

# 4a Reading

1 a) Check these words in the Word List:

- stand in the streets • bonfire • parade
- shallow wooden barrels • burning tar
- eye-catching costumes • fancy dress • ritual
- tall barrels • cheer and applaud

## Predicting content

Read the title of a text, then read the first and the last sentence in each paragraph. This will help you understand what the text is about.

b) Use words/phrases from Ex. 1a in the correct form to complete the paragraph. Which picture does it match?

The picture shows a night parade. People are **1** ..... watching some men dressed in **2** ..... They have **3** ..... on their heads with **4** ..... on them. Some are holding lit torches. They may want to light a **5** ..... I think it's winter time because everyone is wearing heavy clothes.

2 Read the title, then read the first and the last sentence in each paragraph. What is the text about?

Listen, read and check. What is the author's purpose?

3 Choose the best answer according to the text. Give reasons for your answers. Explain the words in bold.

- 1 People go to Allendale at New Year to
  - A walk in the countryside
  - B spend a quiet weekend
  - C see a traditional event
  - D help prepare a festival

## THE TAR BAAL

▶ The village of Allendale is nestled in the North Pennines of Northumberland, an area of outstanding natural beauty, in the north of England. It is a typical sleepy English village where normally nothing much happens except for a few visitors on country walks turning up at the weekend. But once a year that all changes and Allendale becomes a hive of activity as preparations are made for an annual festival and the arrival of flocks of visitors. Every year on the 31st December, the village is packed with people who have come to witness an ancient ritual: the Tar Barrel Fire festival, known locally as the Tar Baal.

▶ The celebration doesn't start, officially, until a quarter to midnight but hours before that, people of all ages begin to gather in the streets of Allendale. Crowds stand in the streets and the main village square in anticipation of the evening's activities. If the weather is very wintry then people wrap up in lots of thick warm clothing so as not to get too chilled while waiting for the main event to start.

▶ At around 11 pm people begin to swarm around a huge bonfire in the middle of the square. Parents lift their children onto their shoulders to make sure they get a clear view of the entertainment. Then, towards the last hour of the old year, a brass band begins to play. It is now nearly midnight and 45 Allendale men, called Guisers, balance shallow wooden barrels filled with burning tar on their heads. Each barrel can weigh as much as 35 pounds, nearly 16 kilos, quite a weight to carry on your head! The men then begin to parade through the streets of Allendale. They walk two by two with the band playing in the middle of the procession as sparks and flames from the barrels create a sea of fire. In the dark winter night, the men

are dressed in eye-catching costumes. Traditionally, they all used to dress up as court jesters from the Elizabethan era, but in more recent years the men have performed the ritual in all kinds of fancy dress. You might see a Roman gladiator or a children's cartoon character like Scooby Doo pass you by. The one thing the participants all have in common, however, is that they are from Allendale families. The right to take part in the festival as a Guiser is only ever passed down the generations from father to son. Some Guisers have performed the task for as many as fifty years.

▶ Once the Guisers have completed a circuit of the village they gather at the bonfire, or Baal, just as the clock is about to strike midnight. Then they hurl their barrels onto the fire while everyone shouts 'Be damned to he who throws last!' As the new year is welcomed in, people may break into singing the traditional New Year's song *Auld Lang Syne*, while others are content to simply warm themselves by the flames of the fire, especially if they've been standing in the cold for hours!

▶ No one knows for sure how the centuries old tar barrel festival began. With no documented evidence to give proof of its origins, the only explanation for the spectacle is in local folklore, which has linked the event to the invasion of Vikings from Scandinavia in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, as well as a pagan belief in fire gods.





## unit 4a

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1. stand in the streets:
2. bonfire:
3. parade:
4. shallow wooden barrels:
5. burning tar:
6. eye-catching costumes:
7. fancy dress:
8. ritual:
9. hurl barrels:
10. cheer and applaud:
11. nestle:
12. outstanding:
13. ancient ritual:
14. gather:
15. in anticipation of:
16. swarm:
17. brass band:
18. shallow:
19. procession:
20. court jester:
21. gladiator:
22. complete a circuit:
23. hurl:
24. spectacle:
25. invasion: