

# IS VALENTINE'S DAY A WASTE OF TIME AND MONEY?



Valentine's Day (14 February) is fast approaching, which means the shops are full of cards, flowers and heart-shaped chocolates and lollipops. Here in the UK, around 25 million Valentine's Day cards are sent each year, many **anonymously** so that the sender has to guess who their admirer is. We look into the history behind Valentine's Day and debate whether it's a fun opportunity to spread a bit of love, or just a waste of time and money that leaves many people feeling sad and left out.

## HISTORY OF VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine's Day, also called St. Valentine's Day, gets its name from a famous saint. Although there are different stories of who Saint Valentine was, a popular version is that he was a priest from the 3rd century. He was thrown into jail for helping young couples to get married, which was forbidden by the Emperor, who thought that unmarried men made better soldiers. While he was in prison the priest wrote a love letter to the jailer's daughter and signed it 'from your Valentine'. This may have been the first ever Valentine's message, but however it started, by the 1500s, sending messages to someone special on 14 February was a popular tradition. By the 1700s, sending flowers was also customary, with the rose thought of as the symbol

of love. By the 1800s, sending Valentine's cards by post became much more popular, but they weren't always messages of love. During the Victorian era, some people sent 'vinegar Valentine's', which were insulting cards you could send to someone you disliked! Vinegar Valentine's cards fell out of favour when concealing the **postmark** on envelopes was no longer allowed, which meant it was much easier to trace the sender!



All pictures: Getty



A statue of St. Valentine in Whitefriar Church, Dublin

## VALENTINE'S FUN FACTS!

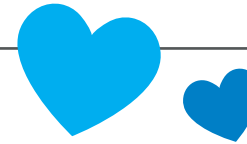
- It's thought that the oldest surviving Valentine's letter in English was written in 1477 by Margery Brews to her fiancé John Paston. Margery described John as her 'right well-beloved Valentine'.
- One in five people in Britain buy Valentine's Day gifts for their pets!



- In 2017, an anonymous student at Troy High School in Ohio, USA, sent 1,500 handmade Valentine's cards, so that every student in the school got their own card!
- Cupid, the Roman god of love, is a common symbol of Valentine's Day. He is often shown as a winged baby with a bow and arrow. According to legend, if you're shot by Cupid's arrow you'll fall madly in love!



## VALENTINE'S TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD



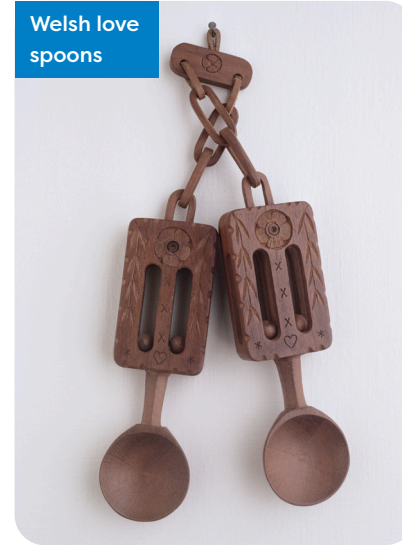
In **Japan**, it's traditional for women to give gifts, such as homemade chocolates, on Valentine's Day. On 14 March, which is known as White Day, it's the men's turn to give the gifts, typically marshmallows, sweets or white chocolate.



In **South Korea**, love is celebrated on the 14th of every month, not just February! The celebrations include Kiss Day on 14 June and Hug Day on 14 December!



Welsh love spoons



Instead of Valentine's Day, people in **Wales** celebrate St Dwynwen's Day on 25 January. St Dwynwen is the Welsh patron saint of lovers and the day is celebrated with cards and presents, including carved wooden love spoons.



Every year, local governments in the **Philippines** host mass weddings for couples who might not be able to afford the cost of an individual wedding ceremony. So, lots of people celebrate their wedding anniversary each year on 14 February.



People in **Estonia** and **Finland** celebrate friendship rather than love on 14 February, calling it 'Friends Day'. People gather for meals and sporting activities, such as skating or sledding.



In **Denmark**, instead of roses, snowdrops are given as a symbol of love. It's also traditional for men to send a note called a 'gaekkebrev' (snowdrop letter) to the person they love. It's usually a poem written on intricately cut paper and signed with a series of dots to indicate the number of letters in the senders' name. If the person receiving the letter guesses the name of the sender, they get an Easter egg!



In **Norwich**, Norfolk, legend has it that on 13 February (Valentine's Eve), Jack Valentine leaves gifts on people's doorsteps, knocking on the door but disappearing before the door is answered. It may be something expensive or just a joke gift.

