

# Birthdays

## Pre-reading

### Questions:

- What do you think of when you read the title?
- What might you learn in this reading?

### Definitions:

- Ancient – something very old, or from long ago
- Festive – joyous, or party-like



## Reading\*

16 Celebrating birthdays is a very old **custom**. Ancient people did not know the exact day of  
16 their birth. They measured time only by using the moon and the seasons. As humans began to  
33 learn more about the earth's natural sequence of time, calendars were developed. Calendars made  
47 it easy for people to keep track of and **celebrate** important events each year. Birthdays were such  
64 events.

65 Many birthday **traditions** and symbols have been passed down through the years. Some  
78 say birthday cakes began with the Greeks who took cakes to the temple of the moon goddess.  
95 These cakes were round to represent the full moon. Others believe the tradition of the birthday  
111 cake started in Germany. Geburtstagorten is a sweet, layered German cake that was used for  
126 birthdays.

127 Another symbol closely related to the birthday cake is the custom of putting birthday  
141 candles on the cake. The Greeks who took cakes to the moon goddess put candles on the cake to  
160 make it look like it was glowing.

167 The Germans, who were known as good candle makers, made small candles for their cakes.  
182 Some say that the candles were put on the cakes for religious reasons, that the light was symbolic.  
200 Others believed that the smoke from the candles would take their wishes up to heaven.

215 Friends and family enjoy celebrating with the birthday person. The earliest birthday parties  
228 were held because people thought that evil spirits would visit them on their birthdays. They liked  
244 to have friends and family nearby so that the evil spirits would not bother them.

259 The birthday party has evolved into a time of food, fun, and gift giving. Friends and  
275 families gather for a festive time and bring gifts to the person of honor. If someone cannot visit a  
294 friend on his or her birthday, a card is often sent. The tradition of sending birthday cards is a long  
314 one. It began in England over one hundred years ago.

324 Don't forget to sing! Before the candles are blown out, and before the cake is cut, the  
341 century-old favorite needs to be sung. "Happy Birthday to You" is one of the most well-known  
357 songs in the world. The six note melody is tradition at most birthdays.

370 \*Revised selection – original text authored by Sara Couch. Reprinted with permission by Deborah Byrnes, Ph.D., Utah State University.

## Understanding

1. Compare and contrast the first known birthday parties with the present day ones. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What does the word **celebrate** mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. About how many years has “Happy Birthday to You” been sung? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Pagan beliefs are a part of many holidays. Do you think this is true for birthdays as well? If so, how?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. We could not have birthdays without what? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What does the word **tradition** mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Which two groups of people can we credit for birthday cakes and candles? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What is a **custom**? \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Write about how you celebrate your birthday.

Option C: Write about a memorable birthday celebration.

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