

Making Holidays Inclusive for All Children

**A Guide for Early Childhood
Educators in Southern NH**

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INTRODUCTION

I started believing in Santa Claus when I was 12 years old. Yep, that's right. Just as other children realized that Santa was not real, I became a fervent believer. I swore I could hear Santa and his reindeer on my roof, as I was lying in bed on Christmas Eve. How is it that I developed this type of magical thinking, right as other children outgrew it? How did I develop Delayed Santa Syndrome?

Perhaps it all began when I started public school in a predominantly white, Christian town. My family was also white, but we were Jewish. My second grade teacher asked me to stand up and explain Hanukkah to my classmates. To this day, I remember the mortification I felt in that moment – how I stood numbly, a spotlight directed squarely on my difference. This would become an annual tradition in each new grade. It was around that time that I also heard other kids referring to a Jewish woman in town as a witch – because she has a bump on the bridge of her nose, which is common among Ashkenazi Jewish people¹. I began to suspect there was something fundamentally yucky about my family and me.



Me, circa 5th grade — wearing plastic earrings!

In middle school, my suspicions were confirmed when I ran for student government and another student vandalized my campaign signs with swastikas. Later that year, a boy on the school bus noticed my plastic heart-shaped earrings and taunted, “JAP,² why are you wearing plastic earrings??” It stung. All I had done was walk onto the school bus wearing the same kind of earrings as anyone else.

Despite my regular attendance at our local synagogue, it wasn't long before I was an adolescent spending my allowance on Christmas decorations for my bedroom. I bought a small plastic Christmas tree and made ornaments for it with molding clay. I decorated our hallway banister with silver garlands. My mom told me I needed to take it down. I tried hanging dreidels from it to appease her. Still, she insisted, “No. Jews don't decorate for Christmas.”

I longed for Christmas with every fiber of my being. Even though my family's Jewish traditions were warm and meaningful, there was nothing my parents could do to counterbalance the message I was receiving over and over at school:

You are different.

Your identity is not okay.

There is something fundamentally wrong with you and your family.

¹ Jews who descended from Europe

² “JAP” is a racist and sexist slur. It is an acronym for “Jewish American Princess,” which carries the connotation of an entitled and spoiled Jewish female.

It was only when I moved to New York City for graduate school and lived amongst a relatively huge Jewish population that I learned what it feels like to *belong*. I slowly began to accept my Jewish identity. I eventually wound up marrying a Jewish partner and we are raising our child Jewish. The only problem is, we are raising our child in New Hampshire, a state known for its homogeneous white, Christian population – and I am now tasked with protecting my daughter from what I experienced.

Inclusive Holidays in Southern NH

In December 2019, when I was pregnant, I toured preschools in Southern New Hampshire. I visited a non-denominational, progressive school. This was a program that truly wanted to attract a diverse student population. They did not realize the degree to which they were inadvertently deterring that from happening. Upon entry, I was greeted by a large Christmas tree in the foyer. In the infant room, there were Christmas stockings on the wall with each child's name on them. I asked, "What happens if you have a student who doesn't celebrate Christmas?" They paused and then replied, "Actually, we don't know. We've never had a student who doesn't celebrate Christmas."

Online, I saw posts in local Facebook parent groups about children writing letters to Santa in public school classrooms in Southern NH. Some teachers were using "Elf on the Shelf" as a behavior management strategy in the winter months.

How could it be that more than 30 years after my detrimental experiences, schools were still so *alienating*? I wondered, deeply concerned: how will my child be able to fully embrace her identity in this environment?

Dominant Culture

What I experienced was only a fraction of what children of color experience, or children whose families wear identifying religious garments of non-Christian traditions, such as hijab³. Many children don't need a spotlight shined on them for other kids to know they are not in the dominant culture.

In New Hampshire, the "dominant culture" refers to people who are white and agnostic or Christian (see Section 6 for specifics). If you, yourself, are a member of the dominant culture, imagine for a moment what it's like for a child of an observant Jewish, Hindu, or Muslim family to go Target in November. Everything in that store, from the music to the decor, tells the child that the important thing about this season is *Christmas*. The child goes to the pediatrician's office. It's the same thing. They turn on the TV. Every commercial is Christmas-themed. When this child goes to school in your classroom...will they continue to feel like an outsider? Or will they finally feel like they are in a place where their family actually exists? Where they can feel like they are as important as every other student in the class?

³ A head covering worn in public by some Muslim women

The Power You Hold as an Educator

As an educator, you can choose to amplify the messages children are already receiving nearly everywhere else outside of school, or you can choose to go a different path: **a path that allows children from underrepresented groups to feel that they *matter*. This is the same path that nurtures empathy in children from the dominant culture.**

As an educator, how can you nurture *all* children from the start so they can embrace their identities and love themselves?

As you read this guide, I hope you'll take away just how influential you are in the lives of the children in your care. You create their world away from home. That is an amazing amount of power to have over young lives! Thank you so much for your interest in this topic, and for the incredibly important work you do.

SECTION 1: Why Approaching Holidays Inclusively Matters

Most of us entered the field of early childhood education because we want to help children grow and thrive. If we are not thoughtful in our approach, though, we unintentionally help some children thrive while leaving other children behind, or – worse – harming them. This is especially true when it comes to the often thorny issue of observing holidays in the school or childcare setting.

Every child who feels excluded is one child too many

Although there is no one right way to approach holidays, unless you are working for an explicitly religiously affiliated program, I'm sorry to say that there are some wrong ways. And the reason they're wrong is that they can make some children feel like they are less important, while allowing other children to live in a bubble – not realizing that there are lots of traditions outside of the ones that they know.

What does it look like to help *all children* grow and thrive in our approach to holidays at school? The NAEYC Code of Ethics states that **respecting family diversity** is the key.

This means recognizing that everyone has the right to their traditions and – this is the tricky one – making sure that your program does not inadvertently favor one category of families over another.

Implicit Bias

It can be tempting to try to treat all children equally by taking the stance of “not seeing color or race” or insisting that “we are all the same.” The problem with this approach is that it erases children’s individuality. It also leaves too much room for our unconscious, or implicit, biases to dictate our actions.

We all have implicit biases. Every single person on the planet has implicit biases! These are preferences that we are often not aware of. In fact, research shows that babies as young as 6 months old prefer individuals who match the race of their primary caregiver.

The first thing you need to do to ensure you are caring for all children equitably is to examine your own implicit biases. Become curious about them. Only then will you have the awareness you need to improve your practice.

How do you know if you are unintentionally favoring some groups over others? You can take implicit bias tests online and find out! See the inset box to learn how.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: Implicit bias tests

Project Implicit offers online implicit bias tests on a range of topics, like specific racial groups, sexual orientation, disabilities, and body size. These questionnaires can help you understand where you might have some biases to consider. Find them at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>.

Choose one or more tests to take. Were you surprised at your result? Why or why not? How might this bias impact your teaching practice?

These assumptions that we're not even aware of can affect how we plan our lessons and interact with our students – and add to existing bias that children and families have experienced outside of the school setting. It's natural to have bias. The question is: what are you going to do about it?

Birthday Celebration Analogy

Here's an exercise to show how emphasizing different holidays can make children feel more or less important. Imagine that a preschool teacher acknowledges the birthday of each child in their classroom using the following system.

Kids with September Birthdays Get:

- their name on a wall calendar
- a paper birthday crown

Kids with October through December Birthdays Get:

- their name on a wall calendar
- a paper birthday crown
- a birthday cake
- a birthday dance party

Kids with January through August Birthdays Get:

- their name on a wall calendar
- a paper birthday crown
- a birthday cake
- a birthday dance party
- a bouncy house

Do you think the children will compare how their birthdays are treated? What about those kids with September birthdays? How will they feel when they see most of the children in the class getting a cake, and some even getting a bouncy house? They have no control over when they were born, making this classroom's birthday practice profoundly unfair and damaging to their sense of self.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what happens when we unintentionally highlight certain customs and holidays more than others. Especially when children are in an underrepresented group of any kind, it is essential that we do our best to protect them from the harm that comes from bigotry, discrimination, systemic racism, implicit bias, and simply feeling like they don't belong because they aren't part of mainstream culture.



Image source: justreedblog.com



Image source: pbs.org



Image source: Dearheart Confections



Image source: Wayfair

What if My Student Body Is Not Diverse?

If you have a homogeneous group of families, as you very well might in New Hampshire, you might wonder if any of this applies to your program. I'd like to share this graphic from the children's book publishing industry to illustrate why an inclusive approach to holidays most certainly applies to children in a relatively non-diverse program.

DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS 2018

Percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2018 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pstats.asp



Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen
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The CCBC inventory includes 3,134 books published in 2018. This graphic would not have been possible without the statistics compiled by the CCBC, and the review and feedback we received from Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Hanning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner. Many thanks.

This graphic shows the proportion of children's picture books in 2018 with main characters of various identities (including animals or inanimate objects, rather than human children). It also indicates the effect that this representation has on the children reading these books:

What do you notice about the mirror of the American Indian/First Nations child? What do you think about the fact that the animal has a larger mirror than any of the non-white children?