In **Ghana**, 14 February is now also known as National Chocolate Day and it's celebrated with special chocolate-themed menus and events across the country.

Girls in **South Africa** often pin the name of the person they love (or have a not-so-secret crush on) to their sleeve on Valentine's Day. It gives a whole new meaning to the phrase 'Wearing your heart on your sleeve'!

## THE COST OF VALENTINE'S DAY

Last year in the UK, the total spent celebrating Valentine's Day was estimated to be £1.37 billion. This means the average amount spent per person was around £22, which was up from 2021, but down from 2020, when the average amount spent was £35 per person. In comparison, it's estimated that in 2022, people in the UK spent £20.1 billion on Christmas gifts, £687 million on items for Halloween and £415 million on Easter eggs.



When there is high demand for something, the price often goes up, so things like chocolates and flowers may be more expensive than usual in the run-up to Valentine's Day. Some people would argue that spending money on these items is wasteful, especially during a cost of living crisis. Others might say that people shouldn't feel pressured to spend money – it's the thought that counts and a handmade card or present means more than a shop bought one.

## FEELING LEFT OUT

One of the biggest criticisms of Valentine's Day is that it can leave people feeling unloved or left out. It is often seen as a celebration of romantic love, which can make people feel excluded if they don't have a partner, rejected if the person they love doesn't feel the same way, or disappointed if they have a partner who doesn't view Valentine's Day in the same way as they do. Also, the traditions involved and the images seen in advertising around Valentine's Day are often based on **heterosexual** couples, which means those in the **LGBT+** community can feel like they're not represented.

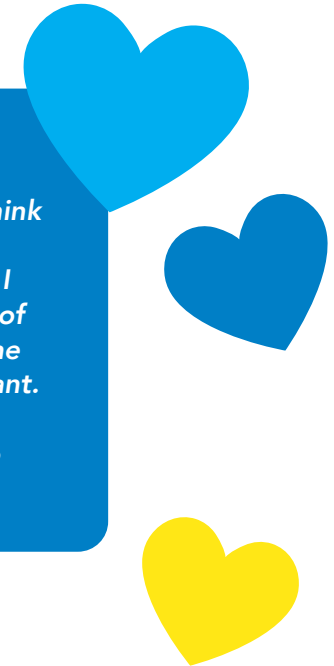


However, there is an argument that Valentine's Day should be seen as a day to appreciate anyone in your life who you love. It doesn't just need to be a celebration of romance, and lots of people already send cards to their family, friends and even their pets! It could be a great opportunity to do something fun with a friend or relation or to be your own Valentine and do something you really love.

## OPINIONS

Journalist Katy Gillett isn't a fan of 14 February: *"Valentine's Day may have started out with a purpose, but nowadays it's a way for card and gift shops, restaurants and all manner of other businesses to cash in... I see couples feeling pressured into spending money unnecessarily or single people feeling bad about not being in a relationship (again, unnecessarily)."*

Actor Ian Somerhalder has changed his mind about Valentine's Day: *"I used to think this day was a **conspiracy** of chocolatiers and florists. But I realise that taking a day out of our busy lives to celebrate the love in our lives is so important. Celebrate love in your life — it's what makes the world go around."*



## GLOSSARY

**anonymously** – Something that's done without the person's name being known

**postmark** – An official stamp on a letter or parcel that gives the place, date and time of posting

**heterosexual** – Someone who is attracted to people of the opposite sex

**LGBT+** – Letters that stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The '+' is to indicate that there are other groups that fall into the LGBT+ community

