

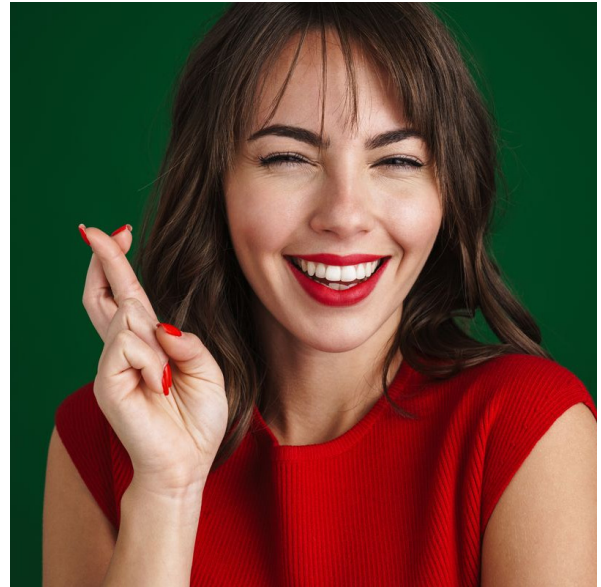


# KNOCK ON WOOD



Scan to review worksheet

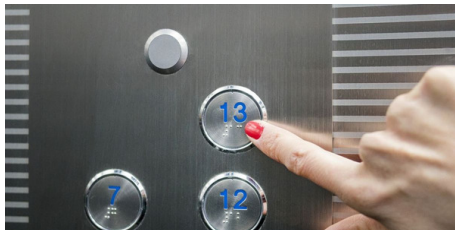
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## 1

### Warm up

Look at the pictures below and answer the questions.



picture 1



picture 2



picture 3



picture 4

1. What are **superstitions**?
2. Do you know anything about superstitions involving the things in the pictures?
3. How **superstitious** are you?



## 2 Vocabulary

You are going to watch a video called "Where do superstitions come from?" Before you watch, complete the exercises to define some useful vocabulary.

### Group 1: word families

Complete each gap with an appropriate form of the root word in brackets. You may need to add a prefix or suffix or use a plural form to fit the sentence.

1. This place has such great \_\_\_\_\_ for me. I remember the wonderful holidays we used to have here when I was a child. (associate)
2. My parents were really happy when my sister got engaged. They gave her their \_\_\_\_\_. (bless)
3. Henry? Is that you? I can't believe you're on holiday in the same hotel as we are, during the same week. What a \_\_\_\_\_! (incident)
4. I'm sorry, but I've got an \_\_\_\_\_ fear of dogs. I don't know why I feel this way, but I just can't be near them. (rational)
5. She uses \_\_\_\_\_ from the fashion industry to make beautiful handbags. (remain)
6. You think we know what we're doing? I'm afraid not - it's all an \_\_\_\_\_! (illusory)

### Group 2: letter F

Write one missing word beginning with the letter *f* in each sentence. The number of missing letters is given. Then explain what the words in bold mean.

1. Witches and princesses are f \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ characters in the **folklore** of many countries.
2. The Easter f \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ has both **pagan** and Christian origins.
3. You must wear shoes at all times here. These people believe that it's **taboo** to show your f \_ \_ \_ in public.
4. We're far more likely to remember things that f \_ \_ in with our beliefs - that's psychological **bias**.
5. In some parts of the world, people **cling to** old ideas instead of f \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ about them.
6. We've made a **conscious** decision to buy f \_ \_ \_ \_ plastic toys for the children in order to help the environment.



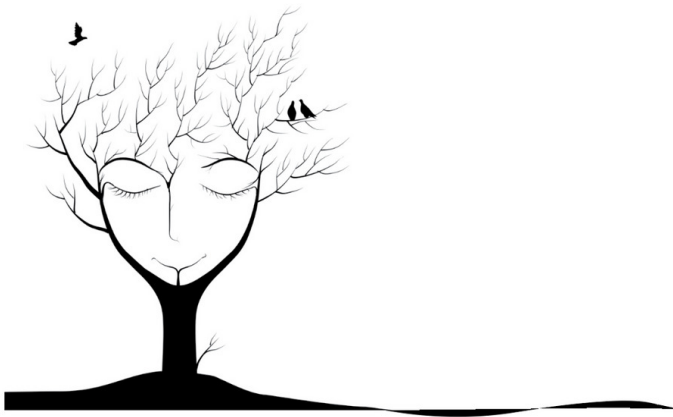
## 3

## Watch the video

Complete each gap in the notes with three words from the video.



