ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #106
Superstitions
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Transcript

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:10] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:20] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about Superstitions, the belief that things are lucky or unlucky.

[00:00:31] From the psychological reasons why we believe in superstitions and the religious **implications**[1] of believing in superstitions to the origins of 5 different superstitions, I think it's going to be quite a fun one.

[00:00:45] If you're listening to this episode on the day it comes out, you might have noticed that it's Friday the 13th, which is considered unlucky in lots of different countries, and don't worry, we'll be talking about that as well, and why it's not really that unlucky at all.

[00:01:02] Before we get right into that though, let me quickly remind you that you can get all of the bonus episodes, plus the subtitles, the transcript, and the key vocabulary for this episode and all of our other ones over on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[1] possible effects or consequences

[00:01:18] This is also where you can also check out becoming a member of Leonardo English, and join a community of curious minds from all over the world, doing meetups, exchanging ideas, and generally, improving their English in a more interesting way.

[00:01:33] So if that's of interest, and I certainly hope it is, then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:40] And final point, thank you to Jachym, an awesome member of Leonardo English from the Czech Republic who requested this episode. I hope you enjoy it.

[00:01:51] OK then, let's get started.

[00:01:54] Superstitions are all around us, and no matter what country you're from you've probably been culturally exposed to superstitions all of your life, even if they might not have immediately seemed to you like superstitions.

[00:02:11] If you look in the dictionary, it will **define**[2] superstition as something like:

[00:02:17] "a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false **conception**[3] of **causation**[4]"

[00:02:26] Or

[2] explain the exact meaning of

[3] idea or understanding

[4] the way one thing makes another thing happen

[00:02:28] “belief that is not based on human reason or scientific knowledge, but is connected with old ideas about magic”

[00:02:35] Essentially it’s a belief in something that doesn’t make sense and is related to magic.

[00:02:41] Superstitions go back **millennia**[5], they go back thousands of years, yet they are still believed by billions of people.

[00:02:50] Indeed, 50% of Americans say that they’re **superstitious**[6], and three quarters of people in the UK say that they knock on wood, they do this 'knock knock', to avoid bad luck.

[00:03:03] So if the dictionary basically says ‘it’s something that people do because they are **ignorant**[7]’, why is half the world doing it?

[00:03:13] We’ll get to some of the psychological reasons for it in a minute, but before that it’s good to understand a bit about the **origins**[8] of superstitions, because this will help us understand why they are so **embedded**[9] in our culture.

[00:03:29] The word superstition is thought to come from Latin, super-stare, to stand over, or to stand upon. Now, how that actually translates to the meaning of the word

[5] thousands of years

[6] believing that luck, magic or signs can control what happens

[7] lacking knowledge or education

[8] beginnings or sources; where things first came from

[9] fixed firmly and deeply

that we have now is a little unclear, but it's thought to have come from the idea of standing over something and being amazed at it.

[00:03:53] Back in Ancient Rome, being superstitious was used to describe people who were too afraid of the Gods, and believed that there were certain things that they could do **over and above**[10] the normal things that people were supposed to do that would influence the future.

[00:04:12] The word 'superstitio' was to be contrasted with 'religio', which was the normal, appropriate fear and belief in Gods.

[00:04:22] If you think about it from a religious **doctrinal**[11] point of view, this idea that there are small, **mundane**[12] things that people can do to influence their **fate**[13], and control the Gods is quite problematic.

[00:04:39] World religions often have strict behavioural **codes**[14], things that people should and shouldn't do, and if there is another set of **seemingly**[15] random things that people should and shouldn't do and these can affect their **fate**, then that doesn't really fit with the religion that that person is following.

[10] in addition to; beyond

[11] relating to the official beliefs and teachings of a religion

[12] ordinary and everyday; not special or exciting

[13] the things that will happen to a person in the future

[14] sets of rules that people are expected to follow

[15] appearing to be, though perhaps not really

[00:05:02] Indeed, the Catholic Church considers superstition to be **sinful**[16].

[00:05:08] If you believe that you can change your **fate** just by throwing salt over your shoulder or by not seeing a black cat, then logically it's quite hard to **reconcile**[17] that with believing that there is an all-powerful God who controls your life.

[00:05:26] Superstition is actually right there in the **Catechism**[18] of the Catholic Church, just above **worshiping**[19] false gods, and is called a '**perverse**[20] **excess**[21] of religion'.

