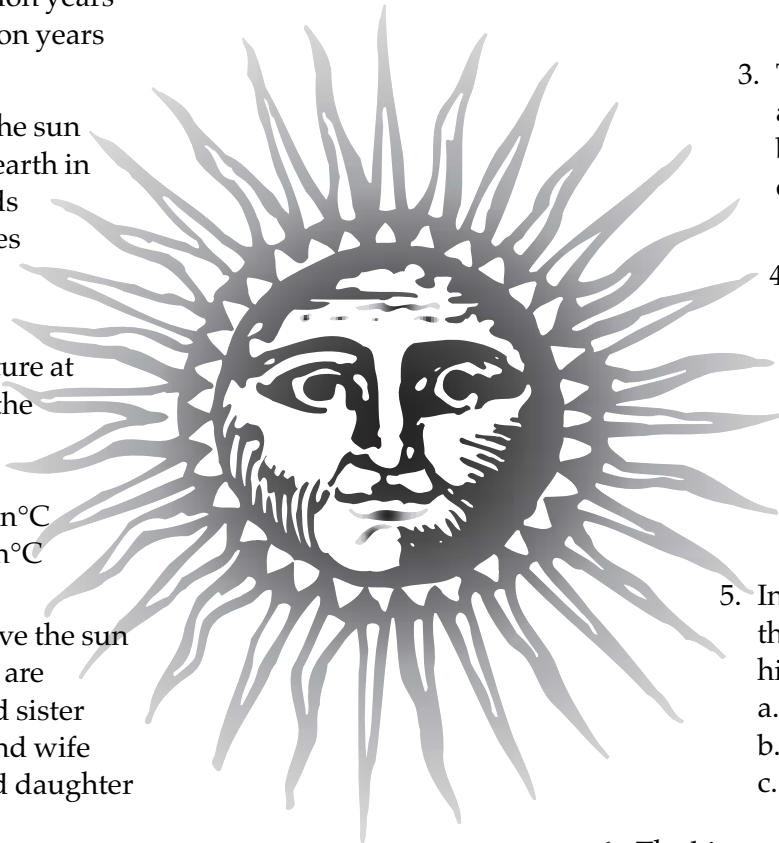


The Sun, celebrations and the Summer Solstice

1. Before you read, do the following quiz about the sun and the summer solstice.

1. The summer solstice is
 - a. a day when day and night are of equal length
 - b. the longest day of the year
 - c. the shortest day of the year
2. The summer solstice is
 - a. the first day of summer
 - b. in the middle of summer
 - c. the last day of summer
3. The word solstice means
 - a. sun not moving
 - b. sun high in the sky
 - c. hot sun
4. In ancient times, on the summer solstice, people lit fires to
 - a. help the sun see the earth
 - b. welcome the sun
 - c. fight against the sun
5. In Portugal, to celebrate the summer solstice people hit each other with
 - a. wood
 - b. flowers
 - c. hammers
6. The biggest solstice celebration in the world is in
 - a. Sweden
 - b. the United States
 - c. Mexico
7. Stonehenge, the ancient stone circle in the UK, is about
 - a. 500 years old
 - b. 5,000 years old
 - c. 50,000 years old
8. *Ra* is the ancient sun god of
 - a. the Greeks
 - b. the Incas
 - c. the Egyptians
9. Eskimos believe the sun and the moon are
 - a. brother and sister
 - b. husband and wife
 - c. mother and daughter
10. The temperature at the centre of the sun is about
 - a. 1,500°C
 - b. 1.5 million°C
 - c. 15 million°C
11. Light from the sun reaches the earth in
 - a. 8 seconds
 - b. 8 minutes
 - c. 8 hours
12. The sun should continue burning for another
 - a. 5 thousand years
 - b. 5 million years
 - c. 5 billion years



2. Check your answers by reading the texts on worksheets B and C.

The Sun, celebrations and the Summer Solstice

The summer solstice

The summer solstice is the longest day of the year and is the first day of summer. In the northern hemisphere, this is 21 June when the sun is farthest north. In the southern hemisphere, it is 21 December. The word solstice comes from the Latin *sol* meaning 'sun' and *sistere* meaning 'not moving'.

Celebrations

The summer solstice, also known as midsummer, has been a day of rituals and celebrations for thousands of years. In pagan times, fires were lit to welcome the sun and people danced and sang and offered flowers and food. For many ancient cultures the summer solstice was a time of great energy and new life. This can still be seen in many modern-day celebrations from around the world. Here are a few of them.

