

Mardi gras

Carnival Time

Background information

Mardi gras, or Shrove Tuesday, is an annual celebration. It is also called, *le carnaval* or Carnival Time.

The traditional colours of Mardi gras are:

| French | English | Symbolising |
|-----------|---------|-------------|
| Le violet | purple | justice |
| Le doré | gold | power |
| Le vert | green | faith |

The colours originate from 1872 when the Grand Duke Alexis Romanoff of Russia visited New Orleans. It is believed that he went to find an actress called Lydia Thompson. During his stay he was asked to select the official Mardi gras colours. These colours are still used all around the world today.

An official Mardi gras flag is flown during Carnival season outside the homes of past Carnival Kings and Queens.

Origins

Mardi gras has its origins some time in the 2nd Century. During mid-February the ancient Romans would observe '*Lupercalia*', a circus type festival quite similar to the Mardi gras celebrations of today. From Rome, celebrations spread all over Europe.

In French, Mardi gras literally means 'Fat Tuesday'. This is because it falls on the day before Ash Wednesday, the last day prior to Lent, a 40-day period of fasting which ends on Easter Sunday.



The word *carnaval* comes from the Latin 'take off the flesh'. People would make the most of eating fatty foods before fasting for Lent began. You were also supposed to make fun of everything and everyone during this time, hidden behind a mask or disguise!

The slogan for Mardi gras is, '*Laissez les bons temps rouler*' translated, 'Let the good times roll'.

One of the biggest Mardi gras celebrations in France is held in Nice. People line the streets in carnival costumes and there are many floats decorated with flowers and street processions.

Records show that in the year 1294, the Comte de Provence Charles II, Duc d'Anjou began taking his holidays in Nice to join in with the Carnival celebrations. There were masked balls, masquerades, bonfires, jugglers, mimes and much more – all you needed to participate was a costume and a mask. Celebrations hit a high note in the late 19th Century at a time called the 'Belle Époque', before the World Wars.



Teaching activities

- ◆ Design a Mardi gras float for a street party.
- ◆ Design your Mardi gras costume.
- ◆ Make an invitation to a Mardi gras party.

Invitation de Lisa

Tu es invité(e) à une fête pour Mardi gras!

Rejoins-moi à ...

Date:

Heure:

Lieu:

Vocabulaire

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| un carnaval | a carnival |
| laissez les bons temps rouler | let the good times roll |
| un bal masqué | a costume ball |
| un char | a float |
| un costume | a costume |
| un défilé | a parade |
| un feu (de joie) | a bonfire |
| un masque | a mask |
| une reine | a queen |
| un roi | a king |
| une invitation | an invitation |
| rejoins-moi à la date | join me at date |
| l'heure | time |
| le lieu | place |

- ◆ Children can use the guided sheet on page 20 to imagine and record a Mardi gras celebration.
- ◆ Use the Internet to find out about how Mardi gras is celebrated in different countries.

Mardi gras



Nom:

Date:

I understand how and why Mardi gras is celebrated in France.

Imagine you are in a town in France, celebrating Mardi gras with your friends and family.

What can you see?

What can you hear?

Extension activities

- ◆ Design a Mardi gras costume in the official colours. Can you label the costume in French using the dictionary?
- ◆ Use the Internet to find out how Mardi gras is celebrated in different countries.