



PDF 1: Reading & Comprehension

Break a Leg!

A Fun English Idiom Story



Warm-up Questions (Discuss in pairs – 5 minutes)

1. What do you usually say to someone before an important event like an exam or performance?
2. Do you have any superstitions before a test or big moment?

Vocabulary Builder

1. **Idiom** – a common expression with a special meaning
2. **Superstitious** – believing in luck or magic
3. **Encourage** – to give someone support and confidence
4. **Jinx** – to bring bad luck
5. **Performance** – a show in front of an audience
6. **Applause** – clapping to show you liked a show
7. **Quirky** – unusual in a funny way

## Reading Passage

### Break a Leg! – The Story Behind the English Idiom

“Break a leg!”

This English idiom sounds scary, but it actually means **“Good luck!”**

People say it before a theater show, exam, job interview, presentation, or sports game. It is a friendly way to encourage someone.

Why say something that sounds unlucky?

Theater actors are very superstitious. They believe saying “Good luck!” directly can bring bad luck to the show. So they say the opposite — “Break a leg!” — as a funny way to trick bad luck! 😂

No one knows the exact origin, but here are the most popular theories:

#### 1. Superstition

Actors think wishing “good luck” can jinx a performance. The phrase first appeared in theater magazines in the 1920s and 1930s.

#### 2. Theater Curtains (“Legs”)

In old theaters, the side curtains are called “legs.” Actors step out from behind these legs to start the show. “Breaking a leg” may mean getting on stage and receiving lots of applause.

#### 3. German Influence

It may come from the German phrase “Hals- und Beinbruch!” which means “Break your neck and leg!” — a common good-luck wish long ago.

Today, you can use “Break a leg!” in everyday situations:

- Before a friend’s exam: “You studied hard. Break a leg!”
- Before a job interview: “Break a leg! You’ve got this!”
- Before a presentation: “Break a leg! Speak clearly and smile.”

Always say it with a smile and positive energy.

## Comprehension Questions

1. What does “Break a leg!” really mean?
2. Why do actors prefer to say “Break a leg” instead of “Good luck”?
3. Name one theory about the origin of the idiom.
4. What are the side curtains in a theater sometimes called?
5. True or False: “Break a leg!” is only used in theater.
6. Give one modern example of using this idiom.
7. How should you say “Break a leg!”?

## Discussion Questions (for class discussion or pairs)

1. Do you like this idiom? Why or why not?
2. Would you use “Break a leg!” with your friends? In what situations?
3. Are there similar “opposite” expressions in your language?
4. Which origin theory do you like the most? Why?

## Answer Key

### Comprehension Questions

1. Good luck!
2. They believe saying “good luck” can bring bad luck.
3. Any one of: Superstition / Theater legs / German influence
4. Legs
5. False
6. Example: “Break a leg! You’ve got this!” before an exam or interview.
7. With a smile and positive energy.