

Las Fallas de San José

The Torches of Saint Joseph

Background information

This is a Valencian tradition in celebration of Saint Joseph and it is held on the 19th March each year. Huge papier-mâché models depicting local characters and politicians are created and set up in squares and streets all over Valencia. *Fallas* artists can spend up to a whole year designing and building these models. Each year there are competitions for the best *fallas* and the very best are kept for displays in a special museum in Valencia.

The celebrations last for five days and people dress up in regional costumes, medieval in style. They proudly wear expensive, traditional dress to show that they are from Valencia. Like many of the fiestas, there is music, dancing, processions, food, drink and fireworks. Paella originates in Valencia and is very popular.



Each day of *Fallas* begins at 8am with *la despertá* or 'the wake up call'. Brass bands will play lively music through the streets, followed by people throwing firecrackers as they go. At 2pm there is *mascletá* – an explosive display of firecrackers.

On the final night of *Las Fallas*, at around midnight, the models are set alight. The fires are known as 'Cremá'. One *falla* is selected to be the overall winner and is kept for inclusion in the museum. The final night of the festival is called *Nit del Foc*. It is always the grandest night of fireworks and fires as it constitutes the grand finale.

There are several theories regarding the origins of the *Fallas* festival. Valencian carpenters used planks of wood to hang their candles on during the winter – these planks were called *parots*. When Spring came, they no longer needed the wood, so it was burnt. Over time, the date of burning the *parots* and the celebration of Saint Joseph coincided, so Saint Joseph was declared the patron saint of carpenters.

This tradition continued to change. The *parot* was given clothes, so it looked like a person. Features of well known people in the town or villages were then added and today cardboard or soft cork is used to create *fallas* in excess of 30 metres!

Teaching activities

- ◆ Design your own *fallas* model. Write a list of materials that you would need to make it.
- ◆ Design a poster listing the events for one of the days/ nights of the festival.
- ◆ Write a diary entry giving information about the wake up call and so on.
- ◆ Brainstorm local characters that would inspire a *fallas* in your area.
- ◆ Do the pupils know the names of key politicians?
- ◆ Teach key politicians/leaders in Spain.
- ◆ Sketch a *fallas* based on a local celebrity. Briefly describe why you have chosen them.
- ◆ Draw a flow diagram to show how it is believed the *fallas* tradition began. Add small illustrations.
- ◆ Link to PSICHE. What behaviour would be expected of people at a San José celebration?

Vocabulario

un carnaval	a carnival
un rey	a king
una reina	a queen
un baile de máscara	a masked ball
una máscara	a mask
una carroza	a float
un disfraz	a costume
un desfile	a parade
una invitación	an invitation
lugar	place
fecha	date
hora	time

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Pupil Task Sheet

4



Nombre:

Fecha:

Design a poster for the *fallas* competition using key vocabulary.

Imagine you have been at *Las Fallas*. Write a postcard home describing what you did.



And now for some **RESEARCH!**

Use the Internet to investigate how *Las Fallas* is celebrated. List the key facts and present your findings to the class.

Quick quiz

- ◆ When is *Las Fallas* celebrated?
- ◆ Who do the models depict?
- ◆ What happens on the final night?
- ◆ How long do the celebrations last?