

UNIT

1

Superstitions

Look at the titles of the readings and their brief descriptions to preview this unit's content. Before you begin each reading, answer the questions about it.

Reading 1



Two Worlds

In this excerpt from her memoir, the writer talks about her childhood fascination with tales of superstition.

- 1. Who used to tell you stories when you were a child? Did you believe that all the stories were true? Explain your answer.
- 2. In some cultures, people think it's bad luck to walk under a ladder. What are some examples of superstitions in your culture?
- 3. Can a person who believes in superstitions also be a rational person who can make decisions based on thought and not just feelings? Why or why not?

Reading 2



Lucky Hats and Other Fishing Superstitions

What are some common superstitions among fishermen? You can find out in this newspaper article.

- 1. Would you like to go fishing? Why or why not?
- 2. What equipment do you need to go fishing?
- 3. Do you think you need luck to have success when you go fishing? Why or why not?

Reading 3



A Superstition About New Calendars

The writer of this newspaper article describes some problems caused by one of his childhood superstitions.

- 1. What do you like most about a new year?
- 2. What traditions do you follow on New Year's Day?
- 3. Do you know any superstitions associated with New Year's Day?

Reading 1

Two Worlds



Previewing Vocabulary

The words in the box are from the reading. Discuss the meanings of the words with a partner. Look up any new words in a dictionary.

curses	miracles	roots and herbs
saints	souls of the dead	the evil eye

Scanning

Scan the reading. Find and circle the words from the box. Then discuss how you think these words relate to the topic of the reading.

This excerpt from her autobiography is about Gabriella de Ferrari's childhood in Peru.

1 Early in life, I realized that there were two very different ways of looking at the world, my parents' and Señorita Luisa's. What she told me was what I assumed the world outside my house believed. At home what I was told was what people believed in that faraway place where my parents came from. I kept them separate and functioned accordingly, never suffering from the difference, at least while I was young and the lines were so easy to draw. Yet Señorita Luisa's world, together with that of the maids in the kitchen, was far more seductive than the rational world of my parents. I liked curses and miracles, and praying for a handsome husband, and buying up heaven.



Mother and Señorita Luisa talked to each other constantly. They would sit under a large mulberry tree in the afternoon and become absorbed in each other’s stories. My own time with Señorita Luisa came in the evenings, when I got back from school. I would go to her house for a snack of hot chocolate and a cake she made especially for me of fresh figs held together with what she called “honey glue.” She had many stories to tell, and they were all equally outrageous. I listened, mesmerized by her tales delivered in the monotonous rhythms of her voice as if they occurred every day, like drinking milk or taking a bath. 2

One of my favorite activities, in which Señorita Luisa would indulge me only when she was in a good mood, was to have my fortune read. She would drip hot wax from a candle into a large container of icy water. When the wax hit the water, it formed different shapes. She read them and told me my “little future,” that is, my future for the next week. The prognostications¹ were mostly designed to teach me to behave: “This week you will tell a lie and that will cost you, because your mother will not believe you anymore.” Only occasionally would she tell me my “big future,” the one I wanted to hear the most: A handsome man would fall in love with me, a man with green eyes and dark hair like Luisa’s brothers. 3

The maids in my family’s kitchen were also constantly reading wax, but they weren’t allowed to read wax for me. My mother thought it was nonsense. She never knew that Señorita Luisa read my fortune. Señorita Luisa also told ghost stories about the *almas*, the souls of the dead that came to visit at night. She used to scare me so much I had to ask Saturnina to stay with me until I fell asleep. Saturnina knew how to send the souls away: She tied a black ribbon to the window and left them a piece of bread. 4

As Señorita Luisa had saints, Saturnina and the other maids had roots and herbs. These could perform any kind of miracle, especially scaring away the “evil eye” that women gave each other when they were interested in the same man. I was constantly torn between wanting to believe Señorita Luisa and Saturnina and wanting to believe Mother, who was more interested in having me worry about geography and math. 5

¹ *prognostications*: predictions

Adapted from *Gringa Latina*

A Comprehension Check

Check (✓) the statement that best expresses the main idea of the reading.

- ___ 1. The writer’s mother paid Señorita Luisa to teach her daughter about superstitions, something that every young girl should learn.
- ___ 2. As a child, the writer loved being with the maids and Señorita Luisa more than she liked being with her parents.
- ___ 3. As a child, the writer lived in a world where many people believed in superstitions, but her parents didn’t.

