

CELEBRATIONS

Groundhog Day

Teacher's notes

Age: Adults and young adults

Level: Pre-intermediate to Intermediate (A2–B1)

Time: 60–90 minutes

Activity: In this lesson, students will:

1. read a text about the American celebration of Groundhog Day, looking at the language involved;
2. write animal facts for a quiz;
3. discuss weather expressions and proverbs.

Language focus: vocabulary related to Groundhog Day and the language of weather, seasons and animal facts

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student plus one piece of paper per pair of students (for the quiz)

Procedure

1. Warmer: Weather and seasons

Students briefly discuss and answer the questions in small groups. Monitor and assist with any vocabulary. Then feedback as a whole class.

2. Key words and expressions

Students should skim-read the text to find and underline the key words. Then they should write them next to the correct definitions and notice how the words are used in context.

Key:

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| 1. rodent | 6. broadcast |
| 2. burrow | 7. channels |
| 3. cheer | 8. settlers |
| 4. shadow | 9. fair |
| 5. weirdest | 10. predictions |

3. Understanding the text

Students should read the text again. They should read the statements and decide if they are true or false according to the text, and correct any that they think are false.

Key:

1. True.
2. False. The biggest and most famous celebration takes place near Punxsutawney in Pennsylvania.
3. False. A groundhog called Phil is pulled out of his burrow at around seven o'clock in the morning on 2 February.
4. False. The celebrations started in the USA in 1886.
5. False. Every year a man in a top hat who belongs to a group called the Inner Circle pulls Phil out of his burrow.
6. True.
7. False. His predictions are only correct 39% of the time.

4. Groundhog facts

Ask students if they knew anything about groundhogs before today. Explain that they are now going to learn some facts about this animal. Students use the words in the box to complete the groundhog facts.

Key:

1. woodchucks
2. squirrel
3. teeth
4. weigh, live
5. insects
6. climb, swim
7. sleep

5. Other animal facts – an animal quiz

In pairs, students research and write between five and eight facts about an animal of their choice. They should write their facts on a piece of paper but they should not write the name of the animal – although they should include their own names on the paper.

Then students either swap their facts or pin them to the wall to make a classroom quiz that everyone can read. They should read the facts that other students have written and, on another piece of paper, write the name of the animals they think the facts are about.

For example: *Leo and Stephanie: mouse, Dominik and Lena: snake, etc*

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6. Weather expressions

Remind students that the events on Groundhog Day are based on the old Candlemas expression:

*If Candlemas be fair and bright,
Come, Winter, have another flight;
If Candlemas brings clouds and rain,
Go Winter, and come not again.*

Elicit from the students what this expression means (*If the weather is good on the day of Candlemas then it will continue to be winter. If the weather is bad on the day of Candlemas, then winter will be over.*)

Direct students to the English weather expressions on the worksheet. They should discuss these, then talk about weather expressions in their language and from their country.

Key/explanation:

Red sky at night, sailors delight. Red sky in morning, sailors take warning. = Sometimes the word *sailors* is replaced by *shepherds*. In both cases, a red sky in the morning warns them to be careful either at sea or looking after their sheep. A red sky in the evening means they can relax as the weather is going to be fine.

Rain before seven, fine after eleven. = This means that if it rains early in the morning, the rain will not last. It will be gone by 11 am.

Hawks flying high means a clear sky. = Hawks are birds of prey.

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Worksheet

1. Warmer: Weather and seasons

Answer the questions.

- What's the weather like today?
- What was it like yesterday?
- What do you think it'll be like tomorrow?
- What kind of weather do you like best?
- What kind of weather is typical in your country for each of the seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter?
- Which is your favourite season? Why?



2. Key words and expressions

Find and underline these words in the article. Then match them to their definitions below. Finally, read the article to see how they are used in context.

broadcast	burrow	channels	cheer	fair
predictions	rodent	settlers	shadow	weirdest

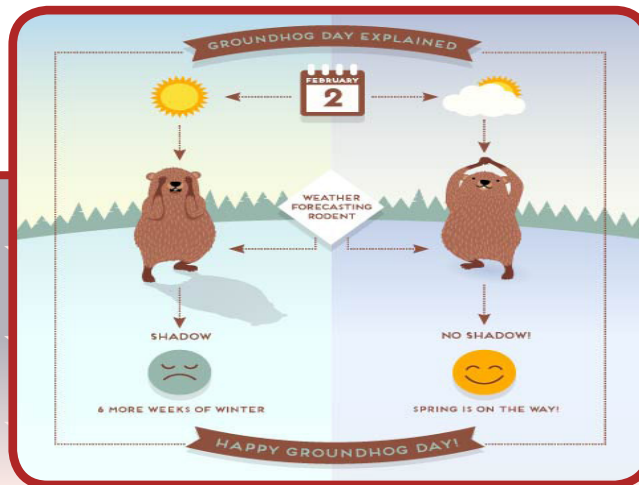
1. a type of small animal that has long sharp front teeth _____
2. a hole or tunnel in the ground made by an animal _____
3. give a loud shout of happiness _____
4. a dark shape created when something blocks light _____
5. strangest and most unusual _____
6. send out messages or programmes on radios or televisions _____
7. television stations _____
8. people who go to live in a place where not many people live, and start to make towns and communities _____
9. pleasant and not raining _____
10. statements about what you think will happen in the future _____

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Worksheet



Every year, on 2 February, thousands of people get up very early in the morning and go to a small field called Gobbler's Knob two miles outside of downtown Punxsutawney in Pennsylvania. They start to arrive at 3 am while it is still cold and dark. By 5 am they will be dancing, watching entertainers, buying warm hats and scarves, t-shirts and buttons (badges) with pictures of a small furry rodent on them, and waiting for the sun to rise.

