



SUPERSTITION

# ITALIAN SUPERSTITIONS

Superstitions are any beliefs or practices considered either irrational or supernatural which often arise from ignorance, misunderstandings of science or casualty, positive beliefs in fate or magic, fears of what is unknown. They are commonly applied to beliefs and practices surrounding luck, prophecies, and certain spiritual beings, particularly the belief that future events can be foretold by specific, apparently unrelated, prior events. The word *superstition* is often used to refer to a religion not practiced by the majority of a given society regardless of whether the prevailing religion contains alleged superstitions.

Superstitions are taken very seriously in Italy, so...you will be shown the most popular ones.

# FRIDAY 17TH

That's a "fatal"  
combination!!!

Friday is considered to bring bad luck as, for Christians, it is the day Jesus died, while 17 - XVII in ancient Roman numbers - is the anagram of the Latin word "VIXI" which means "I lived" (so I'm dead) and that was engraved on the ancient Roman tombs.



# TOASTING – DO IT PROPERLY!!!



Never toast with a glass of water!!! Water is so cheap that is not worth to make a toast with it, so it might bring bad luck if you actually do that. It is also believed that if while clinking glasses you cross arms with other people, that might bring bad luck too...so pay attention!!!

# BLACK CATS



It is believed that when you are walking or driving down a road and a black cat crosses it, that's a sign of bad luck because it reminds of witchcraft. But if you're lucky enough to hear a cat sneezing, then, you're believed to have good luck for the rest of the day!

# THE CITY EMBLEM IN PIAZZA ARANCI DO NOT WALK ON IT!!!

In the pavement of Piazza Aranci, our town main square, there is a mosaic representing the town emblem. It is believed that if a student walk on it, s/he will have an unexpected test and will get a bad mark.





# THE TWO-TAIL LIZARD OF PISA

On the central bronze door of the Cathedral of Pisa there is a relief sculpture of a two-tail lizard. This tiny reptile seems to bring good luck to those who touch its tails as it is a symbol of abundance and wealth.



# THE PIGLET FOUNTAIN - FLORENCE

This ancient bronze fountain seems to have “super powers”. In fact it is traditionally believed that if a coin put into the piglet’s gaping jaws slides down and ends up inside the grate underneath, one’s wish will come true.

Moreover, according to another popular belief, since the female wild boar is an animal associated not only to good luck, but also to fertility, all those women who want a child should rub its nose.





# THE BULL OF MILAN



The legend tells that spinning around "the precise part of the body located between the Little Torino's (little bull) hind legs three times with your heel, it will bring you good fortune. As it can be seen, in fact, the mosaic is seriously damaged, because everyone who visits the Vittorio Emanuele Arcade, wouldn't miss a go!!!

# JULIET'S BREAST

A bronze statue of Juliet (maybe the most famous Shakespearian character) stands in the courtyard of the Capulets' house in Verona. Touching her right breast, according to a lore of unknown origin, it is said to bring luck.



# MIND SPILLING OLIVE OIL...

In Italy, this is very bad luck indeed!!! Italians think that this precious product should be treated with maximum respect and they don't want to see their top quality oil wasted. In fact, extra virgin olive oil has been very expensive since ancient times, so every drop was and is still valuable. In addition, oil stains are tough to get out of clothes. For both these reasons the act of spilling this liquid is considered to bring bad luck.



## ...AND SALT TOO!

Even spilling salt it is said to bring misfortune. As for olive oil, in the past, salt was a very precious and expensive element. Actually it was essential for saving food, for example. Indeed the term “salary” comes from salt, which, back in time, was even used as money...so spilling salt meant, and it still does, wasting money. Anyway, in the unlucky event of dropping salt, there is an antidote to bad luck...apparently: in fact, it is commonly believed that if you toss a pinch of the spilt salt over your left shoulder into the face of the Devil who lurks there, misfortune will be swept away.



# SHARP OBJECTS AND PEARLS...NEED SOMETHING IN RETURN

If you are given pearls or something sharp, such as a penknife or a brooch, as a gift, you cannot but prick the person who gave it to you, or give her/him a coin in return. If you don't, you risk ruining your friendship forever, in the case of sharp objects, or crying for 7 years, in the case of pearls! Nothing is free in life!!!





# TOUCH YOUR NOSE

Saying the same word at the same time as somebody else is thought to be an omen that you will never get married - but there's a way to reverse your fortune...if you actually wish to have a husband or a wife: simply touch your nose immediately!!!



