

Carnival

in Belgium

Confetti and traditions
Activity booklet for kids aged 8 to 12



Alaaf!



Alaaf! Yay, it's that time of year when people in Belgium celebrate Carnival! There are celebrations in the street, people dress up in costumes, there's lots of music and everyone is happy because winter is over and spring is almost here. But this year is a bit strange, since there will be no Carnival in the streets. Luckily that doesn't stop us from having fun at home with our own Carnival festivities!

For every day of the week during Carnival, the BELvue museum will teach you something about a different Carnival festival somewhere in Belgium! After all, every Carnival is different, with its own customs and special traditions. With the fun games in this booklet and the sometimes critical questions about our traditions, you will soon become a real Carnival expert. **Print this booklet out and complete a page for every day of Carnival week.** And during the school holiday make sure to visit the BELvue museum, where you'll find a beautiful mask in our exhibition on famous comic strip artist Comès! Do you know Gille de Binche? He's a famous Carnival character. If you look really carefully, you'll find him in our gallery of typically Belgian objects!



Alaaf?

During the Carnival festivities in some cities, such as Eupen and in Flanders, people traditionally greet each other with a hearty Alaaf! This traditional greeting comes from Germany. So don't say hello during Carnival! As you greet the other person, bring the back of your right hand to the left side of your face in a kind of backward salute. This is how Carnival goers poke fun at soldiers, who normally salute by bringing their right hand up to the right side of their face.



BELvue!
museum 

Place des palais, 7. 1000 Brussels.
www.belvue.be



Monday



On the Monday, the city of Eupen celebrates *Rosenmontag*. That's German for Rose Monday! Way back in the Middle Ages, the Pope consecrated a golden rose on the Monday before the start of Lent, hence its name. On Rosenmontag, there is a big parade featuring beautifully decorated floats and people dressed up in costumes.

The leader of Carnival is a Prince (unfortunately there is no princess 😊). The Carnival Prince is given the keys to the city on the Saturday by the mayor of Eupen, which means he can rule over the city for the three days of Carnival: Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Now he's in charge!

 **The prince is usually much more colourful than this! Can you colour in the prince on his float?**





You can easily recognise the Prince by what he's wearing and carrying:

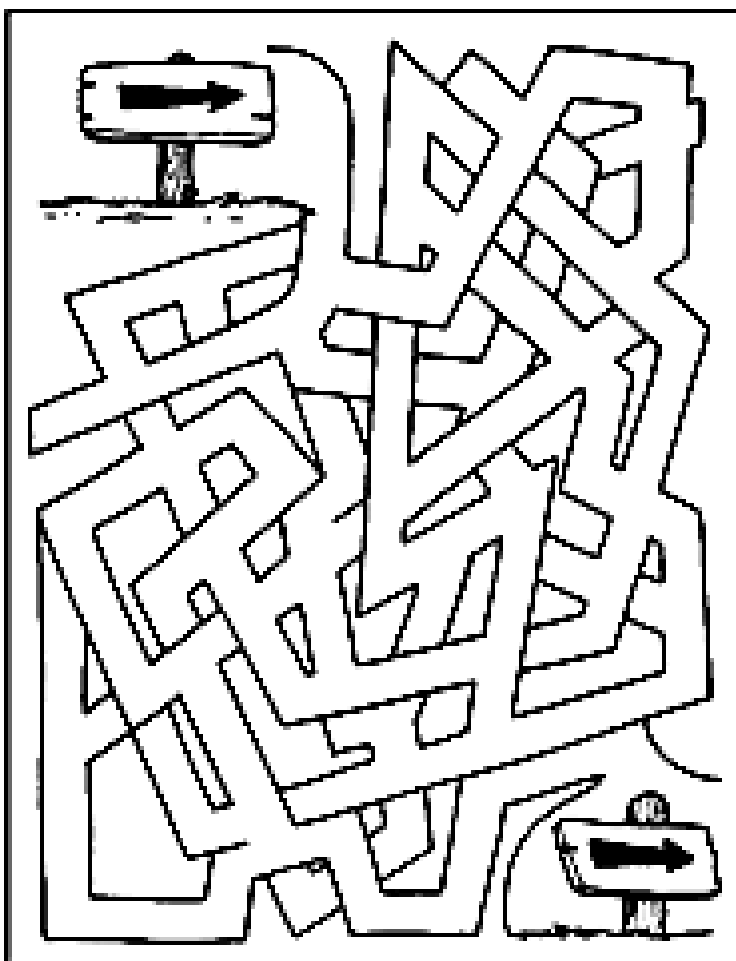
- his staff
- his cloak
- his jester's hat



