

Name _____ Date _____

Earth Day

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Earth Day was founded in 1970 by Gaylord Nelson. Nelson was a US senator from Wisconsin. He noticed that most Americans didn't seem to care much about the environment. At the time, there was little research about the impact people have on the planet. There were no laws to prevent factories from polluting the air and water with waste. Very few Americans even recycled! During the 1960s, environmental disasters became more serious and more frequent. In 1969, the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland caught fire after an oil spill. The same year, three million gallons of oil spilled off the coast of southern California. The spill killed an estimated 3,500 seabirds. Hundreds of other marine animals died, too. This disaster inspired Nelson to organize the very first Earth Day.

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2. b'

Nelson was inspired by the anti-war protests taking place on college campuses. He imagined Earth Day as a series of grassroots demonstrations, or protests by passionate people organizing to fight for a cause. He hoped this would force politicians to pay attention and take environmental issues seriously. In 1969, Nelson started reaching out to activists across the country. He worked with student volunteers from hundreds of universities. Nelson chose April 22nd for Earth Day's official date. He decided on this day because it would be warm enough for most people to go outside and enjoy nature. On April 22, 1970, 20 million people participated in the first Earth Day. Earth Day events took place in almost every major American city. Celebrities appeared at some of these events. Members of Congress even took a break to speak with the people they represented at Earth Day events.

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3. b'

The first Earth Day was very effective. Democrats and Republicans came together to create better regulations to protect the planet. In the decade that followed, several key environmental laws were passed. These included the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Water Quality Improvement Act. And soon after the first Earth Day, the Environmental Protection Agency was established. Nelson continued to work with students and politicians to make Earth Day an annual event, or one that happened every year. He also worked to promote environmental education in schools. 200 million people in 141 countries celebrated Earth Day in 1990. In 1995, President Bill Clinton awarded Senator Nelson the Presidential Medal of Freedom. This is the highest honor a US civilian can receive.

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4. b'

With the power of the internet, Earth Day has grown. Over one billion people now celebrate Earth Day every year. There are many ways to celebrate Earth Day. People plant trees, pick up trash, or simply go outside and appreciate nature. They also participate in political demonstrations and write to their representatives asking them to support environmental issues. But it's important to remember to take care of the Earth all the other days of the year, too! There are easy ways to make environmentalism part of daily life, including saving water and electricity, walking or biking instead of driving, and recycling.

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