# THIRTEEN AT A TABLE

Although in general number 13 isn't as spooky as in other countries, at a dinner table it is meant to be very unlucky indeed. The superstition stems from the Last Supper and the fact that Jesus' traitor, Judas Iscariot, was the 13th and final person to be seated. So if you find yourself at a table of 13, watch your back!!!



# MALOCCHIO

*Malocchio* (evil eye) is the Italian belief that a look of jealousy can bring harm to those it is aimed at, usually in the form of physical pain, such as a headache, or of continuous misfortune. To ward off the evil eye you should make a gesture similar to horns and point them downwards behind your back. Some Italians take things a step further and wear a lucky amulet shaped like a horn. Little golden red horns are traditional gifts for newborns. Not only scratching the red horn keeps bad luck away...also touching the hump of a hunchback can be very helpful...as long as the hunchback is a man...if it is a woman...,on the other hand, just don't touch it!!!





# BREAD

If there's one thing to know about Italians, it's that they love their wine, cheese and bread. This last one has always been an essential element in the Italian diet, although it was

not always easy to have some since white flour was expensive in the past, especially during periods of famine, and more recently, during WWII (in fact we make bread out of many kinds of flour, such as sweetcorn, chestnut, spelt, etc...). For this reason bread was treated with great respect; throwing it away was considered a sacrilege, but in the past this never happened!!! Back in time, people didn't buy or make bread every day, it normally lasted few days, so at the end of every meal, the overleft bread was kissed, wrapped in a cotton cloth and put it away for the following meal. Since most Italians are Catholics, the importance of bread is probably connected to the figure of Jesus Christ, that gives bread another reason to be so valued aside from its delicious flavor. According to this, in fact, it is considered very disrespectful and to bring misfortune to put bread upside-down, as it is like turning Jesus' face upside-down.

# HORSESHOE

Every Italian agrees that a horseshoe on a wall brings good luck. But not every Italian agrees on how it has to be hanged. In fact, some people say it should be hanged with the ends - the heels - pointing up so the good luck it brings won't drain out, while others believe the heels should be pointing down, so good luck falls on anybody passing through the doorway.





# NEVER PUT A HAT ON A BED!!!

In past times, when someone was about to bite the dust, the priest would go to deliver the last rites on their deathbed. He would lay down his hat on the coverlet before divesting himself. Therefore it is obvious that laying a hat on a bed can only mean one thing.



# NEVER BREAK A MIRROR!

It is said that breaking a mirror guarantees 7 years of bad luck.

So be careful and handle them with care!!!



# THE WEDDING BOUQUET



This is something very girly, thou...

Are you going to a wedding soon? If so, you should know that in Italy there is a special tradition that brings good luck to love. The bride, turning her back to the crowd, has to throw her bouquet; it's believed that the person who grasps it without letting it drop, will get married soon. So remember to find a good position...especially if you wish to remain single!!!



# WOODEN LADDER

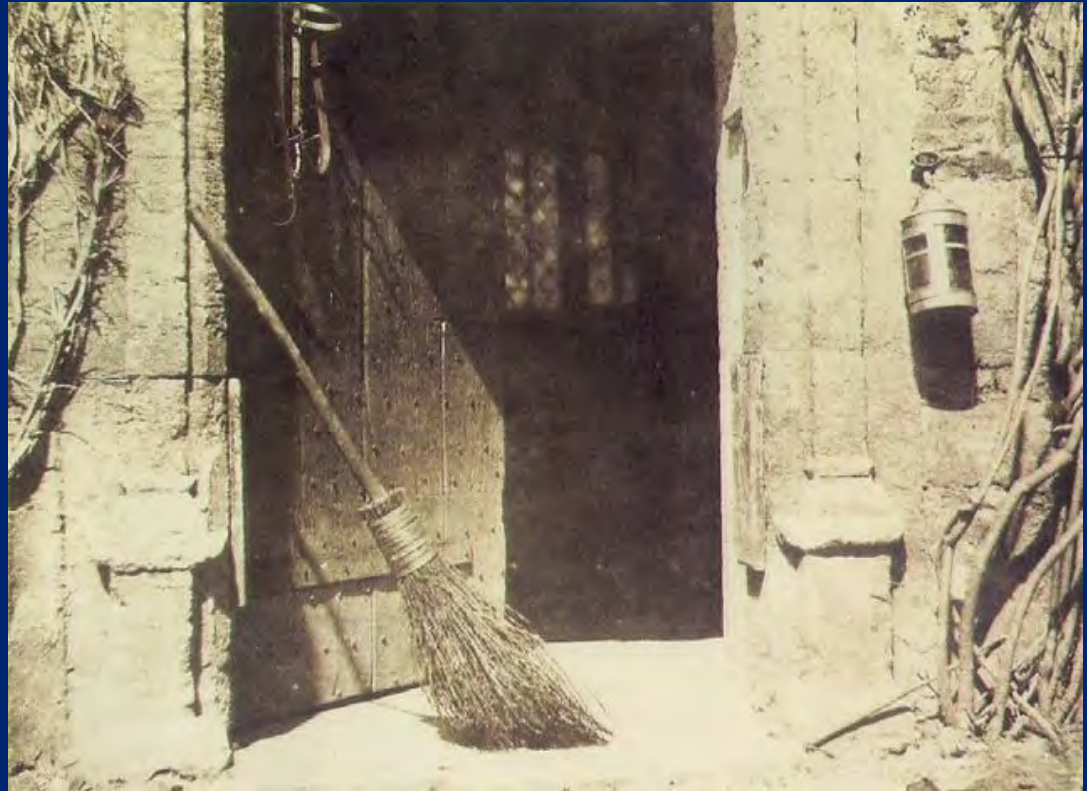
Never pass under  
a wooden ladder  
as it might bring  
you bad luck.

