Leap Year Birthday

A Reading A–Z Level K Leveled Book
Word Count: 440

Connections

Writing and Art

Would you want your birthday to be on February 29? Write a paragraph explaining why or why not.

Science

Review with a partner how days and years are measured by Earth's movement in space. Then, discuss how the length of a year would change if Earth were farther from the Sun.

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Written by Brad Bolchunos
Illustrated by Dani Jones

www.readinga-z.com

Focus Question

What makes Leroy's birthday different from most people's birthdays?

Words to Know

amazement	leap years
beamed	quarter
leap day	time traveler

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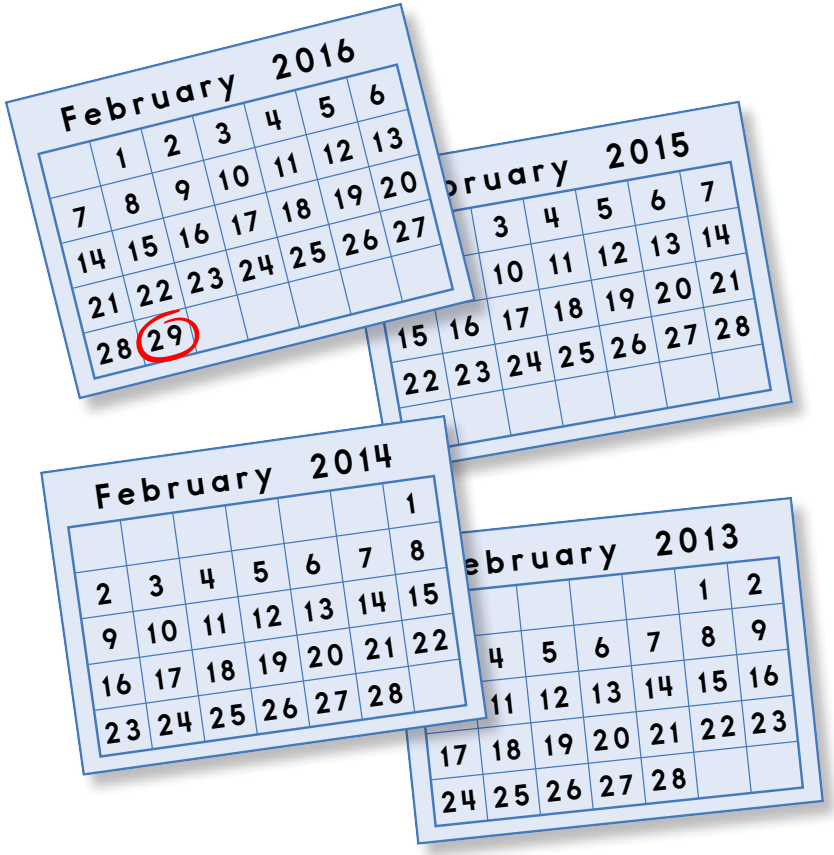
Correlation

LEVEL K	
Fountas & Pinnell	J
Reading Recovery	17
DRA	18

Leroy was a **time traveler**—that's what he told himself, at least. He was in second grade, but he told himself he was only two years old.

Today was his birthday: February 29, otherwise known as **leap day**. That day only came once every four years, though. As far as Leroy was concerned, that meant he only had a real birthday once every four years. To Leroy, most of his eight years were just "pretend years."

