

Celtic Irish Festivals

There are four Celtic seasonal festivals — like the four seasons of the year. They are called Samhain, Imbolc, Bealtaine and Lughnasa.

The Festival of Samhain

When Was It Celebrated?

Samhain was celebrated at the end of October. It marked the beginning of the darker half of the year.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

Samhain marked the beginning of the Celtic year. It was a time of endings and new beginnings. It was also the time when the living and the dead were at the closest. This was in preparation for the new life and growth coming in spring.

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Samhain?

People remembered their ancestors at this time. People prepared lots of food for all of their family, even those who had died. They also tried to keep away evil spirits by wearing costumes and masks. There were large bonfires lit and people came together to celebrate.

The Festival of Imbolc

When Was It Celebrated?

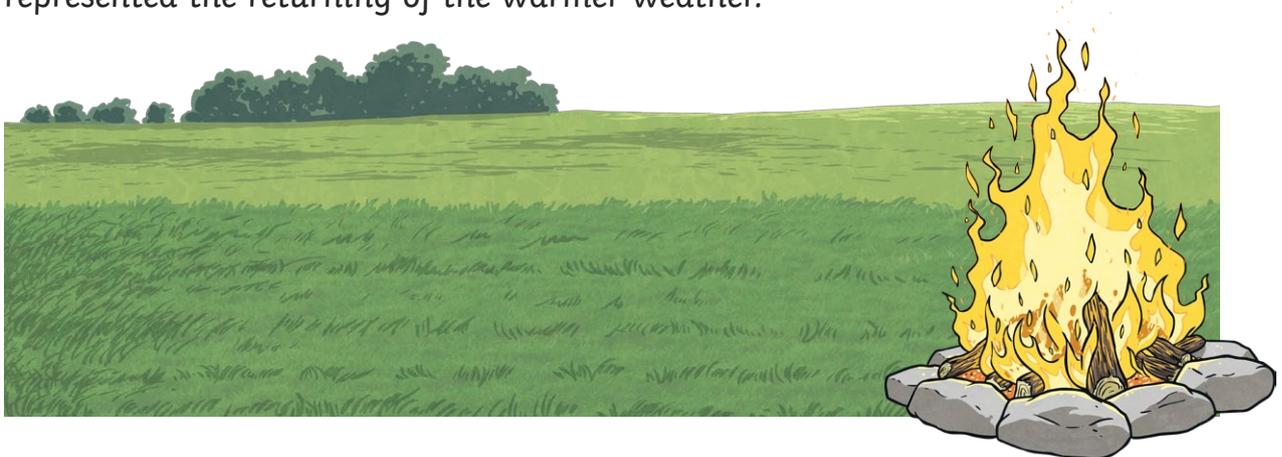
Imbolc was celebrated during the first week of February.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

This festival celebrated the beginning of spring. People celebrated the growth on the land and the new life. It was also a time to celebrate the Celtic goddess Brigid.

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Imbolc?

People gathered together to light big fires and they feasted together. The fires represented the returning of the warmer weather.



The Festival of Bealtaine

When Was It Celebrated?

Bealtaine was celebrated at the start of the summer.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

This festival marks the beginning of the brighter half of the year. It celebrates the beginning of summer. People hoped that summer would bring them healthy crops.

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Bealtaine?

Great bonfires were lit in celebration of Bealtaine. The word Bealtaine means bright fire. People and herds of cows walked between two bonfires for good luck and good crops. During this time of year, witches and fairies were thought to be up to the most mischief.

The Festival of Lughnasa

When Was It Celebrated?

Lughnasa was celebrated at the start of harvest season. This occurs at the start of August.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

Lughnasa marked the end of summer and the start of autumn. This was the time when harvesting began. During the festival of Lughnasa, people tried to please the Celtic god, Lugh. They showed him respect by celebrating with food, dance and poetry. Everyone hoped for good weather and good crops!

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Lughnasa?

Families gathered together to eat. Lughnasa marks the start of the harvest season and people ate the first meal of the new crop of the year. People lit big fires to celebrate Lughnasa.



Questions

1. Which of these is not a Celtic Festival? Tick one.

- Lughnasa
- Samhain
- Feabhra
- Imbolc

2. During Samhain, people made food for everyone in their family, even the dead.

- True
- False

3. How did people keep away evil spirits during Samhain?

4. Which festival celebrated new life?

5. When are these festivals celebrated?

Samhain _____

Imbolc _____

Bealtaine _____

Lughnasa _____

6. Whom did people celebrate during Imbolc?

7. What did people hope for during Bealtaine?

8. Which festivals were celebrated by lighting fires? Tick one.

- none of them
- Samhain
- Imbolc
- all of them

Answers

1. Which of these is not a Celtic Festival? Tick one.

- Lughnasa
- Samhain
- Feabhra
- Imbolc

2. During Samhain, people made food for everyone in their family, even the dead.

- True
- False

3. How did people keep away evil spirits during Samhain?

People wore masks and costumes to keep away evil spirits during Samhain.

