

Jinxes

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Question 6 asked about practices if two people said the same thing at the same time:

6 If you say exactly the same thing at exactly the same time as someone else, what do you say and do next?

This brought a wide variety of responses, but unfortunately, the detail in the answers was very variable, which makes it difficult to interpret the data consistently. It was often the case that we received responses like *jinx*, *personal jinx*, *master jinx*. In cases like this, it was unclear whether this represents three separate and competing forms of jinx, or whether all three are needed to establish one (restricted form of) jinx. Some schools gave very precise details about the procedure for clearing the jinx, and the penalties for breaking the jinx, while others gave none of this information.

The main finding is that practices vary considerably from school to school, and that the same words used in setting up the jinx will not necessarily involve similar penalties or clearance procedures. It is clear that there is a good deal of invention in making jinxes harder to clear, and harsher to incur, and that there are basically no fixed understandings of how jinxes will work. This is an area of potential difficulty for children who move schools: there were 57 different forms of jinx reported, and a variety of penalties and clearance procedures.

There were a small number of responses which did not involve jinxes, but none of them was widespread enough to show any pattern. These included touching wood, hooking pinkies (and possibly making a wish), giving a high five, saying *snap* or some version of the 'copy cat' rhyme (*Copy cat, dirty rat, sitting on the door mat; Copy cat, I said that*). Two schools reported a procedure whereby the jinxed person gets hit until they have produced the names of five objects of a kind (the two specified were fruit and fish).

The commonest wordings of the jinx were *personal jinx* (118 reports) and *jinx* (61). They are often differentiated in terms of who can clear the jinx: if you say *personal jinx*, then only the jinxer can clear the jinx, while if you say *jinx*, then anybody can clear the jinx. However, it is clear that in some schools, *personal jinx* functions like *jinx* as described above, and *private/master jinx* or *personal jinx padlock* functions like *personal jinx* above. There were also 13 reports of *personal jinx 1-2-3*, (or in one case *1...10*), where the first to say the last number in the series is the jinxer, and the slower one incurs the penalty. Sometimes a longer formula is required, e.g. *jinx, jinx, personal jinx*, reported 15 times. We presume that the point of this is that the first to finish saying it is the jinxer, and that the long formula gives both parties a more sporting chance. Other long formulae include *personal private personal jinx, jinx personal personal jinx*. *Double jinx* was reported 8 times, and during school visits, this was said to mean that the jinxer and one other person could clear the jinx. There were a host of one-report-only variations: *banana personal jinx* (which incurs the penalty of being hit 100 times), *commander jinx* (where the jinxer can command the jinxee to do anything they fancy), *infinity jinx, golden jinx, smelly jinx, caller jinx, unbeatable jinx, personal jinx – owe me a coke*, etc.

In terms of penalties, the standard penalty, reported by 62 schools, is that you get punched if you talk while under a jinx. The only other common penalty is that

you get hit once for every word you say while under a jinx. (This was reported in three small pockets: a few in Auckland, a few in Wellington, and a few in Southland.)

The rules for clearing the jinx seem to be rather variable. The commonest practice is that you are cleared when the appropriate person says your name. As indicated above, if a 'personal' jinx has been declared, only the jinxer can clear the jinxee, but if a simple jinx is in place, anyone who says your name can clear you. 57 schools reported clearance procedures like this. However, there were also 29 schools, scattered throughout the country, which reported that the name had to be said three times to clear the jinx, and small numbers of schools reported that four or five namings might be required. Alternatively, the full name might be required.

A number of retaliations were reported, and a number of "immunity" claims, and one school reported that *jinx finx* reversed the jinx. However almost all of these appeared to be localised to the school which reported them.

There is very little evidence in the data of any regionalisation of these forms of jinx, although the only two schools reporting five namings for clearance were in adjacent boxes, and during school visits, this same penalty was reported from another school in the immediate vicinity. What was clearest was that a child moving schools would not be able to predict the procedures in the new school on the basis of the old school, even if the schools are in the same area. It was also clear that children within a school did not always agree on the words, the penalties or the clearance procedures. It would be interesting to know how such conflicts are resolved. During the school visits, several live jinxes were witnessed and recorded.

Since there was no evidence of patterning in this data, no statistical analysis was undertaken, and the maps are not worth inclusion.