

A Mix of Colors and Cultures

By ReadWorks

Boom-cha boom boom-cha boom. Maya bopped her head to the salsa music that played in the distance. She looked toward the beat's source—off to her left, a group of Spanish-speaking students were practicing a dance for the culture festival that their school was holding later in the day. The dancing girls wore swinging, vibrant skirts that swayed as they wiggled their hips to the horns and drums of the music. Maya wished that she could dance like that. In front of her, parents were setting up food stations along the main corridor of the international school. As the mothers and fathers lined up the traditional food items of their native countries on little tables, they wiped off the beads of sweat that had accumulated on their foreheads. April is the hottest month in Bangkok, Thailand, and they were all feeling it. Maya headed inside to the dance studio to get dressed, but mostly to feel the icy breeze of the air conditioner.

Dooooom chik-chik doooooom chik-chik. As she approached the school's dance studio, Maya began to hear cymbals clashing, a sound increasing in volume—dance practice must have already begun.

"Maya! How nice of you to join us," Mrs. Apasiri greeted her student as she walked through the doorway.

"Grab your candles and join in, please," the teacher instructed.

Maya wove through the seven girls who were swaying on the dance floor to the other side of the room where her costume was. She fumbled through her bag for the two candles she would need. After finding them, Maya rushed out onto the floor. They were performing the "Fawn Tian," or candle dance, a traditional Thai folk dance.

"Four on the right and four on the left, please," Mrs. Apasiri told her dancers, arranging their formation. "The orchestra will be behind you, so just remember that when you start moving around," she added.

The girls were to perform last in the entire show, so that their candles could flicker in the dark of the night. Mrs. Apasiri turned on the music, a combination of string and percussion instruments. Maya listened to the humming notes of the *saw duang*, a two-stringed instrument typically used in classical Thai music. She, along with the other dancers, slowly moved up and downstage as they gracefully swung their hands right and left, being cautious so as to not extinguish the candle flames.

Once they finished practicing, it was time to get dressed. A few mothers of the dancers had wandered in during the rehearsal and were waiting patiently to start helping out with makeup and hair. Maya walked over to her bag and pulled out a full-length silk sarong, a jacket, and a matching scarf to wear over one shoulder. She hurriedly wrapped the blue and green sarong around her waist, thinking about the swaying salsa skirts as she looked down at

the straight, starched lines of her own. A mother ushered her over to the hair station, sat her down, and proceeded to squirt an excessive amount of gel into her hands.

“Hurry along, girls!” Mrs. Apasiri chimed in, glancing down at her watch. “Twenty minutes until the show starts!”

Once Maya’s hair was slicked back in a tight bun, she placed a gold headdress on. It looked like an elegant crown, speckled with red and green gemstones, coming to a long, pointed tip at the top of her bun. After everyone put the finishing touches on their costumes, they left the studio to settle in backstage until their performance.

Dooop do-do-do dooop. Maya pulled back the heavy black curtain just slightly to peek out at the traditional Korean dancers on stage. They donned big, billowing red skirts that ballooned out as they spun around in circles to the strings that accompanied their movements. She admired the large fans the dancers waved and shook for the audience.

Next up was the salsa performance. Even the members of the audience began shaking their hips to the contagious beat and clapped their hands to the sound of the drums. Maya watched as if she had never seen their dance before, mesmerized by the way the boys led their partners, as if they were connected by invisible strings. Mrs. Apasiri soon broke Maya’s focus. “Get ready, girls!” she instructed her dancers. The salsa music began to fall quiet, and Maya lined up with the other girls.

As they walked onto the stage, the audience *ooood* and *ahhhed* at the candles flickering in the girls’ hands. They performed their dance to a smiling crowd. Upon their finish, Maya felt a tinge of pride—she glanced at the other dancers on stage as the music faded, lingering on the silk skirts reflecting the light of the candles. Looking at her own, she felt the same admiration she had felt for the other groups.

Once all of the dancers had changed out of their costumes, the food vendors opened. Parents dished out their hard work in plastic bowls, ready to volunteer any information about the food they had prepared. Maya wanted to try all of it. She and her friends set down the main corridor of the school. Jen wanted Korean food, Divesh wanted German, Chris wanted Thai. As they each presented their arguments, Maya snuck away. She collected a variety of dishes from various booths and grabbed a large plate. She returned to her friends, who hadn’t noticed her disappear. She placed the plate in front of them and proceeded to dump all of the food onto the white plastic.

“What are you doing, Maya?!” Divesh asked impatiently.

“Come on, just try it,” she told her friends.

They each grabbed a fork and reluctantly tried Maya’s mixture. Slowly, they all began to nod their heads in approval. “Nice work, Maya,” Chris said with a mouth full of food. She smiled in response.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What are students practicing a dance for?

- A their school's culture festival
- B their school's dance festival
- C a cultural holiday
- D a class project

2. Where is this story set?

- A at a major theater in the USA
- B at an international school in Korea
- C in the hallway of a dance studio
- D at an international school in Thailand

3. Read these sentences from the text.

"Boom-cha boom boom-cha boom. Maya bopped her head to the salsa music that played in the distance. She looked toward the beat's source—off to her left, a group of Spanish-speaking students were practicing a dance for the culture festival that their school was holding later in the day. The dancing girls wore swinging, vibrant skirts that swayed as they wiggled their hips to the horns and drums of the music. Maya wished that she could dance like that."

What conclusion can you draw from this evidence?

- A Maya likes the salsa dancing and music.
- B Maya is not good at any style of dance.
- C Only Spanish-speaking people can dance salsa.
- D Salsa dance is simple and easy to learn.

4. How does Maya feel towards the other cultures highlighted in the food and dance performances at the culture festival?

- A bored and indifferent
- B fascinated and appreciative
- C jealous and impressed
- D embarrassed and annoyed

5. What is the main idea of this story?

- A A girl and her friends taste food dishes from a variety of different cultures at their school's culture festival.
- B A girl prepares for a dance performance by dressing in a sarong, slicking her hair into a bun, and wearing a gold headdress.
- C A group of Spanish-speaking students practice a salsa dance to perform at their school's culture festival.
- D A girl participates in her school's culture festival, which features dances, clothing, and food from different cultures.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"Doooom chik-chik doooooom chik-chik. As she approached the school's dance studio, Maya began to hear cymbals clashing, a sound increasing in volume—dance practice must have already begun."

What might the author be trying to convey with the words "Doooom chik-chik doooooom chik-chik"?

- A the beat of Maya's heart as she goes to dance practice
- B the sound of Maya approaching the dance studio
- C the sound of the cymbals clashing in the music
- D the words that Maya's dance teacher is telling her students

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Jen wanted Korean food, Divesh wanted German, and Chris wanted Thai. _____, Maya wanted to try all of the different dishes.

- A Initially
- B For example
- C In contrast
- D Therefore

8. Describe what Maya wore for her dance performance. Include at least two details from the text in your description.

9. In literature, authors sometimes use vivid and descriptive language that appeals to the senses. This language is called imagery. Give two examples of imagery from this text.

10. Why might the author of this story have used imagery in his or her descriptions of different dances, music, and costumes? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
