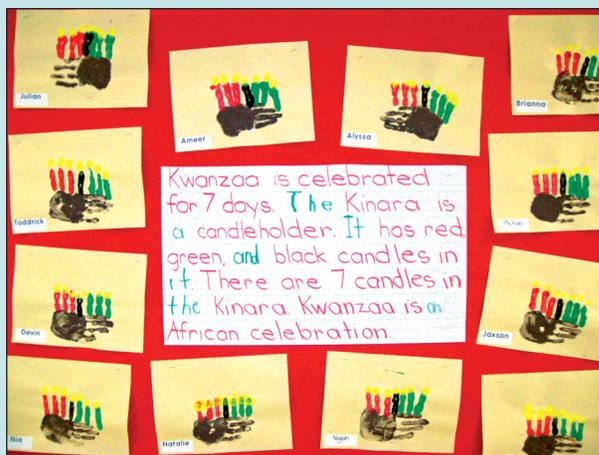


Christmas around the world

by April Larremore

Before we know, it will be Christmas time again. Cards will adorn lounge rooms, classrooms and offices, and Christmas music will be played in shopping centres. Last minute presents will be bought and wrapped, trees will be decorated and twinkling, and ornaments will be hung throughout shops and all along streets. Family dishes will be prepared and served, special celebrations planned, and children will wait anxiously to open gifts and toys. All over the world there are similarities and differences in how Christmas is celebrated, from one continent to another. Each celebration should be appreciated for its geographical and cultural uniqueness. Family and societal traditions imitate both the individual beauty of all cultures, and the strengths of similar beliefs shared by many people. No matter how the Christmas season is celebrated, it is important to teach our students about other customs and places, and the rich diversity of the heritage of Christmas.

Kwanzaa



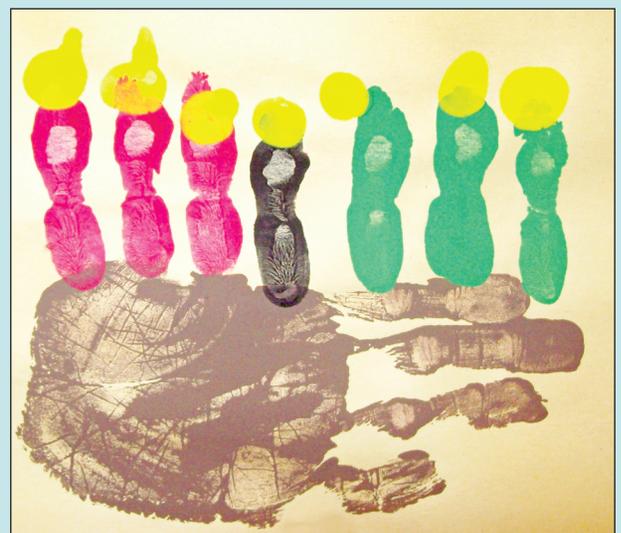
In 1966, Maulana Karenga established a new holiday in an effort to honour and preserve the African American culture. The holiday became known as Kwanzaa, meaning 'first fruits' in Swahili. Kwanzaa begins on 26 December and lasts for seven days. It is celebrated by people all over the United States and Canada. Many of the elements of Kwanzaa are based on traditional African American celebrations, in which family and friends gather to give thanks, remember their ancestors, evaluate their lives, and plan for the future. During Kwanzaa, families think about the seven principles: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith. On each night of Kwanzaa, families honour a different principle. They read stories, sing, and light candles. Kwanzaa candles are held in a special candle holder called a kinara. A kinara holds seven candles, one for each principle. One candle is black, three are red and three are green. The kinara is often placed on a straw mat called a mkeka. Fruits and vegetables are placed on the mkeka as a reminder of the foods grown in Africa. Families drink from a large cup called a kikombe. The cup honours the principle of unity, and represents people living and working happily with others. During Kwanzaa parents give children gifts called zawadi. These

gifts are usually handmade. On the last night of Kwanzaa there is a big celebration called a karamu. People dress in African clothes and sing and dance.

ACTIVITY – Kinara

You will need red, green, black, brown and yellow paint, sheets of white construction paper (23 cm x 30.5 cm) and paintbrushes.

This project needs to be completed one student at a time. Use a paintbrush to paint one of the student's hands brown, excluding their thumb. Press the student's hand down onto the paper horizontally to make a print. Paint the index finger of their other hand red. Lay their finger down on the paper on the top left side of the kinara to make a print. Repeat this step twice, working your way toward the middle of the kinara. You will need to repaint the student's finger in-between each print. Repeat this same step once more using black paint. The black fingerprint should be made in the middle of the kinara. Continue to repeat the same step three more times using green paint and working your way toward the right end of the kinara. Finally, have the student dip their thumb into the yellow paint and make thumbprint flames at the top of each candle.



Christmas in Germany

Germany is located in northern Europe. German is the official language and their Christmas greeting is Frohliche Weihnachten, meaning 'Merry Christmas'. The Christmas season in Germany starts at the beginning of Advent, four weeks before Christmas Day, and ends on 6 January, or Three Kings Day. In Germany, Christmas trees are an important symbol of Christmas.

The Germans were the first to use trees as a symbol for Christmas. The German word for fir tree (the Christmas tree) is tannenbaum. There are many stories about how evergreen trees became Christmas trees. One well-known story is that Martin Luther, a German minister, was walking through the forest on Christmas Eve and saw the stars shining through the trees. He thought it was so beautiful that he cut down a tree and decorated it with candles to represent the stars. Today, Germans adorn their trees with many types of decorations. They use tinsel, candles, stars and angels. Some Germans even add baked decorations called Lebkuchen.