B Vocabulary Study

Find the words in *italics* in the reading. Then circle the correct meaning of each word.

- 1. When something is *seductive*, it is **attractive** / **frightening** / **painful**. (par. 1)
- 2. When something is *outrageous*, it **is very unusual and surprising** / **makes people laugh** / **makes people feel sad**. (par. 2)
- 3. When something *mesmerizes* you, it is **boring** / **interesting** / **confusing**. (par. 2)
- 4. When people *indulge* you, they do something you **need** / **don't want** / **want**. (par. 3)
- 5. When you think something is *nonsense*, you don't **think it's meaningful** / **think it will happen** / **think it's reasonable**. (par. 4)

C Making Inferences

Sometimes the reader must infer, or figure out, what the writer did not explain or state directly in the text.

Check (✓) the statements that you can infer from the reading.

- ☒ 1. Saturnina worked for the writer's family.
- ☐ 2. Señorita Luisa worked for the writer's family.
- ☐ 3. Señorita Luisa and the writer's mother were friends.
- ☐ 4. The writer's parents were born in a foreign country.
- ☐ 5. The writer's mother would be pleased that Saturnina had read wax for her daughter.
- ☐ 6. Unlike Señorita Luisa, the writer's mother wasn't superstitious.

D Relating Reading to Personal Experience

Discuss these questions with your classmates.

- 1. Do you believe in ghosts? Why or why not?
- 2. Were you more or less superstitious as a child than you are now? Do you still believe in superstitions? If so, which ones?
- 3. Have you ever gone to a fortune-teller? If so, did any of the predictions come true? If you have never gone to a fortune-teller, would you like to? Why or why not?

Lucky Hats and Other Fishing Superstitions

Thinking About the Topic

What do you know about fishing? Use the words in the box to complete the paragraph. Compare your answers with a partner.

bait boarding catch on board overboard school

When you go fishing, the most important thing you need to bring _____¹ the boat is _____² because it's impossible to _____³ fish without it. Before _____⁴ the boat, you should also be sure to have a life jacket with you. If you're not wearing a life jacket and you fall _____⁵, you could be in trouble! Once you're out in the boat, you never know what's going to happen. The last time I went fishing, there was a large _____⁶ of bluefish, and I went home with 18 of them. My wife wasn't happy. She hates bluefish.

Scanning

Scan the reading to find and circle the words you wrote in the paragraph. Then read the whole text.

Last January, I was fortunate enough to go to Brazil on a fishing trip. As we were boarding the vessel that would be our home for the next six nights, I looked up and saw a huge bunch of ripe bananas hanging from a hook. I was horrified. For more than 20 years, I have been told again and again that bananas and boats just don't mix. I started talking about it with my fishing companions. Not one had ever heard of such a superstition. Yet just a few months earlier, I had read a paper about the banana superstition. The author was unable to find its origin. One bit of speculation is that dangerous creatures lurk inside the banana bunches. But there's no doubt that anglers throughout the world believe that bananas don't mix with fishing boats.



- 4 The bananas certainly didn't affect the fishing in Brazil. They were downright tasty, and the fishing was outstanding. But it got me to thinking about other superstitions regarding fishing.
- 5 For example, lucky hats. I had a lucky hat for a long time, a bright red cap that I was convinced was lucky. I caught a lot of fish – and a lot of big fish – wearing that hat. Then one day when I was angry, I threw it overboard. I'm convinced I haven't caught as many fish since.
- 6 Recently, a friend e-mailed me a list of "10 Fishing Superstitions" that appeared in a magazine. The lucky hat issue was addressed along with bananas. It says, "The 'right' hat can make or break a fishing trip, but it can't be one you bought yourself." Hmmm. Come to think of it, that lucky cap of mine was a freebie.
- 7 There also were some I'd never heard of. For example, rabbits crossing your path are bad luck. So are eggs.
- 8 One superstition we've all heard is that it's good luck to spit on your bait; but this particular list suggests that if the bait is a fish, you should kiss it. Actually, the idea of spitting on the bait probably has some merit. Just like a spray-on fish attractant, it can help disguise a smell that fish might find offensive.
- 9 There's also some merit in keeping the first fish you catch. Sheepshead fishermen, for example, don't like to release their fish¹ until they prepare to leave an area because it will scare the rest of the school.
- 10 I have a good friend who is convinced that he won't catch any fish unless he first spills a soft drink in his boat. You can't just pour the drink out; it has to be done accidentally. That means you need to leave the drink in a precarious position when you put it down.
- 11 There are other superstitions as well. If you catch a fish on the first cast, you might as well go home; it will be the only fish you will catch. Cameras on board are bad luck. (That's really tough for me.)
- 12 I'm sure there are plenty more superstitions out there, and I'd love to hear them. Let me know and I'll pass them along somewhere down the line. And remember, no bananas.

