Name: _____ Date: _____

The Backward Birthday

Circle group

It was Nell's birthday. Mom was not home. She was at the hospital. A baby was coming.

Nell sat on the stairs. "This is a bad birthday," she said.

Dad had an idea. "Let's have a backward birthday," he said. "Cake first!"

They ate cake for breakfast. They opened presents before lunch. They sang the song at the sink. Nell laughed and got the hiccups.

That night, Mom called. She held up a tiny baby. "Meet your brother," she said.

Nell sang the song to the baby, very softly. "We have the same day now."

Questions

1. Where was Mom on Nell's birthday?

_____

_____

2. What kind of birthday did Dad plan?

_____

_____

3. What did they eat for breakfast?

_____

_____

4. Who did Mom show Nell that night?

_____

_____

5. Why did Nell say they have the same day now?

_____

_____

Words to know

hospital: a place where doctors help sick people and babies are born

backward: in the opposite order from the usual way

hiccups: little jumps in your chest that make a sound
tiny: very, very small

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Backward Birthday

Triangle group

On the morning of Nell's birthday, Mom was not home. She was at the hospital. A baby was on the way, and the baby did not want to wait.

Nell sat on the stairs. "Everything is wrong," she said. "A birthday should start with games. The cake comes last. Not today."

Dad thought hard. Then he smiled. "Let's have a backward birthday," he said. "Cake first!"

So they ate cake for breakfast. They opened presents before lunch. They even sang the birthday song at the sink while they washed the dishes. Nell laughed so hard that she got the hiccups.

That night, Dad's phone buzzed. It was Mom. She held up a tiny baby on the screen. "Meet your brother," she said.

Nell sang the song one more time, very softly. "Happy birthday to you," she told the baby. "We get the same day now."

Questions

1. Where was Mom on the morning of Nell's birthday?

_____

_____

2. What did Dad call the new kind of birthday?

_____

_____

3. What did Nell and Dad eat for breakfast?

_____

_____

4. What news did Mom share that night?

_____

_____

5. Why did Nell say, "We get the same day now"?

_____

Words to know

hospital: a place where doctors help sick people and babies are born
backward: in the opposite order from the usual way
hiccups: little jumps in your chest that make a sound
tiny: very, very small

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Backward Birthday

Square group

On the morning of Nell's birthday, Mom was not at home. She had gone to the hospital, because a baby was arriving and the baby refused to wait any longer.

Nell sat gloomily on the stairs. "Everything is wrong," she complained. "A birthday is supposed to begin with games, and the cake is supposed to come at the very end."

Dad thought hard, and then a grin spread across his face. "Let's have a backward birthday," he announced. "We will start with cake!"

So they ate cake for breakfast and opened presents before lunch. They even sang the birthday song at the sink while they washed the dishes. Nell laughed so hard that she got the hiccups.

That night, Dad's phone buzzed. Mom was calling, and she held up a tiny baby for Nell to see. "Meet your brother," she said.

Nell sang the song once more, very softly. "Happy birthday to you," she told the baby. "Now we get to share the same day."

Questions

1. Where had Mom gone on the morning of Nell's birthday?

_____

_____

2. What did Dad call his plan for the birthday?

_____

_____

3. What did Nell and Dad eat for breakfast?

_____

_____

4. What news did Mom share when she called that night?

_____

_____

5. Why did Nell say that now they share the same day?

_____

_____

Words to know

hospital: a place where doctors help sick people and babies are born
backward: in the opposite order from the usual way
hiccups: little jumps in your chest that make a sound
tiny: very, very small

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: The Backward Birthday

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: The Backward Birthday

Easier · 95 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 0.8

1. At the hospital.
2. A backward birthday.
3. Cake.
4. Her new baby brother.
5. The baby was born on her birthday.

Triangle: The Backward Birthday

This passage · 145 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 1.1

1. At the hospital.
2. A backward birthday.
3. Birthday cake.
4. Nell had a new baby brother.
5. The baby was born on her birthday, so they share it.

Square: The Backward Birthday

Harder · 165 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.1

1. To the hospital.
2. A backward birthday.
3. Birthday cake.
4. Nell had a new baby brother.
5. The baby was born on her birthday, so they have the same one.