4. Which festival celebrated new life?

Imbolc celebrated new life.

5. When are these festivals celebrated?

Samhain: **end of October**

Imbolc: **first week of February**

Bealtaine: **start of the summer**

Lughnasa: **start of August**

6. Whom did people celebrate during Imbolc?

They celebrated the Celtic goddess Brigid during Imbolc.

7. What did people hope for during Bealtaine?

People hoped for healthy crops during Bealtaine.

8. Which festivals were celebrated by lighting fires? Tick one.

- none of them
- Samhain
- Imbolc
- all of them

Celtic Irish Festivals

There are four Celtic seasonal festivals; they occur in a cycle like the seasons of the year. They are called Samhain, Imbolc, Bealtaine and Lughnasa. These are old festivals and come from a time when Ireland was more rural and the people were superstitious and spiritual.

The Festival of Samhain

When Was It Celebrated?

Samhain was celebrated at the end of October. It was supposed to mark the beginning of the darker half of the year.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

Samhain marked the beginning of the Celtic year. It was a time of endings and new beginnings. At this time of year, it was also the time when the living and the dead were at the closest. It was also a period of rest and reflection. This was in preparation for the new life and growth coming in spring.

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Samhain?

People commemorated their ancestors at this time. Everyone prepared lots of food for the festival and this food was prepared not only for the living, but also for the dead. They also tried to keep away evil spirits by wearing costumes and masks to look as though they were evil spirits themselves. There were large bonfires lit and people came together to celebrate around them.

The Festival of Imbolc

When Was It Celebrated?

Imbolc occurs midway between the winter solstice and spring equinox. It was celebrated during the first week of February.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

This festival celebrated the beginning of spring. People celebrated the growth on the land and the new life. Many animals, like sheep and cows, give birth to their young during spring. It was also a time to celebrate the Celtic goddess Brigid. She later became known as Saint Brigid of Kildare and the anniversary of her death was celebrated during this festival, on the first day of February.



How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Imbolc?

People gathered together to light big fires and they feasted together. The fires represented the returning of the sun and heat as the weather became warmer. Farmers also prepared their farms for sowing.

The Festival of Bealtaine

When Was It Celebrated?

Bealtaine was celebrated at the start of the summer. Lá Bealtaine (or May Day in English) was celebrated during the festival and this occurs on the first day of May.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

This festival marks the beginning of the brighter half of the year and the warmth that comes with that. It celebrates the beginning of summer. People hoped that summer would bring them healthy crops and therefore a good harvest when autumn came.

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Bealtaine?

Great bonfires were lit on the eve of the start of May in celebration of Bealtaine. The word Bealtaine means bright fire. People and herds of cows walked between two bonfires to bring them luck for the coming summer months!

During this time of year, witches and fairies were thought to be up to the most mischief. People protected their homes and their cattle from them at this time. On the first day of May, people hung flowers above the door of their house and sometimes on the horns of their cattle to keep them safe.



The Festival of Lughnasa

When Was It Celebrated?

Most Irish festivals celebrate a forthcoming season or event. Lughnasa was celebrated at the start of harvest season. This occurs at the start of August.

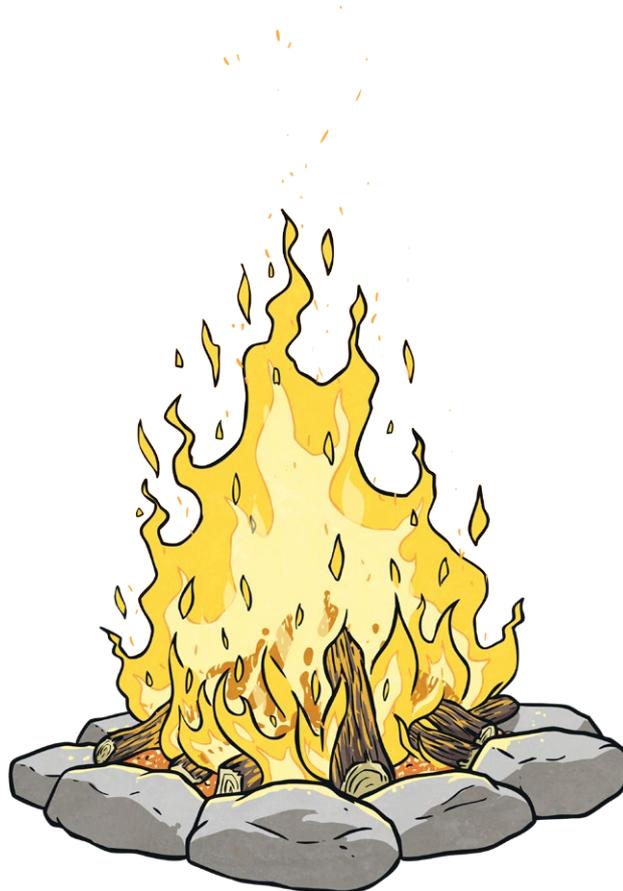
Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

Lughnasa signalled the change from summer to autumn. This was the time when harvesting began. It was a time when the people showed their gratitude for all that had grown during spring and summer, like their crops and animals.

