

46.

Tag! You're Hit!
By Michael Stahl

Lexile: 1110



Paul and Jimmy were chatting during lunch period in the cafeteria one day about their friend Taso's upcoming birthday. Taso was going to turn 13 in two weeks. Paul and Jimmy recognized that it was a significant age because the word "teen" was mixed in there. To be a teenager was to be a little older, a bit more mature. One could do things that young kids could not, and it somehow seemed that a 12 year-old was a young kid when compared to a 13 year-old, even though one could literally go from being 12 to 13 overnight. Teenagers have a bit more freedom—if their parents give them some, that is. So turning 13 meant there should not be just any old celebration for Taso. It had to be special. It had to be an expression of the fact that Taso was not just a little kid anymore, like Paul and Jimmy themselves, who had both turned 13 within the previous couple of months. More important than anything else, though, the birthday party had to be fun.

Paul and Jimmy thought long and hard about what kind of a party they should organize in honor of Taso becoming a teenager. Over their lunch, they recalled their own birthday parties.

Paul's mother had invited all of his friends to their local ice cream parlor for his 13th birthday. Paul could not deny that they all had fun. His mother had arranged with the owners of the parlor for the boys and girls to be allowed to make their own customized ice cream sundaes.

"The ice cream was delicious," Paul said to Jimmy. "But my mom gave me the same kind of birthday when I was five years old!"

Jimmy laughed and said, "Yeah. My mom did something similar."

Jimmy's mother remembered that a local street fair would be held the same day as his birthday. She then decided to contact all of his friends with the message to meet Jimmy, along with his family, at the fair. There were some games where prizes could be won, and cotton candy and corn dogs.

"My birthday was kind of fun," Jimmy admitted, not wanting to sound as though he were ungrateful for what his mother had done for him. "But my mom and dad were there the whole time! If the fair was on any other day besides my birthday, we could have done the same thing anyway."

Paul agreed, adding, "Plus, there were so many grown-ups at the fair already. We could have hung out on our own and have been safe; no doubt about it."

"Right," said Jimmy, reaching for his last fry.

So, for their long-time good friend Taso, a trip to the ice cream parlor, or a day at a street fair with their parents, was out of the question.

Suddenly, just a moment before the lunch dismissal bell rang, Jimmy exclaimed, "I've got it!"

"What?" asked Paul, excited to know.

"Let's play Laser Tag!"

Paul had to give Jimmy credit for that idea. It was perfect.

Lasers are used for many things. DVD players, printers, and barcode scanners are just a few items that use lasers. Lasers are used by construction workers to cut their materials or to weld pieces of metal together. Lasers can be used to measure lengths or to highlight something important a certain distance away. Lasers have also become an ingredient in a popular form of entertainment with the introduction of laser light shows at movie theaters and planetariums, not to mention the fun game called Laser Tag.

Lasers are simply light sources that, unlike other kinds of light, are concentrated together. In other words, they are rays of light that are controlled and focused into a chosen area. Other light forms, like the sun's rays, can spread out and cover large surface areas, and are not manmade or unnaturally configured.

The word "laser" is actually an acronym, which means it is a word that contains letters that stand for other words. Laser's letters stand for "Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation." What that means is that a laser essentially is a collection of radiation that is harnessed and projected into a desired location. A laser generator can create a laser out of atoms that are put into a state of "excitement." This is called "pumping," and it creates photons or forms of light-energy that the atoms rid themselves of upon becoming "relaxed." The photon light waves are then radiated. Mirrors reflect this light back and forth, "amplifying" it, or making the light stronger, each time they reflect it. Laser generators use this absorbed energy and can transform it to one beam that shoots out in whichever direction it is pointed. The radiation sticks together by way of an electromagnetic field, which is possible because all of these photons are of the same exact wavelength.

