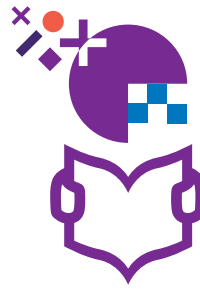


That's Interesting!



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A worksheet for adults to practise reading, writing, spelling and numbers

May Day



The first day of May or May Day as it is known, was one of four important festivals celebrated in Ireland many thousands of years ago.



The festival was known by the Irish word for May which is Bealtaine, (bow al tan a) and it was made up of May Day and the evening before it known as May Eve. It celebrated the end of dark winter evenings and the beginning of long, bright summer days.

The other festivals were Samhna (sow na) which marked the beginning of winter, today we celebrate it as Halloween, the festival of Lughnasa (Lu na sa) which marked the beginning of Autumn and the festival of Imbolc (Im bolc) which marked the beginning of Spring.

People believed that during both the May festival and the festival of Samhna (Halloween), fairies and spirits from the other world, good and evil, roamed the country. This is why many customs and traditions were carried out to protect themselves from evil and bad luck. These traditions were called piseogs, (pish og).



On May Eve, yellow flowers such as daffodils, primroses and buttercups were picked and placed outside their homes or hung over the door to ward off the evil spirits. Bonfires were lit and the flames and the ash from the fires were believed to have special powers of protection. People danced around the fires and even jumped over the flames.

It was regarded as unlucky to bring a branch of a Hawthorn tree anywhere near your home before May Day as this tree is known as the Fairy Tree. Farmers were warned never to let their animals graze outside before noon on May Day as the fairies were still roaming.

It was considered very bad luck to borrow or lend anything to anyone on these days because this would mean you would lose all your possessions before the year was out. Many believed it was unlucky to get married in May.

One of the traditions, which is still practised today in some parts of Ireland, was visiting a holy well during the May festival. People would leave personal belongings at the well, tie items to nearby trees, and pray for good health when walking around the well.

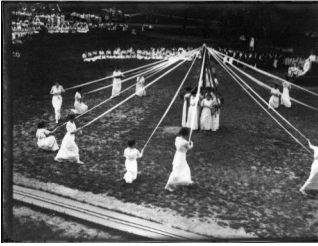


A Holy well in Ireland

The first water drawn from the well on May first was considered to have greater power than any other time of the year so it was used to wash, bless property and animals. To wash your face in water from a well on May Day morning was said to keep wrinkles away.

Today, farmers in many parts of Ireland still bless their animals, farm buildings and fields with holy water on May Eve.

However, it was also a time when people could cause harm to their neighbours or those they did not like. It was said that if eggs or raw meat were buried on any part of a person's property, a curse would be put on them. It was thought that this would cause their crops to fail or their animals to die. The curse could not be lifted until the hiding place of the eggs or meat was found.



The May Pole Dance

As far back as 900 years ago, in Britain, across Europe and in parts of America, a tradition known as the May Pole Dance was performed on 1 May. A large pole was put up which was decorated with flowers, greenery and ribbons. People danced around the pole to bring good luck and a good harvest to the community. In recent years this tradition has been revived in many countries.

In Ireland, for hundreds of years, the month of May has been regarded as “Our Lady’s Month”. Statues of Mary, the mother of Jesus, are decorated with wild flowers and the rosary said daily. Some people make a “May Altar” to Our Lady in their homes with a small statue and flowers. A special hymn in her honour “Queen of the May” is still sung in churches today.



A statue of Our Lady in Ireland



In more recent times, the first of May has become known as International Workers Day, celebrating workers’ rights and improved working conditions achieved by unions and the Labour movement over the past 200 years. It is now a bank holiday in over 80 countries across the world, including here in Ireland, where, since 1994, the first Monday in May has become a public holiday.

Words we often find hard to spell



accident	biscuit	cough	embarrass	friend	nephew
address	bicycle	enough	favourite	height	niece
believe	children	daughter	February	library	onion

Tip: To learn these words, you need to practice them.

