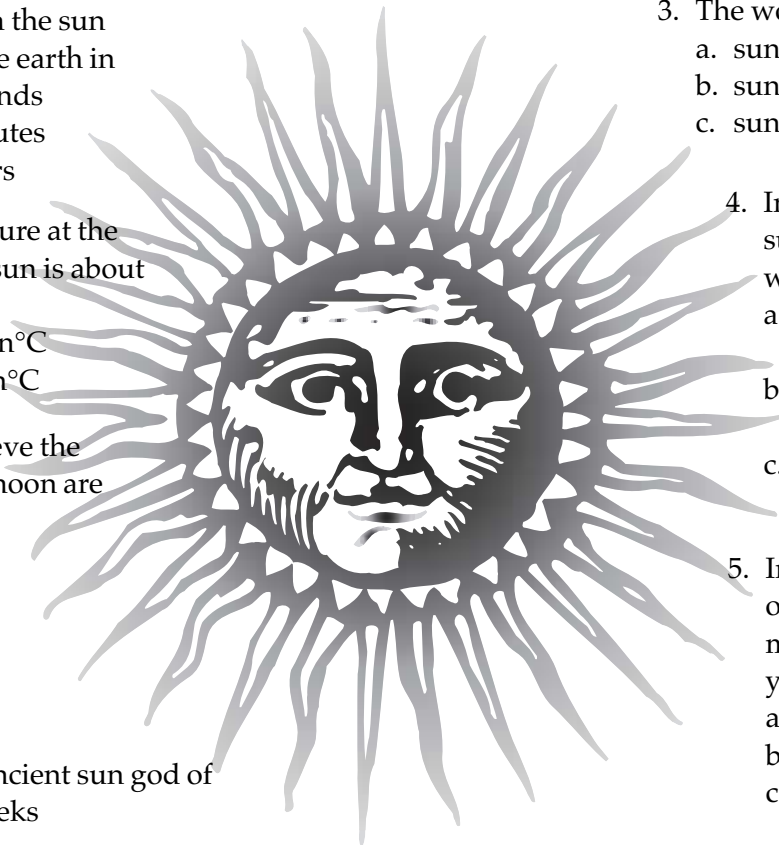


The Sun, celebrations and the Summer Solstice

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

13. The sun should continue burning for another
 - a. 5 thousand years
 - b. 5 million years
 - c. 5 billion years
12. Light from the sun reaches the earth in
 - a. 8 seconds
 - b. 8 minutes
 - c. 8 hours
11. The temperature at the centre of the sun is about
 - a. 1,500°C
 - b. 1.5 million°C
 - c. 15 million°C
10. Eskimos believe the sun and the moon are
 - a. brother and sister
 - b. husband and wife
 - c. mother and daughter
9. *Ra* is the ancient sun god of
 - a. the Greeks
 - b. the Incas
 - c. the Egyptians
8. Stonehenge, the ancient stone circle in the UK, is about
 - a. 500 years old
 - b. 5,000 years old
 - c. 50,000 years old
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 standing still
 - b. sun high in the sky
 - c. sun moving quickly
4. In ancient times, on the summer solstice, people would light fires to
 - a. help the sun see the earth
 - b. help the sun warm the earth
 - c. help the sun dry the earth
5. In Lithuania, you can only light the midsummer fire if your name is
 - a. Peter
 - b. John
 - c. Mark
6. In Portugal, people celebrate the summer solstice by hitting each other with
 - a. hammers
 - b. flowers
 - c. burning wood
7. The biggest solstice celebration in the world is in
 - a. Sweden
 - b. Mexico
 - c. the United States



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 marks the first day of summer. In the northern hemisphere, this is 21 June when the sun is farthest north and at its highest point in the sky. In the southern hemisphere, winter and summer solstices are exchanged and 21 December is the summer solstice. The word solstice is derived from the Latin *sol* meaning 'sun' and *sistere* meaning 'stand still'.

Celebrations

The summer solstice, also known as midsummer, has been a day of rituals and celebrations for thousands of years. In pagan times, fires would be lit throughout Europe to help the sun with its task of warming the earth. People would dance and sing, offering flowers and feasts to welcome it and to entice it to stay. For many ancient cultures the summer solstice was a time of great energy, fertility and new beginnings, and this can still be seen in many modern-day celebrations from around the world. Here are a few of them.

A big pole is burned at the top of a hill. Only men called Jonas, Lithuanian for John, can set fire to the pole – this is because we also celebrate Saint John the Baptist at this time. People dance round it, sing songs and play games. In the morning, the burning poles are rolled down the hill into a river or lake, men jumping over them all the way.
(Yuri, Lithuania)

Girls float flowers on rivers to find out their prospects for marriage. The farther their wreaths float the sooner they will get married.
(Ewa, Poland)

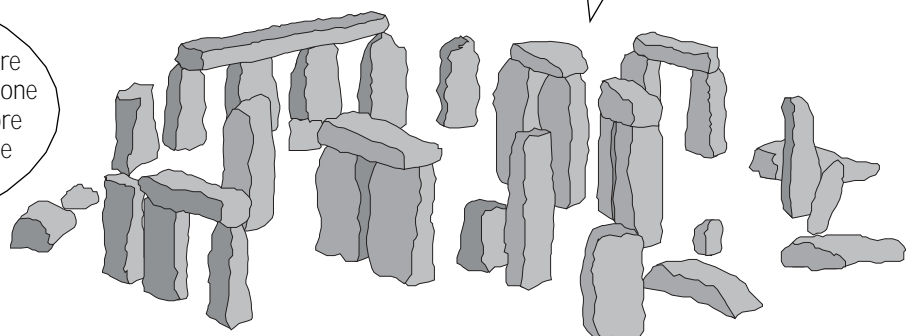
It's a strange way to celebrate, but people go round hitting each other with plastic hammers.
(Luis, Portugal)

On the first Saturday following the solstice, thousands of people parade up State Street through the heart of downtown Santa Barbara. It is a mass of colour, music and positive energy. There are usually about a hundred thousand people there, all celebrating the beginning of summer. It's the biggest solstice celebration in the world.
(Eddie, USA)

People decorate wells and fountains with flowers, candles and paper.
(Sandy, Mexico)

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

If you want to know whom you are going to marry, you pick seven different flowers on the day before the solstice, give each one the name of someone you like and put them under your pillow before you go to bed. You will dream about only one of them.
(Heike, Finland)



The Sun, celebrations and the Summer Solstice

Sun gods

Today's sun worshipper probably prefers lying on a beach to visiting a temple, but in many ancient cultures the sun was worshipped as a god. Here are the myths behind some of these gods.

The Egyptians called their sun god *Ra* and considered him the creator of light. It is believed that humankind was born from the tears of *Ra* and that he created the first couple: *Shu* and *Tefnut*. They were the parents of the earth and sky.

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 was, and continues to be, the sun goddess of the Eskimo people. *Malina* and her brother, the moon god *Anningan*, lived together. They got into a terrible fight and in fear *Malina* ran as far as she could into the sky. This eternal chase makes 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 was sent down from the heavens to reprimand the disobedient suns. He ended up killing nine of the suns and the one that remains 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 travel 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 21,000,000,000,000,000,000km.
- 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 wells and 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 the sun, or the lack of 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: derived, pagan, lit (past tense of light), entice, fertility, pole, nettle, float, wreath, garland, well, druid, alter, reprimand, 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 b 6 a 7 c 8 b 9 c 10 a 11 c 12 b 13 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.html