

Superstitions of the Sea

Task: Cut out the list of superstitions and origins below. Match the correct origin to each superstition.

Superstition	Origin
Pour oil on troubled waters to help keep the waves from breaking	Dolphins have long been considered a sacred friend of fishermen and to have the good fortunes of humans and will protect ships. Some sailors believe that dolphins carry the spirits of dead sailors. Killing a dolphin would bring very bad luck.
Saturday and Sunday are the luckiest days of the week to set sail. The 17 th and 29 th days of the month are also considered lucky days to begin a voyage.	Cuttings form hair and fingernails were used as offerings to Prosperina (goddess of the underworld) And it was believed that Neptune (god of the sea) would be jealous if these offerings were made in his kingdom.
Wearing a gold ring in your ear will bring luck	Babies represent new life and new beginnings and a birth onboard would be seen as a blessing. This superstition completely contradicts the superstition that having a woman onboard is bad luck.
Horseshoes are a sign of good luck at sea and on land	Figureheads played an important part in sailor's superstitions and it was believed that a ship couldn't sink as long as the figurehead remained attached. A figurehead of a bare breasted woman could bring luck and good dialing conditions.
Sighting a mermaid at sea is sure to end in disaster	This is an old ship building custom believed to bring fortune and luck to the ship. It was a way of building good fortune into the ship and ensuring a successful voyage. Pennies were often used but silver coins were thought to be luckiest.
It is bad luck for a priest to come onboard	The probable cause of this superstition is that any fish caught could be eaten by the dog and the fishermen would go hungry. However, dogs could be great companions during long, lonely voyages.
It is unlucky to have flowers onboard a ship	Whistling is said to anger the wind. Whistling may also interfere with whistle commands used in the navy. If you are the youngest gets person onboard or the ship's cook you may be exempt from this superstition and allowed to whistle.
Feathers are a sign of good fortune	Anything associated with death would not be welcome onboard a ship. An empty coffin could mean that a member of the ship's crew would eventually be filling it.
Dolphins swimming with a ship is a good omen	Never repair a flag on the quarter deck. Never reach through a ladder to handle a flag.

If you knit a piece of your hair	Upside down objects could be considered to be a sign that the whole ship will also soon be upside down.
into a sailor's sock he will come back safely to you	Keeping things the right way up was thought to maintain the natural balance. Losing your bucket overboard was also said to bring bad luck.
If you stick a knife into the mast of a ship it will summon up the wind	Birds were thought to carry the souls of dead sailors and could lead ships to safety.
Dreaming of horses predicts high seas to come	Rats and vermin have always been a problem on ships. They spread diseases, ruin food and were even considered responsible for spreading the plague throughout Europe during the Dark and Middle Ages. Ships could be more populated with rats than people. Sailors believed rats lived in the deepest, darkest places on a ship and knew before anyone else that death or misfortune was near. If rats were seen leaving a ship it was not a good sign!
Friday is the unluckiest day of the week to set sail	Black is considered the colour of death. Black is also associated with the unknown and dark depths of the sea.
Having a tattoo on your body will bring good luck.	It was believed piercing the ear lobe and wearing gold ring would improve eyesight. It was also considered to be a lucky charm against drowning and could also be the price paid to enter Davy Jones locker if the sailor died at sea. If a sailor had a gold earring he would never be broke and the gold could be used to pay for his funeral if he died in a foreign land.
Brining an umbrella or raincoat onboard a ship will make it rain	Pouring wine on deck was considered to be an offering to the gods and will bring good luck on a long voyage. This is why new ships are launched with bottles of wine. However, if a wine glass starts ringing you must stop it immediately as the sound may imitate church bells during a funeral.
Walking under a ladder or reaching through its rungs will bring bad luck	There are many different cultural explanations of this superstition. One explanation is that Saint Dunstan once nailed a horseshoe to the devil's foot and only agreed to remove it if the devil promised never to enter a place where a horseshoe hung over the door.
Placing a penny under the mast of a ship that is being built will bring it good luck	Strange sounds heard at sea were often blamed on mermaids or sirens who sang enchanting songs. The songs supposedly lured sailors into treacherous waters where their ships would be dashed against the rocks.

