

May



About this topic – *Learn about special celebrations, traditions and superstitions associated with the month of May and test your memory and knowledge with a quiz and games.*

Resources for this topic

- Suggested session plan
- May Facts – Celebrations, Superstitions and Anniversaries
- May Facts Quiz and Answers
- May Anniversaries Matching Game
- May Word Search and Answers
- May Word Games

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Suggested session plan (one and a half hours approx.)

Whilst the plan below has been developed for face to face meetings, all the activities can be used in Virtual meetings too, using the shared screen facility on Zoom for example, and break out rooms for some activities.

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Working in small groups take turns to read aloud **May Facts – Celebrations, Traditions and Superstitions**. There will be a quiz later so encourage the children and older people to discuss what they have read.
3. Give out **May Anniversaries Matching Game** to groups as they finish 2). The aim is to match 10 events with the date that they occurred.
4. When all the groups have finished 2) collect in **May Facts** and hand out **May Quiz**
5. As groups finish the quiz, they should continue with the **May Anniversaries Matching Game**. Hand out **May Word Scramble** to groups when they have finished the **Quiz** and the **May Anniversaries Matching Game**
6. Go through the **May Quiz Answers** and the **May Anniversaries Matching Game Answers** when all the groups have finished both
7. Refreshments and finish **May Word Scramble**
8. Additional Activity if time – **May Word Games**
9. Thankyous and goodbyes - Before the children and older people leave you may wish to say something about the topic or activity you have planned for the next session. This gives everyone the opportunity to be more prepared and, if appropriate, to bring photographs or other memorabilia

May Day Celebrations, Traditions and Superstitions

May is named after the Greek goddess Maia. Traditionally May was a time of great celebration in the northern hemisphere as the weather got warmer, many flowers started to emerge and crops began to grow.

The Anglo-Saxon name for May was Tri-Milchi, in recognition of the fact that with the lush new grass cows could be milked three times a day.

Although summer does not officially begin until June, the 1st of May has traditionally marked its beginning and May Day has been celebrated all over Europe for over 2000 years. The celebrations have their origins in the Roman festival of Flora, goddess of fruit and flowers, which was held annually from April 28th to May 3rd

For our ancestors, largely in rural areas, it was a major annual festival and was celebrated throughout the country, especially on the first of May with music, dancing and games. There are a lot of traditions associated with May Day.

Washing in the early morning dew

On May morning girls would make a special point of washing their faces in the early morning dew. There is an old tale that says that May dew has magic properties that could remove spots and freckles and it was thought that anyone who had washed their face in it would have a beautiful complexion all through the year.

Garland Day

In some parts of England May 1st was known as Garland Day. Traditionally children would parade with garlands of flowers, sometimes fastened to sticks or in the shape of a cross or fixed to hoops. This was done in the hope of collecting money. Sometimes this was known as May Dolling because often a small doll was placed in the centre of the garland to represent the goddess of Spring.

There are still garland ceremonies today. For example, at Charlton-on-Otmoor, a village in Oxfordshire, a May Day festival is held involving all the children from the Primary School. It starts with a special May Day song followed by a procession to the Church. The children carry a long rope strung with garlands, as well as posies and small crosses decorated with flowers. In the Church, the flowers are displayed below the Rood Screen, above which stands a large wooden cross wrapped in yew and box leaves.



May Queen

Traditionally on May Day there was dancing on the village green, an archery contest and exhibitions of strength.

The highlight of the day was the crowning of the May Queen, the human replica of Flora. By tradition she took no part in the games or dancing but sat like a queen in a flower-decked chair to watch her 'subjects'.

Dancing - May day celebrations traditionally included Maypole dancing and Morris dancing.



Maypole dancing - On May Day, people used to cut down young trees and stick them in the ground in the village to mark the arrival of summer. People danced around the tree poles in celebration of the end of winter and the start of the fine weather that would allow planting to begin. Maypoles were once common all over England and were kept from one year to the next.

School children would practise skipping round the pole for weeks before the final show on the village greens. Many schools today have continued this tradition of Maypole dancing

The tallest maypole is said to have been erected in London on the Strand in 1661; it stood over 143 feet high. It was felled in 1717, when it was used by Isaac Newton to support Huygen's new reflecting telescope.