In the parade, the Prince's float always comes last. He tosses out sweets and gifts to the people who come to watch. The floats are colourfully decorated and often feature huge figures and characters. During the parade they march through the city in a long procession.



Oh no, the float has got lost in the streets of Eupen! It's going to be late for the parade! Can you help it find its way through town?





Tuesday



The most famous Carnival in Belgium is probably the one in Binche. It's even been proclaimed one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization! Shrove Tuesday (known as *Mardi Gras* in French) is the high point of Carnival in Binche: that's when the Gilles wear their famous costumes!



Can you find all the parts of the Gille's costume in the drawing?



- Shirt stuffed with straw
- 150 stars, lions and crowns
- Yellow and red wool belt decorated with bells to wake up the spring
- White ribbons
- White lace collar
- Ostrich feather hat
- Wooden clogs the Gilles use to stomp on the streets and scare away the winter
- Basket of blood oranges that they toss into the crowd

The Gilles start their ritual very early on Tuesday morning: Gille invites his friends over while he puts on his suit, which they then stuff with straw. For breakfast, they drink champagne and eat oysters. Then Gille goes from house to house to pick up the other Gilles. In French, this is called the *ramassage* and the whole procession moves through the streets of Binche!

On the morning of Shrove Tuesday, Gille also wears his famous mask to go to City Hall. It's made of wax and has green glasses, a moustache, a goatee and sideburns.



With the mask on, all Gilles have the same face: this symbolises that they're all equal. In his hand, Gille carries a *ramon*, the French word for a bundle of branches. When a Gille wants to greet a passer-by, he tosses his *ramon* at him. Make sure you don't drop it!

The Gilles of Binche are the most famous, but you can also find Gilles at other Carnivals in Belgium, for example in Nivelles, La Louvière, Aalst and Charleroi. As you walk through the corridors of the BELvue museum, you might just come across a Gille!



In Binche, only men who have lived in the city for at least five years are allowed to dress up as Gille. That's the tradition. Girls may dress up as Harlequin or Pierrot (other well-known characters at the Binche Carnival), but only while they're still very young. Once girls hit puberty, they're no longer allowed to participate.

The masks worn by the Gilles are all the same and have a white face. Society consists of different people with different skin colours. Would it be better if there were different masks that reflect the diversity in society?



