
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Birthday cakes



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Beth

And I'm Beth. [Singing] Happy birthday to you... Happy birthday to you... Happy birthday dear Neil... Happy birthday to you!

Neil

Erm thank you, Beth – but... it's not my birthday.

Beth

I know, but this programme is all about birthdays – or birthday cakes to be precise.

Neil

Ah yes, the highlight of any birthday party is the birthday cake, blowing out the candles and making a wish.

Beth

Right. But things have changed a lot from the days when most birthday cakes were **homemade** – made at home and not bought from a shop. Nowadays many birthday cakes are works of art – extravagant, edible creations designed and decorated to represent the person celebrating their birthday.

Neil

In this programme we'll be hearing from two bakers – a famous TV chef who bakes simple but tasty cakes, and another who's designed personalised birthday cakes for celebrities, including Arnold Schwarzenegger. And, as usual, we'll be learning some useful new vocabulary as well.

Beth

Sounds good. But first I have a question for you, Neil. Everyone looks forward to their birthday, especially if there's cake, but according to the UK's Office for National Statistics, which is the most common month to be born? Is it:

- a) March?
- b) July? or,
- c) September?

Neil

Hmm that's an interesting question and I'm going to guess it's September.

Beth

OK, Neil, I'll reveal the answer at the end of the programme. One of Britain's best loved cake bakers is Dame Mary Berry. Here she describes her perfect birthday cake to BBC Radio 4's, The Food Programme.

Dame Mary Berry

My perfect cake would be something in lemon or orange because those are my favourite flavours. I don't mind how **higgledy-piggledy** it is, doesn't take a long time to do, but beautifully fresh and beautifully flavoured. Simple.

Neil

Mary Berry thinks a simple birthday cake is best. She doesn't mind if the decoration is **higgledy-piggledy** – mixed up and in no particular order.

Beth

Yes, when it comes to birthday cakes, flavour is more important than decoration for Dame Mary Berry. But now, a new generation of bakers is making cakes in a totally different way. The cakes Adam Cox makes in his East London bakery are

truly fantastic-looking creations. Here's Adam speaking to BBC Radio 4's, The Food Programme:

Adam Cox

I get asked to do **all sorts**. My customers and clients are very generous with the **leeway** that they give me based on the past designs that I've made that they've seen, so they're happy to just leave it with me... I really just want to create something that will, you know, **last long in the memory** for the person that I do it for. It's a real pleasure to have this as a job because, as I say, it gives me a lot of freedom to express myself creatively, so I really try and go **above and beyond** to give the client something that, you know, they will be really happy with and...

Neil

Adam gets asked to make **all sorts**, meaning many different kinds, of cakes. His customers, who want the cake to be a special part of a birthday party, give him lots of **leeway**, lots of freedom to make the cake the way he wants to. Adam finds out about the person's interests and hobbies, and uses these to come up with decoration ideas.

Beth

Adam loves his job. It gives him the freedom to express himself creatively, and he enjoys seeing his customers' reaction when the finished cake is revealed. Adam **goes above and beyond** to satisfy his customers. If you **go above and beyond**, you do something with more effort than would normally be expected.

Neil

And the result of Adam's extra effort? Birthday cakes which **last long in the memory**, a phrase describing something which creates such a strong impression that it's remembered for a long time...

Beth

...or at least until the following year, when another birthday comes around and it's time to start baking all over again!

Neil

And speaking of birthdays coming around, what was the answer to your question, Beth? You asked me which was the most common month to be born in the UK...

Beth

And you guessed it was September, which was... the correct answer! Babies born in the UK peak in September. Right, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned from this programme starting with **homemade** – an adjective describing something which is made at home and not bought from a shop.

Neil

If something is **higgledy-piggledy**, it's mixed up and in no particular order.

Beth

The phrase **all sorts** means many different kinds of something, like the sweets called Liquorice Allsorts which come in different shapes and colours.

Neil

If someone gives you **leeway** to do something, they give you the freedom to do it the way you want to.

Beth

The idiom to **last long in the memory** means to create such a strong effect that it is remembered for a long time.

Neil

And finally, when someone **goes above and beyond**, they do something with much more effort than would usually be expected. Once again our six minutes are up. If your birthday is coming up, we hope you have a cake with candles and make a wish to join us again soon for more trending topics and useful vocabulary, here at 6 Minute English. Goodbye for now!

Beth

Bye!

VOCABULARY

homemade

made at home and not bought from a shop

higgledy-piggledy

mixed up and jumbled in no particular order

all sorts

many different kinds of something

leeway

the freedom to do something in the way you want to

last long in the memory

create such a strong effect that it is remembered for a long time

go above and beyond

do something with more effort than would usually be expected or required