



Read the passage comparing two cultural celebrations. Then answer the questions using evidence from the text.

Look for details about food, music, traditions, dates, origins, and the meaning behind each celebration.

Carnival vs Mardi Gras: A Tale of Two Celebrations



Around the world, people love to celebrate, and few celebrations are as vibrant as Carnival and Mardi Gras. **Both** are spectacular pre-Lenten festivals, meaning they take place in the weeks leading up to Ash Wednesday, marking the start of the Christian season of Lent. While their origins are rooted in ancient pagan spring and harvest festivals, they later blended with Christian traditions, becoming a final period of feasting and revelry before a time of fasting. Though celebrated in different parts of the world, they share a common spirit of joy and community.

Brazilian Carnival is perhaps the most famous, especially the grand spectacle in Rio de Janeiro. Celebrated typically in February or early March, it transforms cities into a whirlwind of music, dance, and colour. Samba schools spend months preparing elaborate costumes and floats for their parades, competing for top honours. Beyond the organized parades, millions take to the streets in 'blocos' (street parties), dancing samba and other rhythms. This celebration is not confined to Rio; cities like Salvador and Recife also host unique and energetic Carnival traditions, and Brazilian communities in places like London and New York often organize their own smaller-scale Carnivals.

Across the Atlantic, in the United States, Mardi Gras is most famously celebrated in New Orleans, Louisiana. Meaning 'Fat Tuesday' in French, it's the culmination of a carnival season that begins on January 6th (Twelfth Night). Unlike the samba-centric Brazilian Carnival, New Orleans Mardi Gras is characterized by 'krewes' – private social



organizations that organize parades and balls. These krewes build magnificent floats from which masked riders toss 'throws' like beads, doubloons, and toys to the crowds below. King Cakes, a sweet bread with a hidden baby figurine, are also a central tradition. While New Orleans is the epicenter, Mardi Gras is also celebrated with unique flair in other Gulf Coast cities like Mobile, Alabama, which boasts the oldest continuous Mardi Gras celebration in the U.S.

Both Carnival and Mardi Gras are known for their elaborate costumes, lively music, and parades that draw millions of spectators. **Similarly**, they both offer a chance for people to let loose, express creativity, and come together as a community before a period of reflection. **However**, their distinct cultural expressions set them apart. **While** Brazilian Carnival is globally recognized for its powerful samba rhythms and massive street dancing, **Mardi Gras** in New Orleans is famous for its unique krewes, the tradition of 'throws,' and the distinct jazz and brass band music that fills the air.

The spirit of these celebrations has spread far beyond their original borders. Diaspora communities around the globe often recreate elements of their home country's festivities, allowing new generations to connect with their heritage. For example, Brazilian Carnival-style events can be found in cities across Europe and North America, and New Orleans-style Mardi Gras parades are sometimes organized in places like Toronto or Sydney.

Both festivals have also adapted to modern times, incorporating new music genres and addressing contemporary social issues, yet they continue to serve as vital expressions of cultural identity and collective joy.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

(1) Which celebration is famous for its samba schools and blocos?

- (A) Carnival (B) Mardi Gras (C) Both (D) Neither



(2) Which celebration involves krewes and the tradition of 'throws' from floats?

- A Carnival B Mardi Gras C Both D Neither

(3) "Both Carnival and Mardi Gras are pre-Lenten celebrations." Is this a SIMILARITY or DIFFERENCE?

- A Similarity B Difference

(4) "Carnival is known for samba, while Mardi Gras features krewes and throws." Is this a SIMILARITY or DIFFERENCE?

- A Similarity B Difference

(5) Use two details from the passage to explain ONE similarity between Carnival and Mardi Gras.

(6) Why do you think people around the world celebrate in similar ways even when their traditions are different? Use the passage to support your thinking.

