take.

"I have a rabbit's foot and every morning I wake up and stroke the rabbit's foot. I mean that's not so unusual. Everyone has a white rabbit's foot."

Everyone?

“Maybe not everyone. But if they did, they would find their life would be much better. A rabbit’s foot is lucky.”

Not for the rabbit... How about when you go outside?

“Oh, I have to be extra careful when I am outside,” she said.

“There were some workers fixing something in the street the other day. They were using a ladder. I saw people just walking under the ladder like it was no problem. I could not believe it.”

So you didn’t do that?

“No, of course not! I crossed the road to avoid it. A car had to screech to a stop when I went over the road —”

And that is lucky?

“And another thing... Our neighbour has the audacity to have a black cat. How can he be so inconsiderate? Every time I see that nasty cat I have to shoo it away in case it crosses my path. And I don’t like the way it looks at me either.”

This sounds like a full-time job. How did this all begin?

Sarah takes a deep breath.

“I think you can blame my mother for that,” she says. “When I was a child, she broke a mirror in our house. My grandmother was there, and she was very upset about it. She said: that’s seven

years' bad luck! And scolded my mum. My mum just brushed it off but from that day things have not been quite right.”

Sarah’s home is decorated tastefully but there are little signs of her superstitions. A horseshoe, a picture of a four-leaf clover, a large number 3 painted on the kitchen wall.

She also has her own little habits.

“I have a pinecone that my grandmother gave me as a child,” she says. “Every evening I hold it in both hands and look out the window and say No trouble today, no trouble tomorrow, three times.”

Does it work?

“So far so good,” says Sarah.

And how about your husband? Does he also believe in all of this?

“Oh, he left,” says Sarah, with a sad expression. “He’s gone back to his mother’s.”

Reading Comprehension Questions

Why is Sarah's life so hectic?

How does Sarah regard superstitions?

What are some of the superstitions that Sarah talks about?

What did Sarah do last week because of a superstition she believes in?

What does Sarah do every morning?

What does she do every evening?

How does Sarah deal with going outside?

Does Sarah like her neighbour? Why/why not?

Who does Sarah blame for her belief in superstitions? Is this reasonable do you think? Who do you think is to blame? Why?

What symbols of good luck does Sarah have in her home?

What personal superstition does she have?

Do all of these things work for Sarah?

Where is her husband?

Essential Vocabulary

concern	obsessed
extreme	on the safe side
better safe than sorry	fair enough
precautions	rabbit's foot
ladder	avoid
screech to a stop	audacity
inconsiderate	nasty
shoo	mirror
scolded	brush it off
decorated tastefully	horseshoe
four-leaf clover	pinecone

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Notebook—*a small book with pages of blank paper that students use to make notes when studying.*

“I left my notebook at home so I was unable to make any notes in my English class.”

Make a Superstition

We often base superstitions on animals, objects or strange occurrences. There are often very good reasons why these animals or objects have a superstition attached to them, passed down through history and folk-lore.

In the exercise, you will create a folk tale based on one of the following objects, animals or occurrences and say if it is good luck or bad luck. You can also add a fix to the superstition. For example, a saying or a physical act you must do to get rid of the bad luck or bring good luck.

Example: A horseshoe is good luck. In Ancient Greece, they made horseshoes out of iron. The Greeks believed iron to have magical powers and could ward off evil. Also, horseshoes were in the shape of the crescent moon and the Greeks regarded the crescent moon to be a time of fertility and good fortune.

Example: In England, if we see a magpie we should salute it. This is because we consider a magpie on its own to be a sign of bad luck. And many years ago there was a rank in the British army for magpie. Thus giving the magpie a salute is a sign of respect and therefore wards off the bad luck.

- a fox
- a white feather
- a penny found on the ground

- glasses placed upside down on the table
- spilling some tea on a tablecloth
- a black horse
- a rainbow
- you see a friend outside and you both say “hello” at the exact same time
- a man wearing a white cap walks towards you
- a small white dog
- you throw half a glass of water in the sink
- a knock at the door after nine pm
- You drop a spoon on the floor

Discussion Questions

Are you a superstitious person? Tell the class about the superstitions you believe? Why do you believe in them?

Is there a scientific explanation for some superstitions?

In your country which numbers have good luck or bad luck? Why is this so?

Which animals in your country bring good or bad luck? Why?

Do people take superstitions very seriously in your country? Why/why not?

Are there certain dates that are considered bad luck in your culture? Why?

Have you ever been to see a fortune-teller? What did they say?

Do you have any personal superstitions? What are they?

Do you have any special prayers or sayings before flying on a plane? Why do you say these things?

In the article, do you think Sarah is superstitious? Or does she have another kind of problem? What do you think it could be?

If you were Sarah's good friend what could you say to her?

Why did Sarah's husband leave her? How do you think Sarah

reacted?

Writing

You are Sarah's best friend.

You are going to write a letter begging her to change the way she lives her life so that she can live a normal life and be happy.

You must be very careful and diplomatic in the way you write your letter as you do not wish to offend Sarah.

But at the same time, you need her to know the truth about all the superstitions she believes in.

Credits

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