The History/Mystery of Valentine’s Day

from English Teachers Everywhere ([www.etseverywhere.com](http://www.etseverywhere.com))

My friend, the novelist [Kristin Elizabeth Clark](kristinelizabethclark.com), narrates this strange, and we hope funny, quasi-history of Valentine’s Day.

In general, it’s a good idea to make classroom listening tasks short. Thus, even though the whole audio is less than three minutes, you may want to break it into three listening segments.

You might put some vocabulary on the board before playing each section, and discuss the meaning. This will increase student comprehension when you play the audio, and make the students feel successful! You know your students’ level best, so you can add or subtract words accordingly.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Section 1**  Starts at 0:00 | **Section 2**  Starts at 0:43 | **Section 3**  Star5ts at 1:37 |
| goatskin  fertile  distrust  Incidentally | ensure  lovey-dovey\* | forbidden |

\*lovey-dovey means VERY romantic, maybe excessively so. Like, too cute!

**FULL TEXT**

Section 1

Long ago, in ancient Rome there was a festival, celebrated in February, where men on the streets hit women with pieces of goatskin. This was said to help make them become more fertile. (In reality, it probably just made them distrust men. And maybe goats too). Oh, incidentally the goatskins were called februa. Can you guess what word we get from that?

Section 2

Later, Rome conquered France. You know for certain that when the Italians and French get together, something romantic will ensue. They had a festival, and what they did was this: A woman wrote her name on a note, and she may have added a few lovely-dovey or suggestive words. Then the note was put into a barrel, and a man would reach in and choose one.

It was a kind of love lottery. We don’t know what the happy couple did together after that, but these barrel notes might actually have been the first form of Valentine’s Day cards.

Section 3

But that doesn’t tell us who St. Valentine was.

Again, nobody really knows. But during the Roman Empire days, young soldiers were often forbidden to marry. There was a religious man who didn’t agree with the no-marriage-for-soldiers rule, and he went against the law and married people anyway.

His name was Valentine. Good for you, Valentine. Sadly, he was executed.

There you have it. Some of the possible roots of Valentine’s Day.

*Audio samples used from [FreeSound](http://www.freesound.org/" \t "_blank).*

**GAP-FILL**

You might want to use the gap fills below for each section. If you have a projector, you can show this on a screen (in case you don’t want to print). It’s still a good idea to break the audio into sections.

Section 1

Long ago, in (1) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Rome there was a festival, 2) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in February, where men on the streets hit women with pieces of goatskin. This was said to help make them become more fertile. (In reality, it probably just made them (3) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ men. And maybe goats too). Oh, incidentally the goatskins were called februa. Can you (4) \_\_\_\_\_\_ what word we get from that?

Section 2

Later, Rome (1) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ France. You know for certain that when the Italians and French get together, something romantic will (2) \_\_\_\_\_. They had a festival, and what they did was this: A woman (3)\_\_\_\_\_ her name on a note, and she may have added a few (4) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ or suggestive words. Then the note was put into a (5) \_\_\_\_\_\_, and a man would reach in and choose one.

It was a kind of love (6). We don’t know what the happy couple did together after that, but these barrel notes might (7) \_\_\_\_\_ have been the first form of Valentine’s Day cards.

Section 3

But that doesn’t tell us who St. Valentine was.

Again, nobody really knows. But during the Roman Empire days, young soldiers were often (1) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to marry. There was a (2) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ man who didn’t agree with the no-marriage-for-soldiers rule, and he went against the law and (3) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ people anyway. His name was Valentine.

Good for you, Valentine. Sadly, he was (4) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

There you have it. Some of the possible (5) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of Valentine’s Day.

**GAP-FILL 2**

Here’s something I like to do for extra listening practice. A day or two later, even a week later, play the audio again with a different gap-fill. The familiarity with the text empowers students and makes them feel like they are really improving in English.

Do a different gap-fill. Just copy the above Full Text above, and remove some new words. You could remove all articles for instance (e.g. “a” and “the,” etc.) Or you might try changing some words, replacing them with similar words; students will then identify those. Or you can add a few words. You get the idea. Alter the text again, and play the audio one more time. Extra listening practice!