

Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is celebrated in many countries, but what are the differences between today's celebration and in the past? Read the text to find out some interesting facts about the most romantic day of the year.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–g) with the vocabulary (1–7).

Vocabulary	Definitions
1. a millennial	a) produced and sold in large numbers
2. Generation X	b) without a name on it
3. a baby boomer	c) people born between the early 1960s and the early 1980s
4. mass market	d) to say or write nasty things to someone, often on social media
5. vinegar	e) someone born between 1981 and 1996
6. anonymous	f) a sour liquid used for cooking or on salads
7. to troll	g) someone born between 1946 and 1964

Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is on 14 February, and it can seem as if the world is full of couples who are celebrating their love. Some couples might celebrate with dinner at a nice restaurant, flowers, chocolates or other presents. Some single people might put a post on social media about why they hate Valentine's Day, or maybe they just avoid it completely. But it's impossible not to know that Valentine's is happening. And that's not surprising when millions of people worldwide celebrate it in some way.

The price of love

For many romantic people, Valentine's Day means spending money, but habits vary around the world. People in English-speaking countries such as the UK and the USA often spend more than those in many other regions, although the gap is changing. In the UK, baby boomers, Generation X and millennials are all similarly likely to buy something for Valentine's Day. But in the USA, millennials tend to spend more than Generation X, and both usually spend more than baby-boomers. Across different countries and generations, one pattern remains consistent: men generally spend more money on Valentine's Day than women.

The beginning of modern Valentine's Day

Today, Valentine's Day is celebrated in many parts of the world. But it's the USA where the celebration really became mass market, because of a woman called Esther Howland. She became known as the 'mother of Valentine's' after she created a successful business making and selling greetings cards in the 1840s. She got the idea from valentine cards from Europe that were decorated with lace and flowers and were very expensive. Then, in the early 1900s, two things happened that meant valentine cards became really popular: cheap printed cards were made by the greeting cards company Hallmark, and the price of postage stamps fell.

Vinegar valentines

At about the same time as this, another kind of valentine card was popular. 'Vinegar valentines' were nasty, anonymous cards that people sent to someone they didn't like. This pre-social media way of trolling people was popular for a hundred years, but not many examples of the cards are in museums today. Museums have big collections of traditional valentine cards, but it's no surprise that not many people kept an unkind valentine card.

Further back in history

Valentine's Day has been celebrated in some way for around 600 years. As far back as the 17th century, people gave cards or presents, but the very first Valentine messages were written down in the 1400s. In 1415, the Duke of Orléans in France sent his wife a Valentine's Day letter while he was in prison in the Tower of London after the Battle of Agincourt. This is the earliest known example of a written valentine message.

However, the exact history of Valentine's Day is unclear because there were several Christian saints called Valentine. According to one story, Valentine was a priest who performed marriages at a time when the emperor believed that single men were better soldiers than married men. The emperor was so angry that Valentine was punished with death. Another story tells of a man named Valentine who helped Christians escape from Roman prisons. In a third story, Valentine sent a letter to a woman while he was in prison and signed it 'From your Valentine'.

We can't be sure which Valentine the day refers to, but 14 February later became known as Saint Valentine's Day in the Christian calendar.

Tasks

Task – Reordering vertical

Put the events (a–f) in the order they happened (1–6).

Order	Events
1.	a) Valentine’s Day became a celebration for people in many countries.
2.	
3.	b) People sent loving and also horrible valentine cards.
4.	c) A man called Valentine became a saint after he died.
5.	d) Valentine cards and postage stamps became cheaper.
6.	e) A woman copied the valentine cards she saw from other countries.
	f) People wrote the first valentine messages.

Task – Gap fill drag and drop sentences

Complete the sentences (1–6) with the words (a–f).

Sentences

1. ___ brought a valentine tradition to a large number of customers.
2. ___ sent a valentine card to his wife in France.
3. ___ spend the least money on Valentine’s Day in the USA.
4. ___ spend the most money on Valentine’s Day.
5. ___ used printing technology to make valentine cards.
6. ___ was the name of three different saints.

Words

- a) Valentine
- b) Esther Howland
- c) Hallmark
- d) The Duke of Orléans
- e) Men
- f) Baby boomers

Discussion

What is a good way to celebrate love?

Answers

Preparation task

1. e
2. c
3. g
4. a
5. f
6. b
7. d

Task 1

1. c
2. f
3. b
4. e
5. d
6. a

Task 2

1. Esther Howland
2. The Duke of Orleans
3. Baby boomers
4. Men
5. Hallmark
6. Valentine