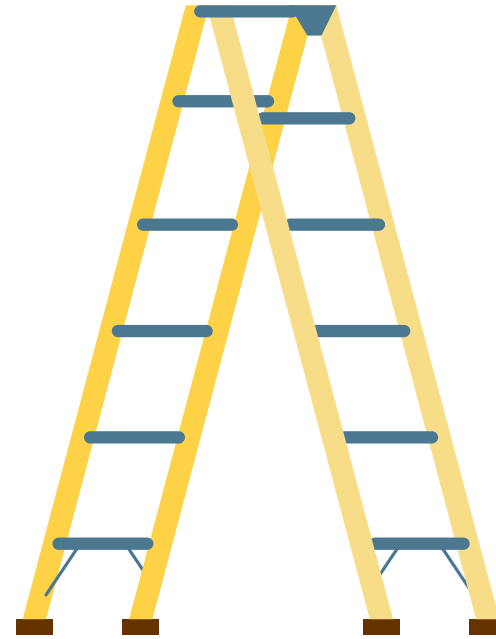
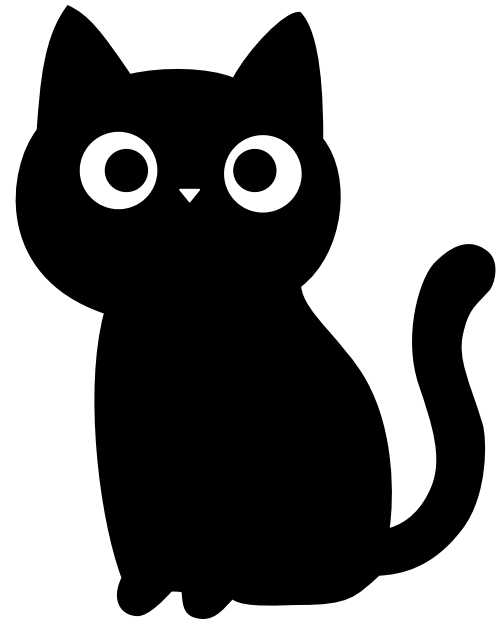




Superstitions

ESL lesson, B1+/B2 level, with video

What is the hidden meaning here?





Warm-up

- Are you afraid of black cats? Why / why not?
- Is the number 13 lucky or unlucky for you or in your culture?
- Would you open an umbrella indoors? What do you think might happen?
- Why do people believe in superstitions?
- Do you personally believe in any superstitions? Which ones?
- Do you know any superstitions from your country or family?
- Do superstitions influence your daily decisions?

Numbers Around the World

Match the numbers with the correct descriptions (1–5).



1

In this case, the shape of the written symbol is sometimes connected with balance and infinity in East Asian cultures, and it is often considered especially positive in business and money contexts.

2

In parts of Europe, this number is sometimes linked with a feeling of bad luck because it appears in historical religious traditions and is often avoided in hotels or buildings.

3

In some cultures, this number is avoided because its pronunciation is very similar to the word connected with death, so people may skip it in buildings or phone numbers.

4

In Italian tradition, this number is sometimes seen as unlucky because its Roman numeral form can be rearranged into a phrase meaning “my life has ended.”

5

In many Western traditions, this number is often considered lucky or magical, appearing in stories, traditions, and even everyday expressions.



Before Watching

Complete the sentences with ONE word or short phrase. Try to guess the superstition.

- In many cultures, seeing a _____ is believed to bring bad luck.
- Some people believe that the number _____ is unlucky and should be avoided.
- In some buildings, the floor number _____ is skipped completely.
- Walking under a _____ is often thought to bring bad luck.
- If you break a _____, you might have seven years of bad luck.
- People sometimes believe that stepping on cracks in the _____ can bring bad luck.
- In the past, lighting _____ cigarettes from one match was considered unlucky.
- Knocking on _____ is a way to protect yourself from bad luck.
- Whistling backstage in a theatre is considered bad luck because it can cause _____.

Let's check!

Video



<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/where-do-superstitions-come-from-stuart-vyse>



Let's watch again!



Watch the video carefully. Decide if the sentences are TRUE or FALSE or NOT MENTIONED.
Correct the false ones.

1. Knocking on wood comes from an old belief that trees were home to protective spirits, so people touched wood to ask for protection.
2. The number 13 became unlucky mainly because of a Roman myth about unlucky kings.
3. The superstition about the number 4 in some Asian cultures is linked to how the word for “four” sounds similar to the word for “death.”
4. The idea that whistling backstage in a theatre brings bad luck comes from the fact that it was once used to secretly communicate stage cues.
5. Lighting three cigarettes from one match was considered lucky because it symbolised sharing fire between friends.
6. The number 17 is considered unlucky in Italy because its Roman numeral (XVII) can be rearranged to form a phrase meaning “my life is over.”
7. Breaking a mirror was originally believed to bring bad luck because mirrors were thought to trap parts of a person’s soul.
8. Superstitions usually disappear quickly once people stop believing in their original cultural or historical meaning.

Post-video Speaking: Ranking Beliefs



You will see a list of superstitions. Your task is to rank them from 1 (most believable / logical) to 8 (least believable / most irrational).

You must explain your choices using:

- your culture / personal experience
- logic (does it make sense?)
- possible origin (history or tradition)
- feelings (does it feel “real” or not?)

Superstitions to rank:

- Knocking on wood brings protection from bad luck.
- The number 13 is unlucky.
- The number 4 brings bad luck in some cultures.
- Walking under a ladder brings bad luck.
- Breaking a mirror causes seven years of bad luck.
- Lighting three cigarettes from one match brings bad luck.
- Black cats bring bad luck if they cross your path.
- Stepping on cracks in the pavement brings bad luck.

Create your own superstition



Imagine you want people to believe in a brand-new superstition.

Create:

- a lucky or unlucky action
- a consequence
- a reason or origin story

Complete the table:

Your Superstition	Details
Is it lucky or unlucky?	
What must people do (or avoid doing)?	
What happens if they do it?	
When does it work?	
How did this superstition start?	

Let's talk



- Is it harmless to believe in superstitions?
- How can group superstitions help sports fans feel better when they support their team?
- If you were afraid of the number 13 when you were younger, what could help you stop being afraid of it?
- Can lucky superstitions cause problems? How? Can unlucky superstitions cause problems too?
- Do you have a lucky object? Why is it special to you?
- Why do different countries have different superstitions?
- Do young people believe in superstitions as much as older people?
- Why do people look for signs of good or bad luck?
- Do superstitions help people feel more in control of their lives?
- If a black cat crossed your path, would you react in any way?
- Would you avoid staying on the 13th floor of a hotel? Why or why not?
- Is it possible to believe in a superstition and still be a rational person?

Answer key



Numbers Around the World

1 - 8

2 - 13

3 - 4

4 - 17

5 - 7

Video

1.TRUE

2.FALSE

3.TRUE

4.TRUE

5.FALSE

6.TRUE

7.NOT MENTIONED

8.FALSE