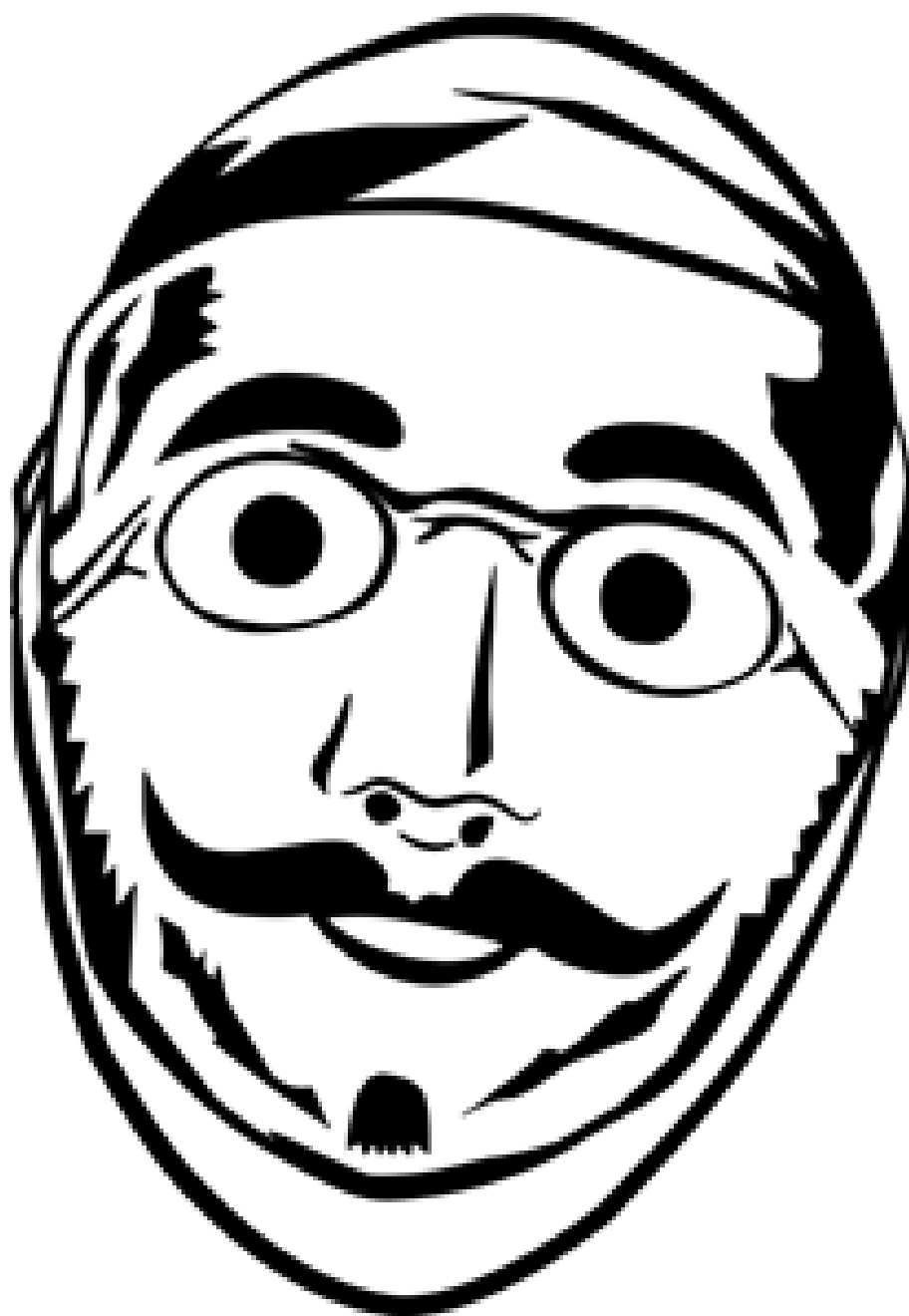
What used to be acceptable in the past is not always acceptable today. Traditions can evolve and adapt to a modern society. What do you think of traditions? Should we sometimes change our traditions? Do you think everyone should be allowed to dress up as Gille? Or are traditions important and should we keep them as they are for as long as possible without changing them?

.....

.....

.....

 This Gille mask could use some colour! Can you colour it? You can give it green glasses or make it as colourful as you want!



Wednesday



In Flanders the most famous Carnival is in Aalst (pronounced Oilst in the local dialect). On the Sunday there is a big parade with floats and they poke fun at all kinds of famous people and serious topics. All the floats form a colourful and festive procession that winds its way through the streets. The Carnival groups spend months preparing for the day when they can finally show off their hard work to the outside world. The festivities continue on Monday with the *Ajuinworp* (Dutch for Onion Throw), when thousands of onion-shaped candies are thrown into the crowd from the Town Hall. One of them is the Golden Onion, a little gem that everyone wants to catch!



Why onions? The inhabitants of Aalst, called Aalstenaars in Dutch, are nicknamed Ajoinen (or Onions in English) because of the many onion farms that dotted the region in the 19th century.



Giants walk the streets during Carnival in some cities. Aalst is home to the giant couple Iwein and Lauretta, who are dressed as a medieval knight and maiden.

