

# Carnival

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

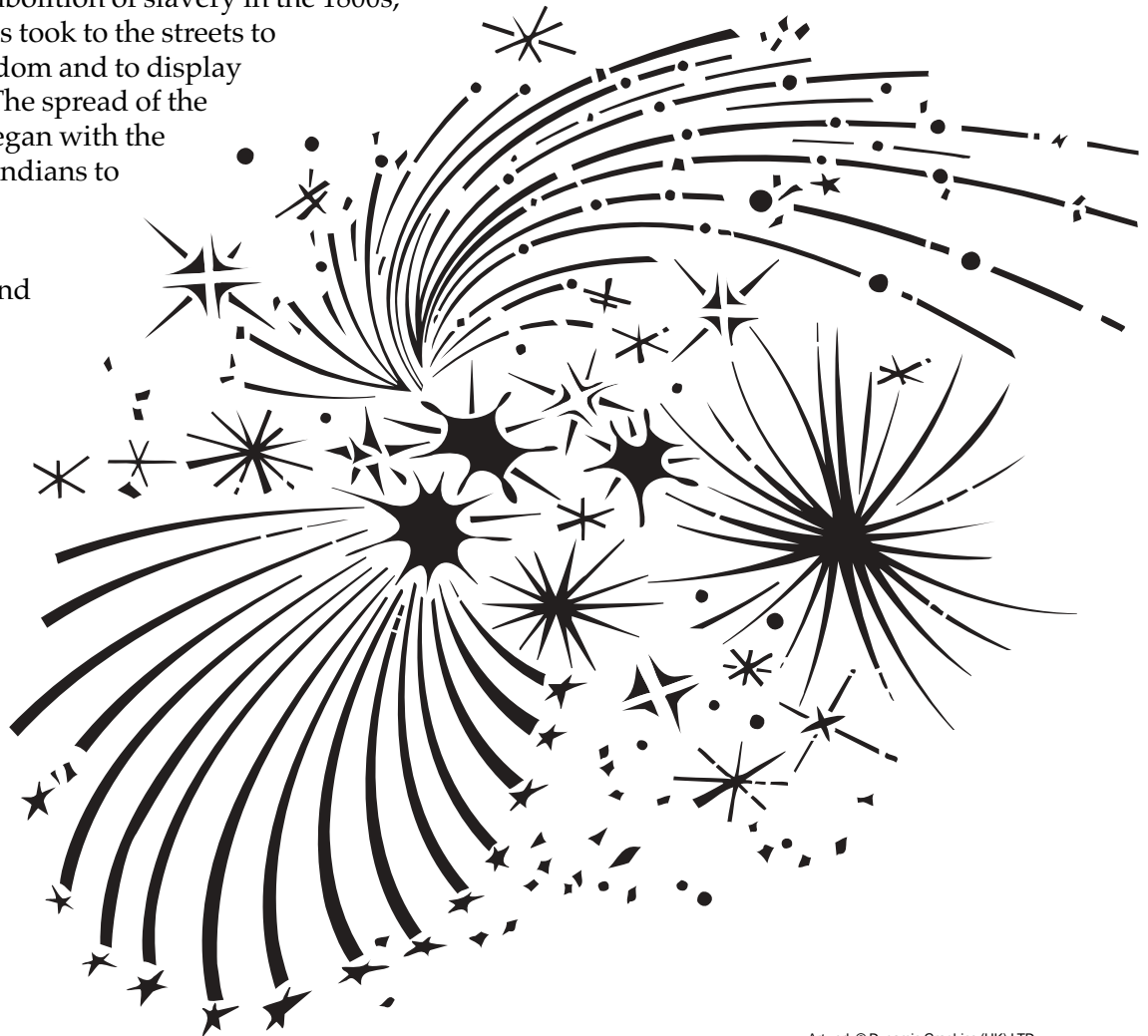
1. Where did Carnival originate?
  - a. The United States
  - b. Italy
  - c. Brazil
2. What was the original purpose of Carnival?
  - a. to prepare for fasting
  - b. to celebrate the end of fasting
  - c. to make fasting more enjoyable
3. The word *carnival* means goodbye to what?
  - a. last year
  - 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. It consisted of several days of feasting and merry-making in preparation for the Christian observance of Lent (a period of fasting). The word *carnival* is believed to derive 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. European colonists 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 their freedom and to display the African spirit. The spread of the modern carnival began with the migration of West Indians to Europe and North America.

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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# Carnival

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. It has another name, which means *Fat Tuesday*. \_\_\_\_\_
6. It takes place in August each year. \_\_\_\_\_
7. It has an official flag and anthem. \_\_\_\_\_
8. It is the largest carnival in the world. \_\_\_\_\_
9. It has about a million visitors. \_\_\_\_\_
10. The main music is Jazz. \_\_\_\_\_
11. The main dance is the samba. \_\_\_\_\_

## *Notting Hill Carnival, London*

The first carnival took place in 1964. For over a decade, Trinidadian immigrants had been meeting in pubs in West London to enjoy the sounds of jazz and calypso. In 1964, this inspired a tiny street party in the Notting Hill Gate district and the carnival was born. In the early years, the carnival remained very small, but by the mid-1970s many other local West Indian communities had joined in and it was growing year by year. By the 1980s it had grown into the largest street festival in Europe and the second largest in the world.

Over three days at the end of August, about a million visitors enjoy the sound systems and DJs, 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 to signify discarding the old to make way for the new. In Rio, the people who were throwing things 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.



# Carnival

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## *New Orleans Mardi Gras*

The New Orleans Carnival is also known as Mardi Gras ('Fat Tuesday' in French). Mardi Gras is actually the final 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 under the control of the Spanish and was the major port of entry for immigrants from the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas. This mixture of cultures means New Orleans has a long history of people celebrating their identities. 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 that year and the Mardi Gras anthem was adopted. The song features these unusual lyrics:

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

Today's visitors can see a range of events, all accompanied by marching bands which fill the streets with the sound of New Orleans jazz.

The carnival ends with displays by native Indians. These displays pay tribute to the early multi-cultural roots of New Orleans.

**3. Write four 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. \_\_\_\_\_ ?

**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

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## 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. New Orleans (Mardi Gras)  
6. Notting Hill 7. New Orleans 8. Rio 9. Notting Hill 10. New Orleans 11. Rio

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](http://www.carnaval.com/cityguides/london/lon_carn.htm)

[www.mardigrasneworleans.com](http://www.mardigrasneworleans.com)

[www.ipanema.com/carnival/home.htm](http://www.ipanema.com/carnival/home.htm)