



Google Arts & Culture

**Celebrating
Freedom and Culture
at Notting Hill Carnival**

in association with  sixredmarbles

How to Make the Most of This Lesson

This lesson serves as a **roadmap** for your journey through a rich and exciting collection of online content made available by **Google Arts & Culture's partners**. You will explore photographs, slideshows, voice recordings, and more. The images in this lesson are just a sample of what's available to you via the **Google Arts & Culture** website.

You can complete this lesson independently or with fellow students, a teacher, or another adult. The content is accessible to a wide range of ages, but it's especially geared toward students ages 13 to 16.

Your journey in this lesson will take you through three major topics:

Chapter 1: What Is Notting Hill Carnival?

Chapter 2: Music, Costumes, and Design

Chapter 3: Behind the Scenes

You'll see some helpful signs along the way:



Estimated time for completing the chapter



Audio recording or video



Link to more online content



Learning activity

Tools for Learning

Below are tools for learning that you may need for Digital Discovery lessons:



A device that connects to the Internet (a computer or tablet)



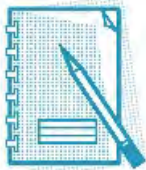
A tool for writing your responses and big ideas (pen, pencil, computer, etc.)



Art supplies (markers, crayons, paint)



Scissors



A notebook



Scrap paper

Explore! Google Arts & Culture pictures are **big**. If you want to explore a picture in greater detail, click on the magnifying glass symbol and zoom in with the zoom slider. By dragging the white box around, you can see even **tiny** details.

Welcome to *Celebrating Freedom and Culture at Notting Hill Carnival*

In this lesson, you will discover the rhythm, Caribbean colours, and history of Notting Hill Carnival, Europe's largest street festival. This three-day annual event takes place on the streets of Notting Hill, London, in late August. Notting Hill Carnival has its origins in the Carnival traditions of the Caribbean and in the social and political conditions of the post-1948 migration of peoples from the Caribbean.

What Will You Do?

1. Learn why migrants left the Caribbean and moved to Britain in the late 1940s.
2. Find out how and why activists wanted to address social tensions in London neighborhoods.
3. See how Notting Hill Carnival grew to become the second-largest street festival in the world.



What's in this lesson?

1. Learn about the origins of Carnival traditions.
2. See how Carnival traditions came to Britain.
3. Understand why Notting Hill Carnival is so important to its participants.
4. Discover the details that make Notting Hill Carnival unique.

By participating in this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Identify the purpose of the original Notting Hill Carnival.
2. Explain what elements are part of Notting Hill Carnival.
3. View Carnival costumes and hear participants talk about Carnival.

Vocabulary

British Commonwealth, Windrush generation, carnival, Notting Hill, multicultural, steel pan, calypso, mas, sound system, masquerade, DJ, papier-mâché

Need help with some of these terms? See the glossary at the end of this lesson.



Stirling Betancourt, Powis Square, Notting Hill, Kensington and Chelsea, Greater London, Chris Redgrave, Historic England 2016-07-20, Historic England

What Is Notting Hill Carnival?



What is this chapter about?
The origins of the Notting Hill Carnival tradition



How long will this chapter take?
1 hour

Chapter 1: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

Consider

1. Think about why people migrate to new places.
 - What might they be leaving behind?
 - What might they bring with them to their new home?



Discover

2. How do some people react to newcomers in their home city, state, or country? Are they welcoming? What do you think might be the best way to integrate new and old residents of a place?

Caribbean Immigrants Arrive in Britain

After the devastation of World War II (1939–1945), workers were needed to help rebuild Britain and fill the many open jobs in hospitals and elsewhere. At the invitation of the British government, more than 300,000 Caribbean migrants left their island homes and moved to Britain. The first group of Caribbean immigrants arrived on the SS *Empire Windrush* passenger liner in 1948. The immigrants from the **British Commonwealth** who came during this period are known as the **Windrush generation**.



Ink Drawings No. 2 Ras Daniel Heartman & Everton Gordon, 1978, Black Cultural Archives



Learn more about the Windrush generation in [this exhibit](#).

The Seeds of Carnival

By the late 1950s, the largest settlements of Caribbean islanders in Britain were in London's neighbourhoods of Brixton and **Notting Hill**. The Caribbean community often faced discrimination and outright attacks by those who wanted to "Keep Britain White." In response to rising tensions, activist Claudia Jones, who was born in Trinidad, organized an indoor Caribbean **Carnival** in June 1959 to celebrate Caribbean culture and help ease tensions.



Learn more about Jones in [this story](#).

[Claudia Jones, Notting Hill Carnival](#)

The Carnival Tradition

The tradition of Carnival in the Caribbean dates to the colonial period—Caribbean islands had been colonized by the British and French. Colonists, particularly those on Trinidad, held Carnival masquerade balls before the beginning of Lent, a Christian religious holiday.

The colonists excluded enslaved people from the festivities, so enslaved people established their own celebrations. Often, they mocked the elaborate costumes and traditions of the slaveholders. After enslavement was abolished, the tradition of Carnival remained. Free Black islanders celebrated Carnival openly and publicly.

