

1 Read the text and choose the correct words.

## The Origins of

# May

## DAY



### When is May Day?

May Day is a holiday that originated in Europe. It takes **1) place/part** every year on 1st May in most countries, but on the first Monday in May in the UK and Ireland.

### Why do we celebrate it?

May Day is a celebration of springtime and the start of summer. It is around halfway between the spring equinox in **2) late/latest** March and the summer solstice in late June. The origins of the May Day celebrations date back many years.

### Springtime celebrations

In ancient Rome, the Romans **3) commemorated/celebrated** a five-day springtime festival called Floralia from 28th April to 2nd May. This festival was **4) assigned/devoted** to Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers – this is where the tradition of the May Queen is thought to come from. The Romans worshipped Flora in the hope that she would **5) protect/prevent** all of the spring blossoms. During Floralia, people made floral crowns and wore them throughout the celebrations. They also took part in games and **6) viewed/watched** theatrical and circus performances. Further north in Europe, people in Scotland and Ireland celebrated the Celtic festival Beltane on 1st May. This was another celebration about the passing of winter and the start of summer. People celebrated the growth of plants and the birth of animals and livestock. They **7) collected/piled** wild flowers and made floral garlands. Then, in the evening, they lit bonfires and danced around them to celebrate the end of the dark winter months.

### Modern May Day celebrations

After the Romans invaded the British Isles, the two festivals, Floralia and Beltane, slowly became **8) joined/combined** to make May Day what it is today. Of course, over the years, some May Day traditions have **9) lost/disappeared** and some newer ones have appeared. One example of this is the maypole, a tall pole or tree trunk decorated with colourful ribbons. On May Day, in several European countries including the UK and Germany, people dance around the maypole and have done so since medieval times. However, the exact origin of this custom **10) remains/keeps** a mystery.



2 Using information from the text, answer this May Day quiz.

### May Day Quiz

- 1 What is true about May Day in the UK?  
A It is always on a Monday.  
B It takes place annually on 1st May.  
C It happens on the same date each year.
- 2 Where was Beltane NOT celebrated?  
A Scotland  
B Ireland  
C Italy
- 3 Flora, the goddess of flowers comes from \_\_\_ mythology.  
A Roman  
B British  
C Celtic
- 4 When did Beltane traditionally take place?  
A 28th April  
B 1st May  
C 2nd May
- 5 Where did the tradition of dancing around the maypole come from?  
A Germany  
B the UK  
C It is unknown.

Key: 1A, 2C, 3A, 4B, 5C

3 **ICT** In groups, find more interesting May Day facts from different countries and present them to the class.

### May Day FACT!

In Italy, May Day is thought to be the happiest day of the year!