

1. Superstitions

This week's lesson is based on a conversation about superstitions and also includes a brief quiz about superstitions in Britain.

Level

Intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level B1 and above)

How to use the lesson

1. Ask your students how they would define the word 'superstition'. Then ask for examples of popular superstitions in your students' country, and ask if your students themselves are superstitious in any way. Encourage any students who have habits based on superstition to describe them to the rest of the class. Do they really believe those habits 'work', for example by bringing good luck, or do they have some other reason for maintaining them?

2. Divide the students into pairs, hand out Worksheet A, and ask them to work together to come up with answers to the six questions in the quiz. The students might have to guess in some cases. Note that some of the vocabulary will reappear in the main text.

3. Check answers in open class.

At this point you might also want to make clear that the superstitions mentioned in the quiz are not necessarily exclusive to Britain (those regarding Friday 13th and a rabbit's foot, for example, are quite widespread), and also that British people in general are not particularly superstitious: the vast majority would be familiar with the superstitions in the quiz but unlikely to take them very seriously. Of all the superstitions mentioned, arguably the most widely adhered to is 'touch wood'.

4. Keeping the students in their pairs, hand out Worksheet B and give them five to ten minutes to read through the dialogue, encouraging them to look up new vocabulary. Tell them they are going to answer a series of questions on the text but that they shouldn't write anything down at this stage.

Note: 'Arsenal' are a popular English football team generally considered one of the best in the country. Their stadium is in London.

5. Divide the students into pairs and hand out Worksheet C. Ask the students to work together to complete Exercises 2 and 3, in which they have to answer two different kinds of comprehension questions.

6. Check answers in open class.

You could also ask the students if, like Rob, they have any superstitions involving their clothing.

7. Hand out Worksheet D and ask the students to work together to complete the crossword.

8. Check answers in open class.

Answers:

Exercise 1

1. b 2. c 3. b 4. a 5. c 6. a

Exercise 2

1. F 2. T 3. F 4. D 5. D 6. T 7. T 8. D

Exercise 3

- 70 pounds
- They agree that Danny's decision not to fly on Friday 13th was not rational.
- He might not be able to get it through the metal detector.
- He says it is based on evidence (i.e. that Arsenal have had better results when he's been wearing his red socks), while presumably there is no evidence that travelling by plane on Friday 13th is more dangerous than on any other day.
- Lucky: being in possession of a rabbit's foot, and a horseshoe. Unlucky: seeing a magpie.
- The two pieces of slang are 'quid', meaning pounds, and 'freaked out', meaning so frightened (or angry, or surprised, or excited) that you cannot control yourself.
- Rob and Danny seem to think each other's superstitions are ridiculous. As well as saying that he finds Danny's fear of flying on Friday 13th 'hilarious', it should be clear that Rob's questions to Danny about the rabbit's foot, the horseshoe and the magpie are sarcastic rather than serious. Danny's speculation about the way Rob's choice of socks affects Arsenal's performances is equally sarcastic.
- It appears that Rob and Danny are friends, mainly because their mutual sarcasm (see 7, above) seems to be taken in good spirit, and also because Rob refers to Danny as 'mate' near the end of the dialogue.

Exercise 4

1. twice 2. horseshoe 3. Milan 4. affect 5. saved 6. performances
7. stands 8. behaviour 9. back 10. ridiculous 11. mystery 12. games

If the sentences have been completed correctly, *white rabbits* will read from top to bottom.

2. Related Websites

Send your students to these websites, or just take a look yourself.

<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/superstitions.htm>

A list of British superstitions, including a mention for white rabbits. Appropriate for intermediate level.

<http://worldsuperstitions.blogspot.com/>

A collection of superstitions from various countries around the world. Appropriate for intermediate level.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6548143.stm

A BBC article (2007) on the extent and origins of the superstition surrounding Friday 13th. Challenging for intermediate level.