

Was it poor visibility or superstition that made Manchester United's players abandon their grey strip for away games in the middle of a Premiership match in 1996? The players couldn't pick each other out, manager Alex Ferguson told reporters at the time. It was nothing to do with superstition. They said it was difficult to see their team mates at a distance. But his protest failed to mention that one of the five occasions the grey strip had been worn, the team had failed to win.

Dr Richard Wiseman, a psychologist at Hertfordshire University, says United's players may have succumbed to the power of superstition without even realising it. "I might argue that the players may have unconsciously noticed that when they do certain things, one of which might well involve the wearing of red shirts, they are successful." He draws a parallel with research into stock market speculators. Like gamblers they swore that certain days were lucky for them. Eventually it was shown that the successful market speculators were unconsciously picking up on numerous indicators and were shadowing market trends but were unable to explain how they did it. Superstition plays a part whenever people are not certain what it is they do to achieve a good performance and people who have to perform to order are particularly vulnerable. It is as if the imagination steps into the gap in the dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious mind.

Many superstitions have deep roots in the past according to Moira Tatem, who helped edit the 1,500 entries in the Oxford Dictionary of Superstitions. People today observe superstitions without knowing why and they'd probably be surprised to discover origins. The idea that mail vans are lucky is a good example. Sir Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister during World War II, was said to have touched a mail van for luck whenever he saw one in the street. The reason for this superstition resides in the ancient belief that Kings and Queens had the ability to cure by touch. Monarchs, naturally enough, grew fed up with being constantly touched and at some point started trailing ribbons with gold medals or coins out of the door of their coaches when travelling and people touched them instead. Mail vans carry the Crown symbol on the side and touching the van is a direct throwback to that earlier belief.

While some ancient superstitious beliefs and practices have been maintained, others have died out. This is because those practices with a connection to farming and a life spent in close proximity to nature no longer make much sense now that so many of us live in cities. Nevertheless, we continue to develop our own sometimes very private and personal superstitions. Many people carry or wear lucky objects

although they may not in fact think of them as such. It only becomes obvious that the object forms a part of a superstitious belief when the person is unable to wear or carry it and feels uncomfortable as a result.

Experts agree that these individual superstitious practices can be an effective means of managing stress and reducing anxiety. The self-fulfilling nature of superstitions is what can help. The belief that something brings you good luck can make you feel calmer, and as a result, able to perform more effectively. International cello soloist Ralph Kirshbaum says musicians are a good example of the effectiveness of these very particular rituals. "I know string players who won't wash their hands on the day of a recital and others who avoid eating for eight hours prior to a performance. They can then play with confidence."

But this self-fulfilling aspect of superstitions can also work against you. This is why Kirshbaum prefers to confront the superstitious practices of other musicians. "If you're in a situation where you can't avoid eating or forget and wash your hands, you then feel that you'll play badly. And you often do, simply because you feel so anxious. I wash my hands and have broken the taboo about eating. My only vice is to insist that people leave and give me two minutes complete silence in the dressing room before I go on."

Superstitions can become even more harmful when they develop into phobias or obsessions, often characterized by elaborate collections of rituals. "It's not a problem if I carry a lucky object of some kind," says psychologist Robert Kohlenberg of the University of Washington. "But if I don't have it with me and I get terribly upset and turn the house upside down looking for it, that's a bad thing."

1. According to their manager, Alex Ferguson, Manchester United decided to change out of their grey shirts because _____.
 - A. they had lost every time they had worn them.
 - B. the colour was not bright enough.
 - C. it was difficult for the other team to see them.
 - D. a psychologist told them they might play better without them.
2. Dr Wiseman says Manchester United players and stock market speculators are similar in that _____.
 - A. both groups can identify the factors that contribute to improving performance.
 - B. both groups attribute their success to wearing particular items of clothing.
 - C. neither group can understand why they do well on some occasions and not on others.
 - D. both groups believe that certain days of the week are lucky for them.

