

For this worksheet, you will need a piece of notebook paper, a pencil, and your brain. Read the story about Pancake Week. Then look at the questions that follow the story. Write the first question on your notebook paper and then answer it in your own words. Continue until you have answered all the questions. There is a bonus question that takes some deep thinking. You might need to ask your teacher or your parents for some help. Tell your friends and family about what you have learned!

## MASLENITSA

If you like pancakes, you might want to visit Russia during “Maslenitsa,” or Pancake Week. Maslenitsa (*Mahs – le – NEET – zuh*) is the week before the beginning of Lent, the 40-day season before Easter that people from some religions observe. The word Maslenitsa comes from “maslo,” the Russian word for butter.

Maslenitsa is the oldest surviving Russian holiday. Russians began celebrating Maslenitsa hundreds of years ago. It was not observed very much during the years of the Soviet Union (1917 – 1991) but it has once again become a very popular holiday!

There are two reasons to celebrate Pancake Week in Russia. 1. If you belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, you are not supposed to eat any dairy products during Lent. Pancakes are full of dairy products: butter, eggs and milk! So Pancake week is sort of one last celebration before giving up dairy products for Lent. 2. For other people, Maslenitsa is a celebration of the symbolic end of winter, even though it is usually in February, and the weather is still ~~very~~ cold in Russia! Since they are round, pancakes symbolize the sun.

Russians celebrate Pancake Week in many different ways. They dress in costumes and go to parties, dances and parades. People visit relatives, and certain things are done on specific days. For instance, sons-in-law should visit their mothers-in-law on Tuesday, and house-cleaning should be done on Thursday. Pancake week is a lot like many festivals we have in the United States, but Russian people do a couple of things that might seem a little strange to us: traditional Pancake Week activities include friendly fist-fights and snowball fights!

Another way to celebrate is by making a straw “Maslenitsa Lady.” At the end of the week, the straw lady is burned to symbolize the end of winter.

And of course, you would eat pancakes! Russians also call pancakes “blini” (*BLEE – nee*) It is said that a proper blini can only be made by a “Babuschka” (*BAH – boosh – ka*). Have you ever heard the expression “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again”? In Russia, a Babuschka might tell you “The first blini always lumps up.” You can put anything on a blini: honey, jam, sour cream, nuts or cottage cheese. Any way you eat them, pancakes are delicious!

Questions:

1. Why do Russian people celebrate Maslenitsa?
2. How do Russian people celebrate it?

3. If you were living in Russia, how do you think you would celebrate?
4. Can you figure out from the story what a Babuschka is?
5. What do we celebrate in the United States just before Lent? How does that compare with Pancake Week?
6. What do you think a Babuschka means when she says, "The first blini always lumps up?"

Bonus Question:

7. Why do you think that Russians didn't celebrate Maslenitsa very much during the years of the Soviet Union?