



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



Carnival in Brazil and Mardi Gras in the United States are two of the world's most vibrant and well-known pre-Lenten celebrations. **Both** trace their origins to European Christian traditions, brought to the Americas by colonists, marking a final period of feasting and revelry before the solemnity and fasting of Lent. While the core idea is shared, their expressions have evolved into distinct cultural phenomena, deeply rooted in their respective regions.

Brazilian Carnival, especially the iconic celebration in Rio de Janeiro, is renowned globally for its spectacular scale and energy. Held annually in February or early March, it transforms cities into a whirlwind of music, dance, and elaborate costumes. Samba schools spend months preparing their dazzling parades, featuring thousands of performers in intricate outfits, moving to infectious samba rhythms. Beyond the official parades, millions participate in street parties known as 'blocos,' where people dance, sing, and celebrate freely, embodying a profound sense of community and national pride.

**Unlike** Carnival's city-wide street party atmosphere, Mardi Gras, particularly in New Orleans, Louisiana, has its own unique traditions. Also taking place in February or early March, Mardi Gras, or "Fat Tuesday," culminates weeks of parades organized by private social clubs known as 'krewes.' These krewes build elaborate floats from which costumed riders throw 'throws'—beads, doubloons, and other trinkets—to the crowds below. The



celebration is steeped in symbolism, with specific colors (purple for justice, green for faith, gold for power) and the tradition of King Cakes, often hiding a small baby figurine.

Societally, **both** Carnival and Mardi Gras serve as important cultural safety valves, offering a period of joyous release and temporary inversion of social norms before the spiritual reflection of Lent. They are times when communities come together, express their cultural identity, and create shared memories. Modern adaptations have seen **both** festivals become major tourist attractions, drawing millions of visitors each year, leading to increased commercialization and global media coverage. This influx of attention has, **however**, also helped preserve and promote these unique cultural expressions on a larger stage.

The influence of globalization is evident in how these celebrations are now perceived and experienced worldwide. People from diverse backgrounds travel to Brazil and New Orleans specifically for these events, contributing to a rich cultural exchange. **While** the specific rituals and aesthetics of Carnival and Mardi Gras differ significantly—from samba to jazz, from blocos to krewes—they **similarly** tap into a universal human need for collective celebration, creative expression, and a temporary escape from the everyday. They are powerful reminders of what all humans share across cultures: the desire to come together, celebrate life, and create moments of pure joy.

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#### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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(1) Which celebration is famous for its elaborate samba parades?

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

(2) Which celebration involves 'krewes' organizing parades and throwing beads?

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

(3)



**Both traditions are celebrated before the Christian season of Lent. Is this a SIMILARITY or DIFFERENCE?**

- A Similarity     B Difference

**(4) Carnival is known for large street parties called 'blocos,' while Mardi Gras features specific colors like purple, green, and gold. 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.**

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**(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.**

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