Tuesday is the day of the *Voil Jeannetten* (Dutch for dirty Jeanettes). These are men who dress up as women, wearing coloured wigs and an old lampshade on their heads, pushing an old-fashioned pram and carrying a broken umbrella and a herring in a birdcage as they walk through the streets. They look really crazy!



Can you imagine what they might look like? Draw your creation here!

Some people don't like the name *Voil Jeannetten*, because it can be used as an insult to abuse other people.



Can you think of a new name for this crazy character?

.....

The Aalst Carnival has been in the news in recent years because some of the floats ridiculed certain religions or made fun of the appearance of people from different backgrounds. Some people and organisations think this is inappropriate and racist. The Aalst Carnival – like the Binche Carnival – was on the UNESCO cultural heritage list, but after Aalst was criticised by the organisation, they themselves asked to be removed from the list. In their view, freedom of expression is very important: you can say anything you want and you can joke about anything. Carnival celebrants say you shouldn't take things so seriously during Carnival.



What do you think? Should we be allowed to poke fun at anything? What if it hurts other people's feelings?

.....

.....

.....



Thursday



In Malmedy they celebrate *Cwarmê*. That's the Walloon name for their Carnival, which is 500 years old! Fifteen masked characters star in their Carnival festivities and each character has its own job to do! The most famous character is the *Haguète*, who wears a mask decorated with ostrich feathers.



Each *Haguète* carries a pair of wooden articulated tongs they use to grab the arms and legs of spectators. Everyone thinks it's hilarious! If they catch you, you have to kneel down and say you're sorry. Only then will the *Haguète* release you.



During the Malmedy Carnival, only the Walloon dialect is spoken and all the songs are sung in Walloon too! Do you speak a dialect at home? Which one?

.....



How would you dress up for Carnival? Give the clown a face and draw the rest of his costume!





Friday



In Ostend, a Carnival Prince and Princess are crowned and given the key to the city. This Carnival by the sea features the cimatiere procession, a night-time lantern parade, followed by the *Kloeffeworp*. The *Kloeffeworp* is a bit like the Onion Throw in Aalst, only they don't throw onions, but clogs (called *kloefjes* in the local dialect)! Luckily they aren't real clogs, but clog-shaped candies. Whoever catches the Golden Clog is the winner!



And we mustn't forget the famous *Bal du Rat Mort* (French for the Ball of the Dead Rat). This is a masquerade ball where everyone attends in costume. The name comes from a café in Paris called *Le Rat Mort* that the founders of the ball once visited long ago. At the end of the ball the person with the best costume wins a prize! All money raised goes to charity.



The original idea for the ball came from a group of men, including famous Belgian painter James Ensor. He lived in Ostend, where his parents had a souvenir shop that also sold masks. Ensor often painted people in masks. Here is one of his paintings titled *My Portrait Surrounded by Masks*. Do you see the painter in the centre of the painting?

To Ensor these masks had an important meaning. Normally you can hide your face behind a mask, but in Ensor's world the masks revealed the real character of the people who wore them, including the bad qualities.



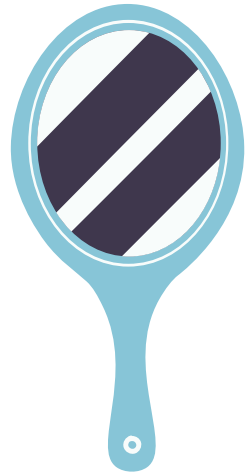
James Ensor - My Portrait Surrounded by Masks - 1899



