

THE DAY OF NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Introduction

Each country, each nation, each ethnic group has its customs, traditions and celebrations.

Traditions represent the transmission of doctrine, legends, historical facts and other legacies from generation to generation. Traditions are often intrinsic to a group of people, a nation, an ethnic group or the population of a country.

Celebrations refer to celebrations around a specific event, a festival, a commemoration, a religious holiday, etc.

Customs are similar to traditions in that they refer to practices followed by most people and enshrined by custom.

Traditions, customs and celebrations refer to the core identity of a group of people, whether it is a religious group, an ethnic group or the population of a country. They refer to specific festivals, rites, rituals, customs, usages and practices that are passed down from generation to generation. Some of them have taken on such importance that they have been consecrated by the state and entered into the calendar of certain countries. Others have been consecrated by Unesco and are listed as intangible cultural heritage by Unesco.

This workshop aims to provide an insight into the customs, traditions and celebrations of each country. It is an invitation to discover, to open up to others, to other cultures, traditions, rituals, etc., to the elements that correspond to the identity of a country, a group of people, and ethnicity...

Through the discovery of the country through its traditions, learners will be able to

- gain a clearer picture of the country
- develop a better understanding of foreign attitudes, customs and traditions
- open their minds to others
- use their creativity

Materials necessary

A flipchart with sticky dough or a whiteboard with magnets.

Photos representing a tradition, custom and celebration.

White paper with a pen, markers, coloured pencils, scissors, glue, cardboard...



Step-by-step instructions

This workshop is designed to enable learners to understand the different celebrations, traditions or customs but also to deconstruct preconceptions.

1) Create a supportive working environment:

Divide your class into a minimum of 3 groups. You can make more groups if you prefer, but this will require more materials).

2) Assign each group the different photos you have collected. One group will deal with a tradition, a custom or a celebration.

3) Give the instruction:

Explain the activity to your students:

Each group has access to several photos representing a tradition, a custom or a celebration. Each group will have to identify:

- the type of event (tradition, custom, celebration)
- the context
- the activities presented
- the meaning

Each group should prepare a short presentation of their thoughts based on the photos, their experiences and knowledge.

4) Restitution:

Each group will present the different pictures and explain what they think it represents. The other groups can interact if they do not agree with the proposal made.

To conclude the feedback, the teacher will give the correct answers to the whole group, explaining the different contents in more detail.

5) Interpretation:

Ask the pupils to draw their interpretation of what they have just heard. Each young person should make a drawing, text or create an object that reminds them of the custom, celebration and tradition they have been working on.

The aim is to be able to collect their creations and display them in the classroom for example.

It is important throughout the exercise to get young people to be respectful of each other. Do not hesitate to deconstruct preconceptions.

Examples from European and other countries

Greece

Greek Christmas and New Year

Greeks love their family get-togethers, traditions, delicious food, and Orthodox Christian rituals. Greeks (in Greece) don't just decorate Christmas trees but boats too. Christmas traditions in Greece officially last for 14 days. Starting on Christmas Eve and ending on Epiphany (January 6) with the 'Great Blessing of Water'. According to the Gregorian calendar, the Greek Orthodox Church celebrates Christmas on December 25. Greeks around the world attend Greek Orthodox churches on Christmas Eve for a 2-hour liturgy. Christmas is not as important for Greeks as Orthodox Easter is.

When December arrives, Greek homes begin to be filled with the amazing aroma of cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, honey, walnuts and more. Greek housewives compete to see who will bake the best Kourabiedes and Melomakarona Christmas cookies for the festive season.

Kourabiedes and Melomakarona Christmas Cookies

When December arrives, Greek homes begin to be filled with the amazing aroma of cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, honey, walnuts and more. Greek housewives compete to see who will bake the best Kourabiedes and Melomakarona Christmas cookies for the holiday season. Greek housewives will send cookies to family and relatives' homes along with other sweets. The main ingredients of *melomakarona* and *kourabiedes* are oil, honey, cinnamon, walnuts, cloves, egg, butter, and orange zest which are Greece's most famous food products. Even though today these honey cookies are connected with Christmas time, in ancient times Greeks would eat them as an everyday dessert.





Kourabiedes and Melomakarona / Adobe stock images

'Christopsomo' Christ Bread

Christopsomo (Christ bread) is a round loaf that is a traditional Christmas tradition in Greece. Christopsomo dates back to the Ottoman era and is still part of the traditional festive meal that is a key element of Greek Christmas traditions. Though the decoration varies by location and is tailored to depict the lives and work of the homes, every Christopsomo has a dough cross in the centre, as well as almonds and nuts strewn on top to symbolise prosperity. The bread has the symbolic meaning of bringing a fruitful year to the household. Christopsomo is served on Christmas Eve night and Christmas Day.



