

Name: _____ Class: _____

All of Spain Celebrates Three Kings' Day

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Three Kings' Day, also known as Epiphany Day, is a Christian holiday celebrated on January 6th. The holiday celebrates a biblical story, in which Baby Jesus is born and visited by kings. As you read, take notes on the different pieces of the parade.

- [1] Trumpets sound in the distance. People's lively¹ conversation comes to a halt.² Children smile and elbow each other.

"They're coming," is the buzz.

Adults lift children on their shoulders.

The trumpets sound louder. Soon I see the trumpeters and the swaying of flags — purple, blue, silver — hanging from T-shaped poles. Flag bearers strive³ to steer their horses as they hold on tight to the flagpoles.

- [5] The trumpets are now booming — or is that noise the pounding of our hearts?

It's early evening on January 5, and the streets are packed. People stand on the sidewalks, watching the *Cabalgata de Reyes Magos*, or Three Kings' Cavalcade.⁴

The Cabalgata de Reyes Magos has been celebrated in Spain since 1866. It commemorates⁵ the Magi's visit to Baby Jesus on the first Christmas after they had followed a star that guided them. With some variations, every city and town, big or small, celebrates this event.



"The best part of the parade is the arrival of the Three Kings" by Photos courtesy of the Tourism Department of the City Council of Alcoy, Spain is used with permission.

January 6, or Epiphany Day, marks the twelfth and last day of Christmas and is a national holiday. On that morning, children wake up to their Three Kings' presents. But tonight is all about the parade!

1. **Lively (adjective):** full of life and energy
2. a stop
3. to work to achieve something
4. a formal parade
5. to remember and show respect for something or someone

After the flag bearers come the shepherds — maybe a hundred children and some adults—all wearing sheepskin vests over their clothing and guiding herds of real goats and sheep. The youngest children carry baskets with flowers. Older ones spread petals that cover the streets, forming a fragrant⁶ carpet that struggles to conceal the scent of the animals.

- [10] I hear the clacking of *castañuelas*, or castanets,⁷ so the dancers must be near. Hundreds of them dance their way down the street. They're assembled in *cuartetos*, or foursomes, and are dressed as Spanish farmers used to dress on Sundays many years ago. The men wear white shirts, knee-length black pants, and long white crocheted socks. The women wear long embroidered skirts and *pañuelos*, or shawls, over their shoulders. They all wear *alpargatas*, straw-soled sandals laced up to their knees. Trumpets and tambourines start playing, and all at once the dancers engage in a set of swirls and steps as they play their castanets. I feel like dancing, too!

As the fading sound of the castanets is carried down the street by the last dancers, I hear the mellow⁸ sound of flutes playing in the distance. The buzzing of the crowd gets louder. We all recognize the melody. Have the Three Kings arrived?

A lonely rider, Jacob, their messenger, makes the announcement. After much traveling from their homeland in the Middle East, Kings Melchor, Gaspar, and Baltasar have arrived in our city.

One by one they appear, riding majestically⁹ on their camels and decked in colorful velvet robes and sparkling gold and silver.

First comes Melchor, with his golden hair and beard. He waves and blows kisses. People cheer and clap.

- [15] Then comes Gaspar, whose long wavy hair and beard remind me of snow-covered mountains.

Dark-skinned Baltasar comes last, but he gets the loudest cheers — he's the one thought to bring the most toys.

Children wave and blow kisses back. Some are lifted in the air to receive hugs from the kings. They're the lucky ones.

But tonight all the children will be lucky, because when the night is quiet and they're asleep, Melchor, Gaspar, and Baltasar will come into their houses and deliver presents — just as the ancient kings brought presents to Baby Jesus on the first Christmas.

Most children go to bed too excited to fall asleep, but they know they must. If they've been good during the year, the Three Kings will bring them presents.

- [20] Later in the day, relatives will gather for the last dinner of the Christmas season, the celebration of Epiphany, or Three Kings' Day. After dinner, sisters and brothers and cousins will play with their toys one last time. It's back to school the next morning.

6. **Fragrant (adjective):** having a pleasant or sweet smell

7. two small pieces of wood that are clicked together with fingers

8. **Mellow (adjective):** soft, calm

9. **Majestic (adjective):** very grand and beautiful

Donkeys Play a Role, Too

Alcoy was the first Spanish city to celebrate the Cabalgata de Reyes. Some traditions established then are still around today. One of them is Els Burrettes, or Donkeys' Day. On January 4, donkeys decorated with ribbons carry large baskets through the city streets. Children place their Cartas de Reyes, letters with wish lists for the Three Kings, in the baskets. The donkeys will then bring the letters to Kings Melchor, Gaspar, and Baltasar.

Three Kings' Dinner

Three Kings' dinner is similar to Christmas dinner except for dessert. Roscón, a special ring-shaped pastry, is prepared on this day. Decorated with pieces of candied fruit, it is baked with all kinds of fillings. A small surprise, usually a ceramic or porcelain figurine depicting Baby Jesus, is hidden inside. The person who receives the lucky piece will have good luck in the New Year.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best expresses the main idea of the text?
 - A. Most children don't understand the significance of Three Kings' Day and only care about the presents.
 - B. Three Kings' Day was an important holiday throughout Spain in the past, but now it is celebrated by few.
 - C. Families and communities come together to remember and celebrate the kings' visit to Baby Jesus with parades and presents.
 - D. Three Kings' Day has changed over the years to be more about presents and parties, rather than the birth of Baby Jesus.

2. PART B: Which TWO details from the text best support the answer to Part A?
 - A. "People's lively conversation comes to a halt. Children smile and elbow each other." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "It commemorates the Magi's visit to Baby Jesus on the first Christmas...some variations, every city and town, big or small, celebrates this event." (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "Older ones spread petals that cover the streets, forming a fragrant carpet that struggles to conceal the scent of the animals." (Paragraph 9)
 - D. "After much traveling from their homeland in the Middle East, Kings Melchor, Gaspar, and Baltasar have arrived in our city." (Paragraph 12)
 - E. "Then comes Gaspar, whose long wavy hair and beard remind me of snow-covered mountains." (Paragraph 15)
 - F. "But tonight all the children will be lucky, because when the night is quiet and they're asleep, Melchor, Gaspar, and Baltasar will come into their houses and deliver presents" (Paragraph 18)

3. What is the author's main purpose in the passage?
 - A. to share their experiences with Three Kings' Day and information about the holiday
 - B. to show how the celebration of Three Kings' Day has changed over the years
 - C. to share the importance of Christmas dinner following Three Kings' Day
 - D. to show how the celebration of Three Kings' Day can vary throughout Spain

4. Which statement best describes the relationship between the final two sections, "Donkeys Play a Role, Too" and "Three Kings' Dinner" and the rest of the text?
 - A. The final two sections highlight different food traditions at Three Kings' dinner.
 - B. The final two sections compare different variations of the parade across Spain.
 - C. The final two sections offer more information about the animals in the parade.
 - D. The final two sections explain traditions that occur before and after the parade.

5. Which of the following describes the connection between the celebration of Three Kings' Day and the actions of the kings in the past? Use information from the text in your response.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. The text explores a holiday celebrated in Spain. Why do you think it's important to learn about holidays celebrated in other parts of the world?
2. Three Kings' Day celebrates the end of the Christmas holiday. How does Three Kings' Day bring people together? Describe a holiday that you celebrate that brings your family or community together.