

Culture note

Believe it or not...

Your zodiac sign tells a lot about you: hard working, highly motivated and methodical – well, you are finishing the last exercise in the book and have learned a lot of English... Although horoscopes may seem accurate, it is possible that other factors, such as the season when you were born and your family and friends, have also had a great influence on your personality. Astrology is considered a science, maybe because these are complex mathematical calculations involved, and it fascinates people all over the world.

Telecommunications have taken over from telepathy (and cost more), yet you have probably had the experience of ringing someone who says, "What a coincidence! I was just thinking about ringing you", or else a letter from a friend crosses in the post with one you have sent to them.

Do you cross your fingers when you want good luck? This superstition comes from making the sign of the cross and hoping for help from above. One of the reasons for saying "Bless you" when someone sneezes is because sneezing was an early symptom of the plague, so you knew that the person was going to die. An old folk tradition in south-west England, when there is a death, is to put black ribbons around the beehives in the garden: you must "tell the bees" and protect them from the same fate. Seeing a black cat brings good luck (not bad) to people in Britain, possibly because the Egyptian goddess Bast was a black cat. Koreans believe that seeing a cow means that a member of your family will die. However, the colour black is certainly not always unlucky: chimney sweeps are welcome at weddings.

Fishermen are generally superstitious and will not go out to sea if they see a priest on the way to their boats. Certain words may not be said on a boat. Fishermen never talk about rabbits, hares or other wild animals. If an Icelandic drops the knife while cleaning fish at home and the knife points towards the sea, he knows he will get a good catch on the next trip. That's always lucky – because Iceland is an island!

THE AUTHORS OF THIS BOOK ALSO WANT TO WISH YOU THE BEST OF LUCK.