Another traditional dance seen throughout the month of May is **Morris Dancing**. It is a traditional English form of folk dancing, performed by groups of men or women. Morris Dancing has been danced for hundreds of years and passed down through the generations in the villages of rural England.

Morris dancers wear different clothes depending on the part of the country in which they dance. They are often dressed in white with coloured belts known as baldrics across their chests.

Other celebrations that still take place today include:



Rochester's annual Sweeps Festival in Kent celebrates the traditional holiday that chimney sweeps used to enjoy on 1st May. It was the one time of the year when the sweeps could put away their tools and have some fun.

The Sweeps Festival is a colourful mix of music, dancing and entertainment and is an opportunity to see some of the traditional

dances and hear the songs which have been passed down from generation to generation.

The oldest May Day celebration still taking place today, is the **Padstow 'Obby 'Oss** celebration in Cornwall. Its origins date back to the 14th century. Every May Day thousands of people come to see the two famous Hobby Horses, the Old Oss and the Blue Ribbon Oss. Celebrations in Padstow officially start the night before at midnight, when a group of 'mayers' meet outside the Golden Lion Inn to serenade the owner with their special Night Song.

On May Day the whole town is ablaze with bluebells, forget-me-nots, cowslips, and sycamore twigs and dancing and other celebrations take place all day.

May 29th Oak Apple Day (Pinch-Bum Day)

This is the date when people traditionally pinned oak apples or oak leaves to their clothes to remember the day that King Charles II returned triumphantly to London after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Oak apples or oak leaves were



chosen because the King had narrowly escaped capture by Cromwell's soldiers by hiding in an oak tree. Until well into the twentieth century, anyone caught not wearing an oak leaf or oak apple on 29th May could be pinched or kicked. Or another favourite punishment was whipping with nettles, hence the name '**Nettle Day**' in some areas. Oak Apple Day continues to be celebrated in some parts of England.

Oak Leaf and Oak Apple ¹

Some Superstitions about the month of May

The month of May was considered an unlucky month particularly for getting married.

'Marry in May and you'll rue the day'

Being born in May was thought to produce a sickly child.

Washing blankets in May was also thought to be extremely unlucky

Wash a blanket in May.

Wash a dear one away.

Cats born in May were thought not to be good rodent catchers and even worse, would bring snakes into the home.

There are also some myths about oak leaves' connection with rainfall which have survived from ancient times. It is said if the leaves of the ash tree open before those of the oak tree, we will be in for a wet summer but if the other way round, then it will be dry.

From Ireland

If the oak before the ash, then we'll only have a splash.

If the ash before the oak, then we'll surely have a soak!

And from Hampshire:

Ash before oak, we're in for a soak;

Oak before ash, naught but a splash.

With thanks to Mandy Barrow for permission to include much of the information above and photos from the Project Britain website

<http://projectbritain.com/mayday.htm>

Additional photograph - With thanks to Wikipedia

¹ Oak Leaf and Oak Apple - EapClochydd / CC BY-SA

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May Celebrations, Traditions and Superstitions Quiz

(20 possible points)

1. Who does the month of May get its name from? 1 point
2. What was the Anglo Saxon name for May? 1 point
3. Why did it have this name? 1 point
4. What did girls think might happen if they washed their face in the early morning dew on May Day morning? 2 points
5. Which Roman goddess is remembered with the crowning of a May Queen and what was she the goddess of? 2
6. How tall was the tallest maypole? 1 point
7. Where was it? 1 point
8. What happened to it when it was cut down? 1 point
9. What is the name given to the coloured belts that Morris dancers traditionally wear across their chests? 1 point

