

## What are the odds?

“Coincidences are proof that the universe has a sense of humour.” – Albert Einstein



### Warm up

- What is a coincidence?
- Have you ever experienced something surprising or unlikely that felt like a coincidence?
- Have you ever heard or read about a famous coincidence? What was it?
- Do you believe coincidences are random, or do they happen for a reason?



### 1. What are the odds? Your teacher will give you the actual probability at the end.

impossible (0%)      unlikely (25%)      even chance (50%)      likely (75%)      certain (100%)

Situation	Your Guess	Actual Probability
Flipping a coin and getting heads	_____	50% (1 in 2)
Rolling a six on a die	_____	16.67% (1 in 6)
The chance that at least one atom in your body was once part of a dinosaur	_____	Nearly 100%
Winning the EuroMillions jackpot	_____	About 1 in 139 million 0.00000072%
A coin landing on its edge	_____	Very rare (~1 in 6,000) 0.0167%
Guessing the suit of a random playing card	_____	1 in 4 (25%)
Getting a royal flush in poker (five-card hand)	_____	1 in 649,740
Drawing a card from a standard 52 deck of cards	_____	0% - Jokers aren't in a standard 52-card deck!
Being at least a 10th cousin to a random stranger	_____	Close to 100%



## 2. Match the words to their meanings.

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| a. incredible   | 1. A meeting with someone after a long time.              |
| b. reunion      | 2. The idea that events are controlled by a higher power. |
| c. fate         | 3. Difficult to believe; extraordinary.                   |
| d. unbelievable | 4. Extremely surprising or amazing.                       |
| e. astonishing  | 5. Hard to believe because it is so unlikely.             |



## 3. Read one or two of the four stories. Then, retell the story to your partner in your own words.

### Story 1: The Unsinkable Connection

Violet Jessop, an ocean liner stewardess, experienced an astonishing series of coincidences when she survived the sinking of three different ships. She was aboard the RMS Olympic when it collided with a warship in 1911, the RMS Titanic when it struck an iceberg and sank in 1912, and the HMHS Britannic when it sank after hitting a mine in 1916. Jessop's incredible luck earned her the nickname "Miss Unsinkable." Truly, what are the odds?



### Story 2: The Separated Twins with Parallel Lives

In one of the most famous cases of separated twins, Jim Lewis and Jim Springer were reunited at the age of 39 after being separated at birth. The similarities in their lives were astonishing: both had been named James by their adoptive families, both had married women named Linda, divorced, and then remarried women named Betty. Both had sons named James Allan and James Alan, owned dogs named Toy, and worked as sheriffs. It was a series of coincidences that seemed stranger than fiction.

### Story 3: The Cab Driver and the Wheelchair

In 2008, a British cab driver named Tom Birchall saved the life of a wheelchair-bound woman who had fallen onto a train track. One year later, Tom was hailed a hero once again when he saved another woman who had fallen onto the tracks—and unbelievably, it was the same woman he had saved previously. It must have been fate that Tom was there both times!

## Story 4: The Lottery Ticket Swap

In 2010, a woman named Julia bought a lottery ticket but accidentally handed it to her co-worker, thinking it was theirs. The co-worker ended up winning \$50,000. Julia laughed it off and joked, "What are the odds?" Months later, Julia bought another ticket and won the grand prize: \$1.2 million! She described the experience as something stranger than fiction.



### 4. Discuss in groups.

1. Which story did you find the most unbelievable? Why?
2. Have you ever heard of a coincidence like these before?
3. How would you react if you gave someone a lottery ticket and they won a huge amount of money? Would you expect a share of the prize?
4. Do you think Violet Jessop was incredibly lucky or unlucky to survive three shipwrecks? Why?



### 5. Learn and practice common expressions to describe coincidences.

Expression

Example Sentence

What a small world!

*I can't believe we ran into each other here. What a small world!*

It must be fate.

*Meeting him again after so many years... it must be fate.*

Stranger than fiction.

*The way they met is stranger than fiction.*

You won't believe this, but...

*You won't believe this, but I found my lost keys in the fridge!*

What are the odds?

*We both chose the same book! What are the odds?*



### 6. Fill in the gaps in the sentences below with the correct expression. Each expression can only be used once.

1. The way the twins lived such parallel lives was truly stranger than fiction
2. Both of us picking the same lottery numbers? *It's so unlikely!* What are the odds?
3. You won't believe this but, I found my missing wallet in the fridge!
4. Bumping into my first love after so many years felt like it must be fate.
5. When I ran into my childhood friend at the airport, I said, what a small world.

## The Third Conditional

The third conditional is used to talk about hypothetical past events—things that did not happen but could have had a different outcome.

💡 Why is it useful for coincidences?

Coincidences often happen unexpectedly, but we can imagine how things could have turned out differently. The third conditional helps us describe "what if" situations related to surprising events.

📖 Structure of the Third Conditional

✅ If + past perfect, would have + past participle

- If I hadn't missed the train, I wouldn't have met my old friend.  
*(But I did miss the train, and that's why I met them.)*
- If she had checked her lottery ticket, she would have known she won earlier.  
*(She didn't check, so she didn't know she won.)*

🚨 Changing the order of the sentence

- If-clause first: *If I had gone to a different café, I wouldn't have met my teacher.* ✅ (comma needed)
- Main clause first: *I wouldn't have met my teacher if I had gone to a different café.* ✅ (no comma needed)



### 7. Fill in the blanks with the correct verb forms.

1. If I ***hadn't taken*** (not take) the wrong bus, I ***wouldn't have run*** (not run) into my old classmate.
2. She ***wouldn't have found out*** (not find out) about the job opening if she ***hadn't talked*** (not talk) to her neighbour.
3. If he ***had forgotten*** (forget) his umbrella, he ***would have gotten*** (get) soaked and never stopped at the bookstore.
4. We ***wouldn't have met*** (not meet) at the party if I ***hadn't decided*** (not decide) to go at the last minute.
5. If they ***hadn't sat*** (not sit) next to each other on the plane, they ***wouldn't have realised*** (not realise) they were long-lost siblings.
6. If I ***hadn't lost*** (not lose) my phone, I ***wouldn't have asked*** (not ask) a stranger for help and we ***wouldn't have become*** (not become) friends.
7. He ***wouldn't have heard*** (not hear) about the surprise event if he ***hadn't checked*** (not check) his messages at the last moment.
8. If she ***hadn't forgotten*** (not forget) her wallet, she ***wouldn't have returned*** (not return) to the café and see the celebrity.

