

Harvest

Harvest is the time of year where the food that has been growing over the summer months is gathered as autumn arrives and the food is ready. People have celebrated this time for hundreds of years as they are thankful to have food for the winter ahead. Imagine the time before supermarkets could buy in food from miles away – you would definitely be grateful for a store of local crops!

When Is Harvest?

The word 'harvest' comes from an Old English word 'hærfest' (pronounced h-er-fest or h-ayr-fest) meaning 'autumn'. Depending on where you are in the world, harvest will follow the summer, although some people celebrate the harvest season differently. In the UK, harvest celebrations mainly fall around the Harvest Moon, which is the full moon nearest to the Autumn Equinox (around 22nd September). Others celebrate the first harvest from 1st August to 1st September in the ancient festival, Lammas.

How Do People Celebrate?

Many schools, churches and groups have harvest festivals where food is brought and displayed. The food that is brought is often gifted to those in need, such as the elderly or people in need of food and support. There are often songs, readings and prayers of thanks at the celebrations.



Extract from the traditional song: John Barleycorn

They ploughed, they sowed,
they harrowed him in, threw clods upon his head,
And these three men made a solemn vow,
John Barleycorn was dead.

They let him lie for a very long time,
'til the rains from heaven did fall,
and little Sir John sprung up his head,
and so amazed them all.

They've let him stand 'til midsummer's day,
'til he looked both pale and wan,
And little Sir John's grown a long, long beard,
and so became a man.

Harvest Symbols and Characters.

Harvest is all about growing and collecting food from the fields so wheat, corn and bread are important harvest symbols as well as English fruits such as apples and berries.



In traditional harvest folk songs, there is often the character of 'John Barleycorn'. He plays the role of barley and he is a symbol of the crop's lifecycle. In the songs, people assume he is dead because he is buried in the soil (when the seeds are planted). Soon, he starts to grow like a child, then he becomes a man before growing older with a beard made of the ears of barley. These songs were written and sung in praise of John Barleycorn when local crops were so important to make bread and drinks. It is believed by some that John Barleycorn has his origins way back in Anglo-Saxon times.

Questions

1. Which two seasons are not mentioned in the text?

2. In the text, the author uses the word 'grateful'. Which of these words means the opposite of 'grateful'?

Tick One	
nongrateful	
ungrateful	
antigrateful	
misgrateful	

3. What does the word 'harvest' mean?

4. In the UK, how is the date of harvest celebrations decided?

5. Tick all the places that harvest food might be donated after a harvest festival:

Tick all that apply	
Shops	
Elderly care homes	
Bakers	
Homeless shelter	
Foodbanks	

6. Why aren't bananas traditional symbols of harvest?

7. Read the John Barleycorn song and number these events in order of what is actually happening:

Event	Number Order
The plant was left to grow taller.	
The seeds were planted.	
The barley was fully grown.	
The seeds started to grow.	

8. Why do you think people today might be less thankful for the food they get from the harvest and harvest is not a huge celebration anymore?

9. Summarise what harvest festival is and include as much detail as possible.

Answers

1. Which two seasons are not mentioned in the text?

Spring and winter are not mentioned in the text.

2. In the text, the author uses the word 'grateful'. Which of these words means the opposite of 'grateful'?

Tick One	
nongrateful	
ungrateful	✓
antigrateful	
misgrateful	

3. What does the word 'harvest' mean?

The word harvest comes from an Old English word 'hærfest' meaning 'autumn'.

4. In the UK, how is the date of harvest celebrations decided?

In the UK, harvest celebrations are decided by the timing of the Harvest Moon (the nearest full moon to the Autumn Equinox).

5. Tick all the places that harvest food might be donated after a harvest festival:

Tick all that apply	
Shops	
Elderly care homes	✓
Bakers	
Homeless shelter	✓
Foodbanks	✓

6. Why aren't bananas traditional symbols of harvest?

Bananas are not a traditional harvest symbol in the UK as they are not grown here.

Traditional symbols include wheat, bread and English fruits such as apples and berries.

7. Read the John Barleycorn song and number these events in order of what is actually happening:

Event	Number Order
The plant was left to grow taller.	3
The seeds were planted.	1
The barley was fully grown.	4
The seeds started to grow.	2

8. Why do you think people today might be less thankful for the food they get from the harvest and harvest is not a huge celebration anymore?

Children's answers may vary but must refer to the fact that food is more readily available. People might be less thankful today because food is available in large quantities all year round from supermarkets so people are less reliant on one local harvest (even though all the supermarket food is still reliant on harvests).

9. Summarise what harvest festival is and include as much detail as possible.

Children's answers will vary. Children should detail key facts based on the texts such as what harvest means, when it is, what people do to celebrate, etc.