People decorate fountains with flowers. They go swimming at midnight. In the city, they celebrate at the swimming pool with swimming contests.
(Sandy, Mexico)

It's a strange way to celebrate, but people hit each other with plastic hammers.
(Luis, Portugal)

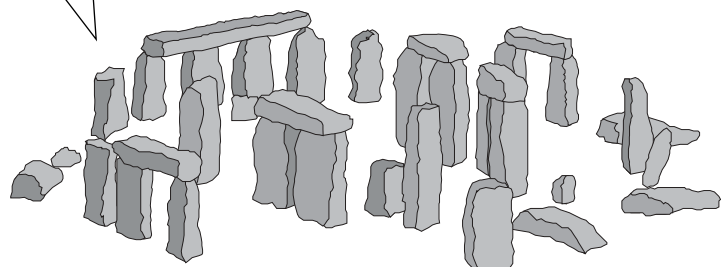
We light fires on the beach and have a big all-night party. (Fernando, Puerto Rico)

Thousands and thousands of people parade through the heart of Santa Barbara. It is a mass of colour, music and energy and everyone is there to celebrate the beginning of summer. It's the biggest solstice celebration in the world.
(Eddie, USA)

Girls float flowers on rivers to find out when they will get married. If the flowers float a long way, they will get married soon.
(Ewa, Poland)

Each summer solstice, hundreds of druids gather at Stonehenge, an ancient circle of stones over 5,000 years old. The stones are arranged so that the first light of the summer solstice falls on its altar. It's become a bit of a tourist event and many people go to watch the ceremony.
(Angus, UK)

On the morning of the solstice, we pick flowers and make them into a garland, which we wear on our heads. In the evening, we dance around the midsummer pole and then party all night.
(Anna, Sweden)



The Sun, celebrations and the Summer Solstice

Sun gods

Today, a sun worshipper is more likely to be on the beach than in a temple. Here are some examples of ancient sun worship.

The Egyptians called their sun god *Ra* and considered him the creator of light. It is believed that humans were born from his tears.

The Greek sun god was *Helios*. The Greeks believed he drove the sun across the sky from east to west in his golden chariot every day. After sunset the sun sailed back across the ocean.

Malina is the sun goddess of the Eskimo people and *Anningan*, her brother, is the moon god. They had a terrible fight and *Anningan* chased his sister into the sky. He is still trying to catch her and this is why the sun alternate in the sky with the moon.

According to Chinese mythology, there were ten suns in the sky. The heat became too much for the people and they asked the suns to appear one at a time. The suns refused, so an archer killed nine of them. The one that remained is the sun they see in the sky today.

Sun facts

- The temperature on the surface of the sun is a cool 4,000°C. At its centre, the temperature is around 15,000,000°C.
- Over a million earths would fit into the sun.
- The sun is about 150 million kilometres from the earth.
- It takes 8 minutes and 19 seconds for light to reach the earth from the sun.
- Light travels at about 300,000 km per second. A light year is the distance light travels in one year – this is about 9.5 trillion km. The furthest we can see without using a telescope is 2 million light years – that’s very nearly 21,000,000,000,000,000km.
- The sun is about 5 billion years old, and should continue burning for another 5 billion years.



3. Write four questions about the text. See if your classmates can answer them.

For example: *Where do people decorate fountains? How old is the sun?*

1.
2.
3.
4.

4. In small groups discuss the questions.

- a. Do you live in a sunny country? Do you have too much or not enough sun in your country?
- b. How does the sun affect the lives of people in your country? Does it have a big influence?
- c. Is the summer solstice celebrated in your country? How do people celebrate it?

Teacher's notes

Tasks

To find out about the summer solstice and its celebrations by reading a text.

To write and ask questions about the text.

To discuss related issues about the student's own country.

Preparation

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

You could pre-teach/ check the following vocabulary: pagan, lit (past tense of light), pole, float, pick (flowers), garland, druid, alter, archer.

Procedure

1. Tell the students that 21 June is the summer solstice in the northern hemisphere and 21 December in the southern hemisphere. Elicit or brainstorm a few facts about the sun and the summer solstice.
2. Give the students a copy of the worksheet A and ask them to discuss and answer the questions in (1) in pairs or small groups.
3. The students read the text to check their answers to the questions. This can be done individually or as a collective effort with the students working in pairs.
4. Check the answers with the whole class.
5. At this point, you could ask the students to read in more detail, underlining any vocabulary or language they do not understand. Then check this with the whole class.
6. Ask the students, working individually or in pairs, to write four questions about the text. The students then ask other students their questions. The students answer the questions from memory or by scanning the text for the answers. Alternatively, you could put the students into small groups and get them to pool their questions. The teams then ask each other the questions, scoring one point for each correct answer.
7. The students then discuss, in pairs or small groups, the questions in (4). Ask the students to report back anything interesting from their discussions.

Answers

1 b 2 a 3 a 4 b 5 c 6 b 7 b 8 c 9 a 10 c 11 b 12 c

Follow up

The students could prepare a poster about the sun and the summer solstice using the information in the texts and other information they can find from other sources such as the Internet or encyclopaedias.

Websites

For more information about the summer solstice and its celebrations, visit the following websites:

www.religioustolerance.org/summer_solstice.htm

www.education-world.com/holidays/archives/solstice_2000.shtml

www.familyeducation.com/topic/front/0,1156,1-7122,00.htm