With fewer mirrors reflecting their realities, children of underrepresented groups are given singular or incomplete ways of viewing themselves, their communities, and their possibilities. They are at risk of feeling less important, less "normal" than their peers.

Take a look at the white child. He is surrounded by mirrors. He's feeling good about himself and imagining all sorts of possibilities. But he may not be aware that people who look or live differently from him exist. He lacks windows into other worlds.

Windows and Mirrors

Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, a distinguished scholar in academic study of children's literature, wrote that books serve as "windows and mirrors" for children. This means that children can both learn about others and see themselves reflected in what we read to them. Our educational settings can be windows and mirrors as well, especially when it comes to our approach to holidays.

Incorporating an inclusive approach to holidays in your program will make it more appealing to families from diverse backgrounds. As you'll see in Section 6, the population of NH is becoming increasingly diverse over time.

This approach will also be tremendously helpful to children in your program who identify with the dominant culture. Children from the dominant culture who lack exposure to diversity miss a critical component of the foundation for developing empathy. They may not develop the type of emotional intelligence that research tells us is *required* for children to grow into successful adults in our increasingly global economy.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY:

Audit Your Program

Decorations

- Which holidays do you decorate your classroom for?
- Which holidays are most represented by your decorations?

Crafts & Art Projects

- Which holidays do you do crafts for?
- Count approximately how many crafts you do for each holiday.

Books

- Which holidays do you read books for?
- Estimate how many books you read for each holiday.

SECTION 2: Specific Traps and Tricky Places

Educators often have the best of intentions when it comes to celebrating holidays in early childhood programs. Usually the intention is to have fun! Having fun is an important part of preschool!

On the flip side, you don't want the fun to harm anyone, right? Become aware of the common pitfalls of various approaches to holidays so that you can understand how to improve your practice to be inclusive of all children. In this section, you'll find some common traps and tricky places. Then, in Section 3, you'll find practical solutions.

Tourist Approach

When you have a homogeneous group of children, you might unintentionally normalize your students' holidays while exoticizing those from other cultures. Lightly touching on "multicultural" holidays while putting tremendous focus on mainstream holidays sends a message to children about which holidays are "normal" and which are "exotic," or not normal. This is called taking a **tourist approach** because it does not allow for meaningful learning.

Tokenizing & Appropriating

It's our nature as early childhood educators to want to offer hands-on learning activities for children. **However, it's best to refrain from planning activities based on holidays that are not intimately familiar to you, unless you are able to get input from someone from that culture.**

Despite your good intentions, it can be easy to accidentally **tokenize** sacred cultural symbols or objects, or treat them with disrespect, by using them as the basis for an activity like an art project. It can be all too easy to get the details wrong too, thereby sharing incorrect information with your students.



Example of appropriation of Native American culture
image source: edpost.com

Partaking in a tradition that's not your own can also be interpreted as **appropriation**, or trying out a tradition in a superficial fashion that might feel strange or offensive to those from that culture.

Singling Out Children

When there is only one child or only a handful of children from the non-dominant culture in your group, it can be tempting to ask them to share about their family's traditions during circle time. Do not single out children in this way. Instead, ask all the children in the group if they would like to share. Encourage children to share only if and when they are comfortable. In upcoming sections of this guide, you'll discover other appropriate ways to encourage children to share.

Ignoring Diversity within Cultures

Every culture has rich diversity within it. For that reason, it's not a good idea to make blanket statements about how any group of people observes holidays. Use language like, "*Some people in India and other parts of the world* celebrate Holi with colorful water fights," as opposed to, "Indian people celebrate Holi with colorful water fights."

Assuming that Certain Holidays Are Universal

Certain holidays have become so commercial, it can be easy to believe that they no longer have a religious affiliation – they're just "fun for everyone," right? Christmas and Easter are prime examples of holidays that are often assumed to be universal, or "not necessarily religious," or "just American."

The NAEYC Code of Ethics states that assuming holidays are universal actually does not respect cultural and religious diversity. Instead, it lifts up one group's holidays above others.

Regardless of how commercially advertised or widespread these seemingly secular approaches may be, they are grounded in specific religious and cultural assumptions. Within many Jewish or Muslim families, for example, Christmas trees and decorations are specifically not used at home, so as to preserve their religious identity. Families who are not Christian may prefer that their children not participate in Christmas and Easter activities because the huge amount of attention around these holidays makes their own family customs seem less appealing.

Similarly, secular holidays like Mother's Day and Father's Day, which we so often see acknowledged in early childhood settings, can most certainly exclude some children. Some of your students may have a single parent, come from a home with two moms or two dads, or live with grandparents, and so on.

These are delicate issues that families may not feel comfortable bringing to your attention or discussing freely. That's why it's so important for your program to offer neutral ground.

Celebrating “All the Holidays”

The approach of celebrating “all the holidays” in your curriculum is particularly tricky because even within cultures, some holidays are more important than others. It is very difficult to understand these nuances without careful research or conversations with people from various cultures.

When taking this approach, it is crucial to monitor how much attention you give to each holiday. If you have a visit from Santa for Christmas and don’t want to let that go, remember that it is essential to have something equally exciting for *every other holiday you celebrate*. Most programs find this impossible and wind up favoring some holidays over others.



Image source: troyrecord.com

Overemphasizing December holidays

In the United States, December is often considered a “holiday” month. Needless to say, this is due to Christmas taking place in December. Hanukkah and Kwanzaa, also often recognized by early childhood programs, also take place in December. In Judaism, Hanukkah is a less important holiday than Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover, but it receives a lot of attention in an attempt to counterbalance Christmas. Muslims sometimes do not have a winter holiday at all. (See Section 7 for more information about the Muslim calendar.)

For families who do not observe any significant holidays in December, a December “holiday party” or “holiday concert” is potentially alienating. It also sends the message to all children (and families) that the dominant culture is the only culture that matters when making decisions about events. If you do have a party or concert in December, consider calling it a “winter” event instead.

Celebrating Problematic Holidays

Finally, there are some holidays that are problematic because they ignore the history of oppressing or harming other people. In the United States, Columbus Day and Thanksgiving are examples of holidays that traditionally have been taught in ways that omit important information. Both of these holidays commemorate events that involved European colonizers forcefully taking Indigenous land, murdering Indigenous people, and eradicating Indigenous ways of life.

In fact, some cities and states have replaced Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day in an effort to shift the focus from the colonization of Native Americans to a celebration and commemoration of Native American people.

Thanksgiving is still widely acknowledged in preschools in a simplistic way. See Section 5 for Curriculum Units on Harvest and Gratitude, which allow for a much more meaningful exploration of the themes behind Thanksgiving.

SECTION 3: Practical Solutions

Okay, so there are a lot of potential pitfalls when it comes to celebrating holidays in the school and childcare setting. So what do you do? Again, there is no one right answer, but here are some suggestions for creating a culture of inclusivity.

Focus on Overall Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Approaching holidays inclusively can be viewed as part of a broader social emotional curriculum that helps children develop love for themselves and respect for others. See Section 4 for curriculum ideas to support SEL as a foundation for your inclusive approach to holidays.

Take an Attitude of Educating Rather than Celebrating

Approach every holiday as an opportunity to learn. What is the origin of the holiday? Where in the world do people celebrate it? What are different ways of observing the holiday? **A safe rule of thumb is to plan each activity only after answering the question: “What is the educational purpose?”**

Imagine you love having an annual classroom Halloween party. You now realize that some families might not celebrate Halloween and/or some families may not be able to send their children to school in costumes, so this event is not inclusive. Ask yourself: “What is the educational purpose of the Halloween party?” Perhaps some benefits are:

- Kids enjoy dressing up and pretending
- The costume parade brings the school community together
- Kids learn about pumpkins
- Kids get to eat a special snack
- Kids make Halloween-themed crafts, which is good for creativity and fine motor skills

How could you accomplish these goals without a specific focus on Halloween? (See Section 5 for ideas for a Harvest Curriculum Unit!)

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY:

Keeping the spirit of celebrations you love

It can be hard to let go of things you really enjoy doing in your program. You might want to hold on to celebrations, and that’s okay! Just change the focus. If there is a tradition you’ve enjoyed that you now realize is not culturally inclusive, figure out how to replace it by honoring similar themes. Ask yourself:

1. What do you like about this activity/event?
2. What are some ways to accomplish these things without the focus on a specific holiday?

Level Up: Take another step back and ask yourself: What is the education purpose of each activity? Refine accordingly, and you’ll arrive at a celebration that’s great all around.

Check Your Reactions

You may be having some big reactions to the suggestion that you change how you approach holidays, and that's actually a good thing! It means there is something to look at there.

Growth as an educator means repeatedly asking yourself how your practice is impacting the children in your care.

This applies to non-religious holidays as well. If you have a student in your class who does not have a father present in their life, what is the overall goal and benefit of having the children in the class create Father's Day cards? If you don't like the idea of letting go of this, or replacing it with something more universal, why is that?

