

Carnival

1. Before you read the text below, try to answer these questions. Then read and check your answers.

1. Where did Carnival originate?
 - a. The United States
 - b. Italy
 - c. Brazil
2. What was the original purpose of Carnival?
 - a. to prepare for fasting
 - b. to celebrate the end of fasting
 - c. to make fasting more enjoyable
3. The word carnival means goodbye to what?
 - a. last year
 - b. evil
 - c. meat
4. Most of today's carnivals share what heritage?
 - a. Asian
 - b. Afro-Caribbean
 - c. Latin

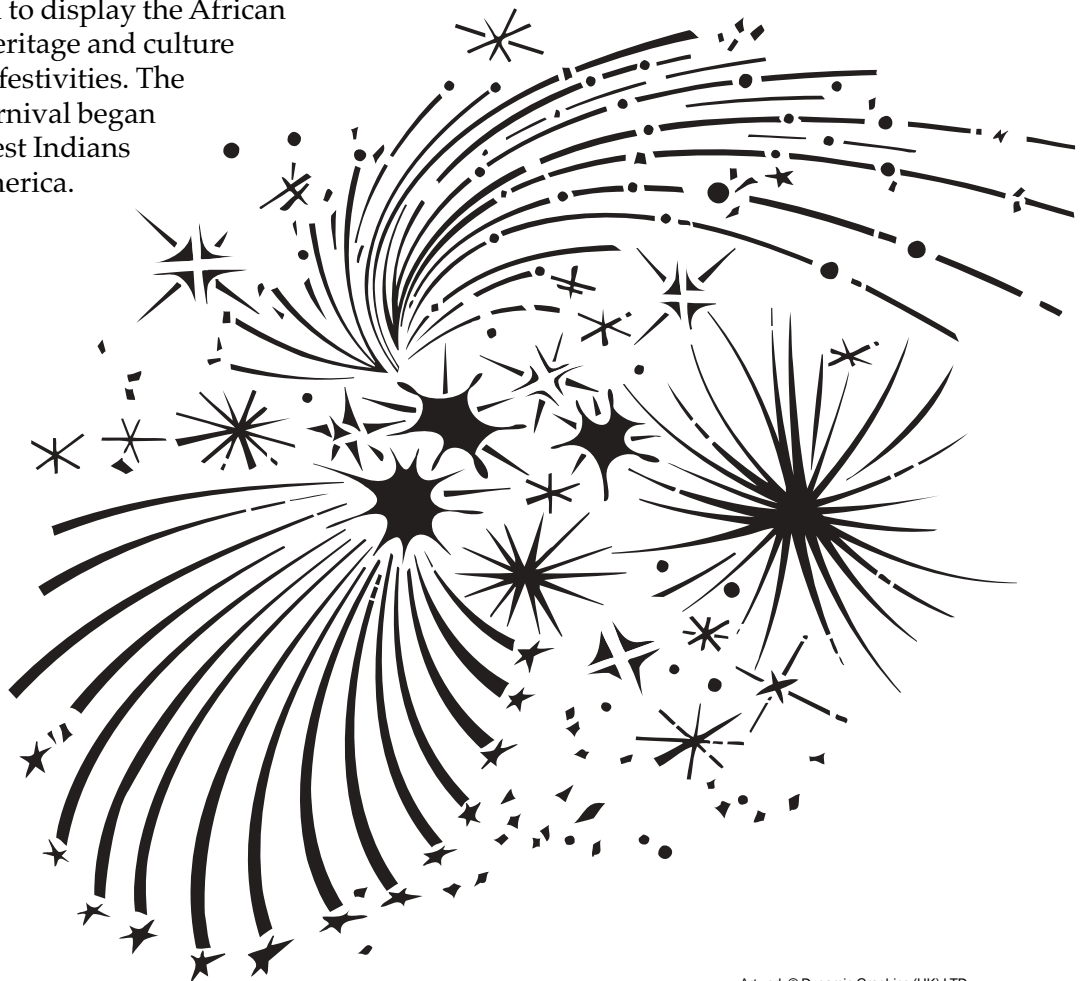
The Origin of Carnival

Carnival originated in Ancient Rome. The days of feasting and merry-making that characterized these early carnivals were in preparation for the forthcoming period of fasting that was observed during the Christian season of Lent. The word *carnival* is believed to be taken from the Italian *carnevale*. This derives from the Latin words *carne* and *vale* meaning 'goodbye to meat' and reflects the practice of abstaining from meat during Lent. Carnival quickly spread to other Italian cities and then throughout Europe. It was European colonists who introduced Carnival to the Americas.

Most of today's carnivals are principally Afro-Caribbean in heritage. With the abolition of slavery in the 1800s, Caribbean ex-slaves took to the streets to celebrate newfound freedoms and to display the African spirit. Afro-Caribbean heritage and culture soon began to shape the festivities. The spread of the modern carnival began with the migration of West Indians to Europe and North America.

Not willing to lose their identity, they formed cultural groups and societies that would, among other things, organize yearly carnival celebrations to keep the homeland spirit alive.

On Worksheets B and C there is a brief introduction to the history of three of the world's most famous carnivals: Notting Hill in London, Rio de Janeiro in Brazil and the New Orleans Mardi Gras.



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2. Before you read, which carnival do you think each statement refers to? Write Notting Hill, Rio de Janeiro or New Orleans next to the statements. Then read and check your answers.

1. It first took place in 1964. _____
2. It was started in 1723. _____
3. It was originally started by immigrants from Trinidad. _____
4. It was started by Portuguese settlers. _____
5. People used to celebrate by throwing things at each other. _____
6. It has another name, which means *Fat Tuesday*. _____
7. It takes place in August each year. _____
8. It has an official flag and anthem. _____
9. It has about a million visitors. _____
