MARDI GRAS
**READING COMPREHENSION**

*Below are three small paragraphs in French explaining the tradition behind the holiday Mardi Gras. Read through the paragraphs and try and answer the questions that follow each paragraph in ENGLISH. Use a dictionary for any of the other words you want to understand.*

**Petite histoire du Mardi gras**

On associe Mardi-gras et ses **déguisements** au Carnaval, car "carnelevare" signifiait en génois "retirer la viande", signe du début des 40 jours du **Carême**. Mardi-gras précède ainsi **le mercredi des Cendres** (symbolisant le retour biblique d'Adam à la poussière avant la renaissance symbolisée par Pâques).

C'était une occasion de célébrer **la fin de l'hiver**. On se déguisait pour laisser de côté toute hiérarchie, de rang comme de sang, et laisser libre cours à **la folie du moment**. C'était également l'occasion d'un grand **défoulement**, où étaient largement parodiées les traditions populaires et religieuses, ainsi que les hauts personnages de l'état.

**Les mots :**
- déguisements = disguise
- Carême = Lent
- la viande = meat
- le mercredi des Cendres = Ash Wednesday
- la fin de l'hiver = the end of winter
- la folie du moment = insanity of the moment
- défoulement = release

**Questions :**

How many days before Easter is Mardi Gras?

What day comes the day after Mardi Gras?

What was the original purpose of celebrating this holiday?

Why did people dress-up in costume for this holiday & who did they dress up as?

**Un carnaval mondial !**

Parmi les **lieux** célèbres où l'on fête le carnaval, **citons** Rio, bien sûr, mais également Venise, la Nouvelle-Orléans, Trinidad et Tobago, ou plus près de nous, Nice, Dunkerque, Tournai...

Notons qu'à la Nouvelle-Orléans, le mardi gras est l'occasion de manger **le gâteau des rois** (King cake), cousin de notre **galette de l'Épiphanie**. Le King Cakes est un gâteau rond (assez proche...
du gâteau des rois provençal) parfumé à la cannelle et recouvert d'un glaçage recouvert de sucre coloré : du pourpre (qui représente la justice), du vert (pour la foi) et de l'or (pour le pouvoir).

Les mots :
lieux = places
citons = citer = to site
le gâteau des rois = King cake, eaten only in Louisiana.
galette de l'Epiphanie = Epiphany Cake, eaten for a different Holiday
la cannelle = cinnamon
glaçage = icing

Questions :
Where are some of the places Mardi Gras is celebrated ?

What is a King Cake and what does the King Cake symbolize?

Dernier jour pour manger " gras "

Mais jadis, Mardi-gras était surtout le dernier mardi où l'on mangeait " gras ", c'est à dire de la viande et des graisses, et en principe beaucoup ! On tuait et consommaient le "bœuf gras", avant 40 jours pendant lesquels toute viande était interdite aux Chrétien (pour se purifier et expier leurs fautes pendant 40 jours, durée de la retraite du Christ dans le désert).

En France et au Québec, c'est le "Mardi Gras", dans les pays anglophones "Fat Tuesday" ou "Shrove Tuesday".

Plutôt que des crêpes, on préparait des beignets frits, dernière occasion de déguster un dessert aussi gras avant longtemps, mais également moyen de consommer les réserves de beurre, d'huile, d'oeufs et de crème avant le carême.

Les mots :
gras = fat
consommaient = to consume
interdite = off-limits
beignets frits = fried doughnuts

Questions :
How did mardi gras get its name ?

What are the two main dishes people celebrating Mardi Gras eat?

What are some of the ingredients in “les beignets frits”?
Now that you have read about Mardi Gras in French, here is a summary in English:

What is Mardi Gras?

Mardi Gras, also known as Shrove Tuesday, Carnival, and even Pancake Day in the UK, is an annual festival which is celebrated every year before Easter. Falling just before Lent, it traditionally marks the last opportunity for fun and feasting before 40 days of "self-denial". Mardi Gras means "Fat Tuesday" in French.

