

READING COMPREHENSION TASK

WHAT ARE WE CELEBRATING?



Wherever you go in the world, there are festivals and celebrations of different kinds. Some are solemn and serious, others loud and colourful. Although the ways we celebrate vary, the things we celebrate are similar.

Almost all cultures have a New Year's celebration. Western cultures celebrate New Year's Eve, the 31st of December, with fireworks displays and small family gatherings or big parties. In Brazil, people run to the beach to jump over waves and make wishes for the New Year. In China, they celebrate a Lunar New Year, which is in late January or February.

Many cultures also have spring festivals, like Holi, an Indian festival in March. People cover each other with coloured powder and have water fights. People in the UK celebrate a festival on the 1st of May called May Day by dancing around a pole. The Christian festival of Easter also has elements from ancient pagan spring rituals, like eggs and the Easter Bunny. Historically, eggs were a symbol of new life and rabbits were a symbol of fertility. The word 'Easter' comes from the old Saxon goddess of fertility, Eostre.



There are also many autumn celebrations to honour the dead. The most famous is Halloween, on the 31st of October. Like Easter, it's a mixture of Christian and pagan festivals. It coincides with the night before All Saints' Day, but now it has more in common with the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, in which people used to dress up as pagan gods or fairies and visit houses asking for offerings. Sound familiar? Mexicans celebrate it as the Day of the Dead by visiting the graves of departed loved ones and leaving gifts.

A lot of celebrations are more local and less universal, but they all have one important thing in common: the idea of bringing communities together.



READING COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

1 The article is about

- why we don't celebrate any of the same things.
- why we celebrate things differently.
- similarities in what we celebrate.

2 What does the article say about New Year celebrations?

- People in Western countries tend to celebrate on New Year's Day.
- Brazilians don't celebrate until New Year starts.
- The Chinese don't celebrate New Year on the 31st of December.

3 What is not true about Easter?

- It has mixed origins.
- It involves elements from pagan and Christian traditions.
- It's the celebration of a Saxon goddess.

4 What does the article say has had the most influence on modern Halloween celebrations?

All Saints' Day

Samhain

The Day of the Dead

5 Choose the best summary of the article.

Although there are differences in the celebrations of different cultures, there are a lot of similarities, especially the idea of uniting people.

If you look at the history of festivals, most of them are really adapted versions of ancient ones.

People around the world celebrate the same types of things in ways that say a lot about their cultures.

Find these words in the text and match them to their definitions.

gathering	•	Very small, dry particles of something, e.g. talc.
make wishes	•	To vocalise a hope for things to come true.
powder	•	Things you give to a god.
water fights	•	A long, thin, round stick standing in the ground.
pole	•	Holes where dead people are buried.
pagan	•	Play combat where people wet each other.
offerings	•	Of a religion with many gods.
graves	•	A small, informal party or meeting.

○ In pairs, say what the five pictures show and what celebrations they represent.



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.