This is where, in order to do more good than harm, you must encourage family communication and be familiar with each child's home situation. This is the only way you can create an environment that is supportive of all students.

Persistently Invite Families to Share

Invite families to share their traditions multiple times throughout each year. You can find a template of a letter to send to families in Section 8.

To make it easy for families, you might want to provide a formula for how you celebrate holidays in your program or classroom. (See inset box below.)

Families may not be able to come into the classroom to share. You can encourage them to give you the information to share with the children if they can't come in person. When families do share their traditions, be sure to let the other families know in your weekly or daily communication! This will normalize family sharing and encourage other families to do the same.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: Review your communications

Do you ask your students' families about family traditions in your onboarding paperwork? If not, send an email or letter, or create a survey inviting families to share. It's never too late in the year to ask for information! (See template in Section 7)

Formula for Family Sharing

Want to make it easy for families to share? Invite them to share:

- 1 book + 1 craft (or song or special object or dance or snack, if your program allows it)



Sharing about Passover in my daughter's preschool class.

Consider Adding Show-and-Share

Another angle on family sharing is to do a Show-and-Tell of sorts and make this part of program culture. A few times each year, ask children to share something that's important to their family at that time of year. They might share things that aren't related to holidays at all, and that's great too.

This is a helpful tool for those families who feel very resistant to giving up, say, "Elf on the Shelf," at school. You can explain that not everyone celebrates Christmas, but if it is important to their family, the child can bring in the elf and share about it.

The down side of this approach is that there is no guarantee that every family can or will participate, and then a child could feel left out.

Have Universal Celebrations Unrelated to Holidays

Many programs avoid cultural holidays altogether and instead come up with universal celebrations that have no particular conventional holiday affiliation. With this approach, you are trusting that families will take care of celebrating the holidays that are important to them. An example of this would be having a "Friendship Day" instead of celebrating Valentine's Day.

Some programs have fun with activities like Pajama Day, but it's always safest to stick to options where you don't rely on family compliance in order for the child to feel included in your classroom activities. If a family forgets to have their child wear pajamas, the child may feel left out of the festivities due to circumstances beyond their control.



Image source: troyrecord.com

Group Holidays by Theme

Exposing children to the rich cultural diversity of our world is important. A great way to do this is to group celebrations by theme, such as "harvest festivals" or "festivals of light." This helps highlight commonalities among holidays from various cultures. I've provided specific ideas for these curriculum units in Section 5.

With this approach, books will form the foundation for the information you share about specific holidays. Activities will be based on common themes of the holidays, not on specific objects or customs.

Section 5 includes a list of holidays celebrated around the world each season, along with recommended books for learning about those holidays.

Be Mindful of Your Decor

Your classroom and program decorations send strong messages about what's important. Rather than decorating the class with symbols typically associated with specific holidays, use more neutral decor. For example, rather than putting up cut-outs of turkeys, which are strongly associated with Thanksgiving, consider images from nature, like leaves in autumn colors. Instead of Christmas trees, decorate with images of snowflakes.



Image source: pin.it/49kExiC

Of course, your wall decor might often consist of children's art projects. This is another reason why it's so important to consider carefully whether your hands-on activities are inclusive.



Image source: parentmap.com

Model Lifelong Learning

It would be impossible to know everything about every culture. There will be plenty of times when you don't know the answer to something or feel unsure. When in doubt, simply say, "I don't know! But I'd like to find out." Then explain how you could find out: reading books, doing online research, or talking to people who have the lived experience to provide accurate information.

SECTION 4: Foundational Curriculum Units for Social Emotional Learning

These foundational SEL curriculum units provide children with the cognitive and emotional skills they need to do the more complex work of comparing and contrasting celebrations from various cultures. Children can repeat these units when they are 2, 3, 4, and 5+ years old, because their perspective on them will evolve as they grow. The book lists and activities provided here are by no means comprehensive. Feel free to make these your own.

Curriculum Unit: All About Me

WHY THIS UNIT?

Young children are notoriously egocentric. Their brains are literally not yet capable of seeing other perspectives. In order to support their capacity for empathy, we first need to help them understand themselves. This lays the foundation for them to begin to compare themselves to others and notice similarities and differences. This unit also helps children feel special, increasing their positive sense of self. When children feel good about themselves, they are better equipped to be kind to others.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [Barefoot Books Children of the World](#)
by Tessa Strickland & Kate DePalma
- [I Like Me](#) by Nancy Carlson
- [What I Like About Me!](#) by Allia Zobel Nolan
- [I Like Myself!](#) by Karen Beaumont
- [The Name Jar](#) by Yangsook Choi
- [You Are Awesome](#) by Susann Hoffmann
- [I Am Enough](#) by Grace Byers
- [Hair Love](#) by Matthew A. Cherry
- [The Colors of Us](#) by Karen Katz
- [I'll Walk With You](#) by Carol Lynn Pearson

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your favorite color? Your favorite food?
- What do you love to do with your family?
- What is your favorite part about school?
- What are some things you are good at?
- What would you like to learn how to do?
- What languages do you speak/understand?
- What color is your skin? Your hair? Your eyes?
- What are some things that make you special?
- What are some things you like about yourself?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- To recognize or write their names
- The meaning or story behind their names
- About their skin tone and hair color/texture
- To identify their likes and dislikes
- To compare how they are similar and different from other children in the class

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Self portraits

Offer children a mirror to use when completing the self-portrait. Provide drawing materials that offer many gradients of color (especially shades of brown and beige), like crayons and colored pencils, so that children can try to match their skin color, eye color, and hair color as accurately as possible. For children who are not yet creating representational drawings, help them choose colors that match their appearance for scribbling.



Image source: www.lindenschool.ca

Names Activities

A quick search online will help you find lots of fun and educational name activities for preschoolers. Here are a few:

- **What Does Your Name Mean?:** Help children look up the meaning of their names online or in a naming book. Ask families to share the stories behind their children's names. For children who are not yet writing their names or drawing representational pictures, write their name for them and encourage them to decorate it.
- **Name Search:** Write children's names multiple times on a large poster or scroll of paper and invite them to circle their name.
- **Sensory Name Search:** Put letter shapes in a sensory bin with rice, dried beans, or sand. Give children a piece of paper with their name on it. Have them find the letters in their name.
- **Shape Your Name:** Print out each child's name on paper, laminate, and show them how to use modeling clay or playdough to create the shapes of the letters.
- **Alphabet Chart:** Put the letters of the alphabet on the wall and have children put a sticker or clothespin by the first letter of their name. Which letter has the most stickers or clothespins?

Eye Color Chart

Create a poster with columns for various eye colors: brown, blue, gray, green, black. At circle time, have each child come up and look in a mirror at their eyes. Then they can put a mark or sticker on the chart under their eye color. After every child has had a turn, how many marks are under each color? What is the most common eye color in the class? The least common?

My Favorite Things

There are so many activities you can do to help children identify their favorite color, food, fun activity, and more. Here are a couple ideas:

- **My Favorite Color:** Create a worksheet that says "My Favorite Color." Ask children what their favorite color is and why. Write down their words. Invite them to decorate the sheet with their favorite color crayon, marker, or other art medium.
- **Favorite Things Collage:** Cut out photos of toys, animals, foods, and objects from nature from magazines (or print out pictures from the internet) and invite each child to make a collage of their favorite things. Be sure to include foods from many cultures. Include a photo of the child for them to put on their collage.

Curriculum Unit: Feelings

WHY THIS UNIT?

Understanding their own feelings and recognizing the feelings of others is foundational for children's development in all other areas. This curriculum unit helps children identify and label feelings, as well as gain tools for regulating their emotions.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [The Way I Feel](#) by Janan Cain
- [The Feelings Book](#) by Todd Parr
- [Tough Guys Have Feelings Too](#) by Keith Negley
- [Whatever Comes Tomorrow](#) by Rebecca Gardyn Levington
- [Calm Down Time/Momento para calmarse](#) by Elizabeth Verdick
- [Mindful Kids](#) by Whitney Stewart
- [Yoga Tots Series](#) by Tess Strickland
- [Mindful Tots Series](#) by Whitney Stewart
- [When Sophie Gets Angry](#) by Molly Bang
- [How Do You Feel](#) by Lizzy Rockwell
- [In My Heart](#) by Jo Witek
- [Glad Monster, Sad Monster](#) by Ed Emberly
- [I'm Sad](#) by Michael Ian Black

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- The names of feelings
- How to identify different feelings
- How to express feelings without hurting others
- Healthy ways to cope with feelings

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When reading books: What do you think this character is feeling? Have you ever felt that way?
- How does your face look when you are mad? Happy? Sad? etc.
- What kinds of things should we put in our Feelings Corner? (see below)

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Mood Paintings

Provide paints and paper for children. This is an especially good activity for painting on an easel. Play music that conveys a specific emotion: sad or happy. Ask children to listen to the music and paint what they hear. This open-ended activity allows children to experiment with color and brush-strokes as modes of expression.