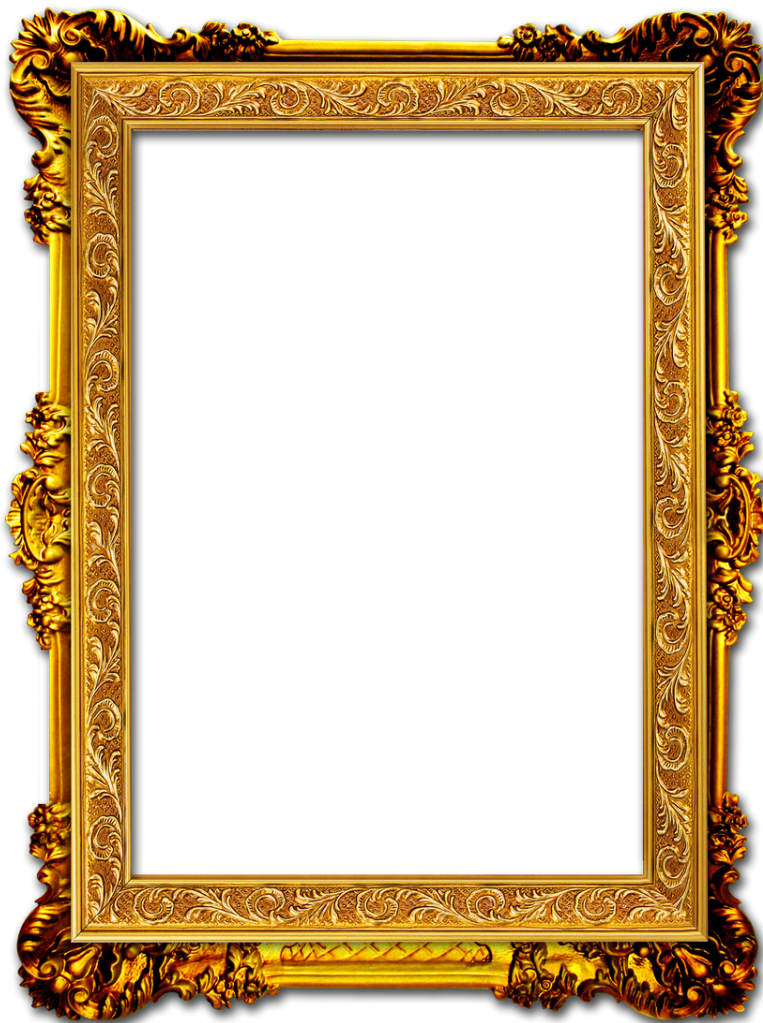
I spy with my little eye.....

- A red hat ●
- A very long nose ●
- 3 skulls ●
- An angry cat ●
- Yellow flowers ●

James Ensor painted the people around him as caricatures. A caricature is a humorous depiction of a person in which the most characteristic features are greatly exaggerated. Which is something that's often done at Carnival!



Draw a caricature of yourself. Sit in front of the mirror and draw a crazy picture of yourself, for example with huge eyes, a gigantic mouth and a wild wig.



It wasn't just Ensor who was a fan of masks. At the BELvue museum you can find a beautiful Venetian leather mask. The mask is called 'Silence, the mute Juggler', named after Silence, the main character in a comic strip written by Didier Comès.



Saturday



Carnival in Stavelot, in Liège Province, is also boisterously celebrated! Their Carnival is called *Laetare*, which is Latin for rejoice. It is celebrated on the fourth Sunday of Lent, when Easter is finally in sight.

The most famous character in Laetare is the *Blanc Moussi*, which is Walloon dialect for a person who wears white. The *Blancs Moussis* wear a white robe and a mask with a long red nose. Only men can become *Blanc Moussi*, unfortunately women cannot. They also carry a stick with an inflated pig's bladder attached to it and throw confetti! They dance, laugh and poke fun at people in the street.

