

4 SUPERSTITIONS AND BELIEFS

LESSON A ► Superstitions

1 STARTING POINT

The things people believe!

A Read the list of superstitions. Do you believe in any of them?

Beliefs Across Cultures

 In Turkey, many people agree that when someone goes on a journey, you should pour water on the ground behind him or her to bring the person back safely. In Brazil, people claim you should enter a place using your right foot to have good fortune.	 In Russia, looking into a broken mirror will bring bad luck. In Italy, many people believe that if visitors toss a coin into the Trevi Fountain in Rome, they will return to that city in the future. In Japan, it is very bad luck to give a present that consists of four pieces.	 In Venezuela, some people say that if someone passes a broom over your feet, you will never get married. In Greece, you should place your shoes with the soles on the floor when you take them off because overturned shoes are considered unlucky.
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B Pair work Which superstitions do some people in your culture believe?

2 VOCABULARY

Expressions with *luck*

A Match the statements with the replies containing *luck*.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. "I've got to go. I have a big test tomorrow." ____ | a. "That was beginner's luck." |
| 2. "I'm out of cash. Is there an ATM nearby?" ____ | b. "No such luck. I'm staying home." |
| 3. "He won the first game of chess he ever played!" ____ | c. "I'm afraid you're out of luck." |
| 4. "He lost his job and house, and now he's sick." ____ | d. "Wow! He's got bad luck." |
| 5. "Are you going to Europe this summer?" ____ | e. "Well, best of luck!" |
| 6. "How did you win those soccer tickets?" ____ | f. "Don't push your luck." |
| 7. "Thanks for the \$20. Can I have \$40 more?" ____ | g. "It was the luck of the draw." |

B Pair work Use the expressions with *luck* to write short conversations. Act them out with your partner.

"I really want tickets to the Jay Z concert."

"I'm afraid you're out of luck. They sold out in 10 minutes!"

VOCABULARY PLUS see page 133

3 GRAMMAR

Reporting clauses

To report what someone says, thinks, believes, etc., you can use a sentence that includes a reporting clause. The use of the word *that* is optional.

In Turkey, **many people agree (that)** when someone goes on a journey, you should pour water on the ground behind him or her to bring the person back safely.

In Venezuela, **some people say (that)** if someone passes a broom over your feet, you will never get married.

The following verbs are often used in reporting clauses.

More formal: argue assert claim report

More conversational: admit agree assume believe doubt explain feel say

GRAMMAR PLUS see page 112

A Look at the Starting Point on page 28 again. Can you find two other sentences that contain reporting clauses? For the sentences that don't, add a reporting clause and rewrite the sentence.

B Rewrite each sentence with a reporting clause. Use a different reporting verb to introduce each one.

- Everyone is superstitious about a few things.
Many people agree that almost everyone is superstitious about a few things.
- It's fine to follow superstitions for fun, but not to really believe in them.
- Superstitions are an important part of our cultural heritage.
- Superstitions are dangerous because they prevent people from thinking scientifically.
- Many holiday rituals are based on ancient beliefs and superstitions.
- Superstitions sometimes contain truths handed down from the past.

C Pair work Share your answers with your partner. Then give your opinions about the statements.

"Many people agree that almost everyone is superstitious about a few things. It's true! When I spill some salt, I always throw a little over my left shoulder so I don't have bad luck."

4 DISCUSSION

Everyday superstitions

A Pair work Do you know any superstitions connected with these things? Describe them to your partner.

- animals and plants
- clothing
- money
- days, dates, or months
- food
- numbers
- household objects
- colors
- weddings

B Group work Join another pair and compare your answers. Ask follow-up questions.

"In parts of Great Britain, people who aren't feeling well sometimes stick coins into the trunk of a tree that has fallen down."

"Why is that?"

"Well, some people believe that if you put a coin in wood, it can make illnesses go away. They call these trees 'wishing trees.'"



5 LISTENING

Common explanations

A Listen to people talk about superstitions. What superstitions are they talking about? How is each superstition explained?