10.What happens in Rochester on May Day? 1 point

11.What do people still go to see in Padstow every May Day? 1 point

12.What was said to be the matter with cats that were born in May? 2 points

13.Why did people wear oak apples or oak leaves on May 29th? 1 point

14. Name three punishments which you might receive for not wearing an oak apple or leaf? 3 points

15. What sort of summer is expected if the leaves of the ash tree open before those of the oak? 1 point

May Celebrations, Traditions and Superstitions Quiz Answers

1. Who does the month of May get its name from? 1 point ***Greek goddess Maia***
2. What was the Anglo Saxon name for May? 1 point ***Tri Milchi***
3. Why did it have this name? 1 point
In May cows could be milked three times a day because of lush new grass
4. What did girls think might happen if they washed their face in the early morning dew on May Day morning? 2 points ***Spots and freckles would disappear and they would have a beautiful complexion in the year ahead***
5. Which Roman goddess is remembered with the crowning of a May Queen and what was she goddess of? 2 points ***Flora, goddess of fruit and flowers***
6. How tall was the tallest maypole? 1 point ***143 feet***
7. Where was it? 1 point ***The Strand, London***
8. What happened to it when it was cut down? 1 point
Used to support Huygen's new telescope
9. What is the name given to the coloured belts that Morris dancers traditionally wear across their chests? 1 point ***Baldrics***
10. What happens in Rochester on May Day? 1 point ***Annual Sweeps' festival***
11. What do people still go to see in Padstow every May Day? 1 point
Padstow Obby Orse celebration
12. What was said to be the matter with cats that were born in May? 2 points
Not good rodent catchers and would bring snakes into house
13. Why did people wear oak apples or oak leaves on May 29th? 1 point
To remember King Charles II returning to London in 1660 after restoration of monarchy. Charles was believed to have hidden in an oak tree to escape capture by Cromwell's soldiers
14. Name three punishments which you might receive for not wearing an oak apple or leaf? 3 points ***Could be pinched, kicked or whipped with nettles***
15. What sort of summer is expected if the leaves of the ash tree open before those of the oak? 1 point ***A wet one (Ash before oak, in for a soak)***

May Anniversaries Matching Game

Here are 10 dates and 10 events that all happened in the month of May but the order has been muddled up. Can you match the date with the correct event? Write the correct date for the event in the column on the right

9th May 1671	VE (Victory in Europe) Day	
12th May 1820	Amy Johnson was the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia	
6th May 1840	Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of Mt Everest	
28th May 1908	The world's first postage stamp, the 'Penny Black' stamp, became valid for use in the UK	
5th May 1930	Helen Sharman became the first British woman in space	
8th May 1945	Captain Blood attempted to steal the Crown Jewels	
29th May 1953	Roger Bannister ran a mile in less than four minutes	
6th May 1954	Nelson Mandela became the President of South Africa	
18th May 1991	Florence Nightingale was born	
10th May 1994	Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond books, was born	

May Anniversaries Matching Game Answers

- 9th May 1671** Captain Blood attempted to steal the crown jewels
- 12th May 1820** Florence Nightingale was born
- 6th May 1840** The world's first postage stamp, the 'Penny Black' stamp, became valid for use in the UK
- 28th May 1908** Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond books, was born
- 5th May 1930** Amy Johnson was the first woman to fly solo from England to Australia
- 8th May 1945** VE (Victory in Europe) Day
- 29th May 1953** Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of Mt Everest
- 6th May 1954** Roger Bannister ran a mile in less than four minutes
- 18th May 1991** Helen Sharman became the first British woman in space
- 10th May 1994** Nelson Mandela became the President of South Africa

May Word Scramble

1. EANSLRIBEOCT _____

2. MIOSRR RACSEDN _____

3. NLSRDAAG _____

4. LORFA _____

5. MYA QNEUE _____

6. PIITGRESNM _____

7. OYAPEML _____

8. SOEWLRF _____

9. RNDITOASIT _____

10. WEESPS FATSELIV _____

May Word Scramble Answers

1. CELEBRATIONS
2. MORRIS DANCING
3. GARLANDS
4. FLORA
5. MAY QUEEN
6. SPRINGTIME
7. MAYPOLE
8. FLOWERS
9. TRADITIONS
10. SWEEPS FESTIVAL

May Word Games

How many words of one syllable can you think of that rhyme with **MAY**?

How many words of 4 letters or more can you make out of the word **MAYPOLE**?

May Word Games Answers

Here are 20 words that rhyme with May. Can you find any more?

Bay

Bray

Clay

Day

Drey

Gay

Grey

Hay

Jay

Lay

Neigh

Pay

Play

Prey

Pray

Ray

Say

Sleigh

Way

Weigh

Here are 20 words from the word Maypole. Can you find any more?

Ample

Lame

Lamp

Leap

Loam

Lope

Male

Maple

Meal

Mole

Mope

Pale

Palm

Peal

Play

Plea

Ploy

Pole

Poem

Yelp