Mardi Gras or Carnival

Mardi Gras or Carnival is the celebration before the Christian penitential season of Lent. Although Mardi Gras literally means "Fat Tuesday" in French and refers to the day before Ash Wednesday, the celebration takes up more than just that one day. In New Orleans, for example, it lasts for a week or more.

In the countries of South America, Carnival (as it is called there) is the most important holiday of the year. This is doubly true of Brazil where the celebration lasts longer every year. The "samba schools," which are the groups in charge of the Carnival parades, would have already spent months in the preparation of the costumes for the parades. Thousands of these costumed samba dancers compete for prizes.

All over Europe, too, this celebration, known by a variety of names, goes on. Germans call it *Fasching*; Poles call it *Zapusty*; and Hungarians call it *Farsang*.

Mardi Gras or Carnival is, traditionally, a period of indulgence in rich foods and rowdy behavior. Christians were once required by their churches to observe a strict fast during Lent, very often giving up the use of meat and even fats, eggs, and dairy products. Because of this, people tried to use everything up in the days before Lent began. The word "carnival" comes from Latin words that mean "taking away meat." Christians no longer observe fasts that are as strict as they were in the past. They do, however, often offer a sacrifice by abstaining from some food of which they are really fond.

The date of Mardi Gras or Carnival depends on the beginning date of Lent. And the beginning date of Lent depends on when Easter occurs in any particular year.

Make a Mardi Gras Mask

Directions:
1. **Cut out the mask from the following page. Don't forget to cut out the mask eyes.**
2. **Glue a stick to the back of the mask. You can also punch holes in the corners of the mask and tie each end of one piece of string in the holes.**
3. **Decorate the mask with feathers, sequins, and lots of color.**
4. **Celebrate Mardi Gras!**