Image source: [kinderart.com](#)

Feelings Puppet

Use one or two puppets at circle time to act out various scenarios that evoke feelings. Some examples include:

- One puppet surprising the other puppet
- One puppet not letting the other puppet take a turn with a toy
- One puppet giving the other puppet a present

After each scenario, ask the children:

- What is the puppet feeling?
- What could the puppet do to express their feelings?
- What words could the puppet use to express their feelings?

Feelings Faces

Print out pictures or cut out magazine images of faces expressing a variety of feelings. Invite children to sort the feelings onto different paper plates labeled with a smiley face, sad face, surprised face, etc. Optional: provide glue sticks so children can create collages on the plates. Hang the plates at eye level in the classroom to create a feelings chart.

Create a Feelings Corner

Create a Feelings Corner or Feelings Nook in your classroom with the help of your students. During circle time, ask them to brainstorm things they can do if they are having big feelings. What would they need in the Feelings Corner to be able to do these things? Some ideas:

- Pillows to punch or rest on
- Poster of feelings faces
- Cozy enclosed space to reduce sensory input
- Music listening station with headphones
- Journals for drawing

Once the space is created, use puppets or role play to demonstrate how to use the space.

Curriculum Unit: My Family

WHY THIS UNIT?

This foundational SEL unit is the gateway to your inclusive approach to holidays. Children have the opportunity to consider and share what is unique to their own families. They also learn that families have differences. In this unit, conversations about family traditions can emerge naturally, also opening the door to respectful comparisons.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [The Family Book](#) by Todd Parr
- [Barefoot Books Children of the World](#) by Tessa Strickland & Kate DePalma
- [Fry Bread](#) by Kevin Noble Maillard
- [Dumpling Day](#) by Meera Sriram
- [Dinner on Domingos](#) by Alexandra Katona
- [Family Reunion](#) by Chad & Dad Richardson
- [The Perfect Sushi](#) by Emily Satoko Seo
- [Bring Back the Babka!](#) by Marilyn Wolpin
- [Families Can](#) by Dan Saks
- [Love Makes a Family](#) by Sophie Beer

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- Every family is special
- Families come in all shapes and sizes
- People in a family can help each other

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who are the people and pets in your family?
- What do you like to do for fun with your family?
- What are your favorite family meals?
- What special holidays does your family celebrate?
- Who in your family helps you? How?
- How do you help out in your family?
- How do you show people in your family you love them?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Family Crest

Create a printable with an outline of a crest, divided into four parts:

- Who is in my family
- Our favorite foods
- Something I love doing with my family
- How I feel about my family

Write the “[child’s name]’s Family” above the crest. Invite children to draw or create a collage in each quadrant to represent their family.



Image source: Barefoot Books

Family Portrait

For this activity, encourage children to draw a picture of their family, leaving a border around the edge of the paper. If they are not yet drawing representationally, you can use the discussion questions to prompt them to make marks on the paper. Write down their words. You can then give them materials to decorate the border or “frame” of the picture.

Family Photos

Ask families to send in a family photo. Put these photos at children’s eye level and keep them there all year long. This is an excellent way to prompt spontaneous conversations and help children compare and contrast their families.

Curriculum Unit: Friends

This curriculum unit expands further outward from the child’s own point of view. Beyond themselves, beyond their families, there are friends. Extending their thinking to others in this way exercises the cognitive muscles that will help them understand traditions from other cultures. This is also a useful theme to keep in mind as an alternative to celebrating Valentine’s Day in your program.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [The Last Hazelnut](#) by Susanna Isern
- [The Little Red Hen](#) by Mary Finch
- [The Kindest Red: A Story of Hijab and Friendship](#) by Ibtihaj Muhammad & S. K. Ali
- [Jojo and the Food Fight!](#) by Didier Lévy
- [Love Grows Everywhere](#) by Barry Timms
- [A Friend for Henry](#) by Jenn Bailey
- [The Tiny Baker](#) by Hayley Barrett
- [Friends Are Friends, Forever](#) by Dane Liu
- [The Little Book of Friendship](#) by Zack Bush and Laurie Friedman
- [Sometimes It’s Nice To Be Alone](#) by Amy Hest
- [Don’t Hug Doug \(He Doesn’t Like It\)](#) by Carrie Finison
- [How To Apologize](#) by David LaRoche
- [All About Friends](#) by Felicity Brooks
- [Elmore](#) by Holly Hobbie

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- What a friend is
- Ways to make a friend
- Ways to be kind to friends
- Appropriate ways to show our friends we like them
- What we can do if we get into a disagreement with a friend
- How to include other children in play
- How to take a break from friends

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What can you do if you want to play with someone?
- What can you do if you want to use something a friend is playing with?
- What are some ways to be a kind friend?
- How can you know if someone wants you to hug them or get close to their body?
- Do you like to play with friends sometimes? Do you like to play alone sometimes?
- What can you do if you want to play alone?
- What can you do if you get into a disagreement with a friend?
- What can you do if you accidentally hurt a friend's body or feelings, or if a friend hurts your body or feelings?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Learn About a Friend

For this activity, group children in pairs. Prepare kids to ask each other a few questions, such as “What is your favorite color?” and “What is your favorite food?” Have children create a drawing or collage with pictures of their partner's favorite things. At circle time have children present what they learned about their partners to the group.

Friendship Ring

Trace children's hands and help them cut out the shape. Have them decorate their hand and help them put their name on it. Hang the hands on the wall with the fingers touching so that it looks like the hands are connected in a circle.

Kind Words

Set up the writing center with paper hearts, each one with a student's name on it. Put the hearts in a box. Have each child pull out a heart. Encourage the child to say something kind about the child whose name is on the heart. If they get their own name they can choose to say kind words about themselves or put it back and choose a different heart. Write down their words and invite them to decorate the heart. Later, share all the hearts with the group at circle time and hang them on the wall.



Image source: pin.it/49kExiC

Friendship Party

Have a classroom Friendship Party! This is a great replacement for a Valentine's Day celebration because it keeps the spirit of the holiday without excluding anyone. Keep in mind that you'll want to differentiate this sufficiently from Valentine's Day. Avoid having children give each other “valentines” and other rituals commonly associate with Valentine's Day. Think instead about the spirit of friendship and how you can celebrate that. Some ideas include a special snack, singing songs about friendship, and reading the kind words hearts (above).

SECTION 5: Curriculum Units for an Inclusive Approach to Holidays

Your best bet for creating a culturally inclusive classroom is to create learning experiences and celebrations around **universal themes** that apply to all children. You can also educate about holidays that fall under these themes by:

- **Reading books** that sensitively and accurately depict the occasions (see book lists in this section and Section 7)
- **Inviting families** of your students to share about their holidays (see template in Section 8)

In this section, you'll find such themes with suggestions for specific books and activities.

Curriculum Unit: Harvest

If you want to focus your curriculum on seasonal fall themes, choose themes of nature, agriculture, and gratitude. These are universal topics that don't favor one culture over others. Remember that it's fine to read books and watch appropriate videos about specific fall holidays, but it's best to keep your classroom decor, crafts, and activities more universal. Notice that this curriculum unit does not include any crafts specific to Halloween or Thanksgiving.

GLOBAL HARVEST FESTIVALS

There are so many harvest festivals! This list below is not complete. Children in your program may observe others as well. Note that not all harvest festivals take place in autumn! It depends on where in the world they originated. Since harvest season occurs in the fall in New Hampshire, though, it makes sense to do this unit in the fall so children can relate it more easily to their own experiences. See Section 7 for more information about these holidays:

- Moon Festival (Mid-Autumn Festival)
- Chuseok
- Sukkot
- Green Corn Festival
- New Yam Festival
- Crop Over
- Thanksgiving
- Mehregan
- Dożynki
- Pongal

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- How to observe nature using their senses
- Where food comes from
- What crops are and how they grow
- What a harvest is
- The history of the land we are on
- Harvest traditions from various cultures

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

- [Harvest Days](#) by Kate DePalma
- [Lin Yi's Lantern](#) (Moon Festival) by Brenda Williams
- [Our Moon Festival](#) by Yobe Qiu
- [Apples and Honey](#) (Rosh Hashanah) by Joan Holub
- [Sukkot is Coming!](#) by Tracy Newman
- [Keepunumuk: Weeâchumun's Thanksgiving Story](#) by Greendeer, Perry & Bunten
- [Harvest Celebrations](#) by Clare Chandler
- [Harvest Festivals Around the World](#) by Judith Hoffman Corwin
- [The Autumn Equinox](#) by Ellen B. Jackson

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How do plants and trees change in the fall where we live?
- What kinds of foods (crops) do farmers harvest in the fall where we live?
- Have you ever gone apple picking or visited a farm? What kinds of things did you see on the farm?
- How do crops grow?
- What kinds of animals live on a farm? Why are they there?
- Who farmed on this land first?
- Do you participate in any harvest celebrations at home?
- What do harvest festivals from around the world have in common? How are they different?
- Where in the world does our food come from? How does it get to us?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

Outdoor Scavenger Hunt

Create or print a nature scavenger hunt printable with pictures of what to find. Give one to each child along with a crayon or marker. If each child can have a clipboard too, that is ideal. Go for a walk outside where there is access to some kind of nature. A city walk is fine as long as there are some trees or grass somewhere along the way. Have children look for items on the scavenger hunt and check them off as they go!



