



Name:

Date:

The Price of a Song

All around the world people sing the “Happy Birthday” song on people’s birthdays. However, for a long time, it was rare to hear the song sang in movies or TV programs. This was because the copyright for the song belonged to a company. If somebody has a copyright for a song, they can charge money when other people use it in their movies or TV programs. In order to reduce their expenses, many directors avoided using the song in their shows.

In reality, though, the complicated history of “Happy Birthday” meant that it is unclear who actually owned the copyright. The music was originally composed in 1893 by Patty and Mildred Hill, two sisters who were teachers. The sisters wrote a greeting song for their students to sing each morning. Sometime later, the words were changed and the song became a birthday song. Nobody knows who wrote the new words, but it was believed that the sisters gave the copyright to a publishing company.

This copyright was then sold to another company, and then in 1988 it was bought by a large music company called Warner / Chappell. After Warner / Chappell bought the copyright, the company decided to carefully check all movies and TV shows to see if the song was being used. They charged different amounts of money depending on how popular the show was. It is estimated that the company has made two million dollars a year from the song.

However, a group of filmmakers thought that Warner / Chappell might not actually own the copyright to the song. They took the company to court and argued that there was no evidence that the copyright had ever belonged to any of the companies who had claimed to own it. In September 2015, the judge in charge of the case agreed with the filmmakers. He said that the copyright for the song was no longer owned by any company and that anyone could use it freely. As a result, it will probably become much more common to hear the song in movies or on TV.



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1. Why did many directors choose not to use the “Happy Birthday” song?
 - a. It was not popular in many of the countries where movies are watched.
 - b. It cost them money to use it in their movies or TV shows.
 - c. They wanted to use songs that were not used frequently by other directors.
 - d. They thought that people wanted to hear more interesting songs.

2. Although Patty and Mildred Hill wrote the music of “Happy Birthday”
 - a. two other teachers had written the famous words to the song.
 - b. it is not clear who actually wrote the words for the current song.
 - c. neither was able to sing the songs that their students wanted to listen to.
 - d. their students decided to write a different song that they would like more.

3. After Warner / Chappell bought the copyright for “Happy Birthday”
 - a. it created new movies and TV shows that used the song in them.
 - b. it charged companies two million dollars each time they wanted to use it.
 - c. it began to make a lot of money each year by charging people who used it.
 - d. it carefully checked whether the song had become more popular than before.

4. Why is “Happy Birthday” likely to become more popular in the future?
 - a. A judge decided that there was no longer any copyright on the song.
 - b. Filmmakers bought the copyright for the song from the company that owned it.
 - c. There is evidence that the song was used most frequently in September 2015.
 - d. The company that owns it has started to freely share the song with other people.