



BREAK A LEG

Level: Intermediate

Focus: Idiom meaning, reading, past simple, modals

Part 1: Discussion Questions

Student A – Ask your partner	Student B – Ask your partner
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you ever performed in front of a group? 2. What do people say to wish someone good luck in your country? 3. Do you believe in lucky or unlucky words? 4. What's something you would say before a big test or show? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What's the most nervous you've ever felt? 2. What helps you feel confident before a performance? 3. Do you think saying "good luck" helps or hurts? 4. What's a funny or strange superstition you've heard?

Break a Leg – The Origin Story

In the busy theaters of 19th-century London, actors lived for applause and excitement. But the stage was full of superstitions. Saying "good luck" before a show was believed to bring bad luck. So actors started using a strange phrase instead: "Break a leg."

No one knows exactly where it came from, but one story from the 1860s gives us a clue. A young actor named Thomas Keane had a small part in a Shakespeare play. The lead actor was famous — and very full of himself. He always tried to steal the spotlight.

On opening night, Thomas heard the stagehands whisper, "Let's hope he breaks a leg tonight." They didn't mean it literally. It was a cheeky way to say, "Maybe something will go wrong, and Thomas will get his chance."

Thomas gave his best performance in his small role. Then, during a dramatic scene, the lead actor tripped on a prop and hurt his ankle. The show stopped, and Thomas was asked to take the lead role. He was amazing — the audience clapped and cheered.

Backstage, the cast laughed and said, "You broke his leg, Thomas!" The phrase caught on. Actors started saying "Break a leg" as a funny, ironic way to wish someone success — without jinxing it.

Today, people say it before tests, speeches, or sports games. It's a playful way to say, "Good luck — but don't say good luck!"

Comprehension Questions

1. Why didn't actors say "good luck" before a show?
2. What did the stagehands mean when they said "Let's hope he breaks a leg"?
3. What happened to the lead actor during the performance?
4. How did Thomas Keane become the lead actor?
5. Why did the cast say "You broke his leg, Thomas"?
6. What does "Break a leg" mean today?
7. Can you think of another idiom that sounds negative but means something positive?

Grammar Focus: Past Simple + Modals

Examples from the story:

- Thomas gave his best performance. (Past Simple)
- The lead actor tripped on a prop. (Past Simple)
- He should have watched his step. (Modal Example)
- Thomas might become famous after that night. (Modal Example)

Mini Task: Write two sentences using *should have* or *might*.

Example: The lead actor should have tied his shoelaces.

should have: _____

might: _____

Grammar Match – Modals in Context

Match each sentence to the correct modal meaning.

Sentence	Meaning
1. He should have checked the stage.	Strong guess or assumption
2. Thomas might become famous.	Missed opportunity
3. The actor could have avoided the fall.	Advice about the past
4. You must be nervous before a big show.	Possibility in the future

Follow-up Task: Write one new sentence for each modal: should have, might, could have, must.

should have: _____

might: _____

could have: _____

must: _____

Teacher's Key

Comprehension Questions

1. Why didn't actors say "good luck" before a show?

They believed it would bring bad luck.

2. What did the stagehands mean when they said "Let's hope he breaks a leg"?

They were jokingly hoping the lead actor would get injured so Thomas could take his place.

3. What happened to the lead actor during the performance?

He tripped on a prop and hurt his ankle.

4. How did Thomas Keane become the lead actor?

He was asked to replace the injured lead and gave a great performance.

5. Why did the cast say "You broke his leg, Thomas"?

They were teasing him for getting the lead role after the accident.

6. What does "Break a leg" mean today?

It's a playful way to wish someone good luck before a performance or challenge.

7. Can you think of another idiom that sounds negative but means something positive?

Open-ended — accept idioms like "knock 'em dead," "spill the beans," "kill it," "hit the jackpot," etc.

Grammar Task: Accept any correct modal sentences.

Examples:

He might miss the show.

They should have checked the stage.

Grammar Match — Modals in Context

Match each sentence to the correct modal meaning.

Sentence

1. He should have checked the stage.
2. Thomas might become famous.
3. The actor could have avoided the fall.
4. You must be nervous before a big show.

Meaning

- Advice about the past
Possibility in the future
Missed opportunity
Strong guess or assumption