[00:05:39] So you can understand, **theologically**[22] at least, why superstition is problematic.

[00:05:45] It's **at odds**[23] with the **scriptures**[24]; logically both can't exist at the same time and be true.

[00:05:52] In terms of where different superstitions come from, this is normally up for debate.

[00:05:59] There are lots of possible explanations about where they come from, with some being more probable than others.

[00:06:07] With all of them, they likely came from a time that something happened just before something good or something bad, and culturally people started associating the thing that happened before to the thing that happened after, believing that the first event impacted the second one.

[16] wrong according to religious rules; against God's laws

[00:06:24] Interestingly, most superstitions predict that something bad is going to happen.

[00:06:30] There are of course a few that are linked to good luck, for example finding a four-leaved **clover**[25], a four-leafed little plant, or carrying a rabbit's foot, but most are negative.

[00:06:44] It's interesting to think why this is.

[00:06:48] There's an idea in psychology called Negativity Bias, which is the idea that we are more affected by negative events than positive events.

[00:06:58] If there are two events of equal **intensity**[26], of equal strength, one good and the other bad, then we feel the negative one more strongly than the positive one.

[00:07:11] So bringing this back to superstitions, if something good happens we might just think, well that's good, whereas if something negative happens it might have a greater impact on us, we remember it more strongly, try to put a reason on why it

[17] make two ideas fit together or agree
[18] an official book that explains the main beliefs of a Christian church
[19] praying to and showing deep respect for
[20] wrong and unreasonable; not what is right or natural
[21] an amount that is more than is right or needed
[22] from the point of view of religious ideas and teaching
[23] in disagreement; not matching
[24] the holy writings of a religion, such as the Bible
[25] a small plant that usually has three leaves on each stem
[26] the degree of strength or force

happened, and start **engaging**[27] in behaviour that we believe might stop it happening in the future.

[00:07:36] OK, so that's a little explanation about some of the psychological reasons that people believe superstitions exist.

[00:07:44] Let's get into some of the stories behind superstitions.

[00:07:48] We're going to start with one that has a story I quite like, and that's to do with umbrellas.

[00:07:54] Now, you've probably heard that you shouldn't open an umbrella inside. Maybe you've just heard that you shouldn't do it, but it's also considered 'bad luck' in many countries.

[00:08:06] Why, you might ask?

[00:08:08] There is a theory that it was to do with the ancient Egyptians and their **sunshades**[28], but this isn't really believed by many.

[00:08:17] The real reason is thought to have actually come from much more recently, from Victorian England.

[27] taking part

[28] umbrellas used to protect people from hot, bright light

[00:08:25] England, as those of you who have visited the country will know, is a place where an umbrella comes in pretty **handy**[29].

[00:08:33] Umbrellas began to be more and more **widespread**[30] in Victorian England, but they were big, heavy things with dangerous **spikes**[31] that could open quickly and without warning, **injuring**[32] people around you.

[00:08:49] So **presumably**[33], when it was raining outside, people used to open their umbrellas inside, but children, family members and pets got hurt by these things opening quickly and dangerously, and so it became bad luck to open them inside.

[00:09:07] So there you go, the reason why you shouldn't open an umbrella inside seems to actually be quite sensible.

[00:09:15] Our second superstition is to do with salt - when it's unlucky, and when it's lucky.

[00:09:22] Salt, as you may know, was a precious **commodity**[34] throughout history.

[29] useful and convenient

[30] common in many places or among many people

[31] long, thin, sharp points

[32] hurting or causing physical harm to

[33] probably, as it seems reasonable to think

[34] a product that can be bought and sold

[00:09:28] Linguistically its importance has left a mark, with the expression 'not worth its salt' meaning 'not worth its cost', and the word 'salary', the money you get from a job, coming from the term for money Roman soldiers were given to buy salt.

[00:09:45] So, salt was important, and **spilling**[35] salt, dropping salt on the ground accidentally, was considered very bad luck. You can see why **spilling** salt would be bad luck. It was expensive and **precious**[36], and so damaging it was obviously not something that you wanted to do.

[00:10:05] And going back to the year 3,500 BC it's thought that the Ancient Sumerians decided that throwing **a pinch**[37] of salt, a small amount of salt over their left shoulders would be a way of **nullifying**[38], of canceling the bad luck caused by **spilling** the salt.

[00:10:26] This superstition has been continued though, and in Judeo-Christian culture it's also good luck to throw salt over your shoulder. The theory goes that Judas, the **disciple**[39] that betrayed Jesus **spilled**[40] salt, because he is **portrayed**[41] doing so in Leonardo Da Vinci's Last Supper, and so if you want to have good luck you should do the opposite of what someone very bad has done.

[35] accidentally dropping or pouring out
[36] very valuable and important
[37] a very small amount, held between finger and thumb
[38] removing the effect of
[39] a close follower of Jesus
[40] accidentally dropped or poured out
[41] shown or represented in a work of art

[00:10:55] It's not clear whether you need to **sweep**[42] it up after you've thrown it down though. I guess in the Renaissance, or in 3,500 BC **sweeping**[43] the floors wasn't quite so important.

[00:11:08] Our third superstition is one of the most popular superstitions, and that is something that three quarters of people in the UK say that they do, and that's to **knock**[44] on, or touch, wood, 'knock knock'.

[00:11:22] Now, I guess you know how this one works, you've probably seen people doing it, and you might even do it yourself. After saying something you touch wood either as a way of hoping that something you want to happen will happen, or of preventing something you don't want to happen from happening.

[00:11:41] Where this comes from, though, is debated by historians.

[00:11:45] Some think it comes from when you would need to **swear**[45] over a **crucifix**[46] to promise something was true. If you were a true Christian you would never **tempt fate**[47] by lying when touching the cross, and so **tapping**[48] wood was a connection to this idea.

[42] clean or collect with a brush
[43] cleaning with a brush
[44] hit with your hand, making a short sound
[45] make a serious, formal promise
[46] a model of a cross with Jesus on it
[47] do something that risks bringing bad luck
[48] hitting lightly

[00:12:04] There's another idea that **peasants**[49] in Europe would knock loudly on their wooden doors to keep away evil spirits, and so the wood is to represent a door.

[00:12:17] There's also the idea that both good and bad **spirits**[50] live in trees, and so by **tapping** on a tree you could either get a good **spirit**[51] to come out and help you or you could keep a bad **spirit** in, to stop something bad happening to you.

[00:12:34] There's another theory that it actually came from a British children's game where children would **chase**[52] each other and could avoid being caught by touching a piece of wood.

[00:12:47] For this one it's pretty unclear where it actually comes from - perhaps that's one of the reasons that it is one of the most popular superstitions, that it just exists in popular culture for no clear reason, or at least, for **disputed**[53] reasons.

[00:13:03] If there was a superstition and everyone knew for sure where it came from it would do some damage to its **credibility**[54], so perhaps that's a reason that the ones with the most debated **origins** **tend**[55] to be the ones that are most widely believed.

[49] poor people who worked on the land, especially in the past

[50] beings without bodies, such as ghosts

[51] a being without a body, such as a ghost

[52] run after to try to catch

[53] argued about; not agreed on

[54] the quality of being believed or trusted

[55] are generally likely

[00:13:21] Our next superstition, our fourth superstition is a **linguistic**[56] one, and it's the reason that in English we say 'bless you' after someone **sneezes**[57], after they do ah-choo.

[00:13:34] This is thought to date back to the sixth century AD, and to have come from when there was a Great Plague **raging**[58] through Europe.

[00:13:44] One of the ways in which the plague passed from one person to the other was through **coughing**[59] and **sneezing**[60], and so Pope Gregory I declared that when someone **sneezed**[61] you should say 'bless you' as a way of protecting them.

[00:14:01] I was a little surprised to find that this **reportedly**[62] came from the pope, given the Catholic Church's current view on superstition, and it does seem a little strange to think that **doctrinally**[63] a person's **fate** can be influenced by another person saying two words, but this is one of the main theories.

[56] to do with language and words

[57] suddenly blows air out of the nose and mouth without control

[58] spreading quickly and violently

[59] pushing air out of the throat with a sudden loud noise

[60] suddenly blowing air out of the nose and mouth

[61] suddenly blew air out of the nose and mouth

[62] according to what people say or have written

[63] according to the official teachings of a religion

[00:14:23] Another theory is that when you **sneeze**[64] your soul is separated from your body and so by saying 'God bless you' it's a way of stopping the devil from jumping in and stealing your soul.

[00:14:37] In your language I imagine you say a similar thing after someone **sneezes** because, well, sneezing normally comes when you have a cold, a flu, or something like that, and you're not in great health.

[00:14:49] So on one level it's just a perfectly nice and reasonable thing to wish someone good health if they have just done something that indicates that they're not in particularly great health right now.

[00:15:02] And our fifth and final superstition is two superstitions **rolled into one**[65], and it's to do with Friday the 13th, or 'today' if you're listening to this episode on the day it's released.

[00:15:16] Before we go into this explanation, I should say that I hope you're having a fantastic day, a better than normal day even, just to **disprove**[66] all of the superstitions about Friday the 13th being an unlucky day.

[00:15:31] Ok then, I've got that out of the way.

[64] suddenly blow air out of your nose and mouth

[65] combined into a single thing

[66] show to be untrue

[00:15:34] So, there are a few theories about why the number 13 is considered so unlucky.

[00:15:41] The first centres around the idea of 12 being a complete number - there are 12 months of the year, 12 hours on a clock, 12 tribes of Israel, 12 signs of the zodiac, and so on.

[00:15:57] 13 is an **outsider**[67], a number that **detracts**[68] from the completeness of 12.

[00:16:04] There were, of course, also 13 people to sit at the table for the Last Supper, with Judas, the **disciple** who **betrayed**[69] Jesus, thought to be number 13.

[00:16:15] And going further back to ancient Norse **mythology**[70] there's a story of 12 gods being invited to dine at Valhalla, a great hall in Viking heaven, and a thirteenth god **crashing**[71] the party, causing a huge fight, one of the good gods to die, and the world **plunging**[72] into darkness.

[00:16:39] There's even a word for fear of the number 13, it's "triskaidekaphobia". I guess you probably won't need to use this one very much, but there you go.

[67] something that does not belong to a group

[68] takes something away

[69] was disloyal to and helped the enemies of

[70] old traditional stories, especially about gods and heroes

[71] arriving uninvited at

[72] falling or moving suddenly

[00:16:51] Triskaidekaphobia is a real problem though. Many buildings don't have a thirteenth floor, most aeroplanes don't have a 13th row, and it's estimated that 10% of the US population, so that's 30 million people, are afraid of the number 13.

[00:17:10] But why Friday, you might ask?

[00:17:12] Well, Friday isn't a great day in the Bible. It was thought to be the day on which Eve offered Adam the forbidden fruit, eventually causing man's fall from Eden. It was also the day that Jesus was crucified.

[00:17:28] So when you combine the bad luck of the number 13 with the bad luck of Friday you are really getting into unlucky territory, so the superstition goes.

[00:17:38] But it wasn't really until the horror film Friday 13th, in 1980, that there was this real **widespread** idea that Friday 13th was a date where all sorts of terrible things happen.

[00:17:51] So is it actually that terrible, and should you **keep a lookout**[73] tonight for all sorts of unlucky things?

[00:18:00] Well, no.

[00:18:01] Indeed, there was a Dutch study from 2008 that suggested that there are fewer car accidents, fewer fires, and fewer bad things that happen on Friday 13 than on

[73] watch carefully

a normal day, **presumably** because people are careful, or they just avoid activities that could be considered dangerous in any way.

[00:18:24] So, if you are listening to this episode on Friday the 13th, I hope you're having a **marvelous**[74] day, full of good luck and joy.

[00:18:33] And if you're listening to this episode and Friday the 13th has been and gone without you noticing any bad luck, congratulations, you've survived, and at least you now know a little bit more about where this superstition, and superstitions in general, come from.

[00:18:51] OK then, that is it for today's episode on superstitions, how they work, where they come from, and why people believe them.

[00:19:00] I hope it's **shed some light**[75] on a few superstitions that you might believe, might observe, or perhaps you think it's all a load of **rubbish**[76].

[00:19:09] As always, either way I'd love to know what you thought of the episode. You can head right in to our community forum, which is community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:19:21] And as a final reminder, if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, and to

[74] wonderful; extremely good

[75] helped to explain or make clearer

[76] nonsense; ideas that are silly or untrue

unlock the transcripts, subtitles, and key vocabulary, and to be a cool cat like Jachym and request episodes then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com

[00:19:42] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English

[00:19:47] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Implications	possible effects or consequences
Define	explain the exact meaning of
Conception	idea or understanding
Causation	the way one thing makes another thing happen
Millennia	thousands of years
Superstitious	believing that luck, magic or signs can control what happens
Ignorant	lacking knowledge or education
Origins	beginnings or sources; where things first came from
Embedded	fixed firmly and deeply
Over and above	in addition to; beyond

Doctrinal	relating to the official beliefs and teachings of a religion
Mundane	ordinary and everyday; not special or exciting
Fate	the things that will happen to a person in the future
Codes	sets of rules that people are expected to follow
Seemingly	appearing to be, though perhaps not really
Sinful	wrong according to religious rules; against God's laws
Reconcile	make two ideas fit together or agree
Catechism	an official book that explains the main beliefs of a Christian church
Worshiping	praying to and showing deep respect for
Perverse	wrong and unreasonable; not what is right or natural
Excess	an amount that is more than is right or needed
Theologically	from the point of view of religious ideas and teaching

At odds	in disagreement; not matching
Scriptures	the holy writings of a religion, such as the Bible
Clover	a small plant that usually has three leaves on each stem
Intensity	the degree of strength or force
Engaging	taking part
Sunshades	umbrellas used to protect people from hot, bright light
Handy	useful and convenient
Widespread	common in many places or among many people
Spikes	long, thin, sharp points
Injuring	hurting or causing physical harm to
Presumably	probably, as it seems reasonable to think
Commodity	a product that can be bought and sold

Spilling	accidentally dropping or pouring out
Precious	very valuable and important
A pinch	a very small amount, held between finger and thumb
Nullifying	removing the effect of
Disciple	a close follower of Jesus
Spilled	accidentally dropped or poured out
Portrayed	shown or represented in a work of art
Sweep	clean or collect with a brush
Sweeping	cleaning with a brush
Knock	hit with your hand, making a short sound
Swear	make a serious, formal promise
Crucifix	a model of a cross with Jesus on it

Tempt fate	do something that risks bringing bad luck
Tapping	hitting lightly
Peasants	poor people who worked on the land, especially in the past
Spirits	beings without bodies, such as ghosts
Spirit	a being without a body, such as a ghost
Chase	run after to try to catch
Disputed	argued about; not agreed on
Credibility	the quality of being believed or trusted
Tend	are generally likely
Linguistic	to do with language and words
Sneezes	suddenly blows air out of the nose and mouth without control
Raging	spreading quickly and violently

Coughing	pushing air out of the throat with a sudden loud noise
Sneezing	suddenly blowing air out of the nose and mouth
Sneezed	suddenly blew air out of the nose and mouth
Reportedly	according to what people say or have written
Doctrinally	according to the official teachings of a religion
Sneeze	suddenly blow air out of your nose and mouth
Rolled into one	combined into a single thing
Disprove	show to be untrue
Outsider	something that does not belong to a group
Detracts	takes something away
Betrayed	was disloyal to and helped the enemies of
Mythology	old traditional stories, especially about gods and heroes

Crashing	arriving uninvited at
Plunging	falling or moving suddenly
Keep a lookout	watch carefully
Marvelous	wonderful; extremely good
Shed some light	helped to explain or make clearer
Rubbish	nonsense; ideas that are silly or untrue

Language spotlight

1. Over and above

- **Meaning**: In addition to something, or more than what is usual or expected.
- **Synonyms**: in addition to, on top of, beyond
- **Antonyms**: excluding, instead of, rather than
- **Examples**:
    - She regularly does work **over and above** what her contract requires.
    - The hotel charged a cleaning fee **over and above** the price of the room.

2. At odds

- **Meaning**: In disagreement with someone or something, or not matching it.
- **Synonyms**: in conflict, in disagreement, inconsistent
- **Antonyms**: in agreement, in harmony, consistent
- **Examples**:
    - His actions are **at odds** with what he says in public.
    - The two reports were **at odds** over the cause of the fire.

3. Tempt fate

- **Meaning**: To do or say something that risks bringing bad luck, especially by being too confident.
- **Synonyms**: push your luck, take a risk, court disaster
- **Antonyms**: play it safe, be cautious, err on the side of caution
- **Examples**:
    - I don't want to **tempt fate**, but I think we might actually win.
    - Going out without a coat when the sky is so grey is really **tempting fate**.

