

Faces™

The Basque Region

Rich in culture, cuisine, and lineage, the Basques are one of the oldest ethnic groups in Europe. Readers will journey from the majestic Pyrenees Mountains to the Bay of Biscay to explore the people, history, and traditions of the Basque Region. This month's issue of FACES magazine teaches readers about the impressive legacy of the ancient Etruscan civilization.



CONVERSATION QUESTION

What makes Basque Country a unique region?

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the characteristics of the Basque region.
- Students will learn about the art of Basque-style improvisational poetry.
- Students will learn about the functions of sheepwagons.
- Students will examine the physical and cultural characteristics of a place.
- Students will analyze tradition.
- Students will distinguish between facts and opinions.
- Students will create a travel brochure for Basque Country.
- Students will participate in an improvisational poetry activity.
- Students will design a personal arborglyph.

In addition to supplemental materials focused on core STEAM skills, this flexible teaching tool offers vocabulary-building activities, questions for discussion, and cross-curricular activities.

SELECTIONS

- **Welcome to Basque Country!**
Expository Nonfiction, ~1160L
- **Improvisational Poetry, Basque-Style**
Expository Nonfiction, ~1000L
- **Sheepwagons: Homes Away from Home**
Expository Nonfiction, ~1180L

Faces® Teacher Guide: February 2025

Welcome to Basque Country!

pp. 8–11, Expository Nonfiction

Basque Country boasts a breathtaking coastline, dramatic mountain range, and rich cultural heritage. Readers will learn about this beautiful region and about the culture of the Basque people.



RESOURCES

Examine Characteristics: Basque-ing in Culture

OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the characteristics of the Basque region.
- Students will examine the physical and cultural characteristics of a place.
- Students will create a travel brochure for Basque Country.

KEY VOCABULARY

- **heritage** (p. 8) features belonging to a culture that were created in the past and have historical importance
- **nationalism** (p. 8) support for the independence of a particular nation or people
- **emigrated** (p. 11) left a home country or region to live elsewhere

ENGAGE

Conversation Question: What makes Basque Country a unique region?

Inform students that the article that they will be reading introduces them to one of Europe's oldest and strongest cultures. Display a world map and give students the following clues, one at a time, so that they can locate the region being studied. (Basque Country)

- This region is located in the Northern Hemisphere.
- This region is located in the south-west of Europe.
- This region is located in the western Pyrenees Mountain range.
- This region is located on the coast of the Bay of Biscay.
- This region straddles the border of Spain and France.

INTRODUCE VOCABULARY

Post and define the three key vocabulary terms (**heritage; nationalism; emigrated**). Have students write a paragraph explaining how each one of these elements can influence a political election and the immigration policies of a particular nation. Discuss responses. After the reading, revisit the terms and discuss how they pertained to the Basque region.

READ & DISCUSS

Pose the following questions to facilitate meaningful discussion.

1. What sets Basque Country apart from other parts of Spain and France?
2. Why was life particularly difficult during Spanish dictator, Francisco Franco's reign?
3. How did the region's location affect its history?
4. Why does the Basque region draw tourists from all over the world?
5. How do Basque descendants pass on their traditions to their children?

SKILL FOCUS: Physical and Cultural Characteristics

INSTRUCT: The article presents the reader with detailed information regarding the physical and cultural characteristics of Basque Country. Remind students that when studying a new land, it is important to consider many facets of life in that region. Distribute the *Basque-ing in Culture* graphic organizer and tell students that they will be using information from the article to complete the worksheet.

ASSESS: Review the chart as a class and collect to check for accuracy.

EXTEND

Social Studies: Have students revisit the map of Basque Country on pages 4 and 5. Instruct them to fold a piece of paper into thirds and to create a travel brochure. Alternatively, many computer programs will have easy-to-use templates. Using information from the various resources, students' brochures should include the following: location, climate, land features, tourist attractions, seasonal events, recreation, and interesting facts.

Basque-ing in Culture

Examine Physical and Cultural Characteristics: Consult the article to explain how each of the elements listed below contributes to the uniqueness of Basque Country.

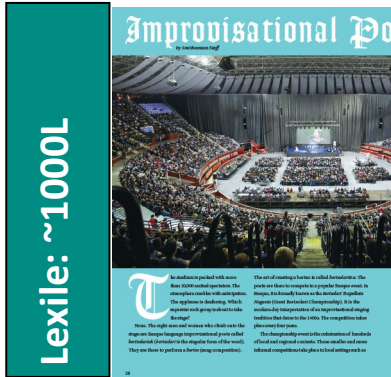
Element	Defining Characteristics
Geography and Climate	
History	
Economy	
Resources	
Language and Celebrations	

Faces® Teacher Guide: February 2025

Improvisational Poetry, Basque-Style

pp. 20–22, Expository Nonfiction

This article allows students to become spectators at a popular Basque competition. The modern-day interpretation of an improvisational singing tradition is the culmination of hundreds of local and regional contests.



RESOURCES

Analyze Tradition: Battle of the Bertsolariak

OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the art of Basque-style improvisational poetry.
- Students will analyze tradition.
- Students will participate in an improvisational poetry activity.