Its original  
triangular shape  
symbolized the  
Holy Trinity.



# BROOMS

It is said that if you are a single lady looking for your prince charming, you should stay away from people who are sweeping!!! It is believed, in fact, that if the broom touches your toe tips you will never find the love of your life!!!





# DON'T OPEN AN UMBRELLA INDOORS



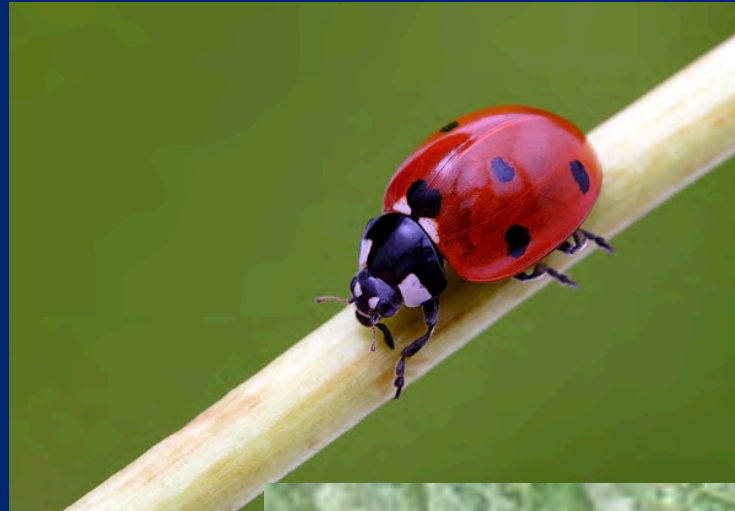
Opening an umbrella indoors has meant many many years of bad luck since ancient Romans. At that time, umbrellas had two functions: either to shelter people from the rain, or from the sun. For it, opening this object inside a covered place was considered an offense to the Sun god.

# WHICH LADYBUG?

It is believed that ladybugs have some powers...

If the ladybug is red with black dots and leans on any part of your body it will bring you good luck.

On the other hand, if this insect is yellow with black dots, it is said to bring you bad luck. Anyway, no matter what colour, ladybugs are really cute!!!



# LEFT FOOT



In Sardinia there's a traditional superstition: getting off the bed with the left foot brings you misfortune.

The left foot is associated to the devil.

# LENTILS

It is said that eating lentils on New Year's Eve will bring lots of money and fortune in the future since they look like small coins...

So there is no Italian dinner on that very night where lentils are not served.



# ...AND TALKING ABOUT 2020!

“Anno bisesto anno funesto” (Leap year, gloomy/unlucky/bad year).

This superstition dates back from the Romans. In fact, at that time, February (Mensis Feralis) was the month of the deaths and of funeral ceremonies. So during leap years, there was one more day to celebrate death (29th of February).

Nowadays a leap year only means one thing: one more day at school!





ErasmusPlus Project *Recognize Yourself in He or She, Who are not like You and Me...*  
Presentation realised by **Giulia Pizzanelli and Gaia Raspanti** – Students at IIS A.Meucci  
(MS) – 4CLSA  
and supervised by **Alessandra Mazzi** – English teacher at IIS A. Meucci

