

Reading Practice

Read the text. Are the sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- a) People who work in the theater are very superstitious. _____
- b) Sir Ian McKellen had bad luck in the play, *Macbeth*. _____
- c) Some actors think that whistling on the stage will bring bad luck. _____
- d) If you wish an actor "good luck," you have to leave the theater. _____
- e) Some experts think that if an actor doesn't do a ritual, they will have bad luck. _____

The use of rituals and superstitions to ensure opening night goes smoothly has long been a part of theater tradition. Many actors perform their own private rituals, such as sleeping with the script under their pillows, or always whispering the same word before going on stage. But other superstitions are more widespread.

One of the most well-known superstitions concerns Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*. Many actors won't say the name of the play inside the theater. Instead they'll call it "The Scottish play." Saying the name of the play is supposed to bring bad luck, and curse the performance. In one episode of *The Simpsons*, the Simpson family meets the famous British Shakespearean actor, Sir Ian McKellen, outside a theater. Every time one of them says "Macbeth," something bad happens to McKellen. He is even struck by lightning.

Another custom is that you won't wish an actor "good luck" before a performance; you'll say "break a leg." It is thought that saying "good luck" will bring bad luck. And many people who work in the theater won't whistle on the stage or in the dressing rooms; in fact, anywhere inside the theater. The people who do say the name "Macbeth," or break any other rules, are forced to perform a cleansing ritual in which they go outside, turn around three times, spit, swear, then knock on the door and ask to be let back in.

This belief in superstitions and rituals has its roots many centuries ago, but why do many of these beliefs still continue today? Some experts think this is because a lot of the actor's livelihood depends on luck.

But maybe it's just a habit that's hard to break. As one actor put it, "The problem is that when you don't do the ritual, it weighs on your mind, and you get nervous. That's when you make mistakes."