1. Many superstitions have \_\_\_\_\_ origins.
  2. Because of the Last Supper, having 13 people \_\_\_\_\_ was seen to be bad luck.
  3. Today some buildings miss out \_\_\_\_\_.
  4. In Indo-European folklore, you could receive \_\_\_\_\_ from wood spirits by touching a tree.
  5. While some superstitions are religious, others are based on \_\_\_\_\_.
  6. Italians associate the number 17 with the phrase "my \_\_\_\_\_."
  7. \_\_\_\_\_ reminds Chinese speakers of the phrase "must die."
  8. In the past, whistling backstage at a theatre could \_\_\_\_\_.
  9. \_\_\_\_\_ from the same match could be dangerous for soldiers during war.
  10. If you have learned to avoid walking under a ladder, doing this will \_\_\_\_\_ even if you know it's not logical.
  11. Knocking on wood doesn't \_\_\_\_\_ so people carry on doing it.
  12. Believing that your lucky socks make you play better gives you the illusion of \_\_\_\_\_ over events.
- How many of these superstitions had you heard of already?
  - What's the most interesting or surprising thing that you learned from the video?





## 4

**Language point**

The presenter in the video uses a lot of discourse markers. These are words or phrases which give structure to a talk or discussion and help the listener notice important points and recognise their significance. Using discourse markers improves the listener's understanding and enjoyment.

Read these sentences from the talk and complete the gaps with a suitable discourse marker from the list. Then listen again to the talk or use the transcript to check your ideas.

After all

Besides

So

Along the same lines

Of course

somehow

believe it or not

Similarly

Well

- \_\_\_\_\_ how did it happen that people all over the world knock on wood, or avoid stepping on sidewalk cracks?
- \_\_\_\_\_, although they have no basis in science, many of these weirdly specific beliefs and practices do have equally weird and specific origins.
- \_\_\_\_\_, many people consider the story of the Last Supper to be true but other superstitions come from religious traditions that few people believe in or even remember.
- And \_\_\_\_\_, this tradition survived long after belief in these spirits had faded away.
- \_\_\_\_\_, the word for the number four sounds almost identical to the word for death in Cantonese ...
- And \_\_\_\_\_, some superstitions actually make sense, or at least they did until we forgot their original purpose.
- \_\_\_\_\_, lighting three cigarettes from the same match really could cause bad luck if you were a soldier in a foxhole...
- \_\_\_\_\_, no one is born knowing to avoid walking under ladders or whistling indoors...
- \_\_\_\_\_, superstitions often do seem to work.

Now write the discourse markers next to their meaning or function, as they are used in the talk. For one option, two answers are possible.

- \_\_\_\_\_ : to explain that something has happened in a way we can't explain
- \_\_\_\_\_ : to give another example of the same sort of thing
- \_\_\_\_\_ : to indicate that something is surprising
- \_\_\_\_\_ : to introduce a well-known, obvious or unsurprising piece of information
- \_\_\_\_\_ : to introduce the answer to a question
- \_\_\_\_\_ : to make an additional point
- \_\_\_\_\_ : to pose the main question that the speaker is going to answer
- \_\_\_\_\_ : to show that what you have just said is true



## 5

**Final activity**

Choose one of these activities.

- **Mini-presentation**

1. Work in pairs or small groups. You are going to plan and deliver a mini-presentation about a superstition (1-2 mins).
2. Each student in your group will read about a different superstition A-D. Remember the information that you read and add at least three discourse markers to make your presentation interesting and enjoyable for listeners.
3. Deliver your presentation to a classmate or your teacher. Your listener will make a note of the discourse markers you used, stop you after 2 minutes by saying, "Thank you very much," and ask you at least one question about the information in your presentation.

superstition about	origins	what will happen	why	also
A) Walking under a ladder	Early Christian teachings	General bad luck and associations with the devil	A ladder leaning against a wall makes a triangle and refers to the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.	You might also knock off the person at the top of the ladder or make them drop something on you.
B) Opening an umbrella indoors	Ancient Egypt	Everyone in the house will experience bad luck	Insulting the sun god Ra	Umbrellas in the 19th century had pointy and dangerous metal spokes.
C) Breaking a mirror	The ancient Romans - they made the first glass mirrors	Bad luck for 7 years	The reflection in a mirror represents a soul; souls regenerate after 7 years	You might cut yourself on the glass, cleaning up.
D) The full moon	Folklore from Italy, France and Germany	Insanity, madness, becoming a werewolf	The full moon influences our mental state	Police in the US have found that crime rates rise by 5% during full moons.