Image source:
pjsandpaint.com

Using Your Senses

Create a chart that has 4 columns with pictures of the following body parts at the top of each column: eyes, ears, nose, hand. Then, go outside with the children. Ask:

- What do you see?
- What can you hear?
- What can you smell?
- What can you feel? What does it feel like?

Record children's answers in the chart as they volunteer them! Later at large group time, review their responses with them.

Where Does Our Food Come From?

Bring in produce from the grocery store that still has stickers on it. Each sticker lists the country where the product was grown. During circle time, read the name of the country from each piece of food and place its sticker on a globe. Did the food come from lots of different places or mostly the same places? How did the food get to us? What kinds of crops grow where we live?

Harvest Sensory Play

Put items in a sensory bin for harvest exploration. Possibilities include:

- Feed corn
- Toy tractor with hitch and trailer
- Plastic farm animals
- Cloth leaves
- Mini scarecrow
- Mini hay bales
- Measuring cups and spoons

Pumpkin Exploration

Show children a large pumpkin. From there you can:

- Invite children to make observational drawings.
- Ask kids to guess what is inside. Cut open the pumpkin to reveal what's inside.
- Allow children to touch the insides of the pumpkin.
- Ask them to estimate the number of seeds, then count them to check their guesses.
- Roast the seeds for a snack (if possible in your program).
- Give children washed and dried seeds for making a collage.

Dried Corn Painting

Put red and yellow paint in large trays. Add an ear of dried corn to each tray. Encourage children to paint on paper with the corn and discover the textures the corn can make.



Image source: kitchenfloorcrafts.blogspot.com

Curriculum Unit: Gratitude

WHY THIS UNIT?

Many cultures have traditions to express gratitude. In this unit, you can weave in books about gratitude traditions from around the world, while also helping children understand the concept of being thankful. This unit has overlap with the Harvest Unit above, so you may want to combine them.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [We Are Grateful](#) by Traci Sorell
- [Harvest Days](#) (global) by Kate DePalma
- [Bear Says Thanks](#) by Karma Wilson
- [An Awesome Book of Thanks](#) by Dallas Clayton
- [Apple Cake: A Gratitude](#) by Dawn Casey
- [The Thankful Book](#) by Todd Parr
- [Splat Says, Thank You!](#) by Rob Scotton
- [All the World](#) by Liz Garton Scanlon
- [My Heart Fills with Happiness](#) by Monique Gray Smith
- [Keepunumuk: Weeâchumun's Thanksgiving Story](#) by Greendeer, Perry & Buntin

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be thankful?
- What are you thankful for?
- What holidays do you know about where we celebrate being thankful?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Gratitude Tree

Cut colorful paper into leaf shapes. Ask children what they are thankful for and write it on their leaves. They can then draw a picture or simply decorate their leaves. Be sure to write their names on the leaves. Put the leaves on a mural on top of a tree shape or on sticks in a vase to create a "gratitude tree." Read the leaves out loud at circle time.

Gratitude Scavenger Hunt

Lead children on a walk inside or outside the school. Ask them to point out and name things they are thankful for. Take a picture of each item, and then print the photos and label them to create a gratitude poster.

Circle Time Gratitude Practice

Include expressions of gratitude in your daily whole group meetings. Model for children how to state something you are thankful for. As children learn more about the concept, you can move towards a daily gratitude practice where the children close their eyes and think about something they are thankful for. You can ask children to share if they would like to.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- What gratitude is
- Why harvest festivals often include a gratitude component
- To brainstorm what they're thankful for in their own lives
- Ways to show gratitude



Image source:
kidsactivitiesblog.com

Curriculum Unit: Festivals of Light

WHY THIS UNIT?

Fire, candles, and other types of light are an integral part of many world celebrations. This unit invites children to compare and contrast these festivals while also learning about light itself.

Global Festivals of Light

Here are festivals from various cultures that incorporate lights, candles, or the sun. This list is not complete! See Section 7 for more information about the following holidays:

- Diwali
- Hanukkah
- Lunar New Year
- Eid al-Fitr
- Kwanzaa
- Christmas
- Inti Raymi
- Día de los Muertos
- Matariki
- Obon
- Yule
- 4th of July (Independence Day)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- Why people need light
- That all living things need light
- Different ways of creating light
- How festivals of light from various cultures are similar and different

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [Let's Celebrate!](#) by Kate DePalma
- [Diwali](#) by Hannah Eliot
- [The Great Race](#) (Lunar New Year in China) by Dawn Casey
- [Happy Chinese New Year!](#) (Lunar New Year in China) by Jannie Ho
- [Our Lunar New Year](#) (Lunar New Year in Asian communities) by Yobe Qiu
- [My First Kwanzaa](#) by Karen Katz
- [Hanukkah is Coming!](#) by Tracy Newman
- [Hanukkah Lights Everywhere](#) by Michael J. Rosen
- [Joy to the World!](#) by Kate DePalma
- [Suki's Kimono](#) (Obon) by Chieri Uegaki
- [Lights of Winter](#) by Heather Conrad
- [Celebrations of Light](#) by Nancy Luenn

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do people need light? How does it help us?
- What or who else needs light? Why?
- What have you noticed light coming from?
- Does your family have any celebrations that include candles or lights of some kind?
- How are festivals of light from various cultures similar? How are they different?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Create Suncatchers

Provide clear contact paper and small squares of colorful tissue paper. Allow children to glue squares of tissue paper to the contact paper, and then adhere to a window. Notice what happens when sunlight passes through.



Image source: mommypoppins.com

Light Table

If you don't have a light table, you can create one by putting string lights in a clear storage bin. Children can play on top of the bin with colorful tissue paper, magnetiles, and other small items.

Shadow Play

Teach children how to play a game of shadow tag outside. (Jumping on each other's shadows, being careful not to bump into each other!)

Glow Stick Sensory Play

Dim the lights and put glow sticks in sensory bins full of water.

Birthday Candles

Set out birthday candles and playdough to spark sensory exploration and dramatic play. Note that this activity may not be inclusive for children who belong to the Jehovah's Witness faith. Be sure you know your students' backgrounds so that you know what is appropriate for your group!

Curriculum Unit: Spring / New Life

WHY THIS UNIT?

Cultures around the world have customs for celebrating spring. Spring is also a natural opportunity to highlight the life cycle of plants and animals. Notice that there are no activities here directly related to Easter.

GLOBAL SPRING HOLIDAYS

Many cultures celebrate spring or include elements of spring in their festivities. This list is not complete! See Section 7 for more information about the following special occasions:

- Holi
- Easter
- Nowruz
- Passover
- Cherry Blossom Festival
- Vaisakhi

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- The life cycle of a plant
- The life cycles of creatures that grow from eggs
- Similarities and differences among global celebrations that celebrate spring or new life

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [Joys of Spring](#) by Heather Conrad
- [Holidays of Spring](#) by Amanda Sullivan
- [Company's Coming](#) (Passover) by Joan Holub
- [More than Enough](#) (Passover) by April Halprin Wayland
- [Easter Around the World](#) by Shannon Knudsen
- [Festival of Colors](#) (Holi) by Surishtha Sehgal & Kabir Sehgal
- [Nowruz: An ABC Book](#) by Ghazaleh Rabiei
- [When the Sakura Bloom](#) (Cherry Blossom Festival) by Narisa Togo
- [Millie's Chickens](#) by Brenda Williams
- [Crack!](#) by Beatriz Giménez de Ory
- [From Seed to Plant](#) by Gail Gibbons
- [Rooftop Garden](#) by Danna Smith

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do plants need to grow?
- What kinds of animals hatch from eggs in the springtime?
- What do spring holidays from various cultures have in common? How are they different?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Create Art in Nature

When outside with children, show them how to collect items from nature to create designs on the ground using natural materials. They can work together or on their own to design creations using things like rocks, grass, pinecones, and wood chips.

Dissecting Seed Pods

Collect seed pods outside. Cut them open and allow children to use a magnifying glass to see what's inside. Children can try to draw what they see in a spring science journal.

Grass Heads

Give each child:

- A paper or plastic cup with one side panel cut out
- A nylon knee-high stocking
- Soil
- Grass seeds
- Googly eyes

Help children put soil and seeds in the foot of the stocking and tie it closed. Cut off the extra stocking. Place the tied stocking full of soil and seeds in the cup. Have children glue eyes on the part of the stocking that is showing through the open panel. Invite children to water their plants. Put on the windowsill and watch the creatures grow grass hair!



*Image source:
activityvillage.co.uk*

Egg Sorting

Put out plastic eggs of various colors and several bowls. Allow children to play freely with the eggs. They may naturally start to sort them. Optional: include small figurines of insects, birds, lizards, and turtles that can fit inside the eggs.