The immigrants who came to Britain from the Caribbean brought many of their cultural traditions with them, including Carnival. Claudia Jones and later activists promoted the linking of these traditions to the community by establishing indoor events in halls around London.



Learn more about the origins of the Carnival tradition [here](#).

A French masquerade ball during the 1600s



The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Carnival Grows

It wasn't until the late 1960s that a group of activists, including Rhaune Laslett, created the first outdoor **multicultural** street festival. Organizers invited a well-known **steel pan** player, Russell Henderson, who had played the indoor Carnivals, to be one of the performers. Henderson's band attracted the local Caribbean community to the new festival. Attendees danced in the streets to the pan music.

This adaptation of Carnival grew over time, adding even more music and participants. In the 1970s, clashes between Carnival attendees and white residents and the police led to debates over the location and safety of Carnival. However, today Notting Hill Carnival is a thriving institution. It draws up to two million attendees and 400,000 volunteers a year.



Learn more about Rhaune Laslett and the reasons behind the first outdoor Carnival in [this story](#).

Follow the parade route and learn more about Carnival in [this story](#).



This drawing is an “action shot” of the festivities that are part of every Carnival—colourful costumes along with dancing, festive participants. This scene was created by artist R Sampson in the 1980s.



Take a Carnival “tour” through this drawing in [this story](#).

Find out more about Notting Hill Carnival in [this story](#).

Chapter 1: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the questions below.



- What issues were activists trying to address in the Notting Hill neighborhood when they founded Carnival?
- How did the elements of Carnival attempt to address these issues?



Carl Gabriel Notting Hill Carnival

Chapter 2:

Music, Costumes, and Design



What is this chapter about?
The details that make Notting Hill Carnival a crowd pleaser



How long will this chapter take?
1 hour

Chapter 2: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions in your notebook.

Consider

1. What might it take to turn a small neighbourhood gathering into the second-largest street festival in the world? What things draw crowds to an event like this one?

Discover

2. Do you listen to music? If so, what types? What music might draw people to Notting Hill Carnival?



The Music

There are five types of music that dominate Carnival. They are **mas** bands, steel bands, **calypso**, Brazilian bands, and **sound systems**.

Mas Bands

Mas comes from the word *masquerade*. Mas bands feature elaborately costumed participants and musicians. There are several official Carnival mas bands. Each year, they announce their latest theme.



Meet some of the women in mas in [this story](#).



Hear an introduction to mas in [this video](#).



"Carnival is a place of self-expression, strength, and joy that comes from within."

—Sadeysa Greenaway-Bailey



Pepe Francis 2020/2020, Notting Hill Carnival

Steel Bands

For the original indoor Carnival, steel band leader Russell Henderson was invited to play. Since that first Carnival, steel bands have been an important part of the Carnival music scene. Pepe Francis, shown here, is leader of Ebony Steel Band and has been playing at Carnival since the 1960s.



Hear Pepe Francis talk about Carnival [here](#).



Find out more about Russell Henderson in [this story](#).

Calypso Bands

Calypso originated in the Caribbean (Trinidad) in the late 1800s and came to Britain around 1917. Calypso features African rhythms along with lyrics on a particular theme.

Brazilian Bands

These bands first arrived on the Carnival scene in 1984 and were very popular. Highly choreographed dance routines and energetic, synchronised live drumming are part of the bands' performance.



Find out more about the bands [here](#).



Brazilian Band, Notting Hill Carnival

“Carnival is a vibe where all communities, all walks of life can get together and party.”



Volcano (Kenya Courtney) 2020/2020, Notting Hill Carnival

Sound Systems

These super-amplified systems are set up around Carnival and feature a team of **DJs** who play recorded music of their choice, adding to the general party vibe.

This sound system duo is known as Volcano. Volcano is made up of the youngest sound system participants in the Carnival. They have been participating since 2008.



Hear Volcano sound system talk about the importance of Carnival [here](#).

Hear DJ Mangrove Fatz talk about Carnival [here](#).

Art and Costume Design

There are many artists behind the elaborate creations of Carnival. Some have been working on Carnival for decades. Carnival exhibits often include sculptures and other kinds of visual art. Carnival costumes frequently have bent-wire frames that must be light enough for the wearer but also strong enough to last.



Carl Gabriel 2020/2020, Notting Hill Carnival

Carl Gabriel, shown here, works in traditional wire-bending technique and **papier-mâché**, paper laced with glue to create molding material for sculpting.



Read more about Carnival costumes [here](#).



Hear Carnival sculptor and creator Carl Gabriel talk about his work in [this story](#).

Listen to designer Dexter Khan talk about Carnival [here](#).

Scenes from Carnival

Take a walk through scenes from Carnivals past on the next few pages. Think about what might have inspired these costumes. Are there some common elements in materials or themes?



