

Festivals: May Day: Traditions

by Julian L'Enfant

Main aims: To develop pupils' reading for gist and specific information

Level: Pre-intermediate

Target age: 8-10 years

Time needed: 15-20 mins

May Day traditions

Procedure

- Create interest in the topic of May Day by showing pictures / drawings of a maypole, morris dancers and a May queen. You can find May Day pictures here: <http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/mayday.htm>.
- Encourage the children to describe the pictures and write up their suggestions on the board. Check they know the meaning of the following language: *to celebrate something, a maypole, morris dancing, to weave (in and out)*.
- Hand out the worksheet. Ask the children to read the text then check in pairs how many of their suggestions were correct.
- Pupils read the text a second time and answer the detailed questions.
- Have students compare their answers with their partner before confirming the right answers with the whole class.

Key:

1. *dance*
2. *weave in and out*
3. *a May king or queen*
4. *ribbons and bells*
5. *bang them together*
6. *work, recreation and sleeping*

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May Day traditions

There are many traditions celebrated on May Day, which is usually on the first Monday of May. In England, people celebrate the spring by dancing around a maypole. Children each hold a ribbon and dance around the pole in circles, weaving in and out to music.

Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers, is symbolized by an important May Day tradition: the crowning of a May Queen or a May King. There are lots of flowers and a parade. There is also morris dancing. Men and women dress up in a costume which is covered with ribbons and bells. They dance to music and the bells ring as they move. They hold long sticks, which they bang together.

Many countries in Europe have a holiday every year on 1st May to celebrate Labour Day. This holiday remembers the group of workers who wanted an eight-hour day – eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation and eight hours for sleeping.

Read the text and answer the questions below.

1. What do children do around a maypole?
2. What do children have to do as they dance to the music?
3. In England, what does every May Day festival need?
4. What do morris dancers wear?
5. What do morris dancers do with their sticks?
6. What are the three parts of an eight-hour day?