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# It's About Time



Written by Mara Rockliff

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These clocks show the time in cities all over the world.

## **Knowing What Time It Is**

Do you know what time it is?  
If you do, you probably are looking  
at a clock or watch.

# Using the Sun

Long ago, people didn't have clocks or watches like you do. When the sun rose, they got up, and when the sun went down, they went to bed. They told time by the position of the sun in the sky.



The sun tells when it is morning, noon, and evening.



Shadow clocks made it easier to tell time between sunup, noon, and sundown.

People discovered that they could use a stick and the sun to tell time. This was called a **shadow clock**. They put a stick in the ground, pointing straight up. The direction of the stick's shadow and how long or short it was told them the time.

A better kind of shadow clock was called a **sundial**. Sundials had a pointer and a base. The pointer cast a shadow on marks around the base. People could tell time by reading the marks.

But shadow clocks were not good for telling time on cloudy days—or at night.



Sundials made telling time using shadows more accurate.

## Using Fire and Water

One kind of clock that didn't need the sun was a **water clock**. A water clock was a container with a tiny hole in the bottom.

Water would steadily drip out of the hole. Marks on the inside of the container showed the time. It took one hour for the water to go down one mark.

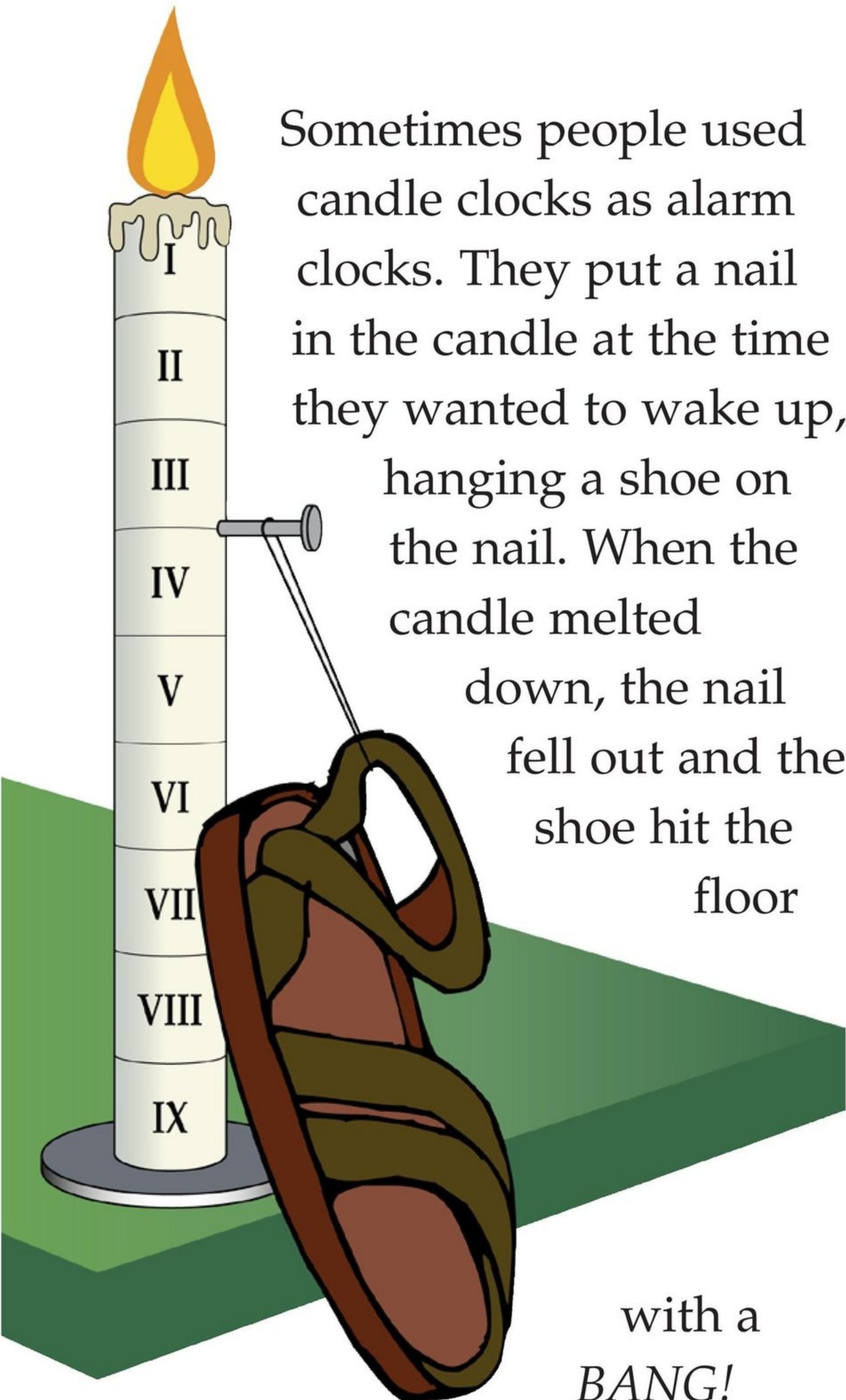


A modern water clock



Candle clocks were used to tell time after the sun went down.

Another kind of clock that didn't need the sun was a **candle clock**. You would know the time by how much of the candle had melted. The candle had marks down its side to show the hours.



Sometimes people used candle clocks as alarm clocks. They put a nail in the candle at the time they wanted to wake up, hanging a shoe on the nail. When the candle melted down, the nail fell out and the shoe hit the floor

with a  
*BANG!*



grandfather  
clock



digital  
watch



pocket  
watch



analog  
watch

## Clocks of Today

Now there are all kinds of timepieces, from tall **grandfather clocks** to watches we wear on our wrists. Most clocks run on electricity from batteries.



Big Ben, an analog clock tower in London, England

Many clocks have two hands that point to numbers in a circle on the clock face. These are called **analog** clocks. Other clocks don't have hands, only numbers. These are called **digital** clocks.



At noon, a cuckoo clock cuckoos 12 times.

Inside one kind of analog clock is a carved bird called a **cuckoo**. Every hour, the door opens and the bird pops out and sings its song:  
*cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!*



There are many more types of clocks, too. Clocks hang in and on buildings. Clocks adorn wrists and mantles. Clocks are everywhere!

## Try This

### Make a Water Clock

You will need:

- a partner
- a large plastic bottle with the top cut off
- two paper cups
- a clock with a second hand
- a pin or tack, masking tape, and water

- ① Stick a piece of masking tape along the outside of the bottle, from top to bottom.
- ② Poke a small hole with a pin or tack in the bottom center of one cup. Fit the cup snugly into the top of the bottle.
- ③ Have your partner use the other cup to pour water into the cup with the hole while you start timing right away. Keep the water clock's cup about halfway full.
- ④ Every 30 seconds, mark the water level on the tape.



## Glossary

<b>analog</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	using hands and dials to show time on a clock (p. 12)
<b>candle</b>	burning candle marked with the hours (p. 9)
<b>clock</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	carved bird used in a cuckoo clock (p. 13)
<b>digital</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	using a row of numbers, rather than hands on a dial (p. 12)
<b>electricity</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	power source for clocks and watches (p. 11)
<b>grandfather clocks</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	tall, fancy clocks that chime with the time (p. 11)
<b>shadow clock</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	clock that uses an object's shadow to tell time (p. 6)
<b>sundial</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	more complex shadow clock that uses the sun to tell time (p. 7)
<b>water clock</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	bowl that drips water to tell time (p. 8)

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