Christopsomo - Greek Christmas Bread / Wikimedia commons

Vasilopita

Vasilopita, which translates to Saint Basil's pie, is a traditional New Year's Day dessert. Every Vasilopita has a coin hidden inside; the family head cuts the pie into pieces, and whoever discovers the coin is

considered to have a prosperous year ahead of them. This practice stems from the legend that citizens of Cappadocia gathered money and jewellery to pay a tax to the region's oppressive prefect. Saint Basil was able to persuade the prefect to relieve the locals from having to hand over their valuables. Because they didn't know how to return the items to their respective owners, the villagers took Saint Basil's suggestion and baked little pies. The jewellery and money were then miraculously placed into the pies, and each person received their personal valuables.



Wikipedia School vasilopita / Wikimedia Commons

Karavaki, decorating a Boat in Greece

The tradition of decorating Christmas trees was first introduced to Greece in 1833. Bavarian Prince Otto, who was ruling the country at the time (1832-1862), decorated the first Christmas tree in his castle in Nafplio in the Peloponnese. According to historians, Christmas trees were only visible in upper-class homes for the following few decades. The tradition only became universally popular after World War II. It was far more typical for Greek families to decorate a small boat before that. The illuminated boat represents a love and respect for the sea, as well as the expectation of reunion with seafaring relatives and bringing loved ones home, as Greece is a maritime nation.

'Kalanta' Greek Christmas Carols

On Christmas Eve, doorbells start ringing as early as 7 a.m. in homes all around Greece. Children holding musical triangles wait for permission to begin singing traditional Christmas carols on the porch (kalanta). Greek Christmas carols begin with the story of Christ's birth, then move on to prayers for the household and the people who live there, and finally, the children's desire for a symbolic present. The lady of the house frequently gives the children a sweet treat like a melomakarono or kourabie cookie in addition to a generous cash tip.



Triangles / Adobe stock photos

Epiphany 'The Blessing of Water'

Epiphany (January 6), also known as Theophany or Ta Fota (meaning "lights") in Greece, commemorates Saint John the Baptist's baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River. Priests perform the water blessing after the Divine Liturgy. A cross is thrown into the sea, river, or lake by priests, and a group of men dive into the water to retrieve it. It is stated that whoever finds the cross first will be blessed for a year and that the water is cleansed after the ceremony.



Epiphany / Adobe stock photos

Greek Easter

Easter holiday in Greece is linked with the Lent period, which starts right after the **Carnival festivities** on “**Clean**” **Monday**, usually spent outdoors. Families and friends go to the countryside, **fly kites** and start Lent with a rich Clean Monday meal.

There are some special traditions surrounding Lent, the period of fasting for 40 days leading up to Greek Easter. Most Greeks follow the Orthodox Christian belief system. Religion and tradition in Greece have it that **Lent** should last **40 days** and involve refraining from all animal products. According to Lent traditions, one is supposed to abstain from eating all by-products and animals with blood. This includes fish, beef, chicken, pork, lamb, turkey, eggs, dairy, etc. Alcohol and olive oil are to be avoided as well. What is left is a diet high in plant foods such as pulses, cereals, vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds. This tradition goes back to Judaeo Christians and then to Byzantium. It was taboo for the Jewish people to eat meat and consequently red blood. The rationale behind this strict fasting period is that the body must be cleansed as well as the spirit in preparation for accepting communion on Easter Day to celebrate Christ’s resurrection from the dead. The meaning of fasting is also for the Orthodox Christians to obey God and to fight against the devil.

Easter, or Pascha in Greek, is the most important religious holiday of the Orthodox Church marking the resurrection of Christ and the chance of rebirth for mankind. Many of the customs practised in Greece at Easter originated in the very distant past and were later adapted as Christianity spread, taking on religious significance.

More specifically, the week leading up to Easter Sunday “Holy Week” is full of traditions:

Holy Thursday

Easter preparations begin on Holy (or Great) Thursday. This is when the traditional Easter bread, *tsoureki*, is baked and eggs are dyed red to represent the blood of Christ. From ancient times, the red eggs have been a symbol of the renewal of life, carrying the message of victory over death.

In times gone by, superstitions grew into customs. These include placing the first red egg at the home's *iconostasis* (the place where icons are displayed) to ward off evil. It also involved marking the heads and backs of small lambs with red dye to protect them. On the evening of Holy Thursday, church services include a symbolic representation of the crucifixion and the period of mourning begins. In many villages and cities, women will sit in church throughout the night in traditional mourning.



