

Saint Patrick's Day

Level: Upper Intermediate

The aim of this lesson is to give students practice in reading an article about St. Patrick's Day for specific information and then the opportunity to talk about the customs and traditions of their own country's national day.

The plan is based around a text from the British Council LearnEnglish Central website at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-magazine-st-patrick.htm>

Procedure

Introduction task

- Ask students what they know about St. Patrick's Day. When is it? Where is it celebrated? What happens on that day?

Tip: You could ask them if they know any other Saint's days and how people celebrate them.

Reading task

- Show students the text about the weather from the website and give them the reading comprehension questions (below) in Worksheet A. Ask them to find the answers to the questions. If you have a computer room, you may prefer them to read the article online at:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-magazine-st-patrick.htm>

<p>Tip: The online article has a special function that you might like to make students aware of. If they double-click on any word, a definition will appear in a separate box on the screen.</p>

- In class, elicit the answers to the questions.

Discussion Task

- Put students in pairs and ask them to discuss the similarities and differences between St Patrick's Day and any national holiday in their country.

Follow-up

- Ask students to write an article about their national day. Send your texts to:
learnenglish.magazine@pt.britishcouncil.org

Worksheet A

Read the article and answer the 17 questions below about St Patrick's Day...

1. When is St Patrick's Day?
2. Why is this day celebrated as St Patrick's Day?
3. Where is it celebrated?
4. When was St Patrick born?
5. What happened to St Patrick at the age of 16?
6. What did the saint see as his 'calling'?
7. What is a shamrock?
8. What use did St Patrick make of the shamrock?
9. What is a leprechaun?
10. What should you do if you meet a leprechaun?
11. Where is the blarney stone and what is special about it?
12. What does the word 'blarney' mean today?
13. Did St Patrick drive all the snakes out of Ireland?
14. What should you wear on St Patrick's Day?
15. What do children do on St Patrick's Day?
16. What do people traditionally eat on St Patrick's Day?
17. What do pub owners do on St Patrick's Day?

St. Patrick's Day: by David Collett

Who Is St. Patrick?

St. Patrick is the patron saint and national apostle of Ireland. He was born in the fourth century and is famous for bringing Christianity into Ireland. St. Patrick's Day is a very well known Irish national holiday, which is celebrated not only in Ireland but all around the world. It falls on the 17th of March.

History of St. Patrick

St. Patrick was born to wealthy parents in the late fourth century. Until the age of 16 years old, he thought of himself as a pagan. He was kidnapped and sold as a slave at this age by Irish marauders. It was during this capture that he turned to God.

He managed to escape after being a slave for six years and then studied in a monastery in Gaul for 12 years. This was when he knew that his 'calling' was to try and convert all the pagans in Ireland into Christianity.

St. Patrick went from monastery to monastery, successfully converting people to Christianity. The Celtic Druids were very unhappy with him and tried to arrest him several times but he always managed to escape.

After 30 years of being a missionary in Ireland, he finally settled down in a place called County Down. He died on the 17th of March, AD 461.

Legend and Folklore

Shamrocks, leprechauns and the blarney stone are associated with St. Patrick's Day. Shamrocks are three-leaved clovers found growing in patches on grass. You are thought to be lucky if you find a four-leaved clover, so do keep it if you ever come across one!

Leprechauns are little Irish fairies, and they are thought to work as shoe-makers for other fairies. The Irish say that if a leprechaun is caught by a human, he will reveal where he hides his pot of gold. On this day, pictures of shamrocks and leprechauns are hung everywhere. Some people even dress up as leprechauns complete with their big green hats!

The village of Blarney is situated northwest of the Irish village of Cork. Blarney comes from the Irish word 'An blarna', meaning the plain. Blarney Castle is a very famous castle in this village and is 90 feet tall. The world famous Blarney Stone is on the top story. It is said that if one kisses this stone, one will be given the gift of eloquence, meaning to have beautiful speaking abilities. Nowadays, the word blarney means the ability to influence and coax with fair words and soft speech without offending.

Legend also says that St. Patrick could raise people from the dead. He is well-known for driving the snakes out of Ireland, although many people dispute how true this is! Another great story was how he used the shamrock, with its three leaves, to explain the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost) to his followers.

What Do People Do on St. Patrick's Day?

St. Patrick's Day is celebrated world-wide with people dancing and singing in Irish pubs, watching St. Patrick's Day parade, drinking 'green' beer, wearing green clothes and just generally having a good time. Children in Ireland have a tradition of pinching their friends who don't wear green on this day!

Traditional Food and Drink on St. Patrick's Day

Corned beef and cabbage is what most people have on this day. Another popular dish is Irish soda bread and potato pancakes. Irish pub owners go crazy on this day, putting green food colouring into their beers and traditional Irish Guinness Stout is a sell out in all Irish pubs! People also drink lots of Irish coffee, which is made with warm whiskey, sugar, coffee and topped off with whipped cream. Sounds delicious? It is!

Irish Proverbs

The Irish have many proverbs but here are some favourites.

- Better the coldness of a friend than the sweetness of an enemy.
- Be nice to them on the way up. You might meet them all on the way down.
- Let your anger set with the sun and not rise again with it.

Irish Humour

The Irish are famous for their jokes and good nature. Here's an example:

Definition of an Irish husband:

He hasn't kissed his wife in 20 years but he will kill any man who does!

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Now that you know almost everything about St. Patrick's Day, go out on March the 17th and enjoy yourselves! Why not try and spot a leprechaun or two to find your pot of gold...?