

## HOW ARE SUPERSTITIONS LEARNED?

**Directions:** Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow.



Standing at the free throw line, the basketball player dribbles the ball five times, flexes her knees twice, and dribbles the ball once more before taking the shot. She repeats this behavior each time she goes to the line to shoot a free throw.

The batter places one foot in the batter's box, swings the bat twice, and loosens then tightens his batting gloves. He finally steps into the batter's box ready to face the pitcher.

In 1948, B.F. Skinner conducted research with pigeons that mimics the superstitious behavior of many athletes. Skinner placed hungry pigeons in a cage. He supplied food to the pigeons every 15 seconds. The pigeons' precise behavior did not matter; the food simply appeared. Most of the birds started repeating whatever behavior they were doing when they first received the food. Skinner reported, "One bird was conditioned to turn counterclockwise about the cage, making two or three turns between reinforcements. Another repeatedly trust its head into one of the upper corners of the cage." (Skinner, 1948)



1. According to Skinner's observations, how does superstitious behavior develop?
2. List three other examples of superstitious behavior.
3. Do you think all superstitions are learned? List examples of superstitions that are not reinforced but which people believe.
4. What kind of events would cause the basketball player's behaviors to be extinguished? What would change the baseball player's behaviors?
5. Describe a procedure for developing helpful behaviors in a basketball or baseball player.