

C1-C2 Worksheet: Oamaru's Steampunk Festival - 03 June 2026

Article

Each year, the small New Zealand town of Oamaru manages to dress up as an alternative version of the nineteenth century. Its steampunk festival, recently photographed by the Associated Press, has turned into one of the world's best-known gatherings for a genre that mixes Victorian aesthetics with science-fiction oddity. Over four days, airship captains, fictional aristocrats and self-styled inventors show off elaborate costumes, many of them made from recycled materials after months of careful work. The town's preserved Victorian streets help the whole performance come alive, giving visitors the feeling that they have briefly stepped into a parallel history.

What makes the festival more than fancy dress is the craftsmanship behind it. Participants learn sewing, metalworking and prop-making in order to stand out, but the mood is deliberately playful rather than competitive in any ordinary sense. Events such as teapot racing, parasol duelling and cookie-dunking challenges draw in spectators because they lean into absurdity while still rewarding ingenuity. Whole traditions have begun to spring up around activities that once sounded like jokes, turning eccentric hobbies into shared rituals with rules, costumes and loyal followers.

Steampunk also allows people to break away from some of the social conventions normally associated with the Victorian era. In Oamaru, the past is not simply copied; it is exaggerated, rearranged and made more inclusive. Women can command imaginary airships, mythical creatures can wander through old streets and adults can take on identities that everyday life rarely permits. That may explain why the festival feels oddly modern. It celebrates nostalgia, but only after pulling it apart and rebuilding it as a space for invention, performance and belonging.

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

1. The article says Oamaru's festival is linked to steampunk's mixture of Victorian style and science fiction.
2. The writer suggests that the costumes are usually bought quickly and with little effort.
3. The preserved streets of Oamaru help make the festival feel more immersive.
4. The article says the festival is only a serious historical recreation of Victorian life.
5. Teapot racing and parasol duelling are presented as playful but organised festival activities.
6. The writer suggests that some activities have developed into shared traditions.
7. The final paragraph says the festival simply copies Victorian social rules.
8. The article presents steampunk as a way of reworking the past into something more imaginative and inclusive.

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. dress up	A. to display something proudly
2. turned into	B. to be clearly noticeable or different
3. show off	C. to begin to appear or develop
4. come alive	D. to become something different
5. stepped into	E. to embrace or deliberately use something
6. stand out	F. to enter an unfamiliar situation or world
7. draw in	G. to escape from or reject something
8. lean into	H. to wear special clothes for an occasion
9. spring up	I. to attract people
10. break away from	J. to become vivid, lively or convincing

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. alternative	A. artistry
2. aesthetics	B. protected
3. elaborate	C. longing for the past
4. preserved	D. different
5. parallel	E. welcoming
6. craftsmanship	F. unusual
7. ingenuity	G. visual style
8. eccentric	H. inventiveness
9. inclusive	I. corresponding
10. nostalgia	J. intricate

Use the new language

Please choose 5 words or phrases and make your own sentence using the new word or phrase.

Discussion Questions

Student A

1. Would you enjoy going to a steampunk festival?
2. Have you ever dressed up for a festival, party or themed event?
3. Why do people enjoy creating characters or alter egos?
4. What makes a festival feel memorable rather than ordinary?
5. Do you prefer traditional festivals or unusual modern ones?
6. Which hobbies in your country draw in very dedicated fans?
7. Is making a costume more interesting than buying one?
8. Would teapot racing or parasol duelling make you laugh or interest you?

Student B

1. Why do some adults find it liberating to take on invented identities in public?
2. Does steampunk express nostalgia for the past, criticism of it, or both?
3. How does using recycled material change the meaning of costume-making?
4. Can eccentric festivals strengthen a small town's identity and economy?
5. Why do communities sometimes spring up around activities that begin as jokes?
6. Is historical fantasy a way of escaping modern life or reimagining it?
7. How far should festivals lean into absurdity in order to stand out?
8. What makes a subculture become more inclusive than mainstream culture?

Answer Key

True/False: 1=T, 2=F, 3=T, 4=F, 5=T, 6=T, 7=F, 8=T

Phrase Match: 1=H, 2=D, 3=A, 4=J, 5=F, 6=B, 7=I, 8=E, 9=C, 10=G

Synonym Match: 1=D, 2=G, 3=J, 4=B, 5=I, 6=A, 7=H, 8=F, 9=E, 10=C

Example sentences with the phrases

1. Many visitors dress up in handmade costumes for the parade.
2. The small market turned into a major weekend event.
3. Contestants love to show off the details of their outfits.
4. The old street seems to come alive during the festival.
5. Walking through the gates felt like we had stepped into another world.
6. A clever costume can stand out even in a crowded parade.
7. Strange competitions often draw in people who enjoy playful events.
8. The organisers decided to lean into the town's unusual reputation.
9. New traditions can spring up when people return every year.
10. Steampunk allows people to break away from ordinary fashion rules.