Carnival

There are many festivals and celebrations around the world throughout the year. However, carnival is one of the most famous and flamboyant festivities. Many carnivals take place in the build-up to the religious season of Lent. Lent happens during the six weeks before Easter Sunday, when people prepare for the death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, the majority of carnivals take place during February. Lent is a time when, traditionally, people give up something that they will find difficult. This could be a type of food or a bad habit that they want to try to stop.

Carnivals differ from place to place as many areas focus on their own traditions and pastimes and are often heavily influenced by the culture of their country. In most countries, carnival is often characterized by masks, flamboyant costumes, music and colourful floats and parades. Some carnivals have special trinkets or symbols. In New Orleans, they have sweet and very colourful cakes called King Cakes as a symbol of their carnival (Mardi Gras).

The most famous and largest carnival in the world takes place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Carnival in Brazil is not just a fun celebration, but a chance to experience the diverse culture of the country. Brazil is often referred to as a 'melting-pot' of culture. There are many European, African and American influences in Brazilian society. Carnival epitomises the Brazilian way of life and their way of thinking. There are many parties, which take place throughout the day and during the night, celebrating the songs, music and dances, typical of Brazilian culture. The most popular form of music and dancing at the Rio carnival is samba, a style unique to Brazil, which is often played on drums with traditional dancing. The 'Sambódromo' is an avenue, specially made to host carnival in Rio. Every year, thousands of people go to this area to celebrate carnival, including over 500,000 foreign visitors!

Although carnival is linked to religious faith and traditions, it is a time of fun, excess and flamboyance, enjoyed by millions across the world.

Carnivals in Europe

There are several carnivals in Europe, for example:

Cadiz is where the largest Spanish carnival takes place. It is heavily influenced by local traditions along with current and political events. Like Rio, there are parades and floats with lots of music.

Nice, in France, is a carnival that is heavily influenced by Catholic traditions. People indulge in lots of rich food in the build up to Lent. One of the most popular street celebrations is the Battle of the Flowers, where there are lots of floats and costumes, brimming with plants and flowers.

Cologne is the principal carnival city in Germany. The carnival season actually begins in November here and culminates the week before (and including) Shrove Tuesday. There are lots of parades and people dress up - even at work and school. It is one of Germany's most important cultural events.

Questions

1. a) When do most carnivals take place?

   b) Why do you think this time of year is chosen?

2. What does the word flamboyant mean?

3. Where do they celebrate Mardi Gras and what is an important symbol of this carnival?

4. Why do you think Brazil is sometimes referred to as a 'melting-pot' of culture?

5. Why is carnival so important to Brazil?

6. What is different about carnival season in Germany and most other countries?

7. Why do you think carnivals are so popular across the world and attract so many visitors?

8. Why do you think people give something up for Lent?

9. The text says that carnivals are often characterised by masks, flamboyant costumes, music and colourful floats and parades. What does this mean?

10. Imagine you have attended a carnival. Describe in three paragraphs, what you have seen, heard and experienced. Use as much detail as possible.

Answers

1. **a) When do most carnivals take place?**

   Most carnivals take place in February, in the build up to Lent

   b) Why do you think this time of year is chosen?

   Most carnivals take place in February, in the build up to Lent. There can be various answers to the second part of the question, however, look for answers alluding to the fact that Lent is a time of fasting and going without, so there are flamboyant and loud celebrations before this time.

2. **What does the word flamboyant mean?**

   Flamboyant means extremely colourful and over-the-top.

3. **Where do they celebrate Mardi Gras and what is an important symbol of this carnival?**

   Mardi Gras is celebrated in New Orleans, and an important symbol is the King Cakes, which are sweet colourful cakes.

4. **Why do you think Brazil is sometimes referred to as a 'melting-pot' of culture?**

   Brazil is often referred to as a 'melting-pot' of culture due to the diverse population and cultural influences on society. There are many different cultures and ethnicities living there which influences their varied culture and traditions.

5. **Why is carnival so important to Brazil?**

   Carnival is so important in Brazil because it is a reflection of their way of life and gives people the opportunity to experience Brazilian culture.

6. **What is different about carnival season in Germany and most other countries?**

   Carnival season in Germany begins in November whereas most other countries have carnival in February as that is just before Lent.

7. **Why do you think carnivals are so popular across the world and attract so many visitors?**

   Various answers, such as the fact they are a spectacle, are lots of fun, they happen once a year. Also answers discussing the fact that people can celebrate the traditions of their country and enjoy singing, dancing and a sense of freedom.

Answers

8. **Why do you think people give something up for Lent?**
   Often people give up something for Lent as it is a religious tradition, to prepare for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

9. **The text says that carnivals are often characterised by masks, flamboyant costumes, music and colourful floats and parades. What does this mean?**
   This means that these are the different things that make up a carnival and that you will see if you are at a carnival.

10. **Imagine you have attended a carnival. Describe in three paragraphs, what you have seen, heard and experienced. Use as much detail as possible.?**
    Various answers