KEY VOCABULARY

- **spectators (p. 20)** people who watch a show, game, or other event
- **improvisational (p. 20)** relating to or characterized by spontaneous performance, especially in music or dance
- **exhilarated (p. 22)** very happy, animated, or excited

ENGAGE

Conversation Question: What makes Basque Country a unique region?

Read aloud the first three sentences of the article: 1. *The stadium is packed with more than 10,000 excited spectators.* 2. *The atmosphere crackles with anticipation.* 3. *The applause is deafening.* Discuss with students how the author has created a hook to get readers interested in the topic. Ask students what they expect the article to be about. Then, reveal the title of the article, “Improvisational Poetry, Basque-Style” and tell students that they will be reading an article about a traditional event that still draws huge crowds today.

INTRODUCE VOCABULARY

Post the key words and discuss the meanings of the terms. Then display the following prompts and have students discuss responses with a partner.

- Discuss events at which you have been a **spectator**.
- How can **improvisational** skills benefit you in your personal life?
- Describe events that leave you **exhilarated**.

READ & DISCUSS

Have students read the article with a partner. Lead a class discussion based on the following prompts.

1. How did bertsolaritza help keep the oral Euskara language alive?
2. What population does bertsolaritza attract?
3. What is the criteria that a contender must meet to be eligible to participate in the competition?
4. Explain the five parts that the competitor must win order to be named the World Champion.
5. Why was the 2009 winner of the competition a historical victory?

SKILL FOCUS: Analyze Tradition

INSTRUCT: The article presents the reader with detailed information regarding the Great Bertsolari Championship. The celebration embraces history and the joy of the Basque people. Distribute the *Battle of the Bertsolariak* graphic organizer and tell students that they will be examining and recording the details of the traditional improvisational poetry event.

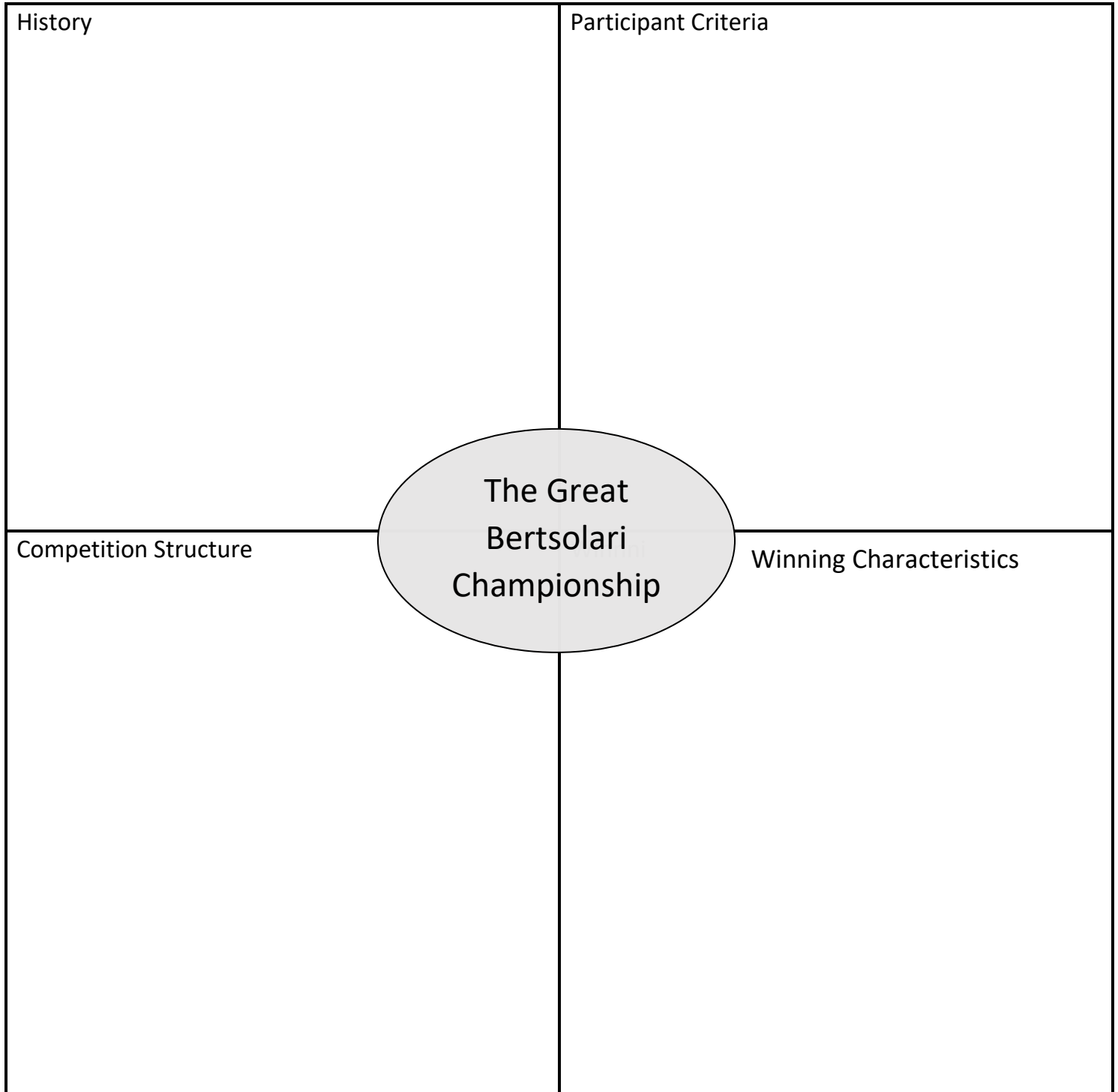
ASSESS: Review the chart. Ask: *Have you attended a similar event?*