**conspiracy** – A secret plan to do something bad or illegal

## YES, VALENTINE'S DAY IS A WASTE OF TIME AND MONEY...

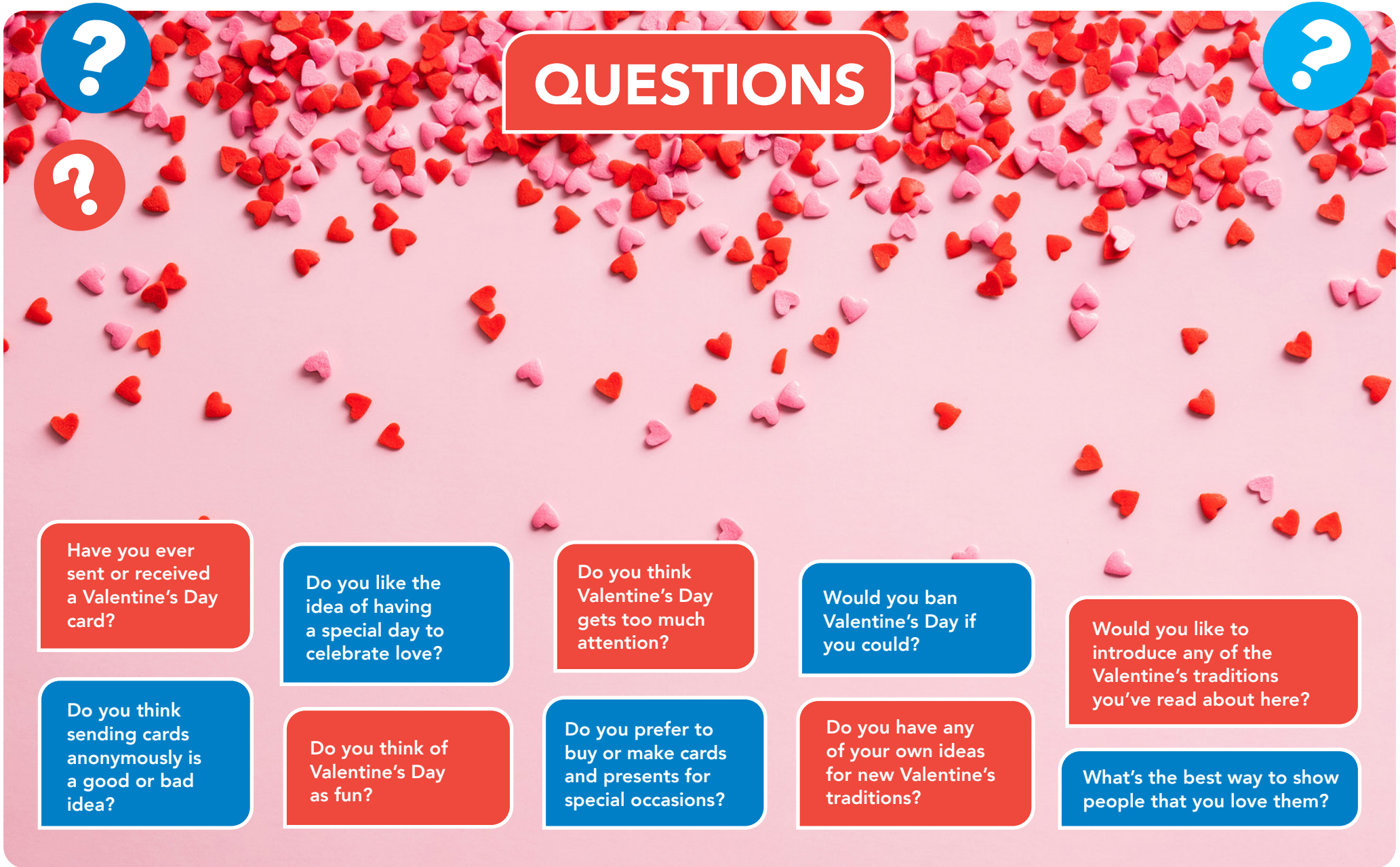


1. Valentine's Day is just for show. If you love someone, you can show it at any time, not just on 14 February.
2. There is far too much pressure to spend money on cards, flowers, chocolates and gifts on Valentine's Day. People have more important things to spend their money on, especially during a cost of living crisis.
3. Valentine's Day can leave some people feeling left out and sad, which is the opposite of spreading love.

## NO, VALENTINE'S DAY ISN'T A WASTE OF TIME AND MONEY...



1. It's fun to have a day to celebrate love and take the time to appreciate the people who mean the most to you.
2. It really doesn't have to cost a fortune – homemade cards and cookies are more thoughtful than shop bought ones anyway.
3. There's no need for anyone to feel left out. It's not just about romance, Valentine's Day should be a celebration of love of all forms, whether that's for your family, friends, pets or even yourself!



**QUESTIONS**

- Have you ever sent or received a Valentine's Day card?
- Do you like the idea of having a special day to celebrate love?
- Do you think Valentine's Day gets too much attention?
- Would you ban Valentine's Day if you could?
- Would you like to introduce any of the Valentine's traditions you've read about here?
- Do you think sending cards anonymously is a good or bad idea?
- Do you think of Valentine's Day as fun?
- Do you prefer to buy or make cards and presents for special occasions?
- Do you have any of your own ideas for new Valentine's traditions?
- What's the best way to show people that you love them?