

Valentine's Day Symbols

Cupid



Cupid is the Roman God of Love and the most popular symbol for Valentine's Day. Originally he was shown as a young man with a Bow and arrows. But over the years, Cupid went from a handsome man to a pudgy baby? The reason is that the Romans had Cupid as the son of Venus (Goddess of Love and Beauty) and a symbol for passion, playful and tender love. His arrows were invisible and his victims (which could also include other Gods as well as humans) would not be aware that they were shot until they fell in love. But, the Victorian era wanted to help make Valentine's Day more proper for women and children. So they tossed out this handsome Roman Adonis guy and made cupid more of a chubby baby. In other words, it's all on how you want to spin the story!



Hearts and Arrows

A heart (red or pink) with an arrow piercing through it is the most common shape and look for a Valentines, and even candles, candies, cookies, cakes, figurines, stuffed images, etc. The heart is a symbol both of love and also vulnerability. When you send someone a Valentine, you take a risk of being rejected and your feelings hurt. So a piercing arrow is a symbol of death and the vulnerability of love. On the other hand, the heart and arrow also symbolize the merging of the male and female as one.

In the 12th century, physicians believed that the heart was the seat of love and affection in the human body. But the actual biological shape of the human heart does not look like the heart as we see it today. Why? Well, some people are guessing (and it is funny!) that the Valentine heart-shape as we know it today was done by a doodler to represent the human female buttocks or a female torso with well-endowed breasts or the imprint of lips (wearing lipstick) made upon a piece of paper. Once again, it's all on how you want to spin the story!

Valentine Cards

The custom of exchanging love notes goes back to the Roman Lupercalia Festival with the names being drawn. But the British were the ones who popularized sending your feelings to someone via a printed card. The first Valentine card was created by Charles, Duke of Orleans, imprisoned in the tower of London for several years following the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. He sent Valentine poems to his wife in France from his jail cell. Commercial valentines didn't appear until 1800 (In England) and although handmade cards had been around for years. In the 19th century a new kind of Valentine emerged called "penny dreadfuls" that were insulting and cruel rather than loving and flattering. They were mostly sent anonymously too.

In America, hand-made Valentines appeared around 1740 and were sealed with red wax and left secretly on a lover's doorstep. Commercial cards for the most part took over around 1880's. But people still (and will always) make homemade ones too. Some included trinkets, some locks of hair.

