

Countries Around the World™

Belgium

Program Summary

Meet Oscar. He and his family live in Linkebeek, a town in the suburbs of Brussels, the capital of Belgium. Join Oscar at the International Carnival and Mask Museum as he gazes at the colorful costumes worn by the Gilles — participants in the Carnival of Binche. Next, Oscar and his family shop in an outdoor market in Linkebeek and introduce students to the lively nature of the market and Belgium's currency, the euro. On a trip to Brugge, Oscar's family experiences the port city's rich and varied history while on a guided tour of the canals. Before heading home, Oscar and his family stop for some waffles and cruise the boardwalk at Blankenberg beach on the North Sea. Then, Oscar meets up with his friend Charles to tour Brussels, starting with Mini Europe, a theme park populated with miniature reconstructions of some of Europe's most famous buildings, where students will learn about Belgium's role in the European Union. Experience the culture Brussels has to offer when Oscar and Charles tour two very different galleries: the Royal Museum of Fine Arts and the Comic Strip Museum. Finally, students will visit the site of a turning point in European history at the town of Waterloo, the place of Napoleon Bonaparte's final defeat and the culmination of the Napoleonic Wars.

Country Information

- **location:** Western Europe, bordering the North Sea; bordered by France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Germany
- **capital:** Brussels
- **official languages:** Dutch, French, German
- **government type:** federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy
- **total area:** approximately 30,528 sq km
- **climate:** temperate; mild winters, cool summers; rainy, humid, cloudy
- **terrain:** flat coastal plains in the Northwest, central rolling hills, and rugged mountains of Ardennes Forest in the Southeast
- **natural resources:** includes construction materials, such as silica sand and carbonates
- **industries:** includes engineering and metal products, motor vehicle assembly, transportation equipment, scientific instruments, processed food and beverages, chemicals, basic metals, textiles, glass and petroleum
- **agricultural products:** includes sugar beets, fresh vegetables, fruits, grain, tobacco, beef, veal, pork and milk

Vocabulary

Gilles — Participants in the Carnival of Binche who wear brightly colored costumes.

euro — The currency of Belgium and several other member nations of the European Union.

European Union (EU) — A family of democratic European countries that are committed to working together for peace and prosperity. Belgium is a member of the European Union.

canal — A man-made waterway that is created to connect two or more existing waterways.

quay — A wharf or reinforced bank where ships are loaded or unloaded.

belfry — The part of a tower or building where bells are hung.

Middle Ages — Also known as the medieval period, the time period that stretched roughly from the fifth to the 15th century. The term was coined to describe the era in between the time of ancient Rome and the Renaissance.

duchy — The territory ruled by a duke or duchess.

speculos — Also speculoos or speculaas. Thin, crunchy biscuits, usually flavored with cinnamon, that have an engraved image on one side.

constitutional monarchy — A government with a constitution, elected representative body and monarch with limited powers.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Belgium is part of the European Union (EU). Give the students an outline map of Europe and have them find and label Belgium as well as the other countries in the European Union. As they watch the program, have them look for references to the EU and how it relates to Belgium.
- Tell students that Oscar, the boy in the program, is going to take them on a tour of Belgium, including foods, museums and theme parks. Ask students what they think would be important to show if they had to give a tour of where they live. Start the discussion with questions such as: What are your favorite foods? What do you do for fun? Where are your favorite places to go? How are the things you would show representative of where you live? Ask students to speculate about how museums, food and pastimes might be different in Belgium. After viewing, follow up by asking students to compare their assumptions about Belgium with what they observed in the program.
- Inform students that Oscar goes to an outdoor market where he shops and meets people. Ask students if they have ever been to an outdoor market. Is that typical for shopping in their hometown? Compare and contrast the idea of an outdoor market with large supermarket or mall shopping. Students should be on the lookout for other similarities and differences between Oscar's life and their own as they view the program.

Follow-up Activities

- In his travels, Oscar eats some familiar Belgian foods: waffles, chocolate and French fries. Before watching the video, ask students what they know about each one of these foods. After viewing, have students share what they learned. How are these foods related to Belgium? Then, challenge students to create their own recipes for Belgian waffles, chocolate, French fries or other Belgian dishes and bring samples to the class to have a Belgium-inspired food festival. Students can discuss how often they should be eating such food and determine what kind of exercise they could do to stay healthy with these foods in their diets. Point out that Oscar does a lot of biking and walking, which help to burn the calories from the foods he eats.
- Belgium has three official languages: Dutch, French and German. Invite your class to learn a few words in each and create an English, French, Dutch and German dictionary with their new vocabulary. As a resource, visit the following sites:
www.languagehelpers.com/learn/french.html,
www.languagehelpers.com/learn/german.html,
www.smartphrase.com/Dutch/du_general_words_phr.shtml (The Dutch site does not offer phonetic pronunciations, but does have a pronunciation guide.)

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- The Carnival of Binche is an important celebration in Belgium where participants in the parade, known as “Gilles,” dress in elaborate costumes and masks. Have students create their own masks based on the designs the Gilles use and stage a parade. Conduct a discussion in which students share how the Carnival of Binche is similar to or different from celebrations that they have attended or observed. Compare this celebration to the celebration of Mardi Gras in the United States.
- Oscar travels to several different museums and even discusses famous Flemish artists, like Peter Paul Rubens. Compile a selection of artwork found in Belgian museums to show to the class, providing some background on the artists and the work. Ask students to respond to each piece of art and offer their own interpretations of it. As a resource, visit the following site: www.fine-arts-museum.be/site/EN/frames/F_peinture.html. Students can pick their favorite painting, create their own version of it and write a caption for the picture explaining why they like it.
- Comic strips and comic books, such as *The Adventures of Tintin* by Hergé, are very popular in Belgium, and they even have their own museum in Brussels. Have students create their own comic strips. Students can share their comics with the class. The United States has its own tradition of comic strips and comic books. After having observed the types of characters popular in Belgium, contrast them with comic book characters in the U.S. Challenge older students by asking questions, such as: What are the major differences and similarities among the different types of comics? What can you infer about the cultures that produce such characters? What does it say about their values or worldview?
- Oscar and his friend Charles visit a theme park called “Mini Europe,” which consists of miniature replicas of many famous European buildings. Have students create their own miniature version of their city/town/neighborhood. Compile a list of the most prominent buildings in your area and assign students, either alone or in pairs, to build them out of any materials that they choose. Have the students bring the replicas to class and display them. Have students use what they know about reading maps and calculating scale to determine where and how far apart buildings should be placed.

Suggested Internet Resources

- www.cia.gov
The CIA World Factbook web site presents detailed and up-to-date information on Belgium and many other countries. Topics include geography, people, government, economy, transportation and communication. On the main page of the CIA site, click on the “World Factbook” link.
- www.europa.eu/abc/index_en.htm
Europa is the portal hub of the European Union. This large and comprehensive site contains multiple indexes on topics such as the history of the EU, updated news and events, and traveling across Europe. Member countries are also searchable.
- www.worldheritagesite.org/countries/belgium.html
The UNESCO World Heritage hub for the sites in Belgium. The main page gives an overview of the country with links to the heritage sites in Belgium.

Suggested Print Resources

- Pateman, Robert. *Belgium*. Marshall Cavendish, Tarrytown, NY; 2006.
- Venezia, Mike. *Rene Magritte (Getting to Know the World's Greatest Art)*. Children's Press, New York, NY; 2003.
- Woodhouse, Jayne. *The Life and Work of Pieter Bruegel*. Heinemann Library, Chicago, IL; 2000.

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