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3. According to Moira Tatem, what would most British people say if you asked them why touching a mail van is considered lucky?
- A. "A famous politician used to do it too."
 - B. "The vans are lucky but I don't know why."
 - C. "Being touched by a monarch can cure disease."
 - D. "The royal coat of arms is on the side of the van."
4. Which older superstitions have been preserved?
- A. Those that still seem meaningful.
 - B. Those connected with life in the city.
 - C. Those connected with life in the countryside.
 - D. Those that are created and held by individuals.
5. How does going without food affect some string players?
- A. It makes them feel too tired and hungry to play well.
 - B. It helps them play with more assurance.
 - C. It makes no difference to the way they perform.
 - D. It ensures that they perform.
6. Why doesn't Ralph Kirshbaum keep the superstitious practices of other musicians?
- A. He can't be bothered with them.
 - B. He has his own complicated rituals.
 - C. He doesn't think they always help.
 - D. He is not superstitious.
7. What attitude does the author of the article have to superstitions?
- A. He thinks they are harmful.
 - B. He thinks they are inevitable.
 - C. He thinks they can be nonsensical.
 - D. He thinks they can be beneficial.



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Wilbur and Orville Wright, aviation pioneers and American inventors, achieved the first powered, sustained and controlled flight of an airplane. Wilbur was born on April 16 1867, in Millville, Indiana, and Orville on August 19 1871 in Dayton, Ohio. They were the sons of Milton Wright, a minister and his wife, Susan Wright. Their aviation interest started at a young age when in 1878 their father brought them a rubberband-powered helicopter toy that they adored. They instantly began making various copies of it.

Wilbur and Orville lived very proper lives. They did not smoke, drink, or marry, and they always dressed in smart business suits, even when they were likely to get dirty working with machinery. They completed high school courses, but neither graduated formally. In 1892 they opened a bicycle shop where they sold, repaired and manufactured bicycles. Income from the shop supported them during the early years of their aeronautical experiments. Their interest in mechanical flight was reinforced by the gliding flights of the German pioneer Lillienthal. The Wright brothers followed Lillienthal's career and studied all the available literature on aviation at the time. This inspired them to begin their aeronautical experimentation. During the winter of 1901-1902 they built a wind tunnel to test the drag and lift of various wing shapes. They also managed to design a gasoline engine that was light enough and powerful enough to propel an aeroplane.

Finally, on December 17 1903 at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, Orville made history's first powered and controlled aeroplane flight. The press, however, refused to believe that man had flown, and their 1903 flight was not immediately acknowledged by the public. This first Wright airplane was underpowered and difficult to control, and it became obvious that a lot had to be done to perfect their invention. As a result, they decided to continue experimentation. Within two years of trials, the Wright Brothers managed to fine-tune the controls, engine, propellers and configuration, and created the world's first "practical" aeroplane. In 1905, after they perfected their aircraft, they began

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looking for buyers for their invention.

In 1905 Wilbur went to Europe to perform various demonstration flights, while Orville departed for the U.S. Army in Fort Myer, Virginia, to present the aeroplane. During a routine flight at the army base, Orville crashed, breaking his leg and killing his passenger. This was only a minor setback because in 1909, the U.S. Army bought the first Wright Aeroplane.

When Wilbur returned to the United States, he had one of his biggest flight demonstrations in New York Harbor where he flew before a million spectators. As their fame grew, orders for aircraft poured in, so the Wright Brothers set up many aeroplane factories to meet demands.

In 1912, Wilbur Wright died of typhoid fever. In 1916, Orville sold the Wright Company to focus on his former passion, inventing. Orville died in 1948. He lived to see his invention used in war and to see airplanes drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

1. The Wright brothers liked to _____.
A. smoke. B. drink.
C. wear formal clothes. D. wear dirty clothes.
2. The Wright brothers ran a bicycle shop _____.
A. because they did not finish high school.
B. to earn money for their experiments.
C. because they were interested in mechanics.
D. while they were still in high school.
3. They became interested in flying because of _____.
A. the German Lillienthal.
B. a toy their father gave them.
C. their bicycle shop.
D. reading material on manpowered flight.
4. The Wright Brothers created a wind tunnel to _____.
A. design a lightweight engine.
B. find the best kind of wings for an aeroplane.
C. help to lift their aeroplane.
D. propel their aeroplane.
5. The Wright Brothers had to fine-tune their first aeroplane because _____.
A. it was difficult to steer.
B. the engine was too powerful.
C. no one would buy their invention.
D. the wings did not produce enough lift.