At around 7 am, a group of men wearing top hats walk onto a stage to start the official Groundhog Day celebrations. These men, called the Inner Circle, take a small brown groundhog out of his burrow and all the people cheer.

The groundhog is called Punxsutawney Phil. According to local tradition, if Phil sees his shadow, gets scared and runs back into his burrow, there will be six more weeks of winter. If he does not see his shadow, there will be an early spring (and good weather coming soon).

Groundhog Day is probably one of America's weirdest and most popular traditions. It is broadcast on news and weather channels, and also streamed live on the web.

Punxsutawney has been celebrating Groundhog Day since 1886. The tradition goes back to the old Christian celebration of Candlemas, which falls on the same date. According to the official Groundhog Day website, it was brought to Pennsylvania by early settlers from Europe.

As an old song goes:

*If Candlemas be fair and bright,
Come, Winter, have another flight;
If Candlemas brings clouds and rain,
Go Winter, and come not again.*

But how good are Phil's weather predictions? Not very. Records show that, in over 130 years, Phil has been correct just 39% of the time.

Fun language fact:

In the 1993 hit movie *Groundhog Day*, Bill Murray played a man who tried again and again to get to the celebrations. Since then, people use the term 'Groundhog Day' when they want to talk about something that happens repeatedly.

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3. Understanding the text

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text? Correct and rewrite any that are false.

1. On Groundhog Day a small animal shows people if the weather is going to be good or bad in the coming weeks.
2. Large Groundhog Day celebrations take place in every city in the USA.
3. A groundhog called Phil is pulled out of his burrow at seven o'clock in the evening on 2 February.
4. The celebrations started in the USA in 1986.
5. Every year one of the people watching the celebration is chosen to pull Phil out of his burrow.
6. The tradition of predicting the weather in February comes from an old European Christian celebration called Candlemas.
7. Phil the groundhog is very good at predicting the weather.

4. Groundhog facts



Use the words in the box to complete the groundhog facts.

squirrel	insects	woodchucks	teeth	live
swim	climb	sleep	weigh	

1. Groundhogs are also called _____. Their scientific name is *marmota monax*.
2. They are a member of the _____ family.
3. They are brown and furry and have two big front _____.
4. They _____ 12 to 15 pounds and _____ for six to eight years.
5. They eat plants, wild berries and _____. They sometimes steal vegetables and fruit from gardens.
6. They whistle when scared, and they can _____ trees and _____.
7. They have a long winter _____ and usually wake up in February or March.

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5. Other animal facts – an animal quiz

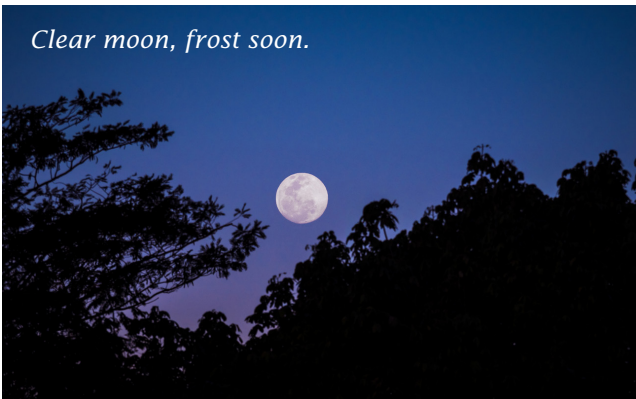
With a partner, research and write between five and eight facts about an animal. Write your names next to the facts but do not write the name of the animal!

Read other students' facts. Can you guess which animals are described?

6. Weather expressions

Read these strange weather expressions.

Clear moon, frost soon.



Cows lying down means it's going to rain.



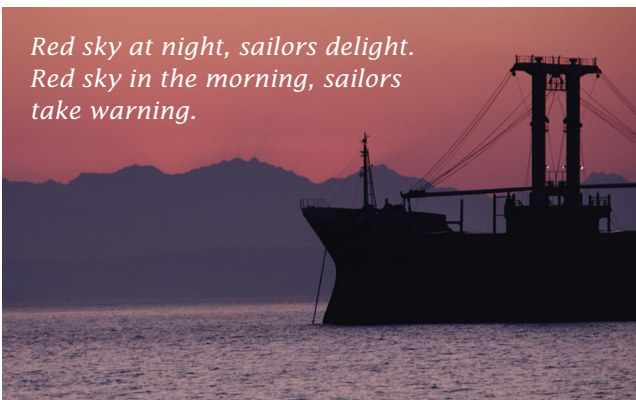
*Rain before seven,
fine after eleven.*



*Hawks flying high means
a clear sky.*



*Red sky at night, sailors delight.
Red sky in the morning, sailors
take warning.*



- Do these weather expressions exist in your language too?
- Are there any strange weather expressions from your country?
- What are they? What do they mean? Do you believe them?