#99 Superstition

Why we still cross our fingers LEVEL 4 | FREE TALK

PALLO!

ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS

1 **How superstitious are you, from 1 to 10?**

2 **Do you have a lucky number, color, or item?**

FREE TALK

1 In Korea, people worry that sharing good news too early will ruin it, and English speakers say "Don't **jinx it**!" for the same reason. Staff in hospitals, cafés, and kitchens avoid saying "It's quiet today" so they don't **tempt fate**. **Is there anything you never say for fear of jinxing it? On the other hand, do you have any good-luck rituals?**

2 In Korean baseball, a fan whose team seems to win every time they show up at the stadium is called a "승요" (victory fairy), whereas a "패요" (defeat fairy) might stay home when the team is **on a roll**. **Are you more of a victory fairy or a defeat fairy? When you watch anything you care about, is there anything you always do or avoid doing, just in case?**

3 In Spain, people eat 12 grapes at midnight on New Year's Eve; in China, a clock is an unlucky gift because "giving a clock" sounds like a phrase tied to funerals. In Korea, some still fear "fan death," widely seen as an **old wives' tale**. **Do you know other unusual superstitions, and is there one that makes you think, "Hmm, that actually makes sense"?**

4 You probably know someone who **swears by** a fortune-teller and visits one before every big decision. Some even spend hundreds of thousands of won on a talisman, or break up because their 궁합 didn't match. **When does relying on superstitions go from harmless fun to too much, and would you say something if a close friend did this?**

5 Some superstitions have become customs. "Bless you" after a sneeze is said to have begun as protection from evil spirits, and in Korea, yeot is **part and parcel of** 수능 season. **Have you or someone you know followed a superstition just because others did? Which traditions would you keep without believing in them, and which would you drop?**

KEY EXPRESSIONS

Slip a couple of these into your answers.

jinx something
bring bad luck by talking too soon

tempt fate
risk bad luck by being too confident

be on a roll
keep succeeding again and again

old wives' tale
a traditional belief that isn't actually true

swear by
strongly believe that something works

part and parcel of
a natural, unavoidable part of something

SAY IT BETTER

The professional line isn't a direct replacement for the everyday one; it's the same idea in a semi-formal, business style.

EVERYDAY		PROFESSIONAL
Let's not celebrate too early.	→	Let's not **get ahead of ourselves**. ***Nuance:*** *A polite brake on early excitement; common in team meetings.*
Winning when I go doesn't mean I caused it.	→	That's **correlation, not causation**. ***Nuance:*** *Data-talk phrase; handy in reports, and fun among friends.*
That one actually sounds reasonable.	→	There's a **sound rationale behind** that one. ***Nuance:*** *Rationale = the reasoning behind a choice; common in proposals.*
We can't just rely on luck.	→	We can't **leave it to chance**. ***Nuance:*** *Used to urge careful planning; natural in project meetings.*
I just did it because everyone else did.	→	I was simply **following convention**. ***Nuance:*** *Convention = the usual, accepted way; common in formal writing.*

DEBATE: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Skip the unlucky floor, or number every floor?

1 WARM UP · No sides yet. Share your own story first.

1. Have you ever seen an elevator with an "F" button instead of a 4? **What did you think?**
2. Would you ask to change rooms if a hotel put you on the 4th or 13th floor? **Why or why not?**

2 SITUATION · Read aloud, one sentence each.

In Korea, the number four is widely avoided because it sounds like the Chinese character for "death," a fear known as **tetraphobia**. Many elevators skip the 4th floor or label it "F," and Seoul's 63 Building has no 44th floor. In the West, the dreaded number is 13: of roughly 620 New York apartment towers tall enough to have a 13th floor, only **13.5%** actually list one. Supporters see skipping as a harmless courtesy, and a 2007 Gallup poll found that about 13% of Americans would feel uneasy on a hotel's 13th floor. Developers also worry that superstitious buyers may shy away from "unlucky" homes. In 2015, however, Vancouver, Canada, announced that new buildings must number every floor, aiming for "a level playing field," since different cultures fear different numbers. Officials said missing numbers confuse everyone, especially paramedics and firefighters, calling it "really a safety issue." A 2024 study found New York's relabeled apartments worth only modestly more after adjusting for location and size, suggesting the habit owes more to tradition than to profit. **Skip the unlucky floor, or number every floor?**

3 TWO SIDES · Everyone picks one. No need for equal sides!

A SKIP THE UNLUCKY FLOOR

votes ☐

"If it puts people at ease, why not?"

Skipping one number costs nothing and spares nervous residents, guests, and patients needless worry. Good buildings cater to the people who use them.

B NUMBER EVERY FLOOR

votes ☐

"A floor is a floor."

Missing numbers confuse visitors, couriers, and emergency crews, and they quietly keep superstitions alive. When lives are at stake, it's best to err on the side of caution.

Everyone speaks once before anyone speaks twice · Answer the last person **first**, then add your point.

4 FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS · Ask one that could make the other side rethink.

ASK SIDE A

- If firefighters lose precious seconds searching for a missing floor, is the tradition worth it?
- Isn't selling the 13th floor as the "14th" simply misleading buyers?
- If buildings keep hiding these numbers, won't the superstitions live on forever?

ASK SIDE B

- If some patients dread the 4th floor, shouldn't a hospital put them at ease?
- Has anyone ever actually gotten lost because of an "F" button?
- Why should a city tell private owners how to number their own floors?

USEFUL LINE "I see where you're coming from, but…" *I see where you're coming from, but safety has to come first.*

5 FINAL ROUND · Don't skip this part!

FINAL POSITION	"In the end, I'd **skip the unlucky floor / number every floor**, because…" Did anyone switch sides? Why?
BEST POINT	"As the other side **rightly said**…" Name the best point you heard today.

KEY EXPRESSIONS

dreaded greatly feared	**shy away from** avoid something out of fear or doubt	**a level playing field** a situation that is fair for everyone
cater to provide what a group wants or needs	**err on the side of caution** choose the safer option when unsure	**put someone at ease** make someone feel relaxed

Data: Korea JoongAng Daily (Oct 15, 2022), CBC News (Nov 5, 2015), Significance (Apr 7, 2024), Gallup (2007).

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