¹ These fishermen must follow rules about returning part of their catch to the sea to avoid reducing the sheepshead fish population.

Adapted from *The Post and Courier*

A Comprehension Check

Which events are good luck for fishermen, and which are bad luck? Check (✓) the correct column.

	Good Luck	Bad Luck
1. having bananas on a boat		
2. having rabbits cross in front of you		
3. having eggs on a boat		
4. spitting on bait		
5. spilling a soft drink on a boat		
6. catching a fish the first time you try		

B Vocabulary Study

Find the words in the reading that match these definitions.

1. boat _____ (par. 1)
2. idea about why something has happened _____ (par. 3)
3. hide and wait to jump out _____ (par. 3)
4. fishermen _____ (par. 3)
5. something you get for free _____ (par. 6)
6. benefit or advantage _____ (par. 8 & 9)
7. hide something _____ (par. 8)
8. not safe or stable _____ (par. 10)

C Understanding Pronoun Reference

▶ Writers use different kinds of pronouns to refer to information that is stated earlier in a text. Some common pronouns are *it* and *its*. Understanding pronoun reference is very important for reading comprehension.

What do these words refer to?

1. *it* (par. 2, line 2) _____
2. *its* (par. 3, line 2) _____
3. *it* (par. 4, line 2) _____
4. *it* (par. 5, line 3) _____
5. *It* (par. 6, line 2) _____
6. *it* (par. 6, line 3) _____
7. *it* (par. 8, line 2) _____
8. *it* (par. 10, line 2) _____

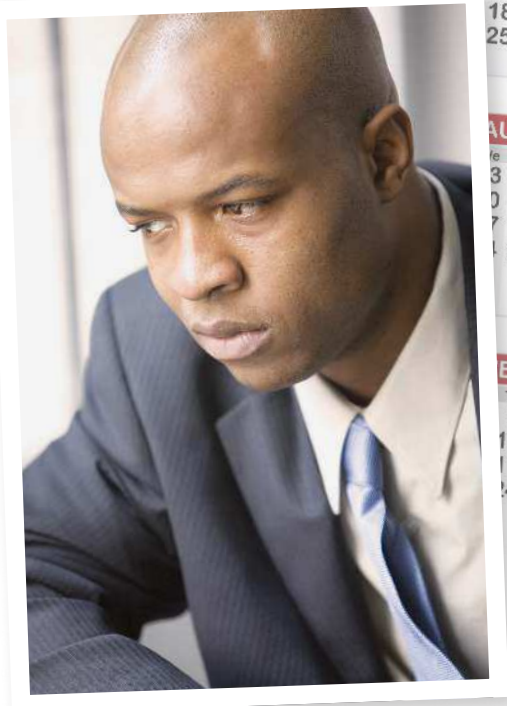
D Relating Reading to Personal Experience

Discuss these questions with your classmates.

1. Do you know any superstitions associated with sports other than fishing? If so, what are they?
2. Do you have a lucky hat (or other article of clothing)? If so, where did you get it? Why do you consider it lucky?
3. Who do you think are more superstitious – men or women? What examples can you give?

Reading 3

A Superstition About New Calendars



Predicting

Look at these statements from the reading. Find out the meanings of any words you don't know. Then answer the question below. Compare your answer with a partner.

- 1. . . . administrative assistants at work hand out new calendars in late November or early December.
- 2. . . . I'm likely to walk into a colleague's space and confront the offending object.
- 3. If I see one, I avert my eyes.

What do you think the writer's superstition is?

Skimming

Skim the reading to check your prediction. Then read the whole text.

