Discussion Starters
Superstitions

PRE-READING WARM-UP QUESTIONS
1. Are you a superstitious person?
2. Name a common superstition from your country or culture.
3. How are superstitions passed on?

PRE-READING VOCABULARY TASK
Match the words on the left with the meanings on the right.

1. nervous  a. lasts forever, does not end
2. superstitious b. worried about what might happen
3. ritual c. a place to gamble for money
4. timeless d. a change in direction
5. jinx e. action repeated due to custom or belief
6. reversal f. to cause bad luck to happen
7. casino g. well known for
8. lucky streak h. to respond to an event or situation
9. notorious i. good fortune that comes again and again in a short time
10. react j. having strong beliefs in something that is not based on science or fact

Superstitions
Would you get married on Friday the 13th?

Do you avoid walking under ladders? Do black cats make you nervous? Some people are very superstitious. They carry a lucky charm such as a rabbit’s foot everywhere they go. Why is a rabbit lucky? Because it’s born with its eyes open, of course!

Where do superstitions come from? Long ago, people didn't have the scientific knowledge we do today. To reduce their fear about unexplainable events, people came up with rituals. They passed their beliefs down from generation to generation. Some superstitions are timeless. Floors in buildings still go from the 12th to the 14th floor, even though nobody can agree why the number 13 is unlucky!

Superstitious people think they can turn bad luck away. They “knock on wood” (or in Britain “touch wood”) to avoid jinxing themselves. For example, if you say “I’ve never broken a limb” you should immediately search for a table to knock on to avoid a reversal of luck. You may break your leg tomorrow if you don’t!

Many superstitions are related to money. For example, if you give money away on Mondays, you’ll give money away all week long. If you leave your purse on the floor, you’ll go broke. Gamblers are notoriously superstitious. If you’re in a casino, never get up to use the washroom. Your lucky streak will go down the toilet!

Superstitions differ from culture to culture. A superstitious African mother won’t cut her baby’s hair before her child’s first birthday! In Mexico, a bride must not wear pearls on her wedding day. Pearls symbolize tears, and an unhappy marriage.

Are you superstitious? How would you react if someone opened an umbrella in your living room?
VOCABULARY REVIEW

A. Fill in the blanks with words from the pre-reading vocabulary task.

1. Superstitious people feel ______________ when a black cat is near.
2. Knock on wood to avoid ______________ yourself.
3. If you’re having a lucky ______________ at the ______________, don’t get up to use the washroom!
4. Mexican brides are ______________ superstitious. They perform many ______________ on their wedding day.

B. Create a result clause to go with the “if clause”.

1. If you step on a crack, you will break your mother’s back.
2. If you wear pearls on your wedding day, ______________
3. If you walk under a ladder, ______________
4. If you leave your purse on the floor, ______________
5. If you carry a rabbit’s foot everywhere, ______________

C. More Superstitions

Write some more examples of superstitions from your own culture. Share these with your classmates.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where do you think the superstition about cutting an African baby’s hair came from?
2. When can superstitions be dangerous?
3. What superstition will never die?
4. Which countries or cultures are the most superstitious?
ANSWER KEY

Lesson Description: Students read about various superstitions, and share superstitions from their own cultures. The lesson includes vocabulary review activities and discussion questions.

PRE-READING VOCABULARY TASK
1. b  2. j  3. e  4. a  5. f  6. d  7. c  8. i  9. g  10. h

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS
1. A rabbit is a symbol of luck because it's born with its eyes open.
2. Superstitions originated from having a lack of scientific knowledge. People wanted to protect themselves from the unknown.
3. The reading mentions the 13th floor of a building because this is an unlucky number, and many buildings skip from 12–14.
4. Some people think that if you give money away on Mondays you'll give money away all week long.
5. A Mexican bride must NOT wear pearls on her “big day” because these symbolize tears, which means she'll have an unhappy marriage.

VOCABULARY REVIEW
A. Fill in the blanks with words from the pre-reading vocabulary task.
1. Superstitious people feel nervous when a black cat is near.
2. Knock on wood to avoid jinxing yourself.
3. If you’re having a lucky streak at the casino, don’t get up to use the washroom!
4. Mexican brides are notoriously superstitious. They perform many rituals on their wedding day.

B. Complete the sentence. (Answers may vary.)
1. If you step on a crack, you will break your mother’s back.
2. If you wear pearls on your wedding day, you will have an unhappy marriage.
3. If you walk under a ladder, you will have bad luck for the rest of the day.
4. If you leave your purse on the floor, you will lose all of your money.
5. If you carry a rabbit’s foot everywhere, you will be lucky.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Answers will vary.