

Lesson 36

Urban Legends

- What is a legend?
- What is an urban legend?
- Where do legends come from? How are they spread?
- Have you heard any good gossip recently?
- Do you know any good jokes?
- 'Laughter is the best medicine'. What does this mean?



Read about some urban legends.

In 1994, the Las Vegas police reported a disturbing series of crimes along the Vegas strip. The first victim was an Ohio man in town for a sales convention. At the bar in his hotel, the man happened to strike up a conversation with an attractive young woman. According to the man, the two hit it off, sharing several drinks over the course of a couple of hours. At some point, the man passed out, and when he came to, he found himself lying in a hotel bathtub, covered in ice. There was a phone on the floor beside the tub, with an attached note that said, "Call 911 or you will die." He called an ambulance and was rushed to the hospital, where the doctors informed him that he had undergone massive surgery. A gang selling human organs on the black market had removed one of his kidneys.

There's a good chance that you've heard this story, or some variation of it. Thousands and thousands of people have passed on news of the Las Vegas "organ thieves" over the course of 10 years. Word of mouth, e-mail, and even printed fliers have relayed it. However, there is absolutely no evidence that any such thing ever occurred, in Las Vegas or anywhere else. This fictional story is an urban legend.

An urban legend is any modern, fictional story, told as truth, that reaches a variety of people by being passed from person to person. Urban legends are often false, but not always. A few turn out to be true, and a lot of them were inspired by actual events but have changed from person to person. Urban legends are usually a combination of humor, horror, warning, embarrassment, or morality. In the story of the organ harvesters, you can see how some of these elements come together. The most outstanding feature of the story is its sense of horror. The image of a man waking up lying in a bathtub full of ice, with one less kidney is a scary thought. The story also includes a moral lesson. The businessman ended up in the unpleasant situation only after going to drink at a bar and then flirting with a mysterious woman.

Not all urban legends are horror stories. Many of them are amusing stories or ordinary jokes told as if they really occurred. One common story is about a drunk driver who is pulled over by the police. The officer asks the man to step out of the car just as another car up the road crashes into a telephone pole. As the officer runs off to help the other driver, the drunken man flees the scene. In the morning, he hears a loud knocking on his door and opens it to find the police officer from the night before. The man swears he was home all night. The officer asks to have a look in his garage. When he opens the door, he's shocked to see the officer's police car parked there instead of his own car.

Comprehension Questions:

1. When did the police report a series of disturbing crimes in Las Vegas?
2. Where was the first victim from?
3. Where did the man meet a strange woman?
4. When the man woke up, where was he?
5. What did the man find attached to the telephone?
6. What did the man do?
7. What did the doctors tell the man?
8. How has this story been passed along?
9. What is an urban legend?
10. Are urban legends always false?
11. What are urban legends usually a combination of?
12. What was the moral lesson of this story?
13. What happened when a drunk driver was pulled over?
14. Who knocked at the driver's door the next morning?
15. Whose car was in his garage?

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think the Las Vegas story is true? Why?
2. Do stories like the Las Vegas story make you afraid?
3. What did you learn from the Las Vegas story?
4. Would you ever pick up a hitchhiker? Why?
5. If a stranger knocked at your door late at night, what would you do?

6. How often do you read books? When do you usually read?
7. What kind of stories do you prefer to read?
8. What was the last book that you read? What was it about?
9. Have you ever thought about writing a book? If so, what kind?
10. Do you have a favorite author? Who is it?
11. Would you rather read a book or watch a movie? Why?
12. Urban legends become embellished as they are spread from person to person. Why do you think this happens?

13. What things make you laugh?
14. Have you laughed today? Why?
15. What is the difference between a joke and a riddle?

Try to solve these riddles:

- What has the head of a cat, the tail of a cat but is not a cat?
- What type of nut has a hole?
- If a rooster laid an egg on a roof, which way would the egg roll?
- What starts with e, ends with e, but usually contains only one letter?
- What starts with P and ends with E and has a thousand letters?
- A cowboy rode into town on Friday, stayed 3 days and then left on Friday. How is this possible?
- Why did the guy throw the clock out the window?