Red easter egg / Adobe stock images

Holy Friday

The holiest day of the week is Holy (or Great) Friday. It is a day of mourning and not one of work. It is also the only day of the year when the Divine Liturgy is not read. Flags are hung at half-mast and church bells ring all day in a slow, mournful tone.

Many devout people do not cook on Holy Friday. If they do, traditional foods are simple and only those that can be boiled in water (not oil) and seasoned with vinegar. Beans or thin soups like *tahinosoupa* (a soup made with tahini) are quite common. Traditionally, women and children take flowers to the church to decorate the *Epitaphio* (the symbolic bier of Christ). It is the day for the Service of Lamentation, which mourns the death of Christ.

The bier is decorated lavishly with flowers and bears the image of Christ. During the service, it is carried on the shoulders of the faithful in a procession that runs through the community to the cemetery and back. Members of the congregation follow, carrying candles.

Holy Saturday

On Holy (or Great) Saturday, the Eternal Flame is brought to Greece by a military jet and is distributed to waiting priests who carry it to their local churches. The event is always televised and if there's a threat of bad weather or a delay, the entire country agonizes until the flame arrives safely.

On the morning of Holy Saturday, preparations begin for the next day's Easter feast. Dishes that can be prepared in advance are made. The traditional *mayiritsa* soup, which uses the organs and intestines of the lamb that will be roasted, is prepared. This will be eaten after the midnight service. The midnight



Service of the Resurrection is an occasion attended by everyone who is able, including children. Each person holds a white candle that is only used for this service.

The special candles that are made for Easter are called *labatha* (*lah-BAH-thah*). They are often given to children as gifts from their parents or Godparents. Though the candle itself is typically white, it can be lavishly decorated with the children's favourite heroes or storybook characters. They may reach as high as three feet tall.

The crowds are so big that churches fill to overflowing as anticipation mounts. Shortly before midnight, all lights are extinguished, and the churches are lit only by the Eternal Flame on the altar.

When the clock passes midnight, the Priest calls out "*Christos Anesti*" (*khree-STOHSS ah-NES-tee*, "Christ is risen") and passes the flame (the light of the Resurrection) to those nearest him. The flame is then passed from person to person, and it isn't long before the church and courtyard are glowing with flickering candlelight.

The night air is filled with the singing of the Byzantine Chant "*Christos Anesti*," and the "*fili tis Agapis*" ("kiss of Agape"). Friends and neighbours exchange "*Christos Anesti*" with one another as a way of wishing one another well. In response, they will say "*Alithos Anesti*" (*ah-lee-THOHSS ah-NES-tee*, "truly, He is risen") or "*Alithinos o Kyrios*" (*ah-lee-thee-NOHSS o KEE-ree-yohss*, "true is the Lord").

As soon as "*Christos Anesti*" is called out, it is also the custom for church bells to ring joyously non-stop. Ships in ports all over Greece join in by sounding their horns, floodlights are lit on large buildings, and large and small displays of fireworks and noisemakers are set off.



HolySaturdayGospel.jpg / Wikimedia commons

The Traditional Meal

It is the custom to carry the Eternal Flame home and use it to make the sign of the cross in soot on the door frame. The soot cross is left there throughout the year, symbolizing that the light of the Resurrection has blessed the home. The candles are used to light icon candelabra and are put on the table for the midnight meal. The sight of hundreds of candle flames moving from churches to homes on that night is indeed beautiful.

Once home, everyone gathers around the table for a traditional meal to break the fast. This includes the mayirtsa soup, tsoureki (sweet bread), and red eggs, which were prepared earlier. Before the eggs are eaten, there's a traditional challenge called *tsougrisma*. Holding your egg, you tap the end against the end of your opponent's egg, trying to crack it. It's a game enjoyed by children and adults alike. Eggs are often made in very large quantities since the game continues the next day with even more friends and family.

Easter Sunday

The main focus of Easter Sunday is on traditional Greek Easter foods. At dawn (or earlier), the spits are set to work and grills are fired up. The customary main attraction of the day is a whole roasted lamb or goat (kid) to represent the Lamb of God. However, many prefer oven and stovetop lamb or kid dishes.

Appetisers, such as Greek olives and tzatziki (a cucumber yoghurt dip), are served for guests to enjoy while watching the lamb cook on the spit. Ovens are filled with traditional accompaniments and all the trimmings, such as *patatesournou* (potatoes roasted with citrus and oregano) and *spanakotyropita* (spinach and cheese pie).