Using these scientific foundations, toy companies began to manufacture fake gun sets that shot out infrared lasers in the late 1970s, which became hugely popular in the mid-80s with the promotion of the particular sets Photon and Lazer Tag. The laser infrared beams used in those play-sets included coded messages that indicated where each stream of light came from originally. When the special laser came into contact with the other players' guns or another device that could receive the message, a "hit" would occur and a noise would sound to make everyone know it.

By the late 1980s, Photon and Lazer Tag saw their popularity completely dwindle. Recently, though, the game has seen a resurgence and regained a high level of appreciation from people, as shown by the fact that there are some organized, international Laser Tag competitions. Around the world, people have gone to Laser Tag auditoriums and hangars to play in whatever clothing they want, while simply renting the equipment for a certain desired amount of time.

Taso's big day came. Paul and Jimmy were prepared. They had rounded up all of Taso's friends and called Taso out from his home. Taso did not know what was in store for him, but when they arrived at their local Laser Tag arena, he was incredibly excited. He was really happy, too, because he realized he had such awesome friends who had thought a lot about how to give him a good time. Paul and Jimmy had chosen a fun game that didn't make them feel like little kids, unlike some of the games that might be found at a local street fair. Plus, there were no grownups around! The boys' parents had all agreed they could go play Laser Tag for Taso's birthday, because there was no chance anyone would get hurt by playing, or at least no greater chance than if they all played basketball in the schoolyard.

Inside the arena, the boys strapped on the little contraption that sat on their chests and would make a noise if it was hit by an opponent's laser. They grabbed their toy guns, too, and ran around the arena for three whole hours. To make it a little more challenging to see the other guys playing, the arena was filled with a little bit of light fog, which also helped reflect the laser lights, making it easier to see the red streaks dart all over the place.

After they had played four or five games and worked up quite a sweat, they all went to the ice cream parlor, that same one where they had gone for Paul's birthday, where they made their own custom sundaes. They couldn't help but want to feel like little kids again and eat some savory ice cream after all that awesome Laser Tag.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How is Taso's thirteenth birthday celebrated?

- A by playing Laser Tag
- B by going to a street fair
- C by eating cotton candy
- D by eating lunch at a restaurant

2. Paul and Jimmy want to make Taso's thirteenth birthday special. What solution do they come up with?

- A Their solution is asking Taso what he wants to do.
- B Their solution is watching a DVD.
- C Their solution is going to a movie theater.
- D Their solution is playing Laser Tag.

3. Read this sentence from the passage: "Lasers are used for many things."

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A The word "laser" is an acronym that stands for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation.
- B In the late 1980s, the popularity of Photon and Lazer Tag decreased.
- C Lasers are used for cutting construction materials, measuring, entertainment, and printing.
- D Lasers are rays of light that are controlled and focused into a chosen area.

4. Why do Paul, Jimmy, and Taso enjoy playing Laser Tag?

- A Playing Laser Tag makes them feel more relaxed than usual.
- B Playing Laser Tag makes them feel like they are no longer little kids.
- C Playing Laser Tag makes them feel like they are five-year-old children.
- D Playing Laser Tag makes them feel smart.

5. What is this passage mainly about?

- A ice cream, cotton candy, and corn dogs
- B lasers, Laser Tag, and turning thirteen
- C activities for kids at street fairs
- D why Photon and Lazer Tag become less popular in the late 1980s

6. Read the following sentences: "Lasers are simply light sources that, unlike other kinds of light, are concentrated together. **In other words**, they are rays of light that are controlled and focused into a chosen area."

Why does the author use the phrase **in other words** above?

- A to describe how the characters in the story are feeling
- B to convince readers that they should look up the words "sources" and "rays"
- C to prove that most people do not understand how lasers work
- D to show that the same idea is going to be explained in a new way

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Paul and Jimmy think hard about what to do for Taso's birthday; _____, they decide on Laser Tag.

- A finally
- B like
- C never
- D on the other hand

8. Describe how Laser Tag is played.
