

Vernal equinox



WORKSHEET A

Exercise 1

Complete the text with *a/an, the* or – (no article).

As (1) _____ Earth tilts on its axis, (2) _____ northern hemisphere starts to emerge from the dark winter days into the warmer, brighter, fertile spring. Twice (3) _____ year, day and night become equal in length. In times past, these equinoxes marked occasions in which seeds would be planted and then harvested. The first of these, (4) _____ *spring* or *vernal equinox*, occurs on or about 20th March each year.

The ancient Saxon goddess, Eostre, who symbolised (5) _____ new life and fertility, was (6) _____ most important figure of this celebration, which was also known as *Ostara*. The pagan Anglo-Saxons used to make offerings of (7) _____ coloured eggs to (8) _____ goddess Eostre. They placed them in the grave during burials as (9) _____ symbol of rebirth. Egyptians also placed eggs in (10) _____ tombs and pagan Greeks placed eggs on (11) _____ fresh graves of their loved ones to ensure resurrection of the dead by the magic associated with the eggs.

It is believed that, during the vernal equinox, if you place (12) _____ egg upright on your kitchen worktop, it will remain upright due to the magnetic forces at work at this time of year. Those who have tried and succeeded remain convinced, but most scientists agree that there is (13) _____ very little reason to believe this to be any more likely to happen during (14) _____ equinox than at any other time of year.

The vernal equinox is (15) _____ time of renewal, both in (16) _____ nature and in (17) _____ home. Many people make time to do their spring cleaning. The tradition, dating back to pagan times, is designed to remove any negative energy accumulated over (18) _____ dark winter months and prepare the home for (19) _____ positive energy of spring and summer.

The vernal equinox and the Christian tradition of (20) _____ Easter are closely connected. As Christianity spread across (21) _____ Europe and (22) _____ Britain, the older symbols of pagan worship became incorporated into the new faith's holiday. The name *Easter* seems to have originated from the name of (23) _____ goddess Eostre, mentioned above. And so the old rituals honouring the planting of new seeds, the fertility of the land and its people and the hope of (24) _____ new life arising in the world were replaced by Christian beliefs.

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WORKSHEET B

Exercise 2

Here are some facts about the vernal equinox. Guess whether they are true (*T*) or false (*F*).

1. Day and night are exactly the same length on the vernal equinox.
2. The vernal equinox is only one of two days per year when the sun rises due east and sets due west.
3. *Vernal* comes from a Latin word that means 'green'.
4. The vernal equinox is the first day of six months of darkness when the sun never rises at the North Pole.
5. The Gregorian calendar, which most of the world now uses to say what day it is, was invented to keep the vernal equinox on the same date each year.
6. There are actually 362.54219 days in a year (the time it takes the sun to make one complete circuit of the Earth's sky).
7. Iranians celebrate the new year on the vernal equinox.
8. The Chinese know of a way to balance eggs on the Equator during the vernal equinox.
9. The 'Easter bunny' (a rabbit that lays chocolate eggs for children) is a recent American invention.
10. In Japan, spring is associated with the colour pink.