- **Talking point**

Discuss these questions in pairs or small groups. Include discourse markers from the box in your answers.

after all	along the same lines	believe it or not
well	of course	similarly
so	somehow	besides

- In what ways can superstitions be harmful or dangerous? In what ways can being superstitious benefit people?
- Do you have your own "lucky socks" story? Explain your beliefs around this item. Why do you think it's more than just psychological bias?
- How long does it take for a superstition to become established? Have you heard of any modern superstitions relating to mobile phones or other modern technology?
- Do you think that the movements of the sun, moon and planets can affect people's lives or do you think that astrology is a type of superstition? Explain your ideas.

**6****Optional extension**

We use these words to make predictions about the future, often based on superstitions. Read these sentences and then underline four verbs and circle four nouns that relate to this function.

1. A high fever presaged more severe or long-term effects of the disease in some patients.
2. This is a sign that the economy is recovering.
3. High unemployment may foreshadow social unrest.
4. I saw a rainbow on my way to the job interview. This must be a good omen.
5. It doesn't bode well that the hotel has lost our booking.
6. Many people see this company as a bellwether showing important trends for the future of this market.
7. Some people say that a red sky at dawn is a portent of bad weather.
8. Your marks on the practice exam augur well for the future.

Which words indicate negative connotations in these sentences?

Choose three words to make original sentences.



## 7

**Transcript****Superstitions**

- Are you afraid of black cats? Would you open an umbrella indoors? And how do you feel about the number thirteen? Whether or not you believe in them, you're probably familiar with a few of these superstitions.
- So how did it happen that people all over the world knock on wood, or avoid stepping on sidewalk cracks? Well, although they have no basis in science, many of these weirdly specific beliefs and practices do have equally weird and specific origins.
- Because they involve supernatural causes, it's no surprise that many superstitions are based in religion. For example, the number thirteen was associated with the biblical Last Supper, where Jesus Christ dined with his twelve disciples just before being arrested and crucified. The resulting idea that having thirteen people at a table was bad luck eventually expanded into thirteen being an unlucky number in general. Now, this fear of the number thirteen, called triskaidekaphobia, is so common that many buildings around the world skip the thirteenth floor, with the numbers going straight from twelve to fourteen.
- Of course, many people consider the story of the Last Supper to be true but other superstitions come from religious traditions that few people believe in or even remember.
- Knocking on wood is thought to come from the folklore of the ancient Indo-Europeans or possibly people who pre-dated them, who believed that trees were home to various spirits. Touching a tree would invoke the protection or blessing of the spirit within. And somehow, this tradition survived long after belief in these spirits had faded away.
- Many superstitions common today in countries from Russia to Ireland are thought to be remnants of the pagan religions that Christianity replaced. But not all superstitions are religious. Some are just based on unfortunate coincidences and associations.
- For example, many Italians fear the number 17 because the Roman numeral XVII can be rearranged to form the word vixi, meaning my life had ended.
- Similarly, the word for the number four sounds almost identical to the word for death in Cantonese,
- as well as languages like Japanese and Korean that have borrowed Chinese numerals. And since the number one also sounds like the word for must, the number fourteen sounds like the phrase must die. That's a lot of numbers for elevators and international hotels to avoid.
- And believe it or not, some superstitions actually make sense, or at least they did until we forgot their original purpose. For example, theatre scenery used to consist of large painted backdrops,
- raised and lowered by stagehands who would whistle to signal each other. Absentminded whistles from other people could cause an accident. But the taboo against whistling backstage still exists today, long after the stagehands started using radio headsets
- Along the same lines, lighting three cigarettes from the same match really could cause bad luck if you were a soldier in a foxhole where keeping a match lit too long could draw attention from an enemy sniper. Most smokers no longer have to worry about snipers, but the superstition lives on.
- So why do people cling to these bits of forgotten religions, coincidences, and outdated advice? Aren't they being totally irrational?



- Well, yes, but for many people, superstitions are based more on cultural habit than conscious belief.
- After all, no one is born knowing to avoid walking under ladders or whistling indoors, but if you grow up being told by your family to avoid these things, chances are they'll make you uncomfortable, even after you logically understand that nothing bad will happen. And since doing something like knocking on wood doesn't require much effort, following the superstition is often easier than consciously resisting it.
- Besides, superstitions often do seem to work. Maybe you remember hitting a home run while wearing your lucky socks. This is just our psychological bias at work. You're far less likely to remember all the times you struck out while wearing the same socks. But believing that they work could actually make you play better by giving you the illusion of having greater control over events.
- So, in situations where that confidence can make a difference, like sports, those crazy superstitions might not be so crazy after all.