Curriculum Unit: New Year

WHY THIS UNIT?

Many cultures have New Year celebrations, but not all cultures use the same calendar. This is why the Jewish New Year and the Chinese New Year, for instance, fall on different dates each year. It is also why New Year festivals happen year-round, not just in January. You can do a New Year Unit any time of year!

GLOBAL NEW YEAR FESTIVALS

This list is not complete. Don't forget that a person's birthday is also a New Year's festival of sorts! (Those of the Jehovah's Witness faith may not observe birthdays, so once again, be sure you know your students' backgrounds.) See Section 7 for more information on the following holidays:

- Rosh Hashanah
- Lunar New Year
- Losar
- Nowruz
- Songkran
- New Year's Day (January 1)

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [Skip through the Seasons](#) by Stella Blackstone
- [Listen, Listen](#) by Phillis Gershator
- [Apples and Honey](#) (Rosh Hashanah) by Joan Holub
- [Chang's First Songkran](#) by Lisa Changadveja
- [The Great Race](#) (Lunar New Year) by Dawn Casey
- [Happy Chinese New Year!](#) (Lunar New Year) by Jannie Ho
- [Our Lunar New Year](#) by Yobe Qiu
- [Squirrel's New Year's Eve](#) by Miller
- [Nowruz: An ABC Book](#) by Ghazaleh Rabiei

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What kind of weather do we have in summer/fall/winter/spring?
- How do trees change with each season?
- How often do you have a birthday?
- How are global New Year's holidays similar? How are they different? Which New Year holiday(s) do you celebrate?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- How we measure time
- The four seasons of the year
- That many cultures have celebrations at different times to mark a new year
- That birthdays mark one year passing

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Classroom Timeline

This activity requires the ability to print out a photo every day, which may not be possible. But if you are able to do this, it's a great way to help children understand the passing of time. Each day take a photo of an activity the children are doing in class. Post it on the wall at children's eye level. Do the same thing every day, putting the photos one after another sequentially in a row that spans the wall. If this is too difficult because of your classroom layout, you could put the photos on your classroom calendar instead. Talk to children about the photos periodically and remind them what they did. This will help them connect their memories to a sense of passing time.



*Image source:
mrstsfirstgrade-class-jill.blogspot.com*

Tree Study

Choose a tree that children can easily view in the play yard or when you take them for a walk near your building. Take children to observe the tree in the fall, winter, spring, and early summer. Each time, take a photo of the tree and ask the kids to describe what they notice. Create a poster with 4 columns, one for each season. After each visit, put a print out of the photo you took in its seasonal column and write down the children's observations. Each time you visit, show them the chart so they can observe how the tree is changing over time.

Birthday Play

Set out birthday candles, party hats, stuffed animals or dolls, and other birthday party materials in the dramatic play area. Children are guaranteed to engage in pretend play about birthday parties. (Another reminder that not all faiths allow birthdays to be recognized, so be sure you know your students' backgrounds before doing this activity.)

Clean Up!

New Year traditions often include an element of cleaning. Set up your sensory table with soapy water and sponges. Allow children to clean and dry toys and other materials that can be washed.

Curriculum Unit: Freedom and Fairness

WHY THIS UNIT?

Many cultures have occasions to mark freedom from oppression. Young children can understand basic concepts of fairness – in fact, fairness is very important to them! Taking turns, following rules, and equal treatment are concepts preschoolers can understand. They can also understand that it's not fair for some people to be free and other people to not be free.

GLOBAL HOLIDAYS ABOUT FREEDOM AND FAIRNESS

Here is an incomplete list of holidays that celebrate freedom from oppression. See Section 7 for more information about each of these:

- Passover
- Juneteenth
- Martin Luther King Day
- 4th of July (Independence Day)
- Pride

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- [Fair is Fair](#) by Sonny Varela
- [Who Was Martin Luther King, Jr.?](#) by Lisbeth Kaiser
- [Company's Coming](#) (Passover) by Joan Holub
- [More than Enough](#) (Passover) by April Halprin Wayland
- [Let's Celebrate Juneteenth](#) by Tonya Abari
- [Pride: the Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag](#) by Rob Sanders
- [We Are the Rainbow](#) by Claire Winslow
- [The Little Red Hen](#) by Mary Finch

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Would it be fair for some kids in our class to get to have snack and not others? Why not? How would you feel if you were one of the kids who didn't get snack?
- Would it be fair for the kids in our class with brown eyes to play with new toys but not the kids with other color eyes? Why not? How would you feel if you didn't get a turn to play with the new toys?
- How can we make sure things are fair in our classroom?
- What does it mean to be free? Should all people be free?
- What do Martin Luther King Day, Passover, Pride, Juneteenth, and the 4th of July have in common? How are they different?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Taking Turns

Any activity that involves taking turns helps young children understand fairness. During group times, give each child a turn to have a special job. Simple card games and board games also provide excellent practice for taking turns.



Image source: sassymamasg.com

Classroom Rules

Creating classroom rules helps instill a sense of fairness. During circle time, ask children to think about what class rules would help keep everyone safe and feeling good. Write down their ideas, no matter how wacky they are. When all the ideas are written down, add your own. You can then ask the group to vote on which rules they want to make official. (You can make voting fun! "If you like this rule, put your hand on your head." "If you like this rule, stomp your feet.")

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will learn:

- What fairness means
- What freedom means
- How to help make things fair for everyone
- That there are holidays in many cultures that celebrate freedom

SECTION 6: Cultural and Religious Demographics in New Hampshire

Here is some interesting information about the demographics of New Hampshire. These data show that, despite being one of the least diverse states in terms of race and ethnicity demographics, minority populations are increasing in number in New Hampshire and will continue to do so. Making sure your program is welcoming and supportive to people from all backgrounds will support the families and wellness – and, therefore, the very economy – of the state.

Race and Ethnicity in New Hampshire

Just over 10% (10.4%) of the population in New Hampshire is Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC), according to the US Census data collected from 2016-2020, and 89.6% of the population is White. The percentage of people who are BIPOC increased over 3% in the past 10 years.

Just under 5% (4.7%) of the population is Hispanic, according to the 2016-2020 estimates, and 95.3% of the population is not Hispanic. The percentage of people who are Hispanic increased almost 2% in the past 10 years.

The BIPOC and Hispanic populations (approximately 141,000 and 63,000 people, respectively) live all around New Hampshire. For example, 4.5% of people in Carroll County and 16.3% of people in Hillsborough County are BIPOC.

The US Census Bureau uses the Diversity Index as a summary measure, which indicates how likely that two random people will be from different racial or ethnic groups. New Hampshire's Diversity Index has increased over time, from 15% in 2010 to 24% in 2020; increases in the Diversity Index occurred in every New Hampshire County.

The Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center reporting of race and ethnicity indicates that **the NH population under 18 are more diverse than the state overall.** The Kids Count Data Center provides age specific estimates, which show that children under 18 range from 16-18% BIPOC and/or Hispanic (using US Census Bureau estimates from 2016-2020).

Religion in New Hampshire

New Hampshire is one of the least religious states in the United States. The religious groups in New Hampshire from most to least populous are:

- Unaffiliated / Secular (40%)
- Catholic (30%)
- Protestant (23%)
- Jewish (2%)
- Unitarian/Universalist (2%)
- Jehovah's Witnesses (1%)
- Mormon (1%)
- Muslim (<1%)
- Hindu (<1%)
- Orthodox Christian (<1%)
- Buddhist (<1%)
- Pagan or Wiccan (<1%)
- Native American Faiths (<1%)

Immigrants in New Hampshire

6.4% of the population of New Hampshire is immigrants. The top countries of origin of immigrants in our state are:

- Canada 8.9%
- India 8.9%
- Dominican Republic 7.3%
- China 4.5%
- Brazil 4.3%

LGBTQ+ in New Hampshire

As of 2019, the LGBTQ+ population of people ages 18 and over in NH is estimated to be 4.7%. The percentage of LGBTQ+ people with children is 31%.

According to the Pew Research Center, 71% of adults in NH say homosexuality "should be accepted." 68% have a favorable view of same sex marriage.

SECTION 7: Become Aware of Holidays from Cultures Around The World

To give you a sense of the vast diversity of holidays, here is a partial list of holidays observed by cultures around the world each season. This is not comprehensive! Looking to find ways to educate about holidays? Read books about the special days below with your class (see book lists by season below). If you have families in your program who observe these holidays, inviting them in to share is another great way to learn about the holiday.

Global Holiday Books

- [Let's Celebrate!](#) by Kate DePalma
- [We All Celebrate](#) by Chitra Soundar
- [What Do You Celebrate?](#) by Whitney Stewart
- [Feasts and Festivals Around the World](#) by Alice B. McGinty
- [A Year Full of Celebrations and Festivals](#) by Claire Grace
- [Birthdays Around the World](#) by Margriet Ruurs

Seasonal Holidays and the Southern Hemisphere

Please note that all global holidays are listed according to the season in which they occur in the Northern Hemisphere (where 90% of the world's population lives). Holidays celebrated around the world occur in opposite seasons in the Southern Hemisphere: i.e., Passover falls in autumn, Christmas falls in summer, etc.

