

SUPERSTITIONS

Superstitions, sometimes called “old wives’ tales,” are longstanding, traditional beliefs that aren’t based on logic or fact. In English and many other languages, superstitions are often phrased in the form of a first conditional statement. In this activity, students will examine superstition statements in English, will think about English equivalents for superstitions from their own culture, and will play a short guessing game related to superstitions.

LEVEL

Intermediate and above

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Grammar, vocabulary (primary focus); reading, speaking (secondary focus)

GOALS

Students will explore vocabulary content in and the meaning of superstitions phrased as conditional statements. Students will brainstorm additional examples of superstitions from their own culture that can be restated in English using the first conditional. Students will work in small groups to guess superstition statements based on a group mate’s miming or drawing the superstition’s meaning.

MATERIALS

- Teacher: whiteboard, chalkboard, or large pieces of paper posted on the wall; markers or chalk; small slips of paper with superstitions on them, enough for each group of 4 students to have 8 slips: print or photocopy the superstitions below and cut them into paper strips, or ask students to write down 8 different superstitions on small blank slips of paper that you provide to each group.
- Students: pencils or pens

PREPARATION

- Review this list of superstition statements phrased in the first conditional. You can add more statements to the list if you like. Also, think of one or two superstition statements from your own culture that can be worded in a first conditional statement to use during the presentation stage of the activity.
 - If you break a mirror, you’ll have seven years of bad luck.
 - If you blow out all of the candles on your birthday cake in one breath, your birthday wish will come true.

- If you find a four-leafed clover, you'll have good luck.
 - If you step on a crack (in a sidewalk), you'll break your mother's back.
 - If you walk under a ladder, you'll have bad luck.
 - If you carry garlic, you will be protected from vampires.
 - If your palm itches, you will receive money soon.
 - If your feet itch, you will travel soon.
 - If you touch a frog (or toad), you'll get warts.
 - If you find a penny that is heads up and pick it up, you'll have good luck.
- Print or photocopy your superstition list, and cut the lists into paper strips, each containing one superstition, or prepare blank paper strips for students to fill out during the activity.

PROCEDURES

1. Write several superstitions from your list on the board. For each superstition, poll the class (ask students to raise their hands) to determine (1) if they have ever heard of the superstition and (2) if they agree with each item. Provide vocabulary explanation support, as needed, while you present the superstitions.
2. Write "superstition" on the board, tell students that all of the examples on the board are superstitions, and then elicit a definition or explanation for the term "superstition."
3. Tell students to turn to a partner and brainstorm a few superstitions that are common in your local culture. Provide an example to get the brainstorming process started. Tell students that they should try to rephrase the local superstitions in English. Elicit responses from several pairs, and add their examples to the list on the board. As you add examples, prompt students to provide their answers in the first conditional format (If you + simple present tense verb..., you will + verb.... or You will + verb...if you + simple present tense verb....).
4. Put students into groups of 4. Ask student volunteers to pass out the superstition strips to each group. Consider including a few blank strips in each pack and asking students to write in some of the local superstitions they supplied. If students are making all of the strips, ask them to copy at least 8 superstitions on the blank slips of paper you provide. Tell groups to put their strips face down and mix them up.
5. Explain that group members will each pick a strip from the pile and then try to get their group mates to guess the corresponding superstition by drawing images to represent the superstition (like the game Pictionary) or acting out their superstition's meaning (like charades). Each student can choose his or her preferred communication method. Model an example superstition for the class by acting or drawing and having the students guess. Encourage students to provide their guesses in the form of a conditional statement.
6. Start playing the game. Monitor groups as they begin guessing, prompting students to give complete answers if needed. Everyone should get two attempts to act or draw, and the game ends once most groups have exhausted their piles of superstition strips.
7. If you want to add a competitive element, groups can keep score while playing: students collect a point every time they are the first to correctly guess the superstition being acted out or drawn.