Great Greek wines, ouzo, and other drinks flow freely. Preparations for the meal turn into festive celebrations, even before the eating begins. The meal is a lengthy affair, often lasting long into the night, sometimes up to four hours.



Roasted lamb / Adobe stock images

Easter Monday

Another national holiday, Easter Monday is a day to take things slowly. It may be more casual, but it is definitely a day filled with delicious leftovers and a time to relax from all the previous celebrations.

Jamales - Carnival Festival in Ioannina

Ioannina is one of the four cities in Epirus. It is the capital of the homonymous prefecture and a lively city of more than 100,000 inhabitants. This busy and friendly town lies at an altitude of 475m, in the middle of agricultural plains, with cereal and tobacco crops. The city is fascinating, ideal for vacation throughout the year. Ioannina has everything; important archaeological sites; a lake and a small island in its middle, surrounded by mountains; intense nightlife; and exquisite traditional cuisine. Ioannina still has cobblestone streets and interesting architecture, where the Orient meets the neoclassical style. In winter, the area is usually under a veil of snow. In spring, there is a feast of colours, while in summer the lake is ideal for boat trips and visits to the island. What is exceptionally captivating about this city though is the festival of Jamales to celebrate Carnival.

Jamales is a custom which originates from the time of Turkish occupation and revives in beautiful Ioannina every year on Carnival! It starts in the evening of Sunday of Tyrini with the lighting of a large fire in every neighbourhood of Ioannina and continues around the flames until the morning of Kathara Monday, with dances, songs, plenty of treats and warm bean soup. This custom is somewhat... competitive, as each neighbourhood tries to have the best Jamala! In total over 60 neighbourhoods in Ioannina compete for who will succeed in celebrating the most around their Jamala every year! The preparation starts three days prior to the festival itself, so that in each district the wood reaches the neighbourhood and is placed appropriately to create a huge bonfire. Around Jamales, according to the custom, a big all-night feast is set up, with dancing, wine and warm bean soup. The masqueraders dance around the fire, in double and triple rows until the early hours of the morning. Every neighbourhood of Ioannina and every village in the Prefecture of Ioannina has its own Jamala. The most popular tzamales are of Karavatia, the castle, in Lakomata, Platanakia and Loutsas. However, the one which attracts the most visitors and locals is the fire inside the castle where, from early afternoon until late at night, young people dance initially to traditional dances and later turn the area into an outdoor club. The word Jamala remains uninterpreted. Some claim it is of Arvanitiki descent while others believe it is Turkish.





Jamales fire / Adobe stock images

France

14 of July

14 July in France is a national day of celebration and has been since 1880.

Although 14 July is generally associated with the taking of the Bastille in 1789, it is in fact 14 July 1790, the Fête de la Fédération, which has been officially commemorated in France for over a century.

This festival commemorates the storming of the Bastille and the popular uprising of 14 July 1789 or "the awakening of liberty" (Victor Hugo), symbolising the end of absolute monarchy. But it also commemorates the first national and widely accepted Federation Day on 14 July 1790: the last great demonstration of national unity, a burst of joy between the throes of the "Great Fear" and the hardest period of the Revolution.

The storming of the Bastille is a central event of the French Revolution. Indeed, on 14 July 1789, the people rose up to overthrow the monarchy following the economic crisis caused by the poor harvests and financial problems of the time.





14 of July / Adobe stock images

It was not until 1880 that 14 July became a bank holiday. For this celebration, a central place was given to the army with the setting up of a military parade on French and Parisian emblematic places. Nowadays, the parade takes place on the Champs Elysées.



French celebration / Adobe stock images

A night show takes place in the major cities of France in the form of fireworks. More precisely, it is a pyrotechnic show of sound and light. In the capital, the fireworks take place in the vicinity of the Eiffel Tower.





French celebration / Adobe stock images

At a more local level, in towns and villages, the fire brigade organises a popular ball on the evening of 14 July or the old one. These balls offer the inhabitants a moment of conviviality and pleasure. Each region celebrates using traditional local music groups or brass bands (Bandas in the south of France).

Fête de la musique

The Fête de la Musique, also known as World Music Day or Make Music Day, is a global celebration of music held annually on June 21st. The event was first established in France in 1982 by the French Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, and music director Maurice Fleuret. They aimed to encourage the people of France to participate in and enjoy music, both as performers and audience members.

The concept behind the festival is simple: to promote music by allowing amateur and professional musicians to perform in public spaces for free, thereby making all genres of music accessible to everyone. The festival takes place on the day of the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, which symbolises the abundance of music and culture in our lives.