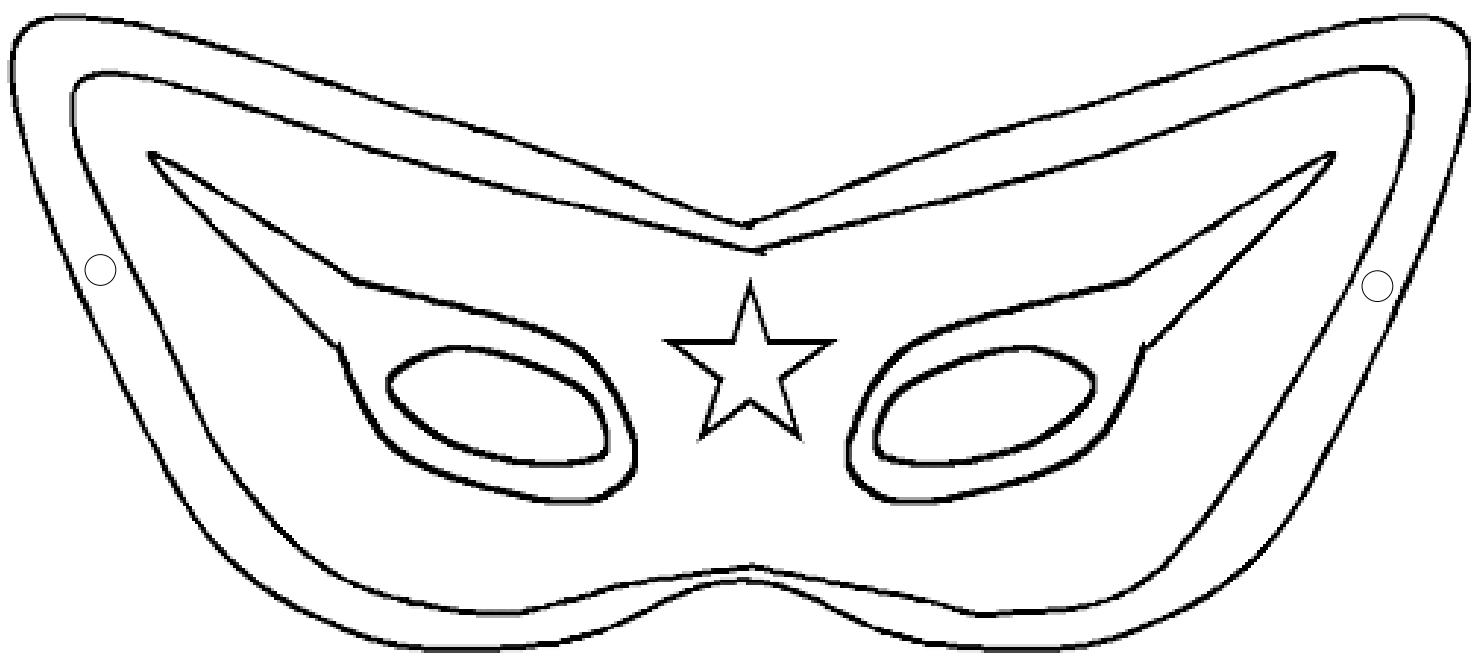


It is said that this tradition dates back to the Middle Ages. Back then, the Prince-Bishop decided that clergymen (you know, pastors, priests and so on) were not allowed to take part in the celebrations held by the people. If they did, they would be punished! In response, the people decided to mock this by imitating the clergy – who were not allowed to be there – by wearing white robes and hoods. Later they added the crazy mask with the long red nose to their outfit.



Do you already have a Carnival mask? You can also make your own!

- Step 1: Colour the mask below using coloured pencils, markers or paint.
Any way you want!
- Step 2: Cut the mask out.
- Step 3: Do you have any other decorations at home? You can stick feathers, stickers and glitter to it!
- Step 4: Use scissors to cut two eyeholes in the mask. Attach a string or elastic band. First make sure the string is long enough to fit around your head!



The Stavelot Laetare is also well known for the huge amounts of confetti they throw into the crowd. In recent years, people have started questioning this tradition. Since it's not easy to clean up, a lot of confetti is often just left on the streets and that's not good for the environment.



What do you think? Should there be strict rules to protect the environment or is it more important to have fun and not have so many rules?

.....

.....




Do you have any ideas for what could be used as an alternative to confetti? What could we throw instead?

.....

.....

Sunday

 So, now that you know everything about the different Carnival traditions in Belgium, you can probably figure out which character goes with which city!



Aalst •
Binche •
Eupen •
Malmedy •
Ostend •
Stavelot •




 Can you find all the words in the word search?