See more images from Carnival and read more about the festivities at [Notting Hill: The Culture of Carnival.](#)



Notting Hill Carnival 2013 Notting Hill Carnival



Notting Hill Carnival 2013, Notting Hill Carnival



Notting Hill Carnival 2019, Notting Hill Carnival



Notting Hill Carnival 2019, Notting Hill Carnival



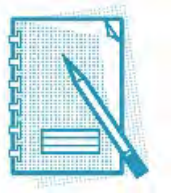
Elimu 2013, Notting Hill Carnival



Notting Hill Carnival 2011, Notting Hill Carnival

Chapter 2: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the question below.



Why do you think the Notting Hill Carnival has become so popular? Explain your answer, using specific details.



Clary Salandy, Notting Hill Carnival

Chapter 3:

Behind the Scenes



What is this chapter about?
The people who have made Notting Hill Carnival possible



How long will this chapter take?
1 hour

Chapter 3: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions in your notebook.



Consider

1. You've seen the elaborate costumes and art created for Carnival and heard from some of the participants. Who do you think organizes the participants and events for Carnival?

Discover

2. How long do you think it takes to organize an event of this size? What might be involved?

The Beginning

As you read earlier, activist Rhaune Laslett is credited with organizing the first outdoor Notting Hill festival in 1966. The Notting Hill Fayre and Pageant was held over a week in September.

The festival featured a parade that included children dressed as characters from the books of Charles Dickens, along with performers who reflected the cultural diversity of the area. The purpose was to bring the many cultural groups living in the area together.



Read more about Rhaune Laslett in [this story](#).



The Team Behind the Event

Notting Hill Carnival is put together by a dedicated team. Its members work throughout the year to arrange the artists, the music, the food, and more.



NHC team, Notting Hill Carnival

A small team puts Carnival together each year.



Meet the Carnival team in [this story](#).



Hear band leader and Carnival board member Allyson Williams talk about the meaning of Carnival [here](#).

Hard Work but a Labour of Love

You might've guessed after seeing the photos that Carnival isn't built in a day. As a matter of fact, it takes the entire year after one Carnival to plan and create the next one.

Those who have been doing it for decades declare it a labour of love—an amazing community builder that requires long hours to pull off successfully.

Participants say that it's important that the tradition be handed down to future generations. They think it's important that they honour the heritage of the people who first celebrated Carnival, both in the Caribbean and once they arrived in Britain.



Hear Carnival historian and ambassador Fiona Compton talk about why Carnival is important in [this story](#).

Listen to participants talk about why they love Carnival in [this video](#).



“Most people who are heavily involved in Carnival do it for little or no profit, they spend long arduous hours working and sleepless nights and it’s a beautiful thing.”

—Fiona Compton

Chapter 3: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the question below.



What do you think the biggest challenge would be in organizing an event like Notting Hill Carnival? Explain your answer.

Digital Learning in Action

So, what did you learn? Read the questions and complete the learning activities below to extend your learning based on what you just experienced.



Reflect: Answer these questions:

- You heard from many participants. What answer do most give about why Carnival is important to them?
- How does Notting Hill Carnival reflect the goal of multiculturalism that its founders had?
- How do traditions like Carnival help keep history alive?



Summarize: Think about the origins of Carnival in the Caribbean and about some of the interviews you heard in this lesson. Why do you think some participants say that Notting Hill Carnival is about “freedom”?



Create: You have seen many examples of Notting Hill Carnival costumes and learned about the mas bands in this lesson. If you were to create a mas band of your own, what would your theme be? Write down ideas for your theme and for costumes to go with it. Then, sketch out an example of a mas costume reflecting your theme. If time allows, take your design a step further by creating a model of your costume using wire and colored tissue paper, feathers, and other craft materials.

Glossary

- **British Commonwealth (known today as the Commonwealth):** an association of independent nations that used to be part of the British Empire
- **calypso:** a kind of Caribbean (originally Trinidadian) music that includes African rhythms along with words on a particular theme
- **carnival:** (1) a season of festivities before Lent; (2) an organized program of entertainment or exhibits
- **DJ:** abbreviation for disc jockey; (1) an announcer who plays popular recorded music on the radio; (2) someone who organizes a program of recorded music for dancing
- **mas:** short for masquerade; originated with the African-Caribbean community during enslavement; enslaved people would mimic and mock the slaveholders, copying the elaborate gowns worn at their celebration balls and combining them with African traditions; continued after enslavement ended
- **masquerade:** a social gathering of masked and costumed people
- **multicultural:** relating to several different cultures in one society
- **Notting Hill:** a district of West London that today is known for its Caribbean roots and its upscale shops and restaurants, as well as Notting Hill Carnival
- **papier-mâché:** a molding material made of paper and glue
- **sound system:** equipment that plays music through speakers
- **steel pan:** instrument dating to Trinidad in the 1930s and originally made from recycled steel containers such as oil drums or chemical containers
- **Windrush generation:** hundreds of thousands of Caribbean immigrants who came to Britain in the late 1940s at the invitation of the British government; the first group of immigrants came on a passenger liner called the *SS Empire Windrush*