EXTEND

Dramatic Arts: The last paragraph on page 21 states that the remaining two poets are given four rhyming words that they must use in their bertso. Show students a video clip of Bertsolari Txapelketa Nagusia, easily available online. Discuss the atmosphere, the talent, and the cultural atmosphere. Give students the opportunity to experience the excitement by asking for volunteers. Give pairs of students the same four rhyming words and have them create a spontaneous poem that they may choose or choose not to sing! Allow more reserved students to speed write their poems instead.

Battle of the Bertsolariak

Analyze Tradition: Review the article and highlight information about each part of the traditional competition listed below. Explain each element and include details.



Discuss with a partner: Would you choose to attend this event if possible? Why/why not?

Sheepwagons:

Homes Away From Home

pp. 23–25, Narrative Nonfiction

Readers will learn how sheepwagons were used by Basque immigrant groups who found work as sheepherders in the western United States in the late 19th century.



RESOURCES

Distinguishing Facts and Opinions: Sheepwagon Statements

OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the function of sheepwagons.
- Students will distinguish between facts and opinions.
- Students will design a personal glyph.

KEY VOCABULARY

- **arborglyph** (p. 24) carvings or symbols carved into the bark of living trees

ENGAGE

Conversation Question: What makes Basque Country a unique region?

Distribute the article, “Sheepwagons”. Have students preview the text and study the photographs. Visit the website suggested on page 25 (www.basquemuseum.com) to build background knowledge before reading the article.

INTRODUCE VOCABULARY

Post and discuss the key word and definition. As the author uses common vocabulary to educate readers about sheepwagons, there is only one key vocabulary term to study. Take the opportunity to do a word study using the word **arborglyph** as follows: *How many letters are vowels? How many are consonants? How many syllables does the word have? What is the meaning of each part of the word? What part of speech is the word? What words are similar to this word (synonyms)? How can you use the word in a sentence? Use this word to make a real-life connection or to discuss book/movie characters.*

READ & DISCUSS

Reinforce comprehension of the concepts presented in the article by using the following questions to direct discussion.

1. What supplies were Basque men given when they came to the United States?
2. Why were the months long and lonely for sheepherders in the American West?
3. How were sheepwagons different from pioneer wagons?
4. Explain the atmosphere of the boarding houses.

SKILL FOCUS: Fact and Opinion

INSTRUCT: Review with the class that it is important to be able to make distinctions between fact and opinion in order to determine the credibility of information. (**Facts:** can be proven, true for everyone.

Opinions: can't be proven, personal judgment.) Instruct students to review the article and to classify each statement on the *Sheepwagon Statements* worksheet as a fact or opinion.

ASSESS: After reviewing answers, have students choose one fact statement and one opinion statement and explain **WHY** it is a fact or opinion.

EXTEND

STEAM: Review the definition of the word, arborglyph, from the key vocabulary. In the mid-1800s, Basque immigrants to the United States carved arborglyphs on aspen trees to record their lives. These carvings often included names, dates, poetry, and pictures. They have been found to include a range of topics including hometowns, sports, love, work, religion, and politics. Cut a huge tree trunk from butcher paper and have students create their own arborglyphs. (Approve sketches.) After they have been “carved” onto the trunk, have students explain the meaning of their glyph.

Sheepwagon Statements

Distinguishing Facts and Opinions: Locate and underline each sentence or idea below in the article. Then, mark each statement as FACT (F) or OPINION (O). *Helpful Hint:* Facts can be proven; opinions are personal judgements.

_____ 1. On the outside, the sheepwagons looked similar to the American pioneers' wagons.

_____ 2. Basque dancers have beautiful costumes.

_____ 3. Every few days, the shepherd moved the flock of sheep to a new location for more food and water.

_____ 4. Basque people like to be alone so they were well suited to become shepherders.

_____ 5. The Basque Museum and Cultural Center in Boise is the most interesting museum you can visit in Idaho.

_____ 6. Basque shepherders caved their arborglyphs on aspen trees.

_____ 7. The job of a shepherd usually lasted between seven and nine months.

_____ 8. The third month of the job was most stressful for the shepherders.

_____ 9. It is still possible to see a sheepwagon or two while driving through the western states of America.

_____ 10. Restored sheepwagons can be a fun place to hang out.

