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The Legend of the Blarney Stone

Blarney Castle

The Irish are said to have the 'gift of gab', meaning that they are great talkers and fabulous storytellers. English literature is full of wonderful plays, poems and novels written by Irish writers. The author of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (C.S. Lewis) was Irish.



Where do the Irish get their special talent for telling tales? According to legend, they get it by kissing an enchanted stone that's built into the wall of an ancient Irish castle.

As the story goes, the lord of Blarney Castle was at one time suspected of being disloyal to the queen. As a punishment, he was told to turn over his land and castle to the crown.

The lord did not want to give up his castle, so he set off to London to plead his case before the queen. Along the way, he saved an old woman who'd fallen into a river from drowning. As it turned out, the woman was a witch and when she heard the lord's sad story, she decided to help him.

The witch showed the lord a stone. It was an enchanted stone, she told him. Kissing it would give him the ability to convince anyone of anything.

The lord kissed the stone and easily convinced the queen to let him keep his castle. He brought the magic stone back home with him and had it built into the castle wall. That way, with the magic stone near at hand, he and descendants would always be able to sweet-talk their way out of any trouble they managed to get themselves into.

Blarney Castle was built in 1446. It is 90 feet tall, and its walls are 18 feet thick. High thick walls were necessary back then to provide protection against enemy attacks.

Today, most of the castle lies in ruins, but the wall with the legendary stone still stands. Every year, thousands of people visit Blarney Castle and try to kiss the blarney stone.

Kissing the stone is not easy. The stone lies near the top of the main castle wall, between the wall and a balcony. To get to it you must first climb up 127 steep

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narrow steps. Then, to kiss the stone, you lie on your back (on the balcony) and holding on to iron rails for support, you bend your head backwards and downwards while someone hangs onto you to make sure you don't topple over.

Sounds rather difficult, but millions of people have given it a try. And if you believe the legend, those who succeed are rewarded with the ability to persuade, coax, and sweet-talk their way through life.

1. Why was Blarney Castle built with such high steep walls?
2. Where in the castle is the blarney stone?
3. Why do people kiss it?
4. What must you do to kiss the blarney stone?
5. Would you want to try kissing the blarney stone? Why, or why not?