Over the years, Fête de la Musique has gained international recognition and is now celebrated in more than 120 countries worldwide. Each country, city, and community organizes its unique festivities, which may include street concerts, open mic nights, music workshops, and special performances in venues like museums, parks, and train stations.

The event showcases a wide variety of music styles, from classical and jazz to rock, hip-hop, electronic, and world music. It encourages collaboration and cultural exchange among musicians, as well as fostering a sense of unity and togetherness through the universal language of music.

One key aspect of the Fête de la Musique is its inclusivity, as it invites people of all ages, backgrounds, and skill levels to participate. This democratic approach to music helps break down barriers, allowing people to connect with and appreciate diverse musical expressions



Latvia

Midsummer (Jāņi)

When the day is longest and the night is shortest, at the summer solstice, Latvians celebrate Līgo evening (June 23) and Jāņi day (June 24), staying awake around bonfires or burning barrels raised high on poles.

When German crusaders arrived on the shores of the Baltic Sea in the 12th century, they were taken aback by the scale of the festivities taking place around the bonfires on the night of Jāņi. The celebration used to take place during the longest day and the shortest night of the year, June 21. The Christianization of Latvia moved the date of Jāņi day forward to June 24, St. John's Day.

In the Latvian farmer's calendar, Jāņi marks the first haymaking and follows the beginning of astronomical summer. Traditions include the conclusion of spring labours, weeding, tending flowerbeds, learning folk songs, cleaning and tidying the home, making a special Jāņi cheese in the shape of the solar disk, brewing beer, baking pīrāgi (pies), and on the day preceding the festivities – decorating the farmstead with birch boughs, bouquets of flowers, garlands, oak branches and wreaths.

Of the seasonal ancient Latvian celebrations, the summer solstice has most fully retained traditional activities that include preparations awaiting the great day. Scholars of religion connect Jāņi to solar cults and fertility rites. The birch boughs and flowers, the gathering of specific, magical plants, the dancing and the sexual symbolism in folk songs make the erotic content of the festival clear.

During the Līgo evening, fires are lit and burned from sunset until the next morning. This practice reflects the belief that light from the fires will transmit to the next solar year. Jumping over the fire is said to bring the best of luck and well-being through the coming year.

Singing has a central place in the celebration. Jāņi is the most loved Latvian holiday. Līgo is also known as the Day of Grasses as the brief summer brings different plants to the peak of bloom.

Jānis used to be the most popular Latvian personal name for almost 100 years (1918-2000). In the Līgo evening everyone called Jānis wears a wreath made from oak leaves, whereas women and girls wear wreaths made from flowers, grasses and herbs.





Girl with flowers / Adobe stock images



Fire / Adobe stock images

Winter solstice (Winter Festival)

The Winter Solstice, called “Ziemassvētki”, literally the “Winter Festival”, is celebrated on the shortest day and the longest night of the year. Over the centuries old pagan traditions have blended and mixed with the Christian ones.

Christmas Eve is also called Log Night (Yule Night), when people rolled the Yule Log from one farm to another and eventually burned it. Burning of the Yule Log symbolizes the beginning of a new solar year and the Sun itself.

Other Winter Solstice traditions include going to the sauna, a nine-course meal, which ensures a prosperous next year, dressing up in special costumes (iet budēļos, ķekatās, čigānos), fortune telling and giving gifts.

The fir tree has a special role; it comes from the ancestral tree of life that was brought into the house. People were gently whipped with its branches in order to have blessings, vitality and health. The fir



tree is also associated with fire and light magic, combining two of our ancestral traditions – living branch and fire blessing.

Throughout the world, just like the whole of Christmas, decorating a Christmas tree is related to pagan winter solstice rituals. It was not always a fir tree that was decorated - our ancestors also used to bring branches of juniper into the house.

Rīga is recognised as the birthplace of the first Christmas tree, put up and decorated as early as 1510 by some accounts. However, the fir tree as the main Christmas adornment for every family in Latvia was introduced at the beginning of the 20th century.

The first Christmas trees were decorated with simple and beautiful edible things – nuts sprinkled with flour, apples, sugar cubes and gingerbread. Cones, paper flowers and pine splints wrapped in red threads were also used. As decorations for the fir tree's branches, colourful threads, straws, birds' eggs, fruit, vegetables, plain chips and dried flowers were used.

Especially popular was the ornament puzurs. It was made from strung straws which were enriched with different colourful cloths or birds' feathers. The houses were also decorated with a potato into which straws were stuck. Such a formation was called the sun (saulīte). The decorations most often were made by children who put in their love and the purity of a child's heart. That is why such creations had special energy.

