

Ditch the balloons and swap the plastic toys for cake: how to have a waste-free birthday party

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

- a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.
 - How do people celebrate birthdays in your country?
 - What are some ways parties and celebrations can be bad for the environment?

2 Key words

a. Find the words from the box in the article. Then use the words to complete the definitions.

	avoid balloons biodegradable	borrow creative homemade	lend reuse rubbish	second-hand shops
1.	at parties.	are co	blourful plastic objects, f	illed with air, that people use
2.			bject is one that can dis	sappear or return naturally to the
3.	Something that is		is made at	home and not bought from a shop.
4.	To else, then you need to g		mething means to use s	omething that belongs to someone
5.	When you are		, you make nev	v things or have new ideas.
6.	То	me	eans to give something t	o someone for a short time.
7.	То	me	eans not to do somethin	g or to stay away from it.
8.	don't want.	are pl	aces where you buy clo	thes or things other people
9.	it anymore.	is mat	terial we throw away be	cause we don't want or need
10.	То	me	eans to use something a	gain and not to throw it away.

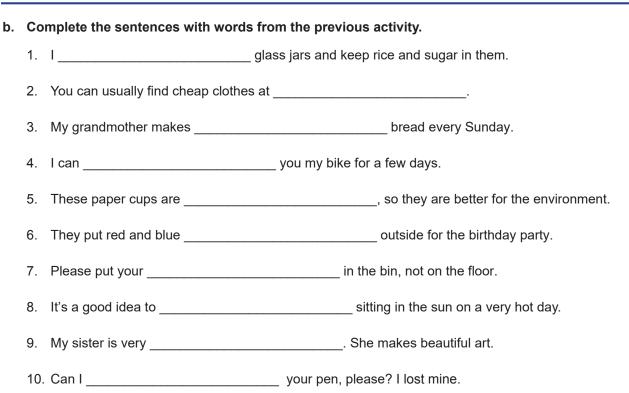


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Koren Helbig 21 March, 2025

1 Last year I planned my 40th birthday party. I wanted a nice party that didn't cost a lot of money. Parties often make a lot of rubbish such as food waste and cheap, plastic decorations. But using less doesn't mean less fun. With help from my friends and some creative ideas, I had a colourful garden party with little waste. Here are some ideas for your party.

2 Food Waste and Decorations

3 Plastic or paper plates, cups and forks create a lot of waste at parties. I avoided this by having a 'pot-luck' dinner where everyone brought food to share. We used metal forks and knives and plates that were biodegradable.

Erin Rhoads, a writer, talks about the Party Kit Network. People in your town can lend you decorations and party games. "Planning a party for your child can be very stressful," Rhoads says. "With the kit, everyone can see how easy it is to reuse things at a party."

4 Reuse, Borrow and Rent

- 5 Think about how to find things without buying new ones. I used things I already had. I put sofas and chairs from my house in the garden. After the party, they went back inside. Before the party, I found a free rug and some chairs. I used old jars as glasses.
- 6 When I needed more things, I borrowed from friends. If you need to buy something, try second-hand shops first. I got my 1920s party clothes at second-hand shops.

7 Presents

- 8 I have most things I need, so I didn't ask for presents. But you could ask for food and drinks or homemade presents.
- 9 Rhoads says a 'fiver birthday' is good for children's parties and helps parents. Each guest gives just \$5 so the child can buy a bigger present they want. Or just ask what the child needs. "There's no point giving a kid a present they'll never use," Rhoads says.

10 Decorations and Party Bags

11 If you make just one change – don't use balloons. Balloons hurt seabirds and turtles. Instead, use homemade decorations from wool, cotton, wood, paper or plants and flowers from your garden.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Choose the correct answer (a, b or c).

- 1. Why did the writer have a party?
 - a. It was their birthday.
 - b. They wanted to show people their garden.
 - c. They wanted to have some fun.
- 2. How did the writer serve food at the party?
 - a. They got food from a restaurant.
 - b. They cooked all the food.
 - c. They asked people to bring food to share.
- 3. What is the Party Kit Network?
 - a. an online store for party food
 - b. a shop that sells party decorations
 - c. a place where you can borrow party items
- 4. How did the writer get furniture for the garden party?
 - a. They used furniture from inside their house.
 - b. They bought new garden furniture.
 - c. They rented furniture from a company.
- 5. What gifts did the writer want?
 - a. five dollars
 - b. food and drink
 - c. no gifts at all



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4 Key language

- a. Find and underline forms of these words in the article.
 - 1. bought
 - 2. decorate
 - 3. funny
 - 4. stress
 - 5. use
 - 6. write
- b. Choose the correct form from the previous activity to complete the sentences.
 - 1. What ______ do you want for your birthday party?
 - 2. Let's wash and ______ the plastic cups so we don't waste them.
 - 3. Who is the _____ of that book?
 - 4. We had a lot of ______ at the wedding.
 - 5. Planning a child's birthday party can be very ______ for parents.
 - 6. I don't usually _____ my clothes from second-hand shops.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What is the best party you have been to? What did you do, and why was it fun?
- Are there any ideas from the text that you could try for your own parties in the future? Which ones and why?





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6 In your own words

- a. Create a simple 'how-to' guide that shows people how to make parties better for the environment. Choose ONE topic from the article such as food, decorations or gifts. Include:
 - a short introduction explaining why it's important
 - numbered step-by-step instructions
 - a list of materials that are needed
 - one helpful tip at the end
- b. Share your 'how to' guides with your class.