

# A Big Birthday Celebration

By ReadWorks



Maeve Wilson was in fourth grade the first time she went to the Lotus Lantern Festival in Seoul, the capital of South Korea. The festival celebrates the birthday of Buddha, the founder of the Buddhist religion. Twelve years later, in 2013, Maeve is studying in university, but she can clearly remember how beautiful the celebration was the first time she went.

“All the people in the city parade through the traditional area of Seoul, called Insadong, where there are many temples,” she remembers. People walk from temple to temple to see the different decorations and lights. In the Buddhist faith, lanterns symbolize the knowledge that is given to the world, since lanterns provide light. Traditionally, the act of lighting a lantern gives respect to Buddha. Almost half the population of South Korea is Buddhist, so the festival is very popular in the country. The parade floats are built to look like lotus flowers or traditional Buddhist figures. “Some of the floats are even completely made of lotus flowers,” Maeve says.

The festival is celebrated around May 16<sup>th</sup> every year and invites visitors from all over the world. The first time Maeve attended the celebration, she went with her father. They held hands as they pushed through the large crowd to a main stage, where monks played traditional Buddhist music. “It’s mostly just drumming on gongs, and everyone dances and sings,” Maeve says. Onstage, people tossed lotus flowers and mints shaped like miniature elephant tusks into the big audience. While she and her father stood there, listening to the

traditional Korean music, a monk next to them tapped the arm of Maeve's father. "Would your daughter like to go on my shoulders to see more?" the monk asked him. Maeve nodded in excitement, and up she soared into the air to see the stage. On it, she saw several monks in both gray and orange robes. They played their drums and sang Buddhist prayers.

As Maeve grew older, she tried to go to the Lantern Festival every year. "I always just wanted to see the lanterns," she says. "Some looked like flowers, with petals hanging off the lamps. Those were smaller. Others were big, and hand-painted." Even though she went to boarding school in Ireland and now goes to university in New York, she tries to travel to South Korea in May to see the lanterns in honor of Buddha's birthday.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What does the Lotus Lantern Festival celebrate?

- A the founding of South Korea
- B the founding of Seoul
- C Buddha's birthday
- D Maeve Wilson's birthday

2. What does this passage describe?

- A the history of Buddhism
- B Ireland and New York
- C lotus flowers, elephants, boarding school
- D lanterns, a festival, Buddhist music

3. Maeve Wilson has enjoyed the Lotus Lantern Festival since she first went in fourth grade.

What evidence from the story supports this statement?

- A The festival is celebrated in May and welcomes visitors from all over the world.
- B People onstage at the festival toss mints shaped like miniature elephant tusks into the audience.
- C Maeve went to boarding school in Ireland and now goes to university in New York.
- D Every year since her first visit to the festival, Maeve has tried to go back.

4. Based on the passage, what is the mood of people at the Lotus Lantern Festival?

- A shy
- B bored
- C happy
- D angry

5. What is the passage mostly about?

- A why Buddhism is a popular religion in South Korea and how it is practiced there
- B the temples in Insadong, parade floats, and the month of May
- C the Lotus Lantern Festival in Seoul and Maeve Wilson's interest in the festival
- D the lotus flowers and mints thrown into the audience at the Lotus Lantern Festival

6. Read the following sentences from the passage: “. . . she saw several **monks** in both gray and orange robes. They played their drums and sang Buddhist prayers.”

What does the word “**monks**” mean?

- A men who are part of a special group within a religion
- B men who enjoy winter activities, such as skiing and ice skating
- C men who get married at a young age and have many children
- D men who prefer reading and writing to being outdoors

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Maeve Wilson liked the Lotus Lantern Festival when she first went; \_\_\_\_\_, she tries to go back every year.

- A last
- B therefore
- C in contrast
- D instead

8. Who was Buddha?

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9. Are lanterns important to Buddhists? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the passage.

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10. Why is the celebration of Buddha's birthday called the Lotus Lantern Festival? Support your answer with evidence from the passage.

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1010

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8. Who was Buddha?

**Suggested answer:** Buddha was the founder of the Buddhist religion.

9. Are lanterns important to Buddhists? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the passage.

**Suggested answer:** Students should recognize that lanterns are important to Buddhists. Two reasons for their importance are given in the passage; students may cite either or both of them. In Buddhism, “lanterns symbolize the knowledge that is given to the world” because they provide light. Also, the act of lighting a lantern shows respect to Buddha.

10. Why is the celebration of Buddha’s birthday called the Lotus Lantern Festival? Support your answer with evidence from the passage.

**Suggested answer:** Responses may vary, as long as they are supported by the text. Students may provide a literal response, noting that lanterns are a big part of Buddha’s birthday celebration. They may also recognize the symbolic importance of lanterns to Buddhism. Because lighting a lantern is an act of respect toward Buddha, it makes sense to celebrate his birthday with a lantern festival. Some students may even address the “lotus” aspect of the Lotus Lantern Festival, observing that lotus flowers, like lanterns, are used widely in Buddha’s birthday celebration, whether in the construction of floats or in stage performances.