

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Traditional May Day Celebrations

May Day is related to the Celtic festival of Beltane and the Germanic festival of Walpurgis Night. May Day falls exactly half of a year from November 1. May Day marks the end of the uncomfortable winter half of the year in the Northern hemisphere, and it has traditionally been an occasion for popular and often raucous celebrations, regardless of the locally prevalent political or religious establishment.

As Europe became Christianised the pagan holidays lost their religious character and either changed into popular secular celebrations, as with May Day, or was merged with or replaced by new Christian holidays as with Christmas, Easter, and All Saint's Day. In the twentieth century, many neopagans began reconstructing the old traditions and celebrating May Day as a pagan religious festival again.

\*

The earliest May Day celebrations appeared in pre-Christian times, with the festival of Flora, the Roman Goddess of flowers. A more secular version of May Day continues to be observed in Europe and America. In this form, May Day may be best known for its tradition of dancing the Maypole and crowning of the Queen of the May. The day was a traditional summer holiday in many pre-Christian European pagan cultures. While February 1 was the first day of Spring, May 1 was the first day of summer; hence, the summer solstice on June 25 (now June 21) was Midsummer. In the Roman Catholic tradition, May is observed as Mary's month.

### England

Roodmas was a Christian Mass celebrated in England at midnight on May 1. Traditional



English May Day rites and celebrations include Morris dancing, crowning a May Queen and celebrations involving a Maypole. Many of these traditions derive from the pagan Anglo-Saxon customs held during the month of May meaning Month of Three Milkings. Perhaps the most significant of the traditions is the Maypole, around which traditional dancers circle with ribbons.

A good example of more traditional May Day festivities is still witnessed in Whitstable, Kent where the Jack in the Green festival was revived in 1976 and continues to lead an annual procession of morris dancers through the town on the May bank holiday.

Padstow in Cornwall holds its annual 'Obby-Oss' day of festivities. This is believed to be one of the oldest fertility rites in the UK; revellers dance with the Oss through the streets of the town and even through the private gardens of the citizens, accompanied by accordion players and followers dressed in white with red or blue sashes who sing the traditional 'May Day' song.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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### Ireland

May Day has been celebrated in Ireland since pagan times as the feast of Bealtaine and in latter times as Mary's day. Bonfires are lit to mark the coming of summer and too banish the long nights of winter. (Officially Irish May Day bank holiday is now on the first Monday in May).

### Germany



A stamp from East Germany celebrating the 100-year anniversary of International Workers Day on 1 May 1990.

In rural regions of Germany, especially the Harz Mountains Walpurgisnacht celebrations of Pagan origin are traditionally held on the night before May Day, including bonfires and the wrapping of maypoles, and young people use this opportunity to party, while the day itself is used by many families to get some fresh air. Motto: "Tanz in den Mai!" ("Dance into May!"). In the Rhineland, a region in the western part of Germany, May 1 is also celebrated by the delivery of a tree covered in streamers to the house of a girl the night before. The tree is typically from a love interest, though a tree wrapped only in white streamers is a sign of dislike.

### International Workers' Day

May Day can refer to various labour celebrations conducted on May 1 that commemorate the fight for the eight hour day. May Day in this regard is called International Workers' Day, or Labour Day. The idea for a "workers' holiday" began in Australia in 1856. May Day has become an international celebration of the social and economic achievements of the labour movement. Although the commemoration of May Day as International Workers' Day received its inspiration from the United States, the U.S. Congress designated May 1 as Loyalty Day in 1958 due to the day's perceived appropriation by the Soviet Union. Alternatively, Labor Day traditionally occur's on the first Monday in September in the United States. People often use May Day as a day for political protest.

### Sources

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CotswoldMorrisHandkerchiefs20040501\\_CopyrightKaihsuTai.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CotswoldMorrisHandkerchiefs20040501_CopyrightKaihsuTai.jpg)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stamps\\_of\\_Germany\\_\(DDR\)\\_1990,\\_MiNr\\_3323.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Stamps_of_Germany_(DDR)_1990,_MiNr_3323.jpg)  
<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/mayday/past.html>  
[http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/May\\_Day](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/May_Day)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Traditional May Day Celebrations Questions

1. The word exactly is spelt incorrectly. The correct spelling is:
  - a. exactly
  - b. exactly
  - c. excatly
  - d. ecsatly
  
2. The **main** purpose of the text is to...
  - a. persuade
  - b. inform
  - c. instruct
  - d. describe
  
3. There is a grammatical error in the second paragraph on:
  - a. Line 1
  - b. Line 2
  - c. Line 3
  - d. Line 4
  
4. There is a word incorrectly used in the section about Ireland. Is it...
  - a. latter
  - b. lit
  - c. of
  - d. too
  
5. There is a comma missing in the section about Germany. It should be...
  - a. after mountains
  - b. after motto
  - c. after tree
  - d. after dislike

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Traditional May Day Celebrations

6. In the section about International Workers' Day an apostrophe has been misused:
- Workers'
  - The day's perceived appropriation
  - Rome's
  - Occur's
7. According to the document....
- German girls give trees to people they don't like.
  - German girls wrap streamers around trees.
  - German girls receive trees wrapped in streamers on 1<sup>st</sup> May.
  - The tree isn't always from a love interest.
8. Another word for celebrations could be:
- commemorations
  - festivities
  - anniversaries
  - chocolates
9. A suitable sub-heading by the \* could be:
- May in Roman times
  - Origins
  - Midsummer
  - May Queens
10. Which of the following is true?
- In Padstow people dance in their gardens
  - In Padstow the Obby Oss plays an accordion
  - Padstow is known to have the oldest fertility rite in England
  - In Padstow people dance and sing traditional songs.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Traditional May Day Celebrations

## Skim / Scan Reading

1. Why did May lose its religious character?
2. Who was Flora?
3. Name 3 English May day Celebrations
4. Where do "Obby-Oss" revellers dance?
5. Why are bonfires lit in Ireland?
6. Why would a German girl *not* want a tree with white streamers?
7. Why do you think 1<sup>st</sup> May is often used as a day of protest?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Traditional May Day Celebrations Dictionary Task

Use a dictionary to find definitions of these words:

raucous	
prevalent	
secular	
appropriation	

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## Answers

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  - Line 1
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