

## Superstition Speak Easy: A Library First-Year Experience Event

Barbara E. Eshbach, Head Librarian, Penn State York, bee11@psu.edu

### NUTRITION INFORMATION

Our small commuter campus does not have a formal First-Year Experience (FYE) program, so we developed ConnectED, a library FYE program, in order to provide opportunities for incoming students to connect with our campus community in a unique way. The five literacies (basic, information, civic and social, health, and financial) of PA Forward, a Pennsylvania Library Association initiative, form the foundation of ConnectED programs.

First-year students earn points (working toward winning a scholarship) for every event they attend, and additional points for each connection they make (either during events or on their own throughout the year). These connections are documented by having students fill out a “connection card.”

We offer a variety of interactive, socially engaging, academic programs throughout the year, using several standard formats. This recipe is for a Speak Easy, which we describe as “an opportunity for conversation in a relaxed, informal setting for anyone who wants to improve their public speaking and learn something in the process.”

### COOKING TIME

50 minutes

### DIETARY GUIDELINES

Research shows the importance of both academic success and social integration in terms of student persistence. While the library is most often thought of in terms of the academic support provided, we hope to also demonstrate our value by offering events to socially engage our students and illustrate ACRL Framework concepts.

### ACRL FRAMEWORKS ADDRESSED

- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation

### MAIN INGREDIENTS

- A standard template to advertise and promote each event. This helps establish an identity and brand for your program and makes your advertising job easier.
- Interesting research articles to connect to your programs. These were a few of the articles we referred to during this event:
  - » Damisch, L., Stoberock, B., & Mussweiler, T. (2010). “Keep your fingers crossed! How superstition improves performance.” *Psychological Science*, 21, 1014–1020. doi:10.1177/0956797610372631.

- » Kramer, T., & Block, L. (2008). “Conscious and nonconscious components of superstitious beliefs in judgment and decision making.” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34, 783–793. doi:10.1086/523288.
- » Zhang, Y., Risen, J.L., & Hoseney, C. (2014). “Reversing one’s fortune by pushing away bad luck.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143, 1171–1184. doi:10.1037/a0034023.

- Refreshments
- Prizes. Our prizes for this event included a box of Lucky Charms cereal and the book *Good Luck of Right Now: A Novel* by Matthew Quick.
- Handouts
- Connection cards (if you would like to encourage and reward first-year students for making connections to others on campus).
- Evaluation forms

### PREPARATION

Prepare a handout with relevant definitions (such as paraskevidekatriaphobia), interesting or controversial quotes from your research articles (to use to get the conversation started), and information about any upcoming library events. We included the following among the

## A. First Year Experience Programming

Eshbach

quotes on our handout: “Although superstitions are often culturally defined, the underlying psychological processes that give rise to them may be shared across cultures” (Zhang, Risen, & Hosey, 2014, p. 1183).

Find obscure superstitions and include the beginning phrase of each on the back of the handout to be used for the main activity.

### MAIN COOKING TECHNIQUE

1. Hand out connection cards to first-year students, allowing time both at the beginning and the end of the session for them to make connections with other attendees.
2. Begin your conversation by asking if anyone had (or will have) a test that day and if they have any good-luck rituals associated with test taking.
3. While the handout includes interesting quotes to discuss, it helps if the group leader for this discussion has read all the articles and can keep the discussion going by providing other examples and questions to consider.
4. After your lively discussion, have everyone complete the sentences on the back of the handout.
5. Collect the handouts and play “Superstition Sentences” using the format and rules of the board game Balderdash. For example, our answers for the sentence, “If a bee enters your home, it’s a sign you will soon have \_\_\_\_\_,” ranged from “a baby” to “random women coming home” (which was probably

- more wishful thinking than superstition). The actual answer, for which you have been awarded two points, was “visitor.”
6. Total the points and award your prizes.
  7. Have everyone complete an evaluation form.

### ALLERGY WARNINGS

Don’t be discouraged if your attendance is low—especially in the beginning of the semester. Word will get around that the library is having some interesting events and first-year students will appreciate the connections they make during these events.

**Superstition Speak Easy**  
Paraskevidekatriaphobes welcome.

**ConnectED** FRIDAY, February 13, noon-1:00 p.m.  
A Penn State York Library First-Year Experience

**CONVERSATION** Join the conversation in the library as we talk about some interesting research on superstitions.

**COMPETITION** Try to win the grand prize in our game of “Superstition Sentences”!

**CONNECTIONS** Connect with other Penn State York faculty, staff, and students!

**PRIZES!**

A Speak Easy is an opportunity for conversation in a relaxed, informal setting for anyone who wants to improve their public speaking. Come talk to us!

Coffee provided

First-year students earn **25 ConnectED points**  
A Penn State York Library First-Year Experience

Like us on Facebook  
facebook.com/ConnectEDYork

Email: [connected@psu.edu](mailto:connected@psu.edu)  
Website: [sites.psu.edu/connected](http://sites.psu.edu/connected)

### CHEF’S NOTE

We are a small campus and our programs worked really well, even with limited participation as the small groups gave our first-year students the opportunity to make meaningful connections with all the other attendees. The evaluations for this program were excellent. Everyone who attended assigned a five (strongly agree) to the statement, “Today’s program was enjoyable,” with one attendee giving it a six! There was a lot of great interaction during this event and everyone enjoyed the game.

**SUPERSTITION SENTENCES!**

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Write an ending for each of the following superstitions. The completed papers will be collected and each answer will be read, along with the correct answer. Players will then vote for the ending they think is the correct answer.

Scoring: A player gets 2 points for each vote their submission receives and an additional 2 points if they vote for the correct ending. If no player votes for the real ending, 3 points go into the bucket to be awarded randomly at the end.

1. An acorn at the window will
2. It's bad luck to put a hat on
3. Pictures of an elephant bring good luck, but only if
4. To dream of a lizard is a sign that you have
5. To protect yourself from witches, wear
6. Evil spirits can't harm you when you stand
7. It's bad luck to say the word "pig" while
8. A bed changed on Friday will
9. If someone is sweeping the floor and sweeps over your feet, you'll
10. To drop a comb while you are combing your hair is a sign of
11. If you catch a falling leaf on the first day of autumn. you will
12. It is bad luck to cut your fingernails
13. If a bee enters your home, it's a sign you will soon have a

## ConnectED

A Penn State York Library First-Year Experience



Your name:





Penn State York first-year student



Penn State York returning student



Penn State York faculty/staff

Please complete the back of this card and drop it off in the library. Make sure to print the names of the people you connected with and include their PSU User IDs so we can give you points for your connections! Turn it in after connecting with 1, 2, or 3 people!

I connected with \_\_\_\_\_  
on \_\_\_\_\_ and discovered we had the  
following in common:




Your PSU  
User ID:

Penn State York first-year student

I connected with \_\_\_\_\_  
on \_\_\_\_\_ and discovered we had the  
following in common:




Your PSU  
User ID:

Penn State York returning student

I connected with \_\_\_\_\_  
on \_\_\_\_\_ and discovered we had the  
following in common:




Your PSU  
User ID:

Penn State York faculty/staff