Carnival – prince – float – Stavelot – giant – parade – mask – disguised – onion – Binche – Ensor – festivity

K	C	A	R	N	I	V	A	L	Y	K	Y
V	H	T	U	E	Y	F	N	R	D	K	T
A	Z	O	T	E	S	V	D	S	I	S	F
B	G	N	U	N	F	I	K	A	S	T	E
V	C	I	Q	S	R	G	W	G	G	A	S
U	J	O	B	O	F	B	O	H	U	V	T
P	J	N	K	R	C	B	R	P	I	E	I
U	F	L	O	A	T	I	M	R	S	L	V
V	G	I	A	N	T	N	A	I	E	O	I
U	E	V	D	V	H	C	S	N	D	T	T
Y	F	H	E	S	H	H	K	C	B	M	Y
P	A	R	A	D	E	E	O	E	Q	X	K

Make your own paper garland for Carnival!

What you need:

- Coloured paper
-  Tip: If you don't have any, you can also use old newspapers.
- Scissors
- Glue or tape



How to make it:

- Cut out strips of paper in different colours, about 5 cm wide and 20 cm long.
- Take one of the strips and make a circle. Stick the ends together with glue or tape to make the first link.
- Take another strip and thread it through the link you just made. Now stick the ends of the second strip together to make your second link.
- Continue in the same pattern until you have a long chain! You can hang it up at home.

Find 10 differences



Make your own Harlequin or clown!

If you have any old wooden spoons you want to recycle, you can use them to create your own Carnival characters!

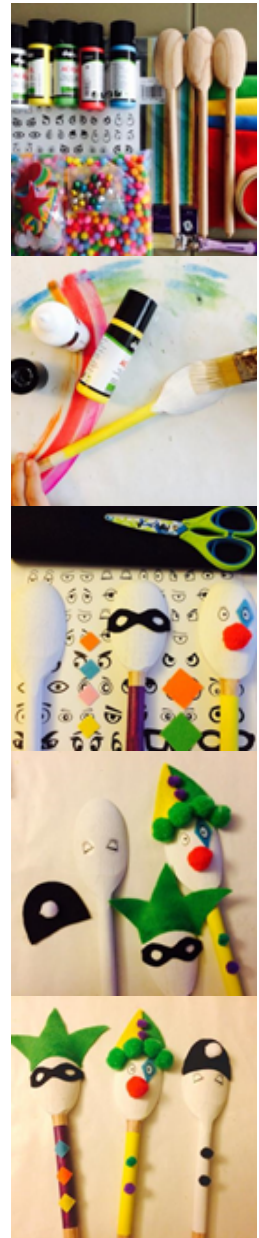
What you need:

- Wooden spoons
- Paint and a brush
- Coloured paper
- Pencils
- Masking tape
- Scissors
- Glue
- Other decorations you might have: felt, googly eyes, pompoms, bells, etc.

How to make it:

- We're going to paint the front of the spoon. Stick a piece of tape to the spoon to mark off the area that you're going to paint: for example, roughly halfway down the handle of the spoon.
- Paint the handle of the spoon for the clown's body, and the round part of the spoon for the face. You can use two different colours.
- Once the paint is dry, you can start decorating the face: glue on or paint eyes, cut a mask from coloured paper, cut out or draw a mouth, make a red nose out of paper or pompoms, and so on.
- Make a hat out of coloured paper or felt. Cut out the shape you want and stick it to the spoon.
- Now dress your character! Decorate the handle of the spoon with pompoms or little shapes that you cut out from the coloured paper or felt.

Source: www.teteamodeler.com/marionnettes-cuillieres-en-bois



Time to train your memory!

- Cut out all the cards.
- Mix the cards up and spread them out (Belgium side up) on the table.
- This is a game for two! The first player turns over two cards. If the cards match, the player can keep the cards and he or she can go again.
- If they don't match, the cards are turned face down again on the table (try to remember the position of these cards).
- Now it's the other player's turn.
- The game is over when all cards are gone. The person with the most pairs wins!