Muslim Holidays

The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar of 354 or 355 days. Because this is shorter than the Gregorian calendar, Muslim holidays can fall in any month of the year.

Ramadan (worldwide) - dates vary: Ramadan, the holiest month in Islam, is observed by fasting from food and drink during the daytime, which teaches patience and obedience.

Eid al-Fitr (worldwide) - dates vary: Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan, is a joyful celebration with prayers, gift giving, and lavish feasts to enjoy after a month of fasting.

Eid al-Adha (worldwide) - dates vary: This day marks the end of Hajj pilgrimage and remembers the story of Ibrahim's sacrifice with prayers, feasting, and the sacrifice of animals.

RECOMMENDED MUSLIM HOLIDAY BOOKS:

- [Zahra's Blessing](#) (Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr) by Shirin Shamsi
- [Ramadan](#) by Hannah Eliot

Fall Holidays from Around the World

In the fall, most of the food we eat is harvested. Harvesting food is hard work, and everyone needs the food we harvest to live. So it makes sense that many cultures celebrate the harvest in the autumn. The days grow shorter, animals prepare for winter, and plants begin to die and go dormant. So autumn is also a time when many cultures remember loved ones who have died or take time to reflect.

Moon Festival (China) — dates vary, usually in September: Also known as mid-Autumn Festival, the Moon Festival celebrates the full moon and the harvest with mooncakes and lanterns.

Chuseok (South Korea) — dates vary, usually in September: Families come together and share traditional foods like sticky rice flour cakes called songpyeon at this Korean harvest festival.

Rosh Hashanah (Jewish communities worldwide) — dates vary, usually in September: The Jewish New Year is one of the most important holidays in Judaism. It is a time of reflection and introspection, often celebrated with sweet foods like apples, honey and round challah bread.

Yom Kippur (Jewish communities worldwide) — dates vary, usually in September or October: The Day of Atonement, a solemn day of fasting and repentance before starting the fresh new year, takes place 10 days after the first day of Rosh Hashanah, and is the holiest day in Judaism.

Sukkot (Jewish communities worldwide) — dates vary, usually in September or October: Jewish people create a temporary building called a sukkah in remembrance of the protection God gave the ancient Israelites when they left Egypt. Families and friends sometimes eat meals or even sleep in the sukkah, which is often decorated with items from nature and festive artwork.

Halloween (various countries) — October 31: Celebrated with costume parties, trick-or-treating, and haunted houses, this holiday has roots in Christianity but is now sometimes celebrated by people from other faiths as well.

Día de los Muertos (Mexico and Mexican communities worldwide) — October 31 to November 2: This celebration honors deceased loved ones with colorful altars, sugar skulls, and marigold flowers.

Diwali (India and Hindu communities worldwide) — dates vary, usually in October or November: The Festival of Lights celebrates the victory of light over darkness and good over evil with celebrations that include the lighting of oil lamps called diya. Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist communities also celebrate variations on Diwali.

Thanksgiving (United States) — fourth Thursday in November: At Thanksgiving, families and friends gather, express gratitude, and share a meal that often includes roast turkey, cranberries and other North American foods.

New Yam Festival (West Africa) — dates vary, usually in August, September or October:

The Igbo people of West Africa celebrate the yam harvest with feasts, dancing, and music.

Mehregan (Iran) — October 8: Also called the Persian Festival of Autumn, this ancient celebration welcomes autumn with a decorative table called a sofreh.

Dożynki (Eastern Europe) — Autumn Equinox: The harvest festival celebrated by Slavs, a group of people in Eastern Europe, in which the last bundle of grains harvested is made into a wreath and carried in a procession.

Saint Martin's Day (Germany) — November 11: A Christian feast day that celebrates Saint Martin of Tours, a French saint known for cutting his coat in half to share with another man, with a procession of children with lanterns.

Indigenous Peoples' Day (USA) — second Monday in October: This holiday, which began as an alternative to Columbus Day, celebrates the Indigenous peoples of the United States and honors their histories and cultures.

Veteran's Day (USA) — November 11: This federal holiday honors veterans of the armed forces with a national day of remembrance, which is sometimes marked with a moment of silence.

RECOMMENDED GLOBAL FALL HOLIDAY BOOKS:

- [Harvest Days](#) by Kate DePalma
- [We Gather Together](#) (general) by Wendy Pfeffer
- [Apples and Honey](#) (Rosh Hashanah) by Joan Holub
- [Lin Yi's Lantern](#) (Moon Festival) by Brenda Williams
- [Our Moon Festival](#) by Yobe Qiu
- [Sukkot is Coming!](#) by Tracy Newman
- [Diwali](#) by Hannah Eliot
- [Gustavo, The Shy Ghost](#) (Día de los Muertos) by Flavia Z. Drago
- [Sweets and Treats](#) (Halloween) by Toni Trent Parker
- [A Tiger Called Tomas](#) (Halloween) by Charlotte Zolotow
- [Keepunumuk: Weeâchumun's Thanksgiving Story](#) by Greendeer, Perry & Bunten
- [Harvest Celebrations](#) by Clare Chandler
- [Harvest Festivals Around the World](#) by Judith Hoffman Corwin

Winter Holidays from Around the World

In winter, the work of the harvest season has finished and the work of the springtime has not yet begun. There's plenty of food left from the harvest. So many festivals around the world stay busy in the short, dark, cold days of winter with festivals that involve lights, feasting, and spending time with loved ones.

Hanukkah (Jewish communities worldwide) — dates vary, usually in December: The Festival of Lights commemorates the miracle of the oil in the Temple with an eight-night celebration marked by the lighting of candles.

Christmas (Christian communities worldwide) — December 25: Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ and includes various traditions like gift-giving, nativity scenes, and festive meals.

Saint Stephen's Day (various countries) — December 26 or December 27: This feast day honors Christianity's first martyr on the day after Christmas. It is one of nine national holidays in Ireland.

Kwanzaa (African-American communities in the United States) — December 26 to January 1: First celebrated in 1966, this cultural holiday honors African heritage and principles with festivities that include a candle-lighting ceremony.

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day (various countries) — December 31 and January 1: Many people in countries around the world celebrate the first day of the Gregorian calendar with parties, fireworks, and other customs.

Three Kings' Day / Epiphany (Christian communities worldwide) — January 6: This Christian feast day, which marks the visit of the Magi or Wise Men to the infant Jesus, is observed with church services, parades, and the exchange of gifts.

Lunar New Year (China and Chinese communities worldwide) — dates vary, usually in January or February: Also called Spring Festival or Chinese New Year, the celebrations for Lunar New Year span a whole week in China and include parades, fireworks, gift-giving, and red decorations.

Yule (Pagan communities in Northern Europe and worldwide) – dates vary in December: Yule is one of the oldest winter celebrations in the world, celebrating the shortest day of the year, midwinter, the return of the Sun, and a festival of rebirth. Celebrations include decorating with seasonal plants, feasting, and burning a yule log.

Carnival (various countries) — dates vary: A festive season preceding the Christian season of Lent, marked by parades, costumes, and street parties. Mardi Gras (also called Shrove Tuesday or Fat Tuesday) is the last day of Carnival.

Groundhog Day (United States and Canada) — February 2: This quirky tradition, where a groundhog's behavior is believed to predict the arrival of spring, comes from Pennsylvania Dutch culture.

Valentine’s Day (various countries) — February 14: This day, which celebrates love and affection, often with the exchange of gifts, has origins in Christianity but is now sometimes celebrated by people of other faiths as well.

Presidents’ Day (United States) — third Monday in February: Honoring the birthdays of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, this is a day to celebrate U.S. presidents.

Losar (Tibetan and Himalayan regions) — dates vary, usually in February or March: The Tibetan New Year is observed by cleaning the house, making offerings, and hanging new prayer flags.

Pongal (parts of India and Sri Lanka) — dates vary, mid-January: This four-day harvest festival celebrated by the Tamil people gives thanks to the Hindu sun god, Surya, by preparing a sweet rice dish called pongal.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day (USA) — third Monday in January: This federal holiday marks the birthday of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and remembers his contributions to American society.

Las Posadas (Latin America) — December 16 to December 24: For nine nights leading up to Christmas, it is traditional to reenact the Biblical story of Mary and Joseph with groups of people dressed up as characters from the story to knock on the door of a house, singing that they are looking for a place to stay.