10. It is the largest carnival in the world. _____
11. It has a king and queen. _____
12. The main music is jazz. _____
13. The main dance is the samba. _____
14. It has a gay costume contest. _____

Notting Hill Carnival, London

The first carnival took place in 1964. Every Sunday night for over a decade, Trinidadian immigrants had been meeting in pubs in the Earl’s Court district of London to enjoy the sounds of jazz and the story-telling of calypso. In 1964, this spilled out of one of the pubs and inspired a tiny street party in neighbouring Notting Hill Gate. The carnival was born. In the early years, the carnival remained a very small affair, but by the mid-1970s the carnival had been embraced by many other local West Indian communities. By the 1980s it had grown into the largest street festival in Europe and the second largest in the world.

Over the Bank Holiday weekend at the end of August, about a million visitors enjoy the sound systems and DJs, the reggae and steel drum music, the colourful processions and costumes and the dancing and partying that make the Notting Hill Carnival the multi-cultural but truly British experience that it is today.

Rio de Janeiro Carnival

The Carnival in Rio de Janeiro takes place between late February and early March. It is the largest carnival in the world and attracts tourists from many countries.

The Rio Carnival was started in 1723 by immigrants from Portugal. The traditional Portuguese carnival involved people throwing household items at each other. Everything from pots, pans and cutlery to eggs, flour and fruit were used as missiles. This signified discarding the old to make way for the new. In Rio, assailants began to wear masks and fancy clothes to hide their identities and, by the mid-1800s, the carnival tradition of dressing up had become established. The samba, a local dance, added an Afro-Caribbean flavour to the carnival. Today the dance remains at the heart of the festivities with tens of thousands of dancers taking part each year in the carnival’s samba competition.

Being elected king or queen of the carnival is a prestigious as well as lucrative honour. The idea was first introduced in 1933 when a paper doll in the shape of a king was left sitting on a throne to preside over the Carnival. The doll reigned until 1949 when it was replaced by an elected human. The first queen was chosen the following year.

New Orleans Mardi Gras

The New Orleans Carnival, also known as Mardi Gras, begins twelve days before Lent. Mardi Gras ('Fat Tuesday' in French) is actually the last day of the carnival – the day when everyone ate as much as possible before they began to fast.

