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A Lesson on English

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Valentine's Day in the U.S.

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If you happen to be in the U.S. on February 14, be prepared for a day of great joy, great sorrow and some "sour grapes." Valentine's Day is set aside for those in romantic relationships to declare their love to each other and the world.

Great Joy

There's no feeling like getting a Valentine from the person you love! Especially for couples who are just beginning to date, Valentine's Day may be the first time the people involved say "I love you."

Romantic Valentine's Day cards are covered with red roses (a symbol of romantic love), hearts and Cupids. If you get a card like this, it's a good bet

that the sender is expressing romantic regard for you.

Great Sorrow

But every February 14th, there are hundreds of people who experience great sorrow. They don't get a card from the one they love. Maybe the person has died, or moved on to another relationship. Maybe he or she isn't ready to declare "love," but is willing to send a humorous valentine that conveys friendship rather than a committed kind of romantic, exclusive feeling of love.

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Cupid

Cupid is the Roman God of erotic love and beauty (in Greek mythology, he is Eros). He's the son of Venus, the goddess of love, and Mercury, the messenger god. Cupid is often depicted with wings, a bow, and a quiver of arrows; in popular culture, he is frequently shown shooting his bow to inspire romantic love.



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"A Lesson on English" is a series of short lessons created for people who want to become fluent in conversational English. The lessons are practical and useful for students learning English in a traditional classroom setting or on their own.

A Lesson on English



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"Sour Grapes"

In a famous fable by Aesop, a fox declared that he didn't care that he could not reach an attractive bunch of grapes because he imagined they were probably sour anyway.

You express sour grapes when you put down something you can't get: "winning the lottery is just a big headache, anyway."

Valentine's Day is full of expressions of sour grapes. People who don't get the Valentine card they want (or don't get any!) may say that Valentine's Day is foolishness for children, or that it's overrated. This reaction masks disappointment by making a pretense that the person didn't really want a Valentine, anyway.



Around the world

Valentine's Day is celebrated in countries all over the world, but the meaning of the day varies from one place to another.

These days, family members may exchange cards, or schoolchildren may give each other small inexpensive cards. The idea of romantic love is missing in these exchanges of Valentine greetings.

But it's still true that, in the U.S., giving someone a romantic Valentine card is a significant step in a relationship. If you aren't sure exactly how the recipient feels about you, it's safer to give a humorous card. Red roses mean "true love," so be careful about what color of flowers you give someone.

Be respectful of Cupid and his bow, or else you may get shot when you least expect it!

The phrase "sour grapes" is often misused to indicate bitterness or resentment in general, rather than a disappointment.