B Listen again. Answer these questions.

1. How did the woman with allergies react to the man's explanation?
2. Why did the son feel it was necessary to say that he was only kidding?
3. Why does the man suggest not telling Mr. Wilson that being left-handed was once thought to be suspicious?

6 DISCUSSION

Are you superstitious?

A Pair work Take turns interviewing each other, and complete the questionnaire. Then calculate your scores.



Lucky or Unlucky?



	YES (1 pt.)	NO (0 pt.)
1. Is it unlucky not to say something like "Bless you!" when someone sneezes?	☐	☐
2. Are there any particular days that you consider unlucky?	☐	☐
3. Do you have any lucky numbers?	☐	☐
4. Do you think some colors bring good luck?	☐	☐
5. Do you avoid walking under a ladder because it might bring you bad luck?	☐	☐
6. Are there any animals you consider unlucky?	☐	☐
7. Do you believe that certain actions before a wedding bring good or bad luck?	☐	☐
8. Do you carry any good luck charms or have any in your house?	☐	☐
9. Do you have a piece of clothing that brings you good luck?	☐	☐
10. Do you avoid having specific items in your house because they might bring bad luck?	☐	☐

SCORE

0–1 Life is not a matter of luck to you!

2–4 You're not very superstitious, but . . .

5–7 You're fairly superstitious, aren't you?

8–10 Wow! You're really superstitious!

B Group work Compare your scores. Then explain some of the things you're superstitious about. Is there anything else that you think brings good or bad luck?

"Well, when I talk about something that's going well, I say 'knock on wood.'"

"Really? Why do you do that?"

"Well, they say that if you knock on something made of wood, your luck will continue."

7 WRITING

Restating a thesis

The first paragraph of a composition provides the thesis statement and sometimes gives general examples. The last paragraph restates the thesis statement.

- A** Read this composition. Find the thesis statement and a supporting example in the first paragraph. Then look at the last paragraph. Which sentence restates the thesis statement?

SUPERSTITIONS: HARD TO IGNORE



Some people think that certain objects bring them good luck; others avoid certain things or situations that they believe might bring them bad luck. Even people who claim not to believe in superstitions sometimes use phrases such as “knock on wood” when they speak. Superstitions concerning both good and bad luck are part of everyone’s life in the United States – even if you don’t believe in them, they are difficult to ignore.



It’s easy to find superstitions relating to good luck. For example, my friend Irene carries a fake rabbit’s foot in her pocket to bring her good luck. Another friend, who plays baseball, panics whenever his mother washes his “lucky” baseball socks. My mother believes that nine is her lucky number, and even my level-headed father has hung a horseshoe over the entrance of our home to bring us good luck and good fortune.



Superstitions concerning bad luck are just as common. My mother believes that certain days are bad for events like marriages and ceremonies, while my uncle always says “knock on wood” and then looks for something made of wood to knock on with his hand. Then there’s my friend who goes out of his way to avoid black cats. My sister never puts her bag on the floor because she thinks doing so will bring her bad luck.



Personally, I am not very superstitious. I don’t have any lucky socks, and I don’t have any lucky or unlucky numbers. Still, I find myself avoiding black cats, and I knock on wood every now and then. Superstitions are just a part of life, whether you believe them or not.

- B** Write a composition about superstitions and good and bad luck in your culture. Do your first and last paragraphs follow the guidelines stated in the box above?
- C Pair work** Exchange your composition with a partner, and answer these questions.
1. Does the first paragraph contain a thesis statement and give general examples?
 2. How well do the examples in the middle paragraphs support the thesis? Are there enough examples?
 3. Does the last paragraph restate the thesis?

LESSON B ► Believe it or not

1 STARTING POINT Fact or fiction?

A Three of these news stories are true and one is false. Decide which one is false.

1



A company has produced a device designed to chase away loitering children and teenagers. It was explained that the device emits a sound that irritates young people.