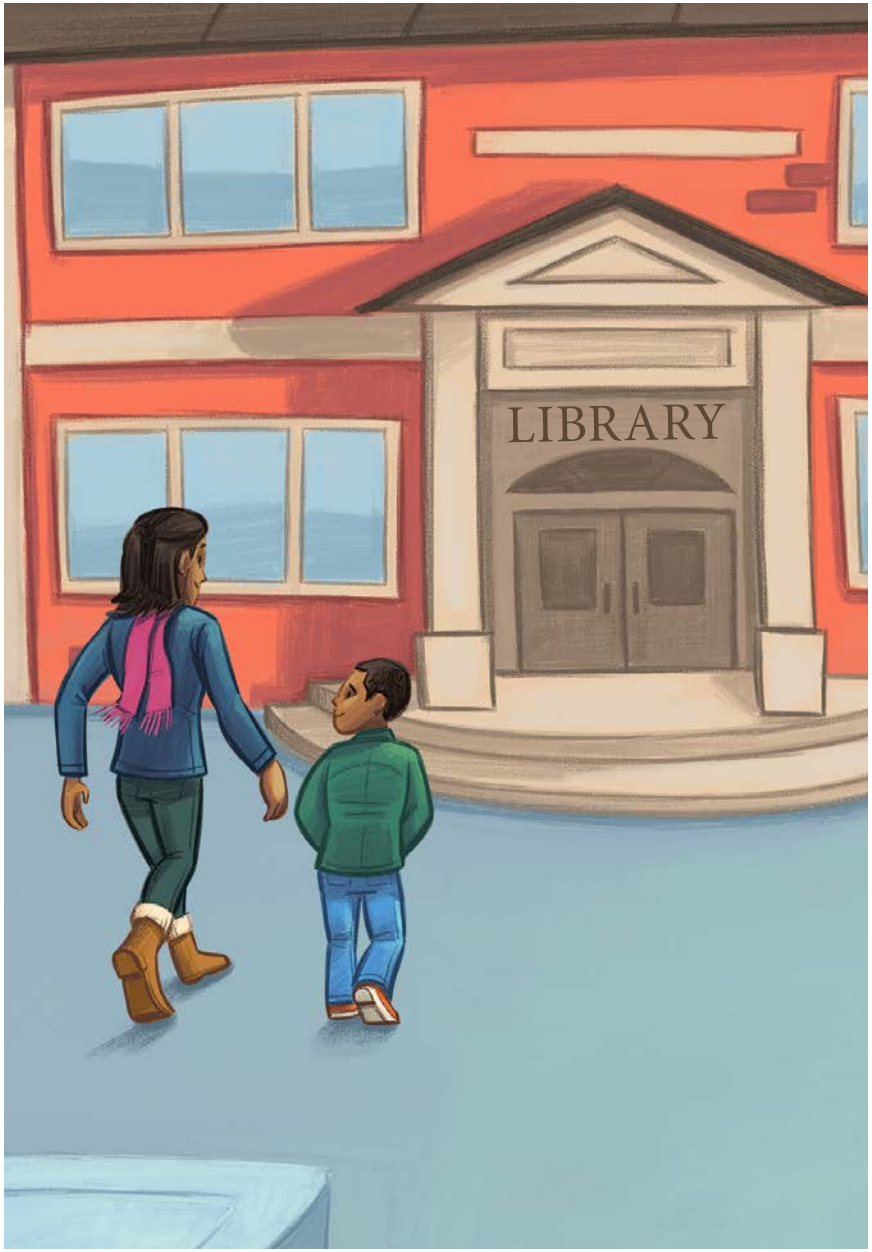


He didn't understand why February 29 couldn't happen each year, like the other 365 days.

So much time had passed since his last real birthday, no one remembered this one. Not even his mother.

Leroy wondered about all those other leap day people. Were they time travelers too? There had to be some explanation for people like him.

"Mom, do we have a book about time travel?" Leroy asked.



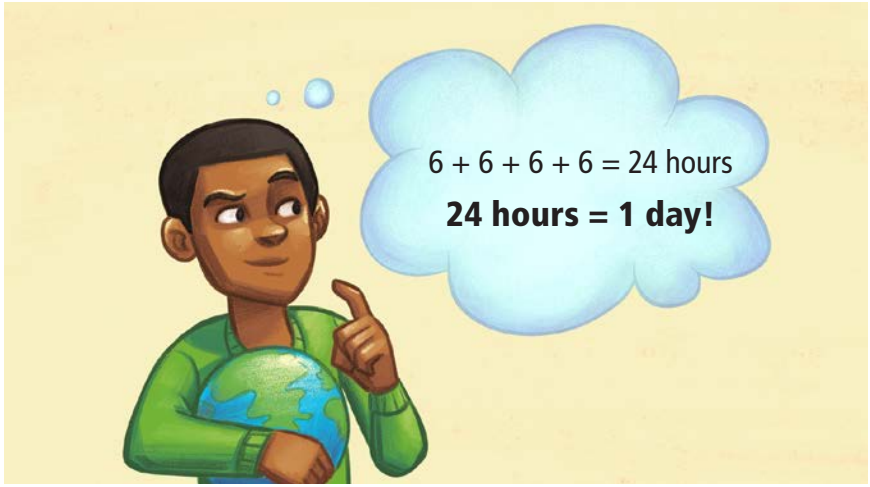
"Sorry, Leroy," Mom said, "but the library might. Let's go see."

The librarian asked Leroy's mother to pretend she was the Sun, and Leroy to play planet Earth.

Next, she told him to spin like a top while also circling his mom.

"Every time you complete a spin, one day passes," the librarian told Leroy.

"You also move a little bit in a big loop around the Sun," the librarian said. "One full loop is one year. That's 365 spins—or days—on your journey."



"Over time, people figured out that a year was not exactly 365 days," the librarian explained. "To complete a full year, you have to spin a little bit more. You need an extra **quarter** of a turn, or six hours, every year. In four years, that adds up to one full extra day, a special year with 366 days."

"Calendars would not work without **leap years**," she added. "In a hundred years, summer would start almost a month later."

"Why are they called *leap years?*" Leroy asked.

The librarian smiled. "Say New Year's Eve was Sunday last year. Usually that means it would be Monday this year, but in a leap year, it would be Tuesday. It would 'skip' or 'leap' ahead a full day."

Leroy laughed in **amazement**. He finally understood!

When he returned home from the library, Leroy's friends sprang out at him. "Happy birthday!" they shouted.

They hadn't forgotten, and neither had Mom. They just wanted to surprise him.

Mom brought out a cake with eight candles. Six were blue and two red—Leroy's favorite color—for his special leap year birthdays.

"When you were born, my heart leaped for joy," Mom said.

Mom **beamed** at Leroy like the Sun beams at the Earth. Leroy beamed back.

Glossary

amazement *(n.)* a feeling of wonder or great surprise (p. 11)

beamed *(v.)* smiled brightly or happily (p. 15)

leap day *(n.)* February 29, the extra day that occurs in the calendar every four years (p. 3)

leap years *(n.)* years with an extra day in them, February 29 (p. 10)

quarter *(n.)* one of four equal parts (p. 10)

time traveler *(n.)* one who moves through time into the past or future (p. 3)