

BBC Learning English – Ask About Britain

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British Superstitions 英国人的迷信

Finn: Hello, welcome to Ask About Britain from BBC Learning English. I'm Finn.

Jean: And I'm Jean.

Finn: Now Jean I've got a little question for you. I'm going to play some sounds and I want to ask you what they have in common.

Jean: Ok, 那让我们来听听下面的几种声音, 看他们的共同点到底是什么。

Insert

Sound of someone knocking on wood.

Sound of a cat meowing.

Sound of a mirror smashing.

Jean: Well, what did we hear there? Someone knocking on wood 有用手敲木头的声音。And a cat, and some glass being smashed 还有打碎玻璃的声音? Go on Finn, tell us.

Finn: Well they're all to do with superstitions 迷信。Yang Botao, who's a student from Zhengzhou University, also wants to know more.

Insert

I want to know Britain's superstitions, for example a broken mirror, touch wood, a black cat and so on. Thanks.

Jean: Yang Botao 想多了解一些英国人的迷信说法和习惯。

Finn: Yes and Yang Botao mentioned three superstitions there. One about a broken mirror, another about touching wood, and a third about a black cat. Ok, so here come those sounds again.

Insert

Sound of a mirror smashing.

Finn: Not glass, but the sound of a mirror breaking. Any ideas Jean?

Jean: 打碎一面镜子 – let me see, it has to be a bad thing, doesn't it?

Finn: Yes, seven years bad luck for you, they say, if you break one, so be careful. But where does the story come from? Now he also mentioned:

Insert

Sound of someone knocking on wood.

Finn: Touching wood.

Jean: 用手摸木头?

Finn: Which has a very interesting superstition attached to it, so more on that later. And then we had:

Insert

Sound of a cat meowing.

Jean: The black cat.

Finn: It's lucky to see one crossing in front of you. Or is it? Some people actually say it's unlucky. So these superstitions can be very hard to pin down 很难考证。

Jean: 有意思。迷信的特点就是，很多这样的做法表面听上去都是没什么道理和逻辑的 irrational，尤其很多迷信说法的起源已经是从无从考证了。

Finn: So I went out onto the streets of London to find out what British people thought about these superstitions. Listen out for the following phrase: to tempt fate, that's T.E.M.P.T. F.A.T.E.

Jean: 逆天而为、冒险

Insert

Finn: Do either of you have any superstitions at all?

Leanne: Touching wood, touch wood. If you say something it's like tempting fate isn't it, so you touch wood then, something like that.

Finn: Broken mirrors? A bad thing?

Cat: Broken mirrors yeah, I've broken about three in my time and I'm very unlucky.

James: No I'm not superstitious about mirrors at all because I've broken far too many in my time.

Finn: How about black cats? Good luck or bad luck?

Leanne: Good luck. Yeah, crossing your path isn't it?

Jack: I've got a black cat so I don't know.

Finn: *So you see it every day?*

Jack: *Every day, yeah.*

Carla: *I don't think I would notice if a black cat went in front of me.*

Jean: 看来，大家对迷信的看法是见仁见智。根据 Finn 进行的这个小型民意调查，有的人相信这些迷信的说法，有的人就不信。

Finn: So, where did they come from? Jean, we've been doing some research haven't we.

Jean: Oh yes we have.

Insert

Sound of a cat meowing.

Jean: 其实，黑猫作为一个不吉利的凶兆 bad omens 在不少国家都是有人相信的，这也是因为在西方中世纪的时候，黑猫总是和巫术 witchcraft 联系在一起。

Finn: So that explains the bad luck. But some say it's lucky or good luck to see it pass in front of you; because the evil has passed you by and not harmed you.

Insert

Sound of a mirror smashing.

Jean: 同样，打碎镜子作为不吉利的凶兆也是有一些历史渊源的。有关的解释和理论不少，不过其中很多都和镜子能影射灵魂 soul 的说法有关。所以如果镜子被扭曲了或者打碎了，那么可能就意味着这个人的灵魂也会随之陨灭。

Finn: The seven years bad luck seems to come from a Roman belief that it took seven years for life, or the soul, to renew itself 重生。

Insert

Sound of someone knocking on wood.

Jean: Touch wood 触摸木头。Now, I think our listeners might want to know a bit more about this one, Finn.

Finn: Yes, it is an interesting one. People tend to say this after describing a good situation that they want to continue, like:

Insert

It's been good weather all month so it should be good this weekend, touch wood.

Finn: Or, when mentioning something bad they don't want to happen, for example:

Insert

Everyone's got a cold at the moment, touch wood I don't get it.

Jean: Ok, fascinating. 看来用触摸木头来化解邪运的说法最早来自有的人相信树木中蕴藏善良精灵的信仰有关，所以用手去摸摸木头就能沾到精灵的仙气，能化解邪气。

Finn: Yes, and there are so many more fascinating superstitions in Britain and all around the world, I think we'd need a lifetime to explain them all, not just one programme or two programmes.

Jean: Yes Finn, but here's just one: apparently in parts of Africa, they believe shaving your head on a Saturday will leave you in debt. 非洲有的人相信，如果你是在一个周六剃头的话，那你这一辈子会负债累累、永不翻身。

Finn: Oh my goodness. Ok Jean, here's another head-related one: in Russia you shouldn't wash your hair before the day of an exam.

Jean: Yuck that would be smelly!

Finn: I think so, wouldn't it. Anyway, we're all learning English here so if you want good luck learning English the best way is to make sure you have plenty of black cats in your room, remember to have a wooden desk and touch it frequently. And please do be careful with that mirror, don't break it.

Jean: And please try not to wash your hair too often!

Finn: Oh never wash your hair again.

Jean: Or, you can visit our website. Much easier, and less smelly, which is: www.bbcchina.com.cn.

Finn: That sounds much better, doesn't it? Much better. Ok, bye for now.

Jean: Bye.

Finn: (off mic) Hey, was that a black cat in the studio?

Jean: (off mic) Oh? Bad luck for us then...

Finn: (off mic) Or good luck, touch wood...

Glossary

superstition 迷信	knock 敲
smash 打碎	hard to pin down 很难考证
irrational 没道理和逻辑的	to tempt fate 逆天而为、冒险
to renew itself 重生	bad omens 凶兆
witchcraft 巫术	