Festivities begin at the beginning of February, leading up to Mardi Gras day, and consist of parades, dancing in the street, costumes and masked balls. The modern Carnival tradition developed in Europe in the Middle ages, and is celebrated mainly in Roman Catholic communities in Europe and the Americas today. Some of the most famous celebrations are held in Nice (France), Cologne (Germany), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and New Orleans (USA).

When is Mardi Gras?

Mardi Gras is celebrated 40 days before Easter, which changes every year.

Perhaps some of you enjoy cooking. If so here is a good recipe for a King Cake:

King Cake

Traditional New Orleans Recipe

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup warm water (110 to 115 degrees)
- 2 packages active dry yeast
- 1/2 cup plus 1 teaspoon sugar
- 3 1/2 - 4 1/2 cups flour unsifted
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest, this is lemon rind, grated
- 1/2 cup warm milk
- 5 egg yolks
- 1 stick butter cut into slices and softened, plus 2 tablespoons more softened butter
- 1 egg slightly beaten with 1 tablespoon milk
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 1" plastic baby doll

Directions

Pour the warm water into a small shallow bowl, and sprinkle yeast and 2 teaspoons sugar into it. Allow the yeast and sugar to rest for three minutes then mix thoroughly. Set bowl in a warm place for ten minutes, or until yeast bubbles up and mixture almost doubles in volume. Combine 3 1/2 cups of flour, remaining sugar, nutmeg and salt, and sift into a large mixing bowl. Stir in lemon zest. Separate center of mixture to form a hole and pour in yeast mixture and milk. Add egg yolks and, using a wooden spoon, slowly combine dry ingredients into the yeast/milk...
mixture. When mixture is smooth, beat in 8 tablespoons butter (1 tablespoon at a time) and continue to beat 2 minutes, or until dough can be formed into a medium-soft ball.

Place ball of dough on a lightly floured surface and knead like bread. While kneading, sprinkle up to 1 cup more of flour (1 tablespoon at a time) over the dough. When dough is no longer sticky, knead 10 minutes more until shiny and elastic.

Using a pastry brush, coat the inside of a large bowl evenly with one tablespoon softened butter. Place dough ball in the bowl and rotate until the entire surface is buttered. Cover bowl with a moderately thick kitchen towel and place in a draft-free spot for about 1 1/2 hours, or until the dough doubles in volume. Using a pastry brush, coat a large baking sheet with one tablespoon of butter and set aside.

Remove dough from bowl and place on lightly floured surface. Using your fist, punch dough down forcefully. Sprinkle cinnamon over the top, pat and shake dough into a cylinder. Twist dough to form a curled cylinder and loop cylinder onto the buttered baking sheet. Pinch the ends together to complete the circle. Cover dough with towel and set it in draft-free spot for 45 minutes, or until the circle of dough doubles in volume. Pre-heat oven to 375 degrees.

Brush top and sides of cake with egg wash and bake on middle rack of oven for 25 to 35 minutes until golden brown. Place cake on wire rack to cool. If desired, you can hide the plastic baby in the cake at this time.

Colored sugars - You can make this with food coloring & sugar or buy it pre-made.

Green, purple, & yellow paste
12 tablespoons sugar

Squeeze a dot of green paste in palm of hand. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons sugar over the paste and rub together quickly. Place this mixture on wax paper and wash hands to remove color. Repeat process for other 2 colors. Place aside.

Icing

3 cups confectioners sugar
1/4 cup lemon juice
3 - 6 tablespoons water

Combine sugar, lemon juice and 3 tablespoons water until smooth. If icing is too stiff, add more water until spreadable. Spread icing over top of cake. Immediately sprinkle the colored sugars in individual rows consisting of about 2 rows of green, purple and yellow.

Cake is served in 2" - 3" pieces.