One of the almost mandatory dishes for the Christmas table is grey peas (pelēkie zirņi) with bacon. The tradition of cultivating grey peas in Latvia dates back to at least the 18th century. Peas, barley and beans long constituted diet staples, and they remained important up until the introduction of the potato in the 19th century. Nowadays grey peas with bacon are referred to in tourist guidebooks as a specifically Latvian dish that is worth sampling. Latvian large grey peas have been enlisted in the European Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) list since 2015.



Yule Log and Ivy bands / Wikimedia commons

Poland

Andrzejki (St Andrew's Day)

“Poles also have a unique way of celebrating St Andrew's Day (30 November, although the festivities can kick off on the evening of 29 November). The festivities include a whole variety of fortune-telling games, including pouring candle wax through a keyhole into cold water to create a wax figurine whose shape is then used to foretell the future. Key to the occasion is the tradition of predicting the likelihood of marriage with the amusing shoe race, in which everyone in the room takes off their shoes and lays them across the floor, one pair after another, starting at the wall furthest from the door. The first pair of shoes to cross the threshold means wedding bells for the owner.”

<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/poland/articles/7-traditions-only-poles-can-understand/>



Old key / Adobe stock images

Śmingus-Dyngus: Poland National water fight day (Wet Monday, Dyngus Day)

It is a Polish Easter Monday tradition which, in short, involves people throwing copious amounts of water at each other. The tradition most likely goes back to the 14th century, but it likely also has pre-Christian origins connected to the March equinox and the coming of spring – water being a symbol of life and renewal. Similar traditions can be found all around Central and Eastern Europe, with Поливаний понеділок (Watering Monday) in Ukraine, Oblévačka in Czech, Oblievačka in Slovakia and Vízbevető in Hungary. It's also known as “Dyngus Day” in Polish communities outside Poland.

Today Śmigus-Dyngus, has turned into a full-blown national water fight. It not only involves just young boys and girls. It can involve anyone. You may be just an innocent passerby, but you, too, could be soaked from head to toe. Śmigus-Dyngus has become a free-for-all: water guns, water bottles and water balloons from above. You never know where the water is going to come from! In some cases, even fire trucks have been known to join in the festivities. <https://culture.pl/en/article/smigus-dyngus-polands-national-water-fight-day>



Water fight / Adobe stock images

The drowning of Marzanna

On the first day of spring, Poles celebrate the departure (or demise) of winter by the ‘Drowning (and sometimes burning) of Marzanna’. This tradition is rooted in the pre-Christian sacrificial rites of Slavic Pagans. Marzanna is the Polish name for a Slavic goddess associated with death, winter and nature.

The Marzanna doll is traditionally made of straw and white canvas and decorated with colourful ribbons. Locals create her likeness using straw, old clothing and even accessories like a headscarf. They then literally throw ‘winter’ into a lake or a river to drown. The practice is symbolic of sending the winter away and preparing nature for spring and its rebirth. Often, singing or the reciting of old verses accompany the procession: “Marzanna, Marzanna, swim across the seas. Let flowers bloom, and fields turn green”. The Marzanna tradition is still popular in some parts of Poland, mainly in the countryside.

<https://culture.pl/en/article/7-confusing-polish-customs>; <https://www.trafalgar.com/real-word/7-unique-polish-traditions/>



Drowning of Marzanna / *Wikimedia commons*

Presentation and discussion of 3 selected traditions and celebrations in Poland (Andrzejki, Śmingus-Dyngus, The drowning of Marzanna)

1. Learning traditions and celebrations by students

Division of students into groups

Group tasks:

- Introduce selected Polish tradition and celebration through drama (pupils play drama and other children guess what tradition it is and what has been shown)
- Pupils prepare a poster advertising one of the Polish traditions or celebrations if it were to take place in their area and culture. They develop a picture and guidelines for participants - what they should prepare, how to dress and what they should bring with them.
- Pupils write an invitation to a Polish celebration – this should include: “Who will you invite, how will you encourage them to participate? What will be the most interesting for you? Why is it worth getting to know the customs and traditions of other countries?”

2. Tasks related to individual traditions

a. St. Andrew's Day

Task: Write your fortune for next year. Provide an image that expresses this fortune-telling as a dream. What would you like to come true? What are you dreaming about?

b. Dyngus Day

Question to reflect: do you know a similar game to Dyngus in your culture? What do you like about this tradition?

c. The drowning of Marzanna

Task: Design your Marzanna using materials prepared by the teacher (blotting paper, coloured paper, fabric, scissors, scotch tape, string) (the task can be individual or group)

- Why is it worth saying goodbye to winter and welcoming spring? What could it mean, value?



