

Pre-reading discussion

- Do you celebrate the New Year in a special way?
- Why do you think many people attach so much attention to celebrating it?
- The author of the essay you are going to read argues that the New Year has certain advantages over Christmas and birthdays; can you predict what arguments he presents in favour of the holiday?

“THE NEW YEAR” BY RICHARD KING

There is something “tonic”¹ about the New Year which there isn’t about Christmas, and Birthdays certainly do not possess. After thirty, you wake up on Christmas morning, look back into the Long Ago, and sigh; after forty, you wake up on the morning of your birthday, look forward, and oftentimes despair.

1) _____ Christmas, besides, has been seized upon by tradesmen and others in whose debt you happen to be to remind you of the fact. I suppose they hope that the Good Will of the Season will make you think kindly of their account - which, in parenthesis, perhaps it might, did not that same Good Will run you into debt in other directions. As for Birthdays – well, the person who remembers Birthdays is the person at whose head I should like to hurl² the biggest and heaviest paving-stone with which, as I lie in bed on New Year’s morning, I lay out my way to Hell. 2) _____ The former brings along with it bills and accounts rendered, and you are fed with rood³ which immediately overwhelms any feeling of kindness you may happen to have in your heart, while the latter is like a settlement day with Time, and Time certainly lets you have nothing off your account. But New Year’s Day, except in Scotland, where, I believe, you are expected to go out and get drunk – always an easy obligation! – brings with it nothing but another year, and possesses all the “tonic” quality of novelty, besides the promise of a much happier and luckier one than the Old Year which has just been scratched off the calendar. It is like an annual Beginning Again, and beginning again much better. 3) _____ On Christmas Day you are expected to do things for other people, and you do (usually just the things they don’t want); while on Birthdays people do things for you (and you wish to Heaven they’d neglect their duty). But New Year’s Day doesn’t belong to anybody but yourself, and you prospect⁴ the future with no reference to anybody whomsoever, and, better still, with no one likely to refer to you. Oh, the New Leaves you are going to turn! The blots⁵ you are going to erase! The copy-books you are going to keep spotless! The Big Things you are going to do with what remains of your life, and the big way you are going to do them! Besides, say what you will, there comes to you on New Year’s Day the very first breath of Spring. The Old Year is dead, and you kick its corpse down the limbo⁶ of the Past and Done-with the while you plan out the New. So, looking forward in anticipation, you feel “bucked”. You aren’t expected to show “good will to all men” after a previous night’s debauch⁷ on turkey, plum-pudding, and sweet champagne. 4) _____ Nobody adds to the day’s joy by wondering if they will be “alive next New Year’s Day”, nor become quite “huffy” if you cheerfully remark that they very probably will. It doesn’t invite the melancholy to become reminiscent, nor the prophet to assume the mantle of Solomon Eagle. New Year’s Day belongs to nobody but yourself, and what you are going to make of the 365 days which follow it. You regard the date as a kind of spiritual Spring Cleaning, and to good housewives there is all the vigorous promise of a Big Achievement even in buying a pot of paint and shaking out a duster. And, though Fate usually helps to enliven Christmas-time by arranging a big railway accident or burning a London store down, and the newspapers, in search of something to frighten us now that the war is over, by referring to Germany’s “hidden army” and an unprecedentedly colossal strike in the New Year, the human spirit soars above these things on the First of January, and Hope, figuratively speaking, buys a “buzzer” and makes high holiday. Who knows if the New Year may not be your year, your lucky year? 5) _____ Nobody wishes you anything, it’s true, but you wish yourself the moon, and in wishing for it you somehow feel that the New Year will give it to you.

Reading Comprehension Tasks

Task 1: you are going to read an essay by Thomas King. Five sentences have been removed from the essay. Choose from the sentences (A-F) the one which fits each gap (1-5). There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

- A. Nobody comes down to breakfast on New Year's morning and weeps because "Dear Uncle John" was alive (and an unsociable old bore) "this time last year".
- B. But New Year's Day has "buck" in it, and, when you wake up, you lay down the immediate future with those Good Intentions which somebody or other once declared paved the way to Hell, but are nevertheless a most invigorating exercise.
- C. And in this feeling you jump out of bed, clothe yourself in your "Gladdest Rags", collect your "Goodest" intentions, and sally forth.
- D. It is all about New Year's resolutions.
- E. Besides, New Year's Day seems to be an anniversary which belongs to you alone, as it were.
- F. No, as I said before, Christmas Days and Birthdays are failures so far as festivity goes.

Task 2: match the numbered words from the essay with their definitions

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|-------------------|---|
| 1. _____ tonic | A. a crucifix |
| 2. _____ hurl | B. blemishes on a person's character; spots' stains |
| 3. _____ rood | C. invigorating physically, mentally or morally |
| 4. _____ prospect | D. an orgy |
| 5. _____ blots | E. anticipate, look forward |
| 6. _____ limbo | F. a place or state of oblivion |
| 7. _____ debauch | G. throw |

Post-reading task

Below you can find the list of ten most popular New Year's resolutions presented by Statistic Brain (www.statisticbrain.com). Mark the items from 1 to 10, according to their popularity.

- A. learn something exciting
- B. fall in love
- C. getting organized
- D. help others in their dreams
- E. lose weight
- F. enjoy life to the fullest
- G. spend more time with family
- H. spend less, save more
- I. staying fit and healthy
- J. quit smoking

KEY

Task 1:

1. B
2. F
3. E
4. A
5. C

Task 2:

1. C
2. G
3. A
4. E
5. B
6. F
7. D

Post-reading task:

- A. 6
- B. 9
- C. 2
- D. 8
- E. 1
- F. 4
- G. 10
- H. 3
- I. 5
- J. 7