

Urban Legends

GENERAL ASSIGNMENTS AND STUDY TIPS
FOR URBAN LEGENDS

* * *

69 stories
retold by Claes Nordenskiöld

The idea behind this collection is to provide the reader with some fun and entertaining reading. Stories to make you smile, laugh, think about – and, retell.

In addition, they provide an ideal tool for the classroom, a reading circle, for individual studies, or they may simply be stimulating reading in English.

Generally, American English is used – both as far as spelling, idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms and language structure. The settings of the stories naturally lend to that.

Inevitably, they will hit a chord in people of all ages and backgrounds. Some may have heard a specific story or variations thereof before. A certain story may trigger off a new story or the chance to reminisce about a related or unrelated tale.

Use that possibility to pave the way for a creative environment around the stories. In allowing that creative environment you give everyone a chance to use both oral and written English, to learn words, expressions and grammatical structures, and best of all, you allow everyone to actively formulate themselves in English. This combination is the ultimate way of excelling in a language, whether you're already fairly fluent or a curious beginner with only a marginal knowledge of English.

The assignments below are very general. If you're in a small study circle you may simply want to read one story each and retell it. Remember that the whole idea of an urban legend is that it is allowed to be changed, that details evolve, specifics erode and settings switch. That's part of the fun.

Truth never stands in the way of a good story...
J.H. Brunvand

CONTENTS INCLUDING SUGGESTED LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

The reasoning behind the division of the legends into three categories (*, **, and *** – * are the easiest) is to give the user an idea of how difficult the story is based on language, vocabulary and content. Keep in mind that this is only a guideline, and may not reflect how an individual reader experiences the story.

- 1 • ANIMAL LEGENDS 8
 - The Rabbit* 10
 - The Mexican Pet** 11
 - The Choking Doberman** 12
 - The Flying Feline* 14
 - Frozen Chickens** 15
 - Man's Best Friend*** 16
 - Of Mousse and Men** 18
 - Wash. Boil. Serv.*** 20
 - Dead Cat* 21
 - The Palm, The Snake and the Dog*** 22
 - Mine and Yours* 24
 - A Cover-Up* 25

- 2 • IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH 26
 - Heavenly Revenge* 28
 - Blind Date* 29
 - The Power of Habits** 30
 - Losing Teeth** 32
 - Heavy Duty Cadillac*** 34
 - The Widow from Kilkenny* 36
 - Surprise, Surprise!* 37
 - Pure Contact* 38
 - Bare Breasts*** 40
 - The Lottery of Life** 42

- 3 • IN SCHOOL 44
 - The Essay* 46
 - The Philosophical Chair* 47
 - The School Dance** 48
 - The Importance of Swimming** 50
 - Bang, Bang, You're Dead!** 51
 - Pavlov's Professor** 52
 - Which Tire?*** 53
 - In the Dark** 54
 - Do You Know Who I Am?* 56
 - Good Advice for Good Grades* 57

- 4 • THIS AND THAT 58
 - Nothing to Declare* 60
 - Putting Out Fires in a Wetsuit*** 62
 - Sounds Familiar* 63
 - On the Road** 64
 - High Up in the Sky*** 66
 - The Housewife** 68
 - Prior to Surgery*** 69
 - No Really, I'm from the FBI** 70
 - Accident Insurance*** 72
 - An Innocent Piece of Advice*** 74

- 5 • MONEY, HONOR AND COURAGE 76
 - Old and Rich* 78
 - Exposed** 79
 - Money in the Wall** 80
 - Riding in a Bodybag** 82
 - Pick Up Two Hitchhikers*** 84
 - Death and the Cleaner** 86
 - Fried Onions for Breakfast* 88
 - The Robber's ID* 89

- 6 • IN SURPRISE 90
 - The Lost Son* 92
 - The Will** 94
 - Blue Lights Flashing* 96
 - The Lottery Ticket* 97
 - A Catcher in the Rye** 98
 - Additional Insurance** 100
 - An Articulate Young Man* 101
 - The Wild Car Chase* 102
 - All that Glitters Isn't Gold** 104
 - A Pack of Cookies** 106
 - The Face of Honesty** 108
 - Bottoms Up** 110
 - Find the Fax* 112
 - Family Fun* 113
 - Woman Stuck in Tiny German Prison** 114

- 7 • CYBERSPACE 116
 - Help Desk* 118
 - The Yearly Internet Clean-Up*** 120
 - <http://ghg.ecn.perdue.edu>** 123
 - Net Search** 124

MAIN ASSIGNMENT

1. Divide the class or students into groups and give a different story to each group. (Each group could consist of anything from two to, let's say, five students. Don't let the groups get too large!)
2. Each group reads their own story and makes sure that everyone has understood it. Use the wordlist!
3. One person from each group moves to the next group and retells his/her story. (An extension of this exercise is that you pretend that the story has happened to you or someone you know.)
4. Then one person from each group moves again, but now he or she retells the story he or she has just heard. (Don't hesitate to change details to make it more fun or odd but still believable!)
5. Repeat this until all the groups have heard all the stories.
6. One person from each group then retells the last story they heard to the whole class.
7. Has the story changed? If so, how? Compare the new variation with the original text. Have a discussion where you may write down key points on a piece of paper or a white board.

ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

- A. Choose a number of legends and write 3–5 questions about each one. Where does the story take place? Who are the main characters? Et cetera. Don't be afraid to add details of your own.
- B. Do you know a story that you think could pass as an urban legend? Write it down and present it to the class. Afterwards, ask them if they feel that it qualifies as an urban legend? Had anyone heard the story or something similar to it before? (Remember that it really doesn't matter where the story takes place or if some of the details are different. Take a look at Brunvand's definition in the Pretalk section of the book.)
- C. Let each student choose one story. Try to learn the story by heart. Retell the story to the class without looking at the text. (Have the complete text, or parts of it, in front of you, or write down key words to help you along.)
- D. Change the setting of a legend. Rewrite it so that it takes place in Sweden and in a specific area, for instance Södertälje, by including key names and references to an area.
- E. Choose a story and retell it as if it has happened to you, using first person narrative 'I'. ("One day I saw my dog with a dead rabbit in its mouth...")
- F. Put together your own wordlists (including translations) by adding or removing words.
- G. Choose a story and write or tell what happens next.