Spain

Reyes Magos (King's Day)

The celebration of King's Day or the Día de los Reyes Magos begins the day before, on January 5th. In towns and cities across Spain, parades are held. The three Kings - Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar, are welcomed with fanfare. Alcoy, in Alicante, has the longest-running parade, dating back to 1885. As the parade passes by, sweets are thrown to the spectators. The three kings or wise men, bring gifts to children while they are sleeping the night of the 5th. Children leave out shoes for the Kings to put their gifts in.



Dia de reyes / Adobe stock images

In preparation for Kings' Day, children write letters to the kings and leave out food and beverage for the three visitors and their camels. According to tradition, children who have been good receive presents and those who have not been good receive coal (a sweet made of sugar that looks like coal).

January 6th is a public holiday and a day for gathering with family to open gifts and share a meal. There is a traditional cake that is called the Roscón de Reyes - it is a circular sweet bread that is topped with sugar, dried fruit and a crown, and sometimes filled with cream. Hidden inside the sweet there is a figure (a king or any other figure) and a bean. Whoever gets the figure in their piece gets the crown and is to be treated as a king or queen for the day. The person who gets the bean is supposed to pay for the roscón.



Roscon de Reyes /Adobe stock images

Diada de Sant Jordi (Saint George's Day)

Sant Jordi, or St. George, is the patron saint of Catalonia and the Diada de Sant Jordi, St George's Day, is a festive occasion that, over the years, has become a celebration of Catalan culture, represented by books and roses.

The Festa de Sant Jordi is held across Catalonia on 23rd April, the day St. George died. He was under the orders of the Roman emperor Diocletian and refused to obey a command to persecute Christians, so he was martyred and decapitated. Very soon he started to be revered as a martyr and fantastical stories about him began to circulate.

The legend of Sant Jordi explains that long ago, in Montblanc (Tarragona) a ferocious dragon, capable of poisoning the air and killing with his breath, had frightened the inhabitants of the city. The inhabitants, scared and tired of the dragon's ravages and misdeeds, decided to calm him by feeding him one person a day that would be chosen randomly in a draw. After several days, the princess was the unlucky one. When the princess left her home and headed towards the dragon, Jordi, dressed in shining armour, riding a white horse, suddenly appeared to rescue her. Saint George raised his sword and stabbed the dragon, at last releasing the princess and the citizens from this turmoil. From the dragon's blood a rose-bush grew with the reddest roses that had ever been seen. Saint George, now a hero, picked a rose and offered it to the princess.

The cult of St. George spread throughout the Catalan Lands in the Middle Ages, though he was venerated as early as the 8th century. And since 1456 he has been the patron saint of Catalonia.





Green dragon with knight / Adobe stock images

The feast day has been celebrated to a greater or lesser extent since the 16th century but in the 19th century, the rise of the political and cultural movement known as the *Renaixença* saw it become the most celebrated civic, cultural and patriotic day in Barcelona and Catalonia.

We can trace the feast day's association to books from the 1920s, when Vicent Clavel i Andrés, a writer from Valencia and the director of the Cervantes publishing house, suggested organising a festival to promote books in Catalonia to the Cambra Oficial del Llibre de Barcelona and the Gremi d'Editors i Llibreters - respectively the Barcelona Official Chamber of Books and the Publishers and Booksellers Guild. They chose 7th October 1927 to hold it on.

During the International Exhibition held in Barcelona in 1929, booksellers decided to set up stalls in the streets, to present their new publications and encourage reading. The initiative was so successful they decided to change the date and establish 23rd April as Book Day because that is the day when two of the great names in the history of literature died: Cervantes and Shakespeare.

Such has been the impact of this Catalan festivity that, in 1995, UNESCO's General Assembly declared 23rd April World Book and Copyright Day.

Nowadays, on April 23rd, both Sant Jordi and Santa Jordina are celebrated, vindicating that flowers are a perfect present for both men and women, and that women don't need to be saved by a knight.



Algeria

YENNAYER (Berber New Year).

This celebration represents the Amazigh New Year in the agrarian calendar used by the Berbers. It usually takes place on 12 January of each year. In 2022, we celebrated the year 2972.

The celebration of Yannayer dates back to 950 BC when the Berber king Chachnaq I was enthroned as Pharaoh of Egypt. Yannayer is also celebrated in other parts of the world, such as the Canary Islands because the island's indigenous inhabitants are Berbers called the Guanches (Igwancien in Berber), the only Berber people who did not become Muslims.

