

IDEAS 70

**International Online Teachers Society
Debate
Educational Materials For
Advance and Upper Intermediate
Students**



**International Online Teachers Society
Publishing Committee**



CONTENTS

THE 70th INTERNATIONAL ONLINE TEACHERS SOCIETY ESSAY CONTEST

- SUPERSTITION I THE ROLE OF SUPERSTITION IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES I Kathlyn Q. Barrozo I 2
SUPERSTITION I SUPERSTITION--DISPELLING FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN I Kathlyn Q. Barrozo I 3
SUPERSTITION I SUPERSTITION AND ITS HISTORY I Marian Baltazar I 4
SUPERSTITION I SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS - A FACET TO A PERSON'S PERSONALITY I Joseph Arre I 5



THE ROLE OF SUPERSTITION IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

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Nearly each and every one of us harbors a superstitious belief of some sort. Many of our beliefs have either been handed down to us by older people or simply fed to us by people we know. It can be difficult to let go of those beliefs readily. They may affect us so profoundly that we simply refuse to no longer stick to them and let them go.

A cat crossing your path is inconsequential, but if the feline happens to be black, then the perspective changes. Walking under a ladder is a no-no. Numbers always have a lucky streak to them especially when betting on lottery games, but the number "13" has always held a distinctive unlucky streak. Friday falling on the 13th of the month is considered particularly not in agreement with one's lucky stars.

Dogs howling are portents of death. We make the sign of the cross before going on an undertaking. We consult astrology and numerology before embarking on a very important mission or scheduling a huge endeavor like a ceremony or the opening of a company. We structure rooms and various parts of our houses based on the concepts of feng shui. Yes, superstition pervades so many aspects of our lives that we sometimes fail to tell where superstition ends and reality begins.

One time, I talked to a friend who also happens to be an architect. I asked her why the layout of doors and stairs and such other structures also find basis on the concepts of feng shui. She laughingly told me that feng shui in architecture, if studied carefully, also finds basis on simple logic. For instance, the reason why having a bathroom positioned directly at the bottom of the stairs could bring about unpleasant events: if someone accidentally falls down the flight of stairs, they'd end up falling straight into the toilet. A door positioned directly at the bottom of a flight of stairs would be a sure opening to one's death if it leads straight to a roadway, if one were, again, to fall down the stairs. Although those were the only examples she mentioned during our conversation, she was still able to enlighten me to a certain degree on why feng shui is such a vital link in the layout of houses.

Superstition that does not find basis in something as concrete and more palpable as logic is nothing but fanaticism and baseless inconsistency. Coincidences happen, but building beliefs based on mere coincidences is nothing short of not thinking with a clear mind. If superstition bothers with what we need to do instead of giving us a clear perspective on things, we need to see where our priorities lie. Superstition should not control each and every aspect of our lives. Once it does, we may never hope to live in the reality of living.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are common superstitions, if any, you adhere to? What is the origin of those personal superstitions?
2. What are common superstitions that people in your country believe in? Be able to elaborate on those beliefs and their various bases.
3. Why do you think it is easy to attribute many unfortunate events to the failure to adhere to particular superstitious beliefs?
4. How can superstitious beliefs help us in some ways? Be as specific as needed.
5. Make a research on superstitious beliefs in other cultures. Be able to report about them in class.



SUPERSTITION--DISPELLING FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

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Man fears the mystery of the unknown. That's why superstition always finds a strong following. Superstitious beliefs are commonly the easiest way to justify what can not be readily explained. We use superstition to explain away ignorance, to dispel feelings of uncertainty and unreason. We adhere to superstitious beliefs because they're more convenient than finding clearer explanations for what we witness, deal with and hear about.

We struggle with uncertainties everyday. We wake up to each and every day unsure of what lies directly ahead of us. Reading the day's horoscope serves to give us a perspective despite the fact that horoscope readings are hazy, too broad, and often only give us something we'd like to hear: good forecasts and words of caution. Once, one of my students told me that before coming to my country to study, she had consulted a monk at a certain temple in her country. The monk had correctly predicted she would go on a journey within the year. Well, my student being in my country proved that the monk was right. The monk had also said that she was a 'boy', maybe in another life. Well, that student happened to have a strong demeanor, so I told her it was probably why the monk had told her she was the opposite of her gender. She tended to be impulsive but always made firm decisions. She also had the inclination to be brusque and had a fairly rough humor.

My mother used to consult fortune tellers in the village where she used to be a school teacher. Going on frequent trips to the village fortune teller, my mom and her also retired co-teachers always came back from such trips with glowing accounts of what the palm reader had told them. Things like: your children will be very successful, one of your kids will be able to go abroad, you will enjoy success and have much money; these were always things that the palm reader saw for those who consulted her. I told my mom that I noticed the fortune teller didn't dish out negative predictions as readily as good ones. I observed that she did not tell them things they didn't want to hear. Perhaps that was the reason why they patronized the fortune teller, I said. My mother has since stopped going to the palm reader.