New Orleans was North America's first truly multi-cultural community. It was founded by the French, was temporarily handed over to the Spanish and was the major port of entry for immigrants from the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas. This melting pot of cultures meant celebrations and processions as a means of proclaiming identity had always been commonplace. The birth of the modern-day Mardi Gras Carnival, however, was in 1857. An official Mardi Gras flag (green, gold and purple standing for faith, power, and justice) was introduced in this year and the Mardi Gras anthem '*If Ever I Cease to Love*' was adopted. The song, which, today, is known to all New Orleans natives, features these peculiar lyrics:

*'If ever I cease to love,
May cows lay eggs and fish grow legs.
If ever I cease to love.'*

Today's Mardi Gras offers the visitor an array of spectacles. Marching jazz bands fill the streets, unusual mating rituals take place in some of the streets in the French Quarter and, on Mardi Gras Day, the spectacular finals of the gay costume contest take place.

The carnival culminates with displays by Mardi Gras Indians. These displays of cultural values and spirit of freedom pay tribute to the early multi-cultural roots of New Orleans.

3. Write six questions about the information in the texts above. Then work in small groups. Ask and answer each other's questions.

For example, *Why did people start wearing masks and fancy clothing in the Rio carnival?*

1. _____ ?
2. _____ ?
3. _____ ?
4. _____ ?
5. _____ ?
6. _____ ?

4. In small groups discuss the questions.

1. Have you ever been to any of these carnivals? If so, describe your experience. If not, which one would you most like to go to? Why?
2. Have you ever been to a carnival, big or small? Tell your group about it.
3. Imagine you were asked to organise a local one-day carnival in your neighbourhood. What events, parades and music would you have? Plan your carnival.

Teacher's notes

Tasks

- To find out about the origin of carnivals and about three famous carnivals by reading short texts.
- To ask and answer questions about the texts.
- To discuss questions related to carnivals and to plan a carnival.

Preparation

One copy of worksheets A, B and C for each student.

Procedure

1. Inform the students that London's Notting Hill Carnival takes place at the end of August each year. Elicit from the students anything they know about this carnival. Elicit the names of other carnivals they know and brainstorm information about them.
2. Give the students a copy of worksheet A and ask them to try to answer the questions. Ask the students to read the text to check their answers. Establish the meaning of *fast* before the students read, if necessary.

Answers 1. b 2. a 3. c 4. b

3. Give the students copies of worksheets B and C and ask them which carnival they think each statement refers to. The students then read the text to check their answers.
[An alternative procedure is to divide the students into groups of three and ask each student to read about one of the carnivals. The students then pool their information to check their answers.]

Answers 1. Notting Hill 2. Rio 3. Notting Hill 4. Rio 5. Rio 6. New Orleans (Mardi Gras)
7. Notting Hill 8. New Orleans 9. Notting Hill 10. Rio 11. Rio 12. New Orleans 13. Rio
14. New Orleans

4. Check the answers with the whole class. At this point you could ask the students to read in more detail, underlining any vocabulary they do not understand. Then check this with the whole class.
5. Ask the students, working individually or in pairs, to write questions about the texts. Ask the students, in groups, to ask and answer each other's questions – either from memory or by scanning the text.
6. The students then discuss the questions in 4. Ask the students to report back anything interesting from their discussions and to give a brief summary of the carnival they have planned.

Follow up

1. Ask the students to prepare a poster advertising the carnival they have planned.
2. Ask the students to do further research (e.g. using the Internet or encyclopaedias) and prepare a poster about the carnivals they read about.
3. Ask the students to imagine they have just visited one of the carnivals and to write a postcard or e-mail to a friend telling them about it.

Websites

For more information about the Carnivals in the texts, visit the following sites:

www.carnaval.com/cityguides/london/lon_carn.htm
www.mardigrasneworleans.com
www.ipanema.com/carnival/home.htm