The aim of the festival of Lughnasa was to appease the Celtic god, Lugh. People hoped that showing him respect by celebrating through food, dance and poetry and making sacrifices for him, it would keep him happy. If Lugh was in a bad mood, he would cause storms which would affect the crops badly!

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Lughnasa?

Families gathered together to eat. Lughnasa marks the start of the harvest season and people ate the first meal of the new crop of the year. Communities gathered together to celebrate with dancing and sport.



Questions

1. What kind of festivals are Samhain, Bealtaine, Imbolc and Lughnasa?

2. What does Samhain mark?

3. The anniversary of whose death was commemorated during Imbolc?

4. What else was celebrated during Imbolc?

5. Why did people feel they needed to protect their homes during Bealtaine?

6. Why was it important to please the Celtic God Lugh?

7. What form of celebration do all the four festivals share?

8. How are the festivals linked with the seasons?

9. Do any of the festivals remind you of festivals celebrated nowadays?

Answers

1. What kind of festivals are Samhain, Bealtaine, Imbolc and Lughnasa?
Samhain, Bealtaine, Imbolc and Lughnasa are Celtic festivals.
2. What does Samhain mark?
Samhain marks the beginning of the darker half of the year.
3. The anniversary of whose death was commemorated during Imbolc?
The anniversary of Saint Brigid's death was celebrated during this festival, on the first day of February.
4. What else was celebrated during Imbolc?
This festival celebrated the beginning of spring. People celebrated the growth on the land and the new life.
5. Why did people feel they needed to protect their homes during Bealtaine?
During this time of year, witches and fairies were thought to be up to the most mischief so people protected their homes and their cattle from them.
6. Why was it important to please the Celtic God Lugh?
If Lugh was in a bad mood, he would cause storms which would affect the crops badly, so it was important to keep him happy.
7. What form of celebration do all the four festivals share?
All four festivals are celebrated by lighting fires.
8. How are the festivals linked with the seasons?
The four festivals occur in a cycle like the seasons of the year. They also celebrate the changing of the weather and the seasons.
9. Do any of the festivals remind you of festivals celebrated nowadays?
Children's own responses, such as: Samhain reminds me of Halloween because it is celebrated at the end of October and people dressed up as evil spirits, like people do nowadays when they go trick or treating.

Celtic Irish Festivals

There are four Celtic seasonal festivals; they occur in a cycle like the seasons of the year. They are called Samhain, Imbolc, Bealtaine and Lughnasa. These are old festivals and come from a time when Ireland was more rural and the people were superstitious and spiritual.

The Festival of Samhain

When Was It Celebrated?

Samhain was celebrated at the end of October. It was supposed to mark the beginning of the darker half of the year.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

Samhain marked the beginning of the Celtic year. It was a time of endings and new beginnings, and a time of death and rebirth. At this time of year, it was believed that the division between the worlds of the living and the dead was at its smallest so it was the easiest time of year for the souls of those who had died to pass on from the world of the living. It was also a period of rest and reflection in preparation for the new life and growth coming in spring.

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Samhain?

People commemorated their ancestors at this time. Everyone prepared lots of food for the festival and this food was prepared not only for the living, but also as a gift to their deceased family members. They also tried to keep away evil spirits by wearing costumes and masks to look as though they were evil spirits themselves. There were large bonfires lit and people came together to celebrate around them.

The Festival of Imbolc

When Was It Celebrated?

Imbolc occurs midway between the winter solstice and vernal (spring) equinox. It was celebrated during the first week of February.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

This festival celebrated the beginning of spring. People celebrated the growth on the land and new life. Many animals, like sheep and cows, give birth to their



young during spring. It was also a time to celebrate the Celtic goddess Brigid. Brigid was the goddess of healing and inspiration, and people associated her with fire and poetry. She later became known as Saint Brigid of Kildare and the anniversary of her death was celebrated during this festival, on the first day of February.

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Imbolc?

To celebrate Imbolc, people gathered together to light big fires and they feasted together. The fires represented the returning of the sun and heat as the weather became warmer. Farmers also prepared their fields for sowing.

The Festival of Bealtaine

When Was It Celebrated?