Yennayer also marks the change of season. Indeed, this season is a sign of the end of the provisions made for the winter.

The word Yennayer comes from the composition of two Berber words: yan, which means "one", and ayyur, which means "month", so Yennayer means "the first month".

Traditionally, in Algeria, on New Year's Eve, a traditional dish is prepared for the occasion, namely couscous and sometimes even berkoukes (pasta in the form of large grains of couscous accompanied by vegetables and meat). As for the meat, it is poultry or red meat, kid or mutton, which are honoured. Traditional pancakes called "bahrir" and "s'fenj", traditional fritters, are also prepared. Dried fruits, almonds, dried figs and all kinds of sweets are laid out on the table, usually accompanied by a good mint tea.

To wish each other a happy new year, Algerians usually say "Assegas Ameggaz" which means "Happy New Year" in Amazigh.

Algerians take a great interest and affection for this festival because it has always been part of Algerian culture. Some families follow very specific rites. One of the beliefs is that cutting a child's hair is like pruning a tree at the same time to allow it to grow better.

In the Kabylia region, it is obvious that the festivities are very folkloric. Women wear their traditional clothes and Berber songs are often heard in the houses, which gives a very festive aspect to this day. However, the fact remains that other cities in Algeria celebrate Yennayer in an equally festive manner.

Every year, the whole of Algeria celebrates. The current situation due to the spread of the Coronavirus has meant that some festivities have not been able to take place or have been very limited. Nevertheless, some events were held, such as markets and exhibitions throughout the country.

Video: <https://youtu.be/RIXio8kcsYA>

Eid al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr (عيد الفطر, Feast of Breaking) is the Muslim festival marking the breaking of the fast in the month of Ramadan. It is celebrated on the first day of the month of Shawwal.

Although Eid is a common holiday for all Muslims around the world, it is not celebrated everywhere at the same time. The difference is one or two days from one country to another. Nevertheless, it remains a unanimous symbol of the triumph of the accomplishment of many hardships during the whole month.

On the eve of Aid, all Algerian families prepare various traditional cakes. It is with these same cakes that the first-morning coffee, after a long month of fasting, is taken. Cakes, gifts, clothes, most Algerian families go to great lengths to make these two days a celebration for young and old.

On the day, Algerians visit their families, bringing boxes full of cakes prepared the day before, and it is not uncommon to come home with a box as full as the one taken! An exchange of small sweets that will be eaten several days after Eid.

In addition, the Eid prayer takes place in the early morning in the mosques. Its particularity is a religious song before the prayer.

Other habits of Algerians during this holiday are to buy new clothes, mainly for the children. They also give them gifts, sometimes even a little money to make the little ones happy.

For those who have a loved one who has passed away, it is also an opportunity to visit his or her grave, a way of always including the dead in the celebration.

An alms is also set each year by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Wakfs called "Zakat el-Fitr". This year in Algeria, the Zakat is set at 120 DA per person. It is given at the end of the month of Ramadan.

Finally, on this day, people wish each other "Aid Mubarak" or "Saha Aidek", which is more common in Algeria and simply means "Happy Aid". Some people add to their wishes a typical Algerian phrase, "Taâydou bel eou el Hna", to wish each other a "Happy and healthy Aid celebration".

Thus, Aid is a festival but one that remains very much marked by piety, kindness and spirituality, a continuation of what Ramadan symbolises.





Eid al-Fitr / Adobe stock images



Eid al-Fitr / Adobe stock images



SEBEIBA



Sebiba 3 Algeria / Wikimedia Commons

Sebeiba is a big Tuareg festival organised in the region of Djanet, in the south-east of Algeria. It is a typical tribal ceremony of the Tuareg world. Every year for more than 3 millennia, during the festival of El Achoura, the various Tuareg tribes of the Tassili N'Ajjer have gathered in the oasis of Djanet to celebrate the pact of peace, the S'biba, perpetuating a tradition that goes back several thousand years.

The wise men of the Djanet Oasis determine the date of the Sebeiba.

The preparations for the Sebeiba last 8 days. It is an opportunity to organise this festival in all its aspects: choral, dance, rhythm and voice. It is real training to reach the most perfect harmony.

The women, dressed in their finest jewellery, sing Tuareg songs while the men dress in traditional costumes and wage a 'bloodless' war. Under the war songs, they challenge each other and the tension rises, but they never clash.

They celebrate the reconciliation between the nomadic peoples at the announcement of Moses' victory over the armies of Pharaoh and his death.

Video: <https://youtu.be/1D7IdP6oBhc>