<p>If you bring bananas onboard a disaster is sure to follow</p>	<p>Priests are associated with funerals. If a priest came onboard it could be a sign that he may have to perform a funeral service during the voyage. Priests usually wear black which was considered the colour of death.</p>
<p>When a baby is born onboard good luck will follow</p>	<p>Probably related to the bible and resurrection of Christ.</p>
<p>Throwing your old shoes overboard will bring good luck</p>	<p>Scientifically oil in the water can affect waves to a certain extent but it would take a lot more oil than a sailing ship could carry to make any difference. Sailors would add a few drops of oil to the sea as an offering to the sea gods.</p>
<p>A woman onboard will bring bad luck to the ship but bare breasted women can tame fierce storms and wild seas.</p>	<p>Any sound that sounded like a church bell would not be welcome onboard as it represents a funeral and would be considered a sign that someone is going to die. Ships' bells were exempt from this superstition because they signaled time and the changing of watch duties. But if the ship's bell rang on its own it meant somebody was going to die.</p>
<p>Carrying a turtle bone in your pocket will bring good luck but if you kill a turtle and don't eat it bad luck will follow.</p>	<p>This superstition highlights the importance of food sources while at sea. Catching sea animals such as turtles would be an important part of survival but to waste a food source and kill for no reason would be frowned upon.</p>
<p>If you don't treat flags with respect it could lead to disaster</p>	<p>Throwing stones into the sea was considered a sign of disrespect to the sea. The sea would retaliate in the form of storms and great waves. If a stone is thrown into the sea as a ship is leaving port it was believed that the ship will never return.</p>
<p>If an albatross follows your ship it will bring good luck but if you kill an albatross it is very bad luck.</p>	<p>Some possible explanations for this superstition are:- It was observed that nearly every ship that went missing during the early 1700s trading boom in Spanish Atlantic and Caribbean was carrying a cargo of bananas. Bananas spoil quickly so the faster sailing ships were often used to transport them. Fishermen trolling for fish from these faster ships were rarely successful and this was blamed on the bananas When bananas become rotten they ferment and give off methane gas which would be trapped below deck and poison anyone in the hold, particularly slave prisoners. A species of lethal spider likes to hide in bunches of bananas.</p>
<p>Cutting your hair or fingernails at sea will bring bad luck.</p>	<p>This superstition is probably connected to many others involving left handed people. Many superstitions have tied left handedness to the devil in some way and are therefore considered bad luck.</p>

It is bad luck to bring a black bag onboard	This superstition probably started by sailors tattooing their bodies with reminders of home and loved ones. It was a way of taking a piece of home with them and ensuring the safe return of loved ones.
Do not step onto a boat with your left foot first.	This superstition is like many others that don't have any factual base but say that you can make some things happen by tempting fate. Umbrellas and rain coats are associated with foul weather so if you bring one onboard you are tempting fate.
Pouring wine on deck will bring good luck.	Cats were probably considered lucky because they ate the rats onboard. Black was considered the colour of death and therefore seeing a black cat could mean someone was going to die. However, some sailors believed that superstitions of the land were reversed at sea and black cats actually brought good luck.
Throwing stones into the sea will bring bad luck and bad weather	No one knows for sure where this superstition came from. Maybe some poor sailor got so frustrated without wind that he stabbed the mast. The next day a wind came up and the superstition was born????
It is lucky to take a cat as a mascot onboard a ship as long as it is not a black one.	This superstition came from the belief that pigs can see the wind. Other words were used instead such as Gruff, Little Fella and Mr. Dennis. Canadian sailors often had a tattoo of a pig on their knee- pig on the knee, safety at sea.
Saying the word 'pig' onboard will cause the wind to blow too strongly.	This superstition may have begun with early mythology saying that Pegasus the white horse of the heavens was the son of Poseidon the god of the sea. It could be believed that if you dreamed of a horse at sea you may be predicting that Poseidon was speaking to his son and high seas would result.
If a shark follows a ship someone onboard will soon die. Sharks are a sign of death	Flowers can be associated with death as they could be used to make a wreath for a funeral. Taking flowers onboard a ship could be considered a symbol that someone could die during the voyage. If someone brought flowers as a bon voyage gift for a sailor they would be thrown overboard as soon as the ship was out of sight of land.
An empty coffin onboard a ship is bad luck	This superstition may have started as giving an offering to the sea or could have been a symbol of a new start.
It is an extremely bad sign to see a rat running from a ship before it sets sail	Sharks will often swim around boats and ships looking for food. It wouldn't be hard to think they were patiently waiting for a human meal to be consigned to a watery grave.

<p>If a bell rings while at sea it means someone is about to die</p>	<p>Feathers are related to birds and it was believed birds carried the souls of dead sailors and could lead a ship to safety. It was also believed that a feather from a wren killed on New Years Day would protect a sailor from dying in a ship wreck. If you sighted a feather from a land based bird while at sea it would be a sign that you will be approaching land soon.</p>
<p>Manta Rays are a bad omen</p>	<p>Sending a sailor to sea with a strong link to home was considered to bring him back home safely. Sewing a lock of your own hair into a sailor's sock would be a strong reminder of home.</p>
<p>It is bad luck for objects such as buckets to be upside down on a ship</p>	<p>This superstition comes from the Norse myths which say that Friday was the day when witches gather. It is also the day that Christians believe Jesus was crucified. It is unluckier still to travel on Friday the thirteenth.</p>
<p>Dogs are considered lucky companions on ships but a dog seen near fishing tackle is a sign of bad luck</p>	<p>Ladders have long been associated with bad luck both on land and at sea. A ladder leaning against a wall forms a triangle. Triangles are associated with the holy trinity so if you break the trinity by walking or reaching through it you are seen to be associating with the devil. Bad luck was said to follow if you reached through the rungs of a ladder to handle a flag.</p>
<p>Whistling on ships is bad luck</p>	<p>Manta Rays are also known as devil fish or sea devils. Sailors believed that these sea creatures could attach themselves to the ship's anchor and drag the ship to the bottom of the sea.</p>