It's funny how we tend to readily believe that knowing ahead gives us power. Knowing ahead does indeed do that, but it does so with careful planning and clear anticipation. If we don't proceed with a plan on what to do and how to proceed in case of contingencies, then indeed we are doomed. In any endeavor, especially less favorable ones, we should always hope for the best and expect the worst. We should not blame our sorry fates on not believing in superstition. Good things happen to those who carefully lay out plans for their future. Having a foretold good fortune come true is coincidental; it's not the direct result of consulting your lucky stars. What our mind can conceive, we are able to achieve.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Are you particularly superstitious? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever been to a fortune telling session? What did the fortune teller tell you? Have any of those predictions come true?
3. Why do we fear the unknown? Why is it easy to believe in superstition?
4. Be able to talk about the superstitious beliefs your own family adheres to.
5. Why should we take superstition with a grain of salt? Use examples to support your answer, if needed.



Superstition and its history

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As the year 2012 comes to an end, people tend to remember several superstitious beliefs. Superstitious beliefs are deeply rooted in our society. Superstition is mainly based on the concept of cause and effect. It states that certain forces can cause things to happen. ...The forces that people often link to events are omens, astrology, witchcraft, and luck. According to superstitious people, such forces are not controlled by natural elements and they can literally change human existence.

Various superstitious beliefs can be linked back from thousands of years. During the 18th century, philosophers based their religion according to superstitious miracles and revelations which are based on the occult. Because of such beliefs, the 18th century has been considered as the Age of Enlightenment. Some of the beliefs in the Christian and Catholic doctrine are also based on superstitious beliefs. Most people used superstitious beliefs and practices in order to create their religion. One of which is the Voodoo belief.

Superstitious beliefs become apparent during the 15th century. The word came from the Latin *superstitio*, which means to stand over or upon. The true Latin meaning of the word is unclear and several types of possibilities have been made. The Greek and the Roman legions firmly believed in the supernatural. They modeled their religion according to deities, gods, and superstitious events. Before making decisions, their leaders will first look for signs and omens from oracles and then they will base their conclusions according to the signs. They tend to follow the prophecies and the signs since not following such omens can actually lead to destruction, defeat, and death.

The superstitions of people can also be seen in Japan and in other countries. In China, they tend to follow everything according to the concept of the Feng Shui, a belief which is based on the natural power of the yin and the yang. Architecture, agriculture, medicine, and religious affairs were all based on Feng Shui. In Japan, luck and prosperity can also be achieved through appeasing various deities and following certain customs. Through shrines and religious seals, they believe that spiritual beings are appeased and that such metaphysical beings can grant people with various blessings.

Nowadays, people incorporate superstitious beliefs to luck, prophecy, and spiritualism. Some individuals believe that luck and calamities can be controlled through adhering through some ritualistic beliefs. For instance, some believe that throwing a grain of salt at one's back can actually be good luck while seeing a black cat can be considered as bad luck. In some countries, people believe that breaking a glass can be 7 years bad luck while in others such things can actually lead to a better life.

Questions:

- 1) What are some superstitious beliefs that you know?
- 2) Do you believe in superstition?
- 3) What is Feng Shui?
- 4) What is the Latin word for superstition?
- 5) Do you believe in luck? Why?



SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS - A FACET TO A PERSON'S PERSONALITY

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In this modern age that we live in, superstitious beliefs are still prevalent and rampant which shows that it reveals a facet to a person's personality. We know pretty well that superstitions are not backed up by Science and are even far from rationality. It seems that everything has a superstitious belief associated with it. People are so much attached to it that sometimes they can't even seem to survive without them. It barely seems impossible too for people to ignore them.

It looks like superstitions have been part of the people's lives for it has been rooted in our society for over a period of time. It has made a place from people of all walks of life and that includes politics and sports too. As a matter of fact we can find a lot superstitious beliefs and practices all over the world. They are actually illogical assumptions of people who are found to be so gullible. Even the elite can be called practitioners of superstition.

There are psychologists who believe that superstitious beliefs actually reveal a facet of a person's personality. It can even be related to the lifestyle of a person. Superstitious beliefs can also be accounted to false interpretations of the natural events. On the other hand, it can be a crucial part of one's culture too. It has been handed down to us from generation to generation by our ancestors, making us hold on to these beliefs and practices. It is even termed as a folklore belief.

In fact, we can quote as many superstitious beliefs that we may know and a lot of them have been very popular. There are times that we are unconsciously doing or acting out these practices in our daily living to the point that it directs our way of thinking or our way of life. For this reason, there are some superstitious beliefs that become social norms too. We tend to put a lot of meaning to what happens in our life and a lot of underlying circumstances. At times we get these beliefs from sources such as the leaders, elders, government, myths, imaginative stories and from some of the scholars.

It has been a fact that superstition can neither have a scientific nor biblical basis for that matter. Even then, it has proven to influence the lives of many people and what is more puzzling is that it also affects the responsible professional people. It can also come to the point of people developing a personal superstition, when in fact it is actually a behavior that has no rational basis or history. In reality, these superstitious belief stems out of our curiosity regarding things that are hidden or those things which are still in the future. Believe it or not, people tend to be "so superstitious" because of stress.

Yes, we always worry too much about life, not considering the fact that we don't like ambiguity in our life. We can never run out of reasons why superstitious beliefs exist, simply because it only shows another side or facet of a person's personality.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is the real reason behind having superstitious beliefs? Elaborate on your answer.
2. Do we have a lot of superstitious beliefs that makes us worry too much? Why or why not?
3. Are we that gullible in life to be so superstitious in a lot of things? Explain your answer.
4. What are the circumstances in your life wherein you were so controlled of these beliefs and practices? Justify your answer.
5. Do you always associate yourselves with superstitious beliefs? Why or why not?





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