Bealtaine was celebrated at the start of the summer. Lá Bealtaine (or May Day in English) was celebrated during the festival and this occurs on the first day of May.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

This festival, celebrating the beginning of summer, marks the beginning of the brighter half of the year and the warmth that comes with that. This was the time of year when animals were moved to the summer pastures. The people hoped that summer would bring them healthy crops and therefore a good harvest when autumn came.

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Bealtaine?

Great bonfires were lit on the eve of the start of May in celebration of Bealtaine. The word Bealtaine means bright fire. People and herds of cows walked between two bonfires in the hope of being purified and to bring them luck for the coming summer months! During this time of year, witches and fairies were thought to



be up to the most mischief. People protected their homes and their cattle from them at this time. On the first day of May, people got up early to go and pick flowers, especially hawthorns and primroses. They hung these flowers above the door of their house and sometimes on the horns of their cattle to keep them safe. There was also lots of feasting and dancing during the festival of Bealtaine.

The Festival of Lughnasa

When Was It Celebrated?

Most Irish festivals celebrate a forthcoming season or event. Lughnasa was celebrated at the start of harvest season. This occurs at the start of August.

Why Was This Festival Celebrated?

Lughnasa signalled the change from summer to autumn. This was the time when harvesting began. It was a time when the people showed their gratitude for all that had grown during spring and summer, especially their crops and animals. The aim of the festival of Lughnasa was to appease the Celtic god, Lugh. People hoped that showing him respect by celebrating through food, dance and poetry and making sacrifices for him would keep him happy — he was renowned for having quite a temper! If Lugh was pleased with the celebrations, it settled his temper. If Lugh was in a bad mood, he would cause storms which would affect the crops badly.

How Did People Celebrate the Festival of Lughnasa?

To celebrate Lughnasa, families gathered together to eat. Lughnasa marks the start of the harvest season and people ate the first meal of the new crop of the year. Communities gathered together to celebrate with dancing and sport.



Questions

1. When are the four Celtic festivals celebrated?

2. What do you think was most important to the people who celebrated these festivals?

Explain your answer using evidence from the text.

3. What did Samhain mark?

4. Why did people wear costumes during Samhain?

5. What did people hope for during Imbolc?

6. How did people celebrate Bealtaine?

7. Why was it important to please the Celtic God Lugh and how did people do this?

8. Do any of the festivals remind you of festivals celebrated today?

9. In your opinion, were Celtic people more superstitious than people are today? Explain your answer.

10. Define these words from the text:

superstitious _____

purified _____

harvest _____

gratitude _____

Answers

1. When are the four Celtic festivals celebrated?

Samhain was celebrated at the end of October, Imbolc was celebrated during the first week of February, Bealtaine was celebrated at the start of summer and Lughnasa was celebrated at the start of August.

2. What do you think was most important to the people who celebrated these festivals?

Explain your answer using evidence from the text.

Children's own responses using suitable evidence, such as: The festivals were centred around the changing of the seasons and harvest time, so I think farming and crops were most important to the people who celebrated these festivals.

3. What did Samhain mark?

Samhain marked the beginning of the Celtic year. It was a time of endings and new beginnings, and a time of death and rebirth.

4. Why did people wear costumes during Samhain?

During Samhain, people wore costumes and masks to look as though they were evil spirits, which they thought would keep away the real evil spirits.

5. What did people hope for during Imbolc?

People hoped for the return of the sun and heat during Imbolc.

6. How did people celebrate Bealtaine?

People and herds of cows walked between two bonfires in the hope of being purified and to bring them luck for the coming summer months! On the first day of May, people got up early to go and pick flowers, especially hawthorns and primroses. They hung these flowers above the door of their house and sometimes on the horns of their cattle to keep them safe. There was also lots of feasting and dancing during the festival of Bealtaine.

7. Why was it important to please the Celtic God Lugh and how did people do this?

If Lugh was pleased with the celebrations, it settled his temper. If Lugh was in a bad mood, he would cause storms which would affect the crops badly. People showed him respect by celebrating through food, dance and poetry and making sacrifices.

8. Do any of the festivals remind you of festivals celebrated today?

Children's own responses, such as: Samhain reminds me of Halloween because it is celebrated at the end of October and people dressed up as evil spirits, like people do nowadays when they go trick or treating.

9. In your opinion, were Celtic people more superstitious than people are today? Explain your answer.

Children's own responses, such as: I think that Celtic people were more superstitious than people today because they believed in evil spirits and gods who could destroy their crops, whereas now we know that storms are caused by weather and climate.

10. Define these words from the text:

superstitious – **having a belief or notion not based on reason or knowledge**

purified – **having had contaminants removed**

harvest – **the process or period of gathering in crops**

gratitude – **the quality of being thankful**