Groundhog Day

Groundhog Day is a holiday that is celebrated in parts of the United States and Canada. Each year, Groundhog Day is celebrated on the second day of February. Groundhog Day comes from a legend. In this story, a groundhog can predict a change in the weather. So people watch the groundhog on February 2 to know how long until spring arrives.

Another name for groundhog is woodchuck. Groundhogs hibernate, or sleep through the winter. According to the groundhog legend, a groundhog wakes up on February 2. Then, he comes out of his burrow, a hole in the ground. If it is a sunny day, he will see his shadow. This will scare him, and he will run back into his burrow and hide. He will sleep for six more weeks. This is a sign that there will be six more weeks of winter. But if it is not sunny that day, he will not see his shadow, and he will leave his burrow. This is a sign that spring will come early.

Groundhog Day is believed to come from the Candlemas holiday in Europe. Candlemas is also on February 2. It is believed that a sunny Candlemas meant more winter. A rainy or cloudy Candlemas meant the end of winter. European immigrants to the USA brought this custom with them. Over time, the groundhog became part of the tradition. The first Groundhog Day celebration may have been as early as 1840.

Many places in the USA and Canada now have Groundhog Day events. The most famous event is held in the town of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Thousands of people travel there each year on February 2. They want to see the town’s groundhog, named Punxsutawney Phil, predict the weather. A 1993 movie called Groundhog Day is set in Punxsutawney. It tells the story of a man who keeps repeating Groundhog Day. Thus, the term Groundhog Day now also means when a person gets stuck doing the same activities or events.

Of course, no one believes that a groundhog can really predict the weather. But after a cold winter, it is good to have some fun. And Groundhog Day is a fun way to hope that spring will arrive early!

Answer comprehension questions on page 80.