2



It's been confirmed that if an egg is placed directly between two cell phones that are in "talk mode," the egg will be cooked in about an hour.

3



A candy company is selling lollipops with a variety of insects inside, including crickets, ants, and scorpions. It is claimed that the lollipops are actually quite tasty.

4



It was reported that a website broadcast live video of a wheel of cheddar cheese as it ripened. It is said that the video ran for over nine months.

B Pair work Tell your partner your choice and explain why you think it is false.
(For the answer, see page 142.)

2 VOCABULARY & SPEAKING That sounds fishy!

A Which of these words describe something likely to be true? Which describe something likely to be fabricated? Divide them into two groups. Then add two more items to each group.

believable	convincing	dubious	fishy	misleading	plausible
conceivable	credible	far-fetched	iffy	phony	well-founded

B Use the words in part A to write about each story in the Starting Point.

*The article about the candy company sounds completely phony to me.
It's just not a plausible story.*

C Group work Take turns making statements, some true and some false, about yourself to your group. Respond using the words describing truth and fabrication.

"I have a very good singing voice, and I sing with a band on the weekend."

"Well, your speaking voice is very nice, so that seems pretty believable to me."

VOCABULARY PLUS see page 133

3 GRAMMAR

Reporting clauses in the passive

To report a general claim or opinion, you can use a passive form of a reporting verb and *it*.
Notice that the agent is often omitted and understood to be "some people" or "many people."

It was explained (that) the device emits a sound that irritates young people.

It is said (that) the video ran for over nine months.

GRAMMAR PLUS see page 113

A Look at the Starting Point on page 32 again. Can you find other examples of reporting clauses in the passive?

B Rewrite these statements with a reporting clause in the passive with *it*.

- People estimate that 50 percent of the population believes in ghosts.
It is estimated that 50 percent of the population believes in ghosts.
- Some sources say that the idea of horseshoes being lucky dates back to the ancient Greeks.
- Many claim that some people can communicate with plants.
- People once thought the sun moved around the earth.
- Some sources have reported that practical jokes on April 1 are becoming less common.
- Experts argue that people create Internet hoaxes for a wide variety of reasons.
- Sociologists think that people developed the first superstitions in an attempt to gain control over things they didn't understand.
- People too easily assume that just because something is in print, it's true.

C Pair work Use reporting clauses in the passive to talk about these interesting facts.

- A company makes a bicycle that seats seven people.
- A 33-year-old man married a 104-year-old woman.
- On April 1, 2006, a flight was denied permission to land because the air traffic controller was on a tea break.
- Butterflies can taste with their feet.
- You can send a coconut through the mail in the United States without any wrapping.
- A crocodile measuring over six meters long was found in the Philippines.
- The world's first webcam was used to let staff in a university computer department see the office coffee pot.

"Get this – it's been reported that a company makes a bicycle that seats seven people."



Useful expressions

Reporting something surprising

Get this – . . .

Believe it or not, . . .

Did you hear what happened?

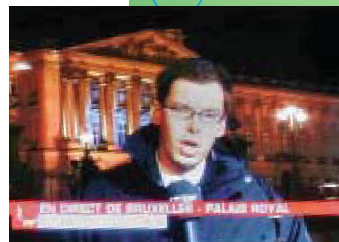
D Pair work Complete these statements about beliefs using your own information. Compare your statements with a partner.

- People don't believe this anymore, but it used to be said that . . .
- Recently, it has been reported in the news that . . .

4 LISTENING

Shocking news

- A** Look at the map of Belgium. What do you know about this country?
- B** Listen to a conversation about a journalistic hoax that affected many people in Belgium. What was the hoax?
- C** Listen again. Which events actually happened? Choose the correct answers.
- ☐ 1. The king and queen left the country.
 - ☐ 2. People panicked.
 - ☐ 3. A television station website crashed.
 - ☐ 4. Foreign ambassadors called the Belgian authorities.