4. Keep a lookout

- **Meaning**: To watch carefully for something or someone.
- **Synonyms**: watch out, be on the alert, keep an eye out
- **Antonyms**: pay no attention, ignore, overlook
- **Examples**:
    - **Keep a lookout** for the bus while I buy the tickets.
    - The guards **kept a lookout** for anyone trying to climb the wall.

5. Shed some light on

- **Meaning**: To help explain something or make it easier to understand.
- **Synonyms**: clarify, explain, make clear
- **Antonyms**: confuse, obscure, complicate
- **Examples**:
    - The newly discovered letters **shed some light on** why the artist left Paris.
    - Can you **shed some light on** what happened at the meeting?

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. In Ancient Rome, who was described as superstitious?

a) People who did not believe in the gods at all

b) People who were too afraid of the gods

c) People who earned their living by selling magic

d) People who served the gods as temple priests

2. Why, according to the episode, is superstition a problem for religions such as Catholicism?

a) It came from Ancient Rome rather than from the Bible

b) It makes people spend their money on lucky charms

c) It suggests small acts can change a fate God controls

d) It was spread by people who did not go to church

3. How does Negativity Bias help explain why most superstitions are about bad luck?

a) We feel bad events more strongly than equally strong good ones

b) Bad events happen to most people more often than good events

c) People tend to forget bad events faster than good events

d) Good luck was believed to come only as a gift from God

4. What is thought to be the real reason it became bad luck to open an umbrella indoors?

a) Umbrellas were too expensive to risk damaging inside

b) Rainwater brought into the house was thought to cause illness

c) Queen Victoria banned umbrellas inside her palaces

d) Early umbrellas could open suddenly and hurt people nearby

5. What did a Dutch study from 2008 suggest about Friday the 13th?

a) More car accidents happen than on other Fridays

b) Fewer accidents and fires happen than on a normal day

c) Hospitals are busier than they are on a normal day

d) Most people stay at home all day because of fear

True or False

6. Around half of Americans say that they are superstitious. (True/False)

7. The custom of throwing salt over your left shoulder is thought to come from the Ancient Romans. (True/False)

8. Pope Gregory I declared that people should say ‘bless you’ when someone sneezed. (True/False)

9. It is estimated that around 30 million people in the US are afraid of the number 13. (True/False)

10. In the Bible, Friday is described as a particularly lucky day. (True/False)

Fill in the Blanks

11. Superstitions go back _____, they go back thousands of years, yet they are still believed by billions of people.

12. It's at ____ with the scriptures; logically both can't exist at the same time and be true.

13. If you were a true Christian you would never tempt ____ by lying when touching the cross.

14. And our fifth and final superstition is two superstitions rolled into ___, and it's to do with Friday the 13th.

15. So is it actually that terrible, and should you keep a _____ tonight for all sorts of unlucky things?

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does "**mundane**" mean in the description of the small things people can do to influence their fate?

a) Secret and magical

b) Holy and religious

c) Ordinary and everyday

d) Dangerous and risky

17. What does "**reconcile**" mean when Alastair says it is hard to reconcile superstition with believing in an all-powerful God?

a) Make two ideas fit together

b) Become friends again after a fight

c) Prove that an idea is false

d) Pay back money that is owed

18. What does "**commodity**" mean in the description of salt throughout history?

a) A type of medicine for the sick

b) A tax that was paid to the king

c) A rare kind of cooking spice

d) A product that is bought and sold

19. What does "**disputed**" mean when Alastair talks about the reasons people knock on wood?

a) Known and accepted by all

b) Argued about, not agreed on

c) Completely forgotten over time

d) Linked only to religion

20. In the Norse story, what does "**crashing**" the party mean?

a) Driving a vehicle into it

b) Leaving it suddenly and noisily

c) Going to it without an invitation

d) Organising and paying for it

Answers

1. b) People who were too afraid of the gods
2. c) It suggests small acts can change a fate God controls
3. a) We feel bad events more strongly than equally strong good ones
4. d) Early umbrellas could open suddenly and hurt people nearby
5. b) Fewer accidents and fires happen than on a normal day
6. True
7. False
8. True
9. True
10. False
11. millennia
12. odds
13. fate
14. one
15. lookout
16. c) Ordinary and everyday
17. a) Make two ideas fit together
18. d) A product that is bought and sold

19. b) Argued about, not agreed on

20. c) Going to it without an invitation