

Las Fallas de San José

The Torches of Saint Joseph

Background information

This is a Valencian tradition in celebration of Saint Joseph and it is held on the 19th March each year. Huge papier-mâché models depicting local characters and politicians are created and set up in squares and streets all over Valencia. *Fallas* artists can spend up to a whole year designing and building these models. Each year there are competitions for the best *fallas* and the very best are kept for displays in a special museum in Valencia.

The celebrations last for 5 days and people dress up in regional costumes, medieval in style. They proudly wear expensive, traditional dress to show that they are from Valencia. Like many of the fiestas, there is music, dancing, processions, food, drink and fireworks. Paella originates in Valencia and is very popular.



Each day of *Fallas* begins at 8am with 'la despertá' or 'the wake up call'. Brass bands will play lively music through the streets, followed by people throwing firecrackers as they go. At 2pm there is 'mascletá' – an explosive display of firecrackers.

On the final night of *Fallas*, at around midnight, the models are set alight. The fires are known as 'Cremá'. One is selected to be the overall winner and is kept for inclusion in the museum. The final night of the festival is called 'Nit del Foc'. It is always the grandest night of fireworks and fires as it constitutes the grand finale.

There are several theories regarding the origins of the *Fallas* festival. Valencian carpenters used planks of wood to hang their candles on during the winter – these planks were called 'parots'. When Spring came, they no longer needed the wood, so it was burnt. Over time, the date of burning the 'parots' and the celebration of Saint Joseph coincided, so Saint Joseph was declared the patron saint of carpenters.

This tradition continued to change. The 'parot' was given clothes, so it looked like a person. Features of well known people in the town or villages were then added and today cardboard or soft cork is used to create *fallas* in excess of 30 metres!

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Nombre:

Fecha:



I can explain about the *Las Fallas de San José*.

Draw a picture of a *fallas* model. Use a dictionary to label the parts of the body or the clothes your model is wearing, in Spanish.

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Extension activity

Make a PowerPoint presentation showing some of the events which take place during the festival.