

1. Vernal equinox

This week's lesson is about the first official day of spring, which this year fell on 20th March, and its history and traditions.

Level

Upper intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level B2 and above)

How to use the lesson

1. As a warm up, ask your students whether they have noticed the days getting longer and warmer. Spring is here! Ask them whether they know when spring officially started, and how that date is decided. If your students celebrate Easter, you could also discuss Easter plans, traditions and customs, and point out that for Christians, Easter and spring are closely related.
2. Give one copy of Worksheet A to each student in the class. Ask them to first read through the text, ignoring the missing articles, to get the overall meaning. Encourage them to use the glossary to check the meaning of any unfamiliar words. They then complete the gaps with the missing articles (or use a dash across the gap to indicate that no article is needed).
3. When the students have finished, check answers in open class.
4. Put the students in teams of four or five and give each team a copy of Worksheet B. Ask them to think of a creative name for their team and write it at the top of the worksheet. Explain that they should discuss each statement and decide as a team whether it is true or false. This exercise calls on their general knowledge skills as well as their ability to negotiate and use logic to make best guesses.
5. When the teams have marked their answers, collect in their worksheets and score them to see which team is the winner. If a tiebreaker question is needed, tell the teams with the same scores to each send one representative to the front of the class. Tell the representatives that you will ask them one question, and the first person to answer correctly *in English* wins the game for their team. Ask: *'Equinox' is the word for the dates on which the sun crosses the equator, when day and night are the same length. What is the word for the dates on which the sun reaches its highest or lowest point in the sky at noon, marked by the longest and shortest days? (Answer: solstice)*

Answers:

Exercise 1

- | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| 1. the | 2. the | 3. a | 4. the |
| 5. – | 6. the | 7. – | 8. the |
| 9. a | 10. – | 11. the | 12. an |
| 13. – | 14. the | 15. a | 16. – |
| 17. the | 18. the | 19. the | 20. – |
| 21. – | 22. – | 23. the | 24. – |

Exercise 2

1. F (The point at which day and night are exactly equal always fall *before* the actual equinox.)
2. T
3. F (It is a Latin word, but it means ‘spring’, not ‘green’.)
4. F (The statement is true, but for the South Pole, not the North. The North Pole’s six months of darkness begins at the *autumn* equinox in September.)
5. T
6. F (The correct number is 365.24219.)
7. T (Note: this holiday is called *Nowruz*. For more information see <http://www.irpedia.com/iran/best/44/>)
8. F (This is a myth, and it has nothing to do with the equator. It is particularly important in Chinese culture, and they are said to have started the tradition. See <http://radio86.com/culture/customs/news/balancing-eggs-chunfen-spring-equinox>)
9. F (The Easter bunny laying eggs in a bonnet was a German tradition originally.)
10. T (Note: this is because of the association with cherry blossoms. Pink is a masculine colour in Japan.)

2. Related websites

Send your students to these websites, or just take a look yourself.

<http://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials/everything-you-need-to-know-vernal-or-spring-equinox>

All about the vernal equinox from the EarthSky science website (12th March 2012), with links to other interesting articles. Accessible to Upper intermediate level.

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/03/120320-spring-equinox-first-day-2012-vernal-science/>

A *National Geographic* News article (20th March 2012) on myths and facts about the vernal equinox. Accessible to Upper intermediate level.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-vernal-equinox-2012-20120319,0,2006154.story>

An article (19th March 2012) for the *Los Angeles Times* about the balancing-an-egg myth, with a video from 2008. Accessible to Intermediate level and above.