- 1 Don't forget to throw that quarter into your pot of black-eyed peas tomorrow . . . for good luck, of course.
- 2 I picked up my share of superstitions growing up, and several of them are connected with the new year. The pot of peas seems more tradition to me than superstition, and it's easy to ignore since I don't cook. I can also say that another southern superstition – making sure a man is the first person to cross the threshold of your home on New Year's Day – also has no impact on my adult life. But one superstition I can't seem to escape is the one dealing with calendars. In my family, we believe it's bad luck to look at a new calendar before the start of the new year.
- 3 I can't ignore this because efficient administrative assistants at work hand out new calendars in late November or early December. And some of my co-workers hang them up as soon as they get them. So at any time, I'm likely to walk into a colleague's space and



confront the offending object. If I see one, I avert my eyes. Try as I might to rid myself of this superstition, I'm not willing to take any chances, either.

I go through the same contortions each December. What to do if I see a new calendar? How do I avert my eyes while still preserving the air of a professional? Sometimes it isn't easy.

I've found myself looking at the floor while talking with colleagues or studiously examining a spot on the wall far away from a new calendar. As yet, none of my co-workers has called me on my seeming aloofness.

This December when the administrative assistant at work asked if I wanted a calendar for next year, I didn't immediately say no as I usually do. I didn't say yes, either, but finally decided to rid myself of this silliness. So I did what any confident, competent adult does when confronted with a boogeyman of the past – I called my mother.

"Do you remember that superstition we had about putting a quarter in the black-eyed peas on New Year's Day?" I asked her.

"Well, it wasn't exactly a superstition," she said. "We did it for you kids. We wanted y'all to eat the peas, and maybe finding a quarter in your plate was just a way to get you to do it."

"You mean you were trying to bribe us to eat?" I asked incredulously.

"What about calendars?" I asked, finally getting to the point of my telephone call.

"Have you ever heard that it's bad luck to look at a calendar before the New Year?"

"Not to look at it but to hang it," she replied. "It's bad luck to hang a new calendar before the New Year."

There it was. I had remembered my superstition wrong. My contortions were all for nothing. No more staring at my feet in the face of a new calendar. Looking at one wouldn't bring me bad luck. My co-workers who hung the calendars were going to have the bad luck!

Adapted from *The Washington Post*

A Comprehension Check

Mark each statement *T* (true) or *F* (false). Then correct the false statements.

- F 1. The writer's family used to ~~eat~~ ^{throw a quarter into a pot of} black-eyed peas for good luck.
2. The writer used to think that if a man were the first to enter the home on New Year's Day, the family would have good luck.
3. The writer thought that if he waited until January to hang up a new calendar, he wouldn't have bad luck.
4. If colleagues were sitting near a new calendar, the writer would not look at the people while he was talking to them.
5. The writer called his mother to put an end to his superstition.
6. The actual superstition was not to look at a calendar before the new year.

B Vocabulary Study

Find these phrases in the reading. Then circle the letter of the correct meaning of each phrase.

- 1. *hand out new calendars* (par. 3)
a. put calendars in people’s hands b. give calendars to everyone
- 2. *walk into a colleague’s space* (par. 3)
a. meet a colleague b. go to a colleague’s desk or office
- 3. *take any chances* (par. 3)
a. believe in chance b. do anything risky
- 4. *I go through the same contortions each December.* (par. 4)
a. I look up and down. b. I turn my body in unnatural ways.
- 5. *preserving the air of a professional* (par. 4)
a. seeming professional b. not smoking in the office

C Summarizing

When you summarize a text, you include only the most important information. A summary does not include details or examples. Summarizing is a strategy that can help you check your understanding of a text.

Cross out the sentences that don’t belong in the summary.

Ever since he was a child, the writer had been superstitious about looking at a new calendar before January 1. He had other superstitions about the new year, too. His calendar superstition was a problem because some of his colleagues at work hung up new calendars in November or December. They hung them up as soon as they got them. The writer tried hard not to look at the calendars. It wasn’t easy. Eventually, his mother told him that he had the superstition wrong: It was bad luck to hang up calendars before January 1, but it was fine to look at them. So it was his colleagues who would have the bad luck!

D Relating Reading to Personal Experience

Discuss these questions with your classmates.

- 1. Do you know any superstitions for other holidays? What are they?
- 2. Did your parents ever bribe you to do something? Do you think this is something parents should do? Why or why not?
- 3. Imagine a friend is worried that he is going to have bad luck because he broke a mirror. How would you help your friend put an end to this superstition?

Reread one of the unit readings and time yourself. Note your reading speed in the chart on page 124.