5 DISCUSSION

Internet hoaxes

- A Pair work** Have you ever read or heard about something on the Internet that was a hoax? Tell your partner about it.
- B Pair work** Read these claims found on the Internet. Choose the ones you think are hoaxes. Then discuss with a partner. (For the answers, see page 142.)

Website Claims		HOAX?
1. A man offers \$10,000 to anyone who can find him a wife.	☐	
2. There is a group dedicated to preventing cruelty to insects throughout the world.	☐	
3. Each year, the Internet must be shut down for 24 hours to allow authorities to clean it.	☐	
4. There is a new chewing gum that you can recharge with flavor when the taste fades.	☐	
5. An 85-year-old woman is training to climb Mount Everest with her little dog.	☐	
6. An adventure company is now reserving seats for a trip to the center of the earth.	☐	
7. A new technology allows you to get a suntan from your computer screen.	☐	
8. A company can deliver tacos to homes using delivery robots.	☐	

- C Group work** Discuss these questions with your group.
- Which of the website claims seems the most plausible to you? Which seems the most iffy? Why?
 - Why do you think people create hoax websites and hoax emails?
 - Do you think people who create Internet hoaxes should be punished?

6 READING

Athletes and their superstitions

A Pair work Research suggests that good luck charms and lucky rituals can actually have an effect on an athlete's performance. Why might this be so? Discuss with a partner. Then read the article.



DO GOOD LUCK CHARMS REALLY WORK? IN COMPETITIONS?

To avoid jinxing herself, Canadian hurdler Angela Whyte never carries her podium clothes with her to the track at international competitions. But before the 100-meter hurdle final at the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, Ms. Whyte faced a dilemma, because her roommate – whom she would usually ask to bring them – was gone for the day.

“I packed the podium clothes in a separate backpack, so they wouldn’t touch the competition gear,” she laughed, after winning a silver medal. “It’s a little psycho, but it worked!”

Ms. Whyte isn’t alone in her faith in the power of superstition. Numerous studies have examined the prevalence of “magical thinking” among athletes, finding that the greater the interest in sports, the more superstitious a person is likely to be.

Intrigued by stories about athletes such as Michael Jordan, who wore his old college shorts under his uniform throughout his professional career, Dr. Lysann Damisch led a study in which

she found that following a lucky ritual enhances self-confidence. This leads one to set higher goals and be more persistent, ultimately achieving greater success.

Not all athletic rituals work this way, though. Dr. Damisch claims that routines such as bouncing a basketball exactly three times immediately before shooting a foul shot does more than simply boost confidence. This routine actually serves to focus attention and also triggers well-learned motor sequences. Other apparent superstitions may have more to do with creating a relaxed and positive mindset. Ms. Whyte, for example, always travels to competitions with a teddy bear named O.T. – but not because she believes O.T. brings her luck. “I’ve had him since I was two years old,” she explains, “so he reminds me of my home and family when I’m traveling. He’s my security blanket.”

The effectiveness of superstitious rituals may explain why they have persisted across cultures and eras, Dr. Damisch points out. But there are limits to their power. Following such rituals “doesn’t mean you win, because of course winning and losing is something else.”

Source: “Do Good Luck Charms Really Work In Competitions?” by Alex Hutchinson, *The Globe and Mail*

B Read the article again. Are the statements true (T), false (F), or is the information not given (NG) in the article? Write the correct letters and correct the false statements.

- ___ 1. Angela Whyte considers her ritual of not carrying her podium clothes to the track completely rational.
- ___ 2. Those with an avid interest in sports are not likely to be influenced by superstitions.
- ___ 3. Dr. Damisch was fascinated by Michael Jordan’s professional career.
- ___ 4. An increase in self-confidence can make people set and reach more challenging goals.
- ___ 5. Some lucky rituals actually help the brain and body prepare for performance.

C Group work Discuss these questions. Then share your answers with the class.

1. What other good luck charms and lucky rituals used in sports do you know about? How do they relate to the findings of the research mentioned in the text?
2. What things do you do to increase confidence and keep a positive mindset? Which is most effective?