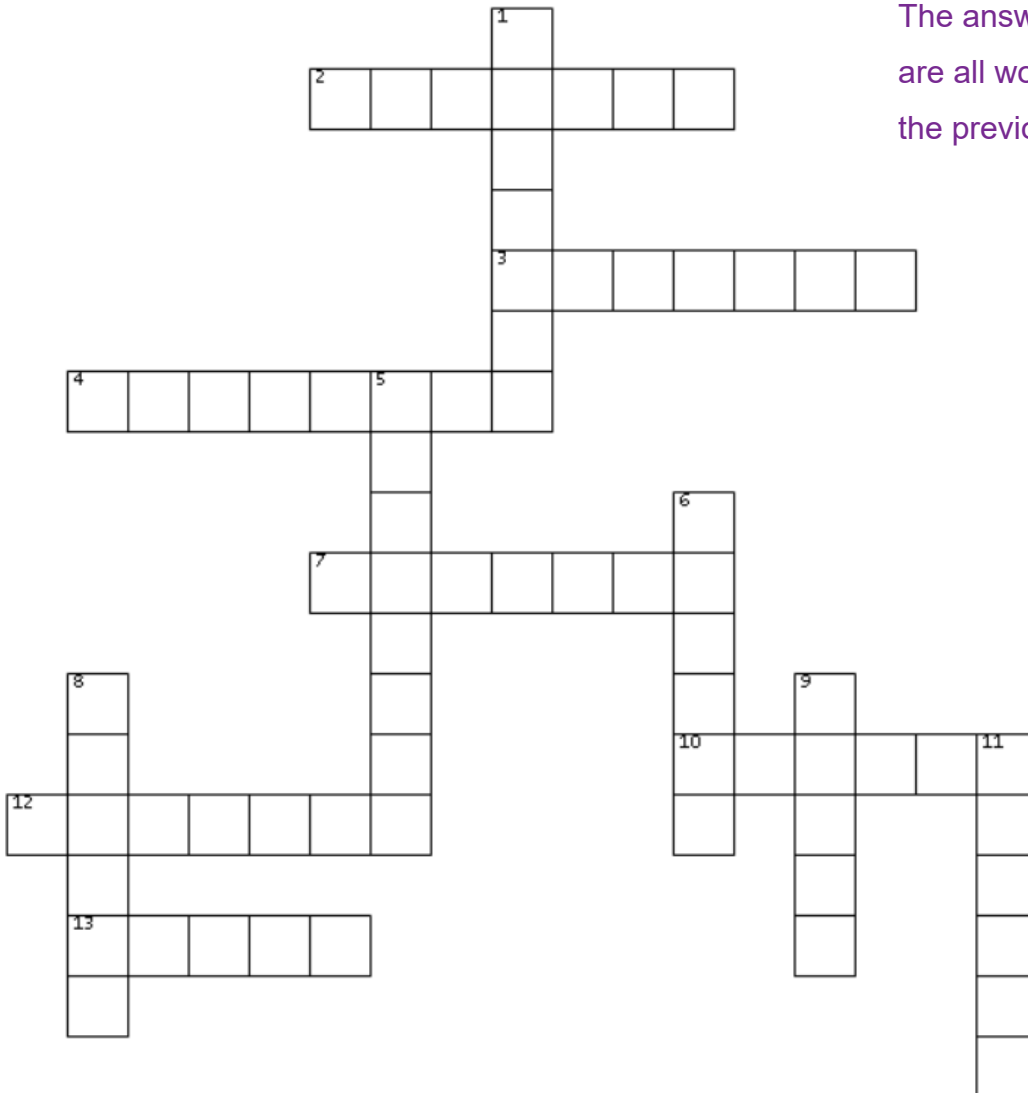
Take **three** words every day and put each in a sentence.

Example: biscuit: I like to have a biscuit with my cup of tea.

Find a word from the list above with the **same meaning** as these:

1. Where you will find a collection of books to borrow _____
2. This is the one I like best of all, it is my _____
3. The second month of the year _____
4. This is how tall you are _____
5. Another word for a pal _____
6. A two-wheel vehicle _____
7. We often refer to them as kids _____
8. When you trust someone, you really _____ in them.
9. In America they call these cookies _____
10. My sister's son is my _____
11. This is where you live _____
12. Female child _____
13. A tickle in your throat _____
14. When you cause a person to blush, you _____ them
15. This vegetable can make you cry _____

Crossword



The answers to the clues are all words from the list in the previous page.

Clues

Across

2. You can achieve anything if you _____ in yourself.
3. Please write down your name and _____
4. Valentine's Day is in this month.
7. A two-wheel vehicle.
10. Have you _____ of everything?
12. Another name for a cookie.
13. My sister's daughter.

Down

1. Where you borrow books
5. A mishap
6. I am his uncle, he is my _____
8. She is my best _____
9. I had a really bad _____ when I got the flu
11. He has grown 5 cm in _____

Notes



Further help is available

If you need help with these worksheets, or with reading, writing, maths or digital skills, you can contact the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).



Call us on Freephone **1 800 20 20 65**
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You can study online on our Learn with NALA website www.learnwithnala.ie or with a tutor over the phone or we can give details of your local centre.



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