ACTIVITY – Tannenbaums

You will need white paint, empty thread spools, blue construction paper (23 cm x 30.5 cm), green and brown construction paper, scissors and glue.

Give students pre-cut green triangles, or have them cut out their own. Have students glue three or four green triangles onto their blue sheet of construction paper. Next, have them glue on brown rectangles for the tree trunks. To make snowflakes, have students dip an empty thread spool into white paint, press it onto the paper, and make prints on top of the trees and all over the blue construction paper. Use spools in various sizes to add as many snowflakes as you like.

Christmas in Sweden

Sweden is a Scandinavian country located in northern Europe. The official language is Swedish and their Christmas greeting is God Jul, meaning 'Good Christmas'. In Sweden, Christmas Day is celebrated on 25 December, but St Lucia Day, which falls on 13 December, marks the beginning of the Christmas season. This holiday honours St Lucia, a 4th century saint who carried food and drink to hungry Christians in underground tunnels around Italy. To light the way she wore a wreath of candles on her head. Early in the morning on 13 December, the oldest daughter in the house dresses in a white gown with a red sash and wears a crown of evergreens and lit candles. Accompanied by her sisters and brothers, she awakens the other members of her family with sweet buns and cups of coffee, while she sings the Swedish version of the song 'Santa Lucia'. Swedish boys dress in white shirts, wear pointed hats with stars on them, and are called Star Boys. Swedish children believe that on Christmas Eve a Christmas gnome, or Tomte, comes out from under their house and leaves gifts for everyone.



ACTIVITY 1 – St Lucia Day Crown

You will need 5 cm x 15.5 cm green construction paper strips, green construction paper leaves, white construction paper candles, yellow construction paper candle flames, glue and a stapler.

Fit green construction-paper strips around each girl's head and staple the ends to form an 'evergreen crown'. Have girls add green coloured leaves, candles and flames around the crown. Allow to dry. Girls can role-play the St Lucia Day tradition by serving their classmates sweet buns or pastries and tea.



ACTIVITY 2 – St Lucia Day Star Hat

You will need crayons or felt-tip pens, yellow construction paper stars, a stapler, and large sheets of white construction paper (30.5 cm x 46 cm).

Have boys decorate a large white sheet of construction paper using crayons or felt-tip pens. Roll the white paper into a cone large enough to fit the child's head. Staple the edges closed to make a pointed hat. Have boys finish decorating the hat with pre-cut paper stars. Boys can wear their hats along with the girls in their Crowns of Light while they eat sweet buns or pastries and drink tea.

Christmas in Mexico



Mexico is located south of the United States. The official language is Spanish, and their Christmas greeting is Feliz Navidad, meaning 'Happy Christmas'. In Mexico, the most cherished custom of Christmas is Las Posadas. Las Posadas means 'lodging' and is the name given to the nine days of celebration before Christmas Day. The celebration commemorates the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and their search for a place to sleep each night. On each of the nine nights before Christmas, children and their families re-enact Mary and Joseph's search to find shelter. Holding lit candles, children walk in a procession from house to house, singing a song and asking for lodging. At each house they are turned away until they reach the final house, where they are welcomed and invited to come in for a party. After saying prayers the children break a piñata and fireworks are set off in celebration of Jesus's birth. Children in Mexico receive their gifts on 6 January (or Three Kings Day). Instead of hanging up stockings, the children lay out their shoes for the Wise Men to fill with gifts and toys.



ACTIVITY – Poinsettias

You will need red, green and yellow construction paper, scissors, a hole-punch and glue.

In advance, trace the flowers and leaves on red and green construction paper. Give students the pieces to cut out. Each student will need one red flower and three green leaves. Glue the leaves anywhere on the back of the flower. Use a hole-punch to make small yellow circles. Squeeze glue onto the centre of the flower. Lay the yellow circles on top of the glue. Allow to dry.



Hanukkah



Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday which celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrians. Hanukkah begins on the twenty-fifth day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, which falls within the months of November and December. During the eight-day celebration, Jewish families light a special candelabrum called a menorah. At sundown on the twenty-fourth day of Kislev the first candle is lit, along with the Shamash (attendant) candle. Each evening another candle is lit until all nine candles are burning together. The menorah represents the miracle of light which came from the Maccabees's lamp that continued to burn for eight days on only one day's worth of oil. Hanukkah is sometimes called the 'Festival of Lights'. Jewish people say prayers, sing songs, and give gifts as they light the menorah. They eat special foods such as latkes and play with dreidls. A dreidl is a spinning top with four sides. Each side of the dreidl contains one Hebrew letter. The letters stand for the words Nes, Gadol, Haya and Sham, which mean 'a great miracle happened here'.

ACTIVITY – Menorah



You will need yellow and blue paint, pre-cut menorah shapes made from yellow construction paper, white construction paper (23 cm x 30.5 cm), paintbrushes and glue.

Have students glue the menorah shape onto the bottom half of their white sheet of construction paper. You will need to do the following step one student at a time. Use a paintbrush to paint the student's right hand blue. Lay his or her painted hand on top of the right side of the menorah, with the thumb print in the middle of the menorah. Press down onto the paper to make a print. Use a paintbrush to paint the child's left hand blue. Lay his or her painted hand on top of the left side of the menorah. The thumbprint will overlap the thumbprint that is already on the paper so that there are only nine candles on the menorah. Press down onto the paper to make a print. Allow to dry. Then have students dip their thumb in yellow paint and make thumbprint flames at the top of all nine candles.

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