Read and listen.

Lucky numbers

When James Edwards completed his lottery ticket, the numbers he always used were the birth dates of people in his family. So the day he won nearly three million dollars he thanked both his lucky stars and his lucky numbers. Most people have got at least one lucky number and this number sometimes depends on where you’re from.

In China, for example, eight is a lucky number. People believe that an eight in your date of birth will bring good fortune and in 2008 there were more births than in a normal year.

These babies are called ‘Olympic babies’ because the Olympics were in China that year – the Games started in Beijing at 08:08 on 08.08.08. (at eight minutes past eight on 8th August, 2008). In August 2016 lots of Chinese children will be 8!

But why eight? In Mandarin, the pronunciation for eight (ba) sounds like the word for ‘prosperity’. In Hong Kong people pay a million dollars for a car number plate with eights in it. It’s also a popular number in phone numbers, addresses and PIN numbers.

But the number four in Mandarin (sì) sounds like the Mandarin word for ‘death’, so you probably won’t find a fourth floor in a hospital in China. The number 14 is also very unlucky in the East.
In the USA and some European countries the unlucky number is thirteen. The origin of this superstition isn’t clear, but it’s possible that it started because Judas was the thirteenth person at the Last Supper. A person with a phobia about the number thirteen is ‘triskaidekaphobic’.

It’s a phobia which affects a lot of people, particularly on Friday 13th, when they believe that bad things will happen to them. Unfortunately the phobia can also affect people who aren’t superstitious, like the man who was happy to buy house number 13 in his road, but then couldn’t sell it. Maybe he’ll change the number to 12½.