GLOBAL WINTER HOLIDAY BOOKS:

- [The Great Race](#) (Lunar New Year) by Dawn Casey
- [Happy Chinese New Year!](#) (Lunar New Year) by Jannie Ho
- [Our Lunar New Year](#) by Yobe Qiu
- [My First Kwanzaa](#) by Karen Katz
- [Hanukkah is Coming!](#) by Tracy Newman
- [Hanukkah Lights Everywhere](#) by Michael J. Rosen
- [Squirrel’s New Year’s Eve](#) by Miller
- [Tres Reyes Magos](#) (Epiphany) by Patty Rodriguez & Ariana Stein
- [Grumpy Groundhog](#) (Groundhog Day) by Maureen Wright
- [If You’ll Be My Valentine](#) (Valentine’s Day) by Cynthia Rylant
- [The Night of Las Posadas](#) by Tomie dePaola
- [To Carnival!](#) (Carnival in Saint Lucia) by Baptiste Paul
- [Joy to the World!](#) (Christmas around the World) by Kate DePalma
- [Lights of Winter](#) by Heather Conrad
- [Celebrations of Light](#) by Nancy Luenn

Spring Holidays from Around the World

In the spring, we emerge from the cold days of winter into a season of warmer weather, longer days, new plants, and new baby animals. Around the world, people think of springtime as a time of newness and fresh possibilities, and many cultures celebrate with festivals that involve symbols of spring like flowers and eggs.

St. Patrick's Day (Ireland and Irish communities worldwide) — March 17:

This celebration of Irish culture and the patron saint of Ireland is marked by parades, green attire, and festivities.

Nowruz (Iran and Persian communities) — Spring Equinox: The Persian New Year is celebrated by cleaning the home, wearing new clothes, and decorating a table with symbols of springtime.

Holi (India and other countries with Hindu communities) — dates vary, usually in March: The Festival of Colors celebrates the arrival of spring with the throwing of colorful powders and water.

Easter (Christian communities worldwide) — dates vary, usually in March or April: Celebrating the Christian belief that Jesus Christ was resurrected, Easter includes church services, egg hunts, and festive meals. The week before Easter is called Holy Week and includes Palm Sunday and Good Friday.

Songkran (Thailand) — April 13 to April 15: The Thai New Year is celebrated with water fights, temple visits, and traditional rituals.

Passover (Jewish communities worldwide) — dates vary, usually in March or April: Jewish people remember how the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt by telling the story each year at a special meal called a seder.

Cherry Blossom Festival (Japan and other countries) — dates vary, usually in April: This festival celebrates the blooming of cherry trees with cultural events and picnics.

Vesak (Buddhist communities worldwide) — dates vary, usually in April or May: Buddhists commemorate the birth, enlightenment, and death of Gautama Buddha with meditation, ceremonies, and acts of kindness.

Cinco de Mayo (Mexico and Mexican communities) — May 5: People enjoy celebrating Mexican heritage and the Battle of Puebla with parades, music, and traditional foods.

Kodomo no Hi (Japan) — May 5: This festival celebrates children with sweet rice cake treats and brightly colored fish flags that represent each family member.

Vaisakhi (India and Indian diaspora) — dates vary, mid-April: An ancient springtime festival celebrating the winter wheat harvest that also has special significance to Sikhs.

Lent (Christian) — dates vary: Lent is a solemn 40-day period in the Christian calendar when believers might pray, fast, and/or choose a luxury to give up temporarily (called a “Lenten sacrifice”). On Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, some Christians attend church services at which a cross is drawn on each person’s forehead with ashes.

GLOBAL SPRING HOLIDAY BOOKS:

- [Joys of Spring](#) by Heather Conrad
- [Holidays of Spring](#) by Amanda Sullivan
- [Company’s Coming](#) (Passover) by Joan Holub
- [More than Enough](#) (Passover) by April Halprin Wayland
- [Easter Around the World](#) by Shannon Knudsen
- [Festival of Colors](#) (Holi) by Surishtha Sehgal & Kabir Sehgal
- [How to Trap a Leprechaun](#) (St Patrick’s Day) Sue Fleiss
- [Nowruz: An ABC Book](#) by Ghazaleh Rabiei
- [Chang’s First Songkran](#) by Lisa Changadveja
- [When the Sakura Bloom](#) (Cherry Blossom Festival) by Narisa Togo

Summer Holidays from Around the World

Farmers stay busy in the summer from early until late using the daylight to tend their crops, which is why summertime is not a time when many cultures have time for major celebrations. But the long nights and warm weather make summer the perfect time for outdoor gatherings.

Dragon Boat Festival (China and other countries) — dates vary, usually in June:

This traditional Chinese holiday is celebrated with dragon boat races and rice dumplings called zongzi.

Midsummer (various European countries) — June 21: This celebration welcomes the summer solstice with bonfires and dancing on the longest day of the year.

Pride (worldwide) – June: Pride Month is an annual celebration held in June to honor and promote the visibility and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. During this month, various events, parades, and activities take place worldwide, serving as a platform for advocacy, education, and a joyful celebration of diversity and LGBTQ+ rights.

Inti Raymi (Peru and beyond) — June 24: This Inca festival celebrates the winter solstice with a ceremony in praise of Inti, the Inca sun god. (It is winter in Peru when it is summer in the Northern Hemisphere.)

Juneteenth (United States) — June 19: This holiday commemorates the end of slavery in the United States with parades, festivals, and other cultural events honoring the African American community.

Independence Day (United States) — July 4: Americans celebrate independence from British rule with fireworks and parades

Obon (Japan) — dates vary, usually in July or August: This Buddhist festival honors ancestors with lanterns, dance, and visits to ancestral graves.

Raksha Bandhan (India) — dates vary, usually in August: This Hindu festival celebrates the bond between brothers and sisters with the tying of sacred threads around the wrist.

Ganesh Chaturthi (parts of India) — dates vary, usually in August or September: This Hindu festival honors Lord Ganesha with elaborate processions and rituals.

Matariki (New Zealand) — dates vary, June or July: A Maori tradition celebrating the first sight of the star cluster Matariki with a dawn feast cooked in an oven made in the ground.

Crop Over (Barbados) — June to the first week in August: The people enslaved on sugarcane plantations on Barbados celebrated the end of the brutal work of the harvest season with singing and dancing, and the tradition continues today with two months of parades, parties and more.

Green Corn Ceremony (North America) — dates vary, late summer: At this annual celebration of the beginning of the corn festival practiced by some Native American tribes, the first green corn of the year is sacrificed to ensure a good harvest.

Labor Day (USA) — first Monday in September: This federal holiday recognizes the laborers (workers) and labor unions (organizations of workers) of the United States with a day of rest from work.

Memorial Day (USA) — last Monday in May: On this federal holiday, which honors and mourns American military officials who died serving in the armed forces, some Americans decorate the graves of service members with flags.

GLOBAL SUMMER HOLIDAY BOOKS:

- [Ganesha Goes Green](#) (Ganesha Chaturthi) by Lakshmi Thamizhmani
- [Let's Celebrate Juneteenth](#) by Tonya Abari
- [One is a Drummer](#) (Dragon Boat Festival) by Roseanne Thong
- [Up and Down the Andes](#) (Inti Raymi) by Laurie Krebs
- [Suki's Kimono](#) (Obon) by Chieri Uegaki
- [Food Fight Fiesta](#) (La Tomatina) by Tracey Kyle
- [Thread of Love](#) (Raksha Bandhan) by Kabir Sehgal & Surishtha Sehgal
- [Pride: the Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag](#) by Rob Sanders
- [We Are the Rainbow](#) (Pride) by Claire Winslow

SECTION 8: Resources

Sample Email / Letter for Inviting Families to Share Their Traditions

Dear Families,

As part of creating a welcoming community for all families, we would love for you to share some of your family traditions with the class throughout the year. Here are some questions to get you thinking about how you might want to do this:

How does your family enjoy spending time together?

- What are the objects, activities, and foods associated with this activity?
- Is there an activity or craft we could do that would help children learn about this family tradition?

Do you have a family heirloom or other cherished possession?

- What is its history?
- Why is it important to your family?

For each holiday your family celebrates:

- What are the special objects, symbols, rituals, and foods associated with this holiday?
- Is there a book you recommend to teach children about this holiday?
- Is there an activity or craft we could do that would help children learn about this holiday?

Would you be willing to come in to share your family traditions with the class? If so, please reply to let us know how you'd like to get involved.

If you are unable to come in to share, we would still love to hear from you! We would be happy to read a note you write to the class or share any pictures you can send.

Not sure what to share or how to share it? Let us know! We can have a conversation and help you figure it out.

We can't wait to learn about your families!

With warm regards,

[Your Name]

Sources

[The NAEYC Code of Ethics](#)

[Anti-Bias Education](#)

[Research on babies and bias](#)

[Emotional Intelligence and Outcomes](#)

Rudine Sims Bishop, The Ohio State University. "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors"; originally appeared in *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*

[Educating vs celebrating holidays](#)

[Tourist approach to holidays](#)

[Avoiding holiday balance traps](#)

[Light activities for preschoolers](#)

[Ethnicity and racial demographics in NH](#)

[Religious ranking of NH](#)

[Religious Demographics in NH](#)

[Immigrant Groups in NH](#)

[Race and Culture in NH](#)

[LGBTQ+ Demographics in NH](#)

Resource for elementary educators: [Addressing the December Dilemma in Schools](#)

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