

Urban Legends

An urban legend is an apocryphal, secondhand story, alleged to be true and just plausible enough to be believed, about some horrific, embarrassing, ironic, or exasperating series of events that supposedly happened to a real person. It's likely to be framed as a cautionary tale.

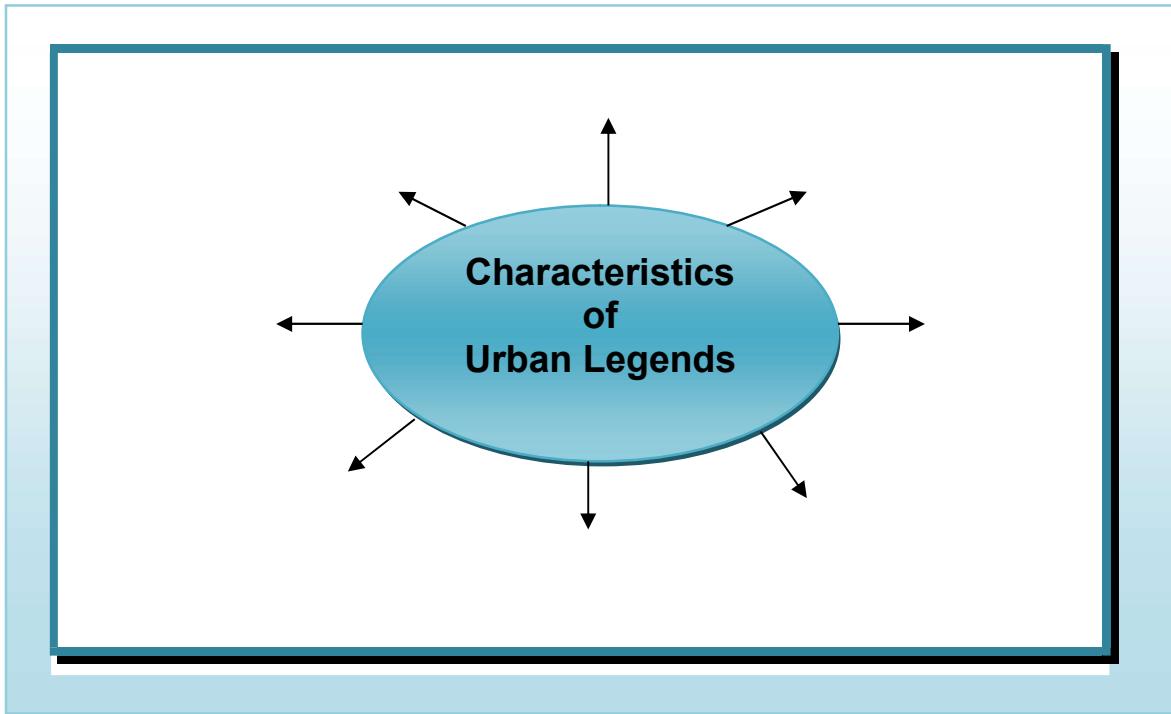
Legends spread from person to person

Urban legends are a type of folklore, defined as the handed-down beliefs, stories, songs, and customs of ordinary people ("the folk"). One way to differentiate urban legends from other narrative forms (i.e. popular fiction, TV dramas etc) is to compare where they come from and how they're propagated. Urban legends emerge spontaneously, spread "virally" from person to person, and are rarely traceable to a single point of origin. Urban legends tend to change over time with repetition and embellishment. There can be as many variants as there are tellers of the tale.

They're usually false, but not always

They are indeed usually false but which may also, on occasion, turn out to be true, or at least loosely based on real events. The crucial factor is that the story is *told* as true in the absence of verification. Folklorists are generally more interested in the social context and meaning of urban legends than their truth value.

Factual or not, when an urban legend is told it's meant to be believed. The teller is apt to rely on skillful storytelling and/or reference to putatively trustworthy sources — e.g., "it really happened to my hairdresser's brother's best friend" — in lieu of actual proof or evidence. Other stories rely on irrational fears, such as scary things that are unlikely to happen.



When someone tells one of these stories it sounds interesting because of the details. They tell you:

- *Who it happened to*
- *When it happened*
- *Where it happened*
- *How people felt*
- *What they were wearing, etc*