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6. The public immediately knew about _____.
A. Orville's first flight.
B. Wilbur's New York Harbor flight demonstration.
C. Orville's European flight demonstrations.
D. Wilbur's flight accident in Virginia.
7. Orville lived _____.
A. long enough to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
B. to be a great inventor.
C. through a great war.
D. thirty-six years longer than his brother.



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The train pulled out of the station noiselessly and without a jerk. I was on my way. I started a conversation with my fellow-passenger opposite me (people take to each other quickly when travelling). He seemed to be bright and good-tempered.

I was somewhat surprised when the man opposite me in the train said he did not smoke and that he could not give me a light. I had been admiring the fine lighter which he had on the folding table by the window and the least I expected of it was that it would work. But I did not give the matter a second thought, for we were now rapidly approaching the frontier and conversation on the customs' examination we were soon to undergo was becoming quite heated. We had been given forms to fill in, and the lady beside me was arguing that a fur coat which had been worn three times was a used article. Everybody joined in the argument – except the man opposite who kept gazing intently out of the window.

I finally grew bored with the discussion and was just trying to get some sleep when an official came into our compartment and asked for

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passports. He collected them wearily, stamped them mechanically, and handed them back to us. He had no sooner left than the customs officers entered. They were extremely polite and much to our surprise (especially the lady in the fur coat), did not seem too concerned about the goods we had with us. They opened one or two cases, which they did not examine thoroughly, and then asked each of us how much money we had with us and requested to see it. (I learned afterwards that large amount of money were being smuggled out of the country).

The officers remained quite satisfied that all was in order and were preparing to leave when one of them casually picked up the cigarette-lighter to light his pipe. The man opposite me made an involuntary movement and checked himself, saying that the lighter was broken. The officer replied jokingly that that was why the man had probably had no cigarettes to declare. The man stammered an embarrassed reply and it was clear he was trying to hide something. The customs officer noticed this too, and offered to repair the man's lighter. He unscrewed the bottom of it and, to our amazement, began to draw out a thick roll of dollar bills of high value. A lighter like this was too valuable to be left lying around, the officer said, and he asked the man to follow him out of the compartment.

1. The narrator's fellow-passenger _____.
 - A. was a rather reserved and bottled-up man.
 - B. spoke with a very strong accent.
 - C. used strong language.
 - D. was cheerful and jolly.
2. The fact that the man couldn't give the narrator a light _____.
 - A. didn't seem strange to him because he didn't give it a second thought.
 - B. was rather unexpected.
 - C. surprised him because his fellow-traveller used to be so helpful all the way to the frontier.
 - D. was at the back of his mind as they were rapidly reaching the frontier.
3. When an official came into the compartment, _____.
 - A. he found the narrator fast asleep.
 - B. he did his duty habitually, without fixing his mind on it.
 - C. he went through the motions of the procedure mechanically pretending nothing was wrong.
 - D. he warned the passengers that a lot of money was smuggled out of the country.

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4. After a very quick survey of passengers' things the customs officers _____
A. seemed dissatisfied with its results.
B. were suspiciously polite with the passengers and quickly left the compartment.
C. inquired whether the passengers had any currency along.
D. stated the value of them.
5. One of the officers _____
A. was a heavy cigar smoker.
B. was a violent opponent of smoking.
C. wanted to light a cigarette.
D. liked to smoke a pipe.
6. One of the customs officers suspected that something was wrong _____
A. after they were through with the thorough examination of the things.
B. after one of them made a motion to take the lighter and tried to make use of it.
C. because the man looked very embarrassed.
D. after the officer unscrewed the bottom of the lighter.
7. The customs officers asked the owner of the lighter to come along with them because _____
A. the man was a smuggler.
B. they couldn't leave such a valuable thing as the lighter lying around.
C. he was too nervous and it was clear he was trying to hide something.
D. one of them wanted to repair a lighter.