

Superstitions

Are you afraid of black cats or walking under a ladder? Do you think it's bad luck to open an umbrella inside the house? These are common superstitions. Superstitions are beliefs based on irrational feelings, usually ones related to fear of the unknown or a trust in chance.

Superstitions have been around for as long as people have inhabited the earth. Many superstitions are rooted in early people's attempts to explain the world around them and to keep themselves safe in what often seemed to be a capricious world. Early humans had strong beliefs in unseen spirits. They believed these spirits to be responsible for events they did not understand, like lightning and thunder, and even birth or death.

Many people are superstitious. Some fear the number 13; this is called "triskaidekaphobia." Some have a "lucky tie" that they believe once helped them land a job. As a result, they wear it whenever they're meeting a new client or making an important presentation.

Other people carry a rabbit's foot for good luck. In early Celt society, rabbits were revered because they burrowed underground. Celts believed that rabbits secretly communicated with the powerful spirits of the underground world. Because of this, rabbits were associated with people's fortunes.

Ancient Egyptians believed it was bad luck to walk under a ladder because a ladder leaning against a wall forms a triangular shape. In many societies, the triangle is a sacred symbol because of its association with the number 3. Common people in Egypt were not permitted to step into a sacred place, so walking in the triangular space formed by a ladder and a wall was synonymous with desecrating a holy place.

Unit 3

Groundhog Day, February 2, is based on a superstition as well. Legend has it that if the groundhog sees his shadow on that day, six more weeks of winter will follow. But if a shadow isn't apparent, an early spring will occur.

- Do you think that superstitious people are confident people? Why or why not?

- Would it be a nuisance to be a superstitious person? Why?

- How do you think superstitious people feel about destiny?