



Happy Holidays Around the World

A Study Guide for Grades preK-6
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THE COMPANY

At Beth & Scott and Friends, we strive to educate and entertain children and adults through the writing and performance of original songs, shows and workshops. Beth and Scott Bierko, the owners and principal performers, are a husband and wife team of singer/songwriters and arts-in-education specialists. Since 1993, Beth & Scott have performed thousands of school assemblies and workshops for children. They are parents of two daughters, Helen and Stephanie. The roles of Beth & Scott are now shared by five wonderful actor/musicians.

THE PROGRAM

"Happy Holidays Around The World " is a forty-five minute show of original and traditional music that teaches children about three major holidays that occur in December: Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Christmas. It is important to note that "Happy Holidays" is a celebration of culture and tradition -not a religious program. However, Beth and Scott do make mention of the religious connections in passing because to not do so would be historically inaccurate. That said, Beth and Scott emphasize that which unites us as people of one world, focusing on the values of joy, community, gratitude, charity, and sharing – the values we all agree upon!

Using stories, songs, humor and a great deal of audience participation, Beth and Scott share with the students some of the history, customs and music associated with each holiday. Beth and Scott highlight both the similarities and differences among the holidays and even the differences from culture to culture in celebrating Christmas. The goal is to give students a better understanding and appreciation for various celebrations taking place at this time of the year all over the world.

To help students better understand these very important messages and to get the most out of this event, Beth and Scott strongly recommend that the classroom teacher utilize some of the ideas listed on the following pages to prepare students for their concert or as a follow-up to the show. Numerous discussion questions and activities have been provided as well as specific information about each holiday. Please feel free to choose the ideas that are most appropriate for each class or make up other ideas of your own.

Hanukkah

The Festival of Lights holiday, Hanukkah, usually comes in December and is celebrated for eight nights by Jewish people throughout the world. It is a joyous and historical holiday based on the events told below.

Long ago, the Jews lived in Jerusalem and worshipped in a beautiful temple with a huge and wonderful menorah. Everything was peaceful until the King of Syria, King Antiochus, decided that the Jews should worship Greek idols instead of their God. Disobedience, declared Antiochus's messengers, would mean certain death.

Although some Jews were quick to follow Antiochus' proclamations, one man, Mattathias, a respected leader, stood up to openly defy the new decrees. He and his small group of followers fought for many years and after Mattathias' death, his sons, especially his eldest, Judah the Macabee, continued to lead the fight and eventually defeated the King.

The Jews returned to Jerusalem to reclaim their homes and rebuild their sacred and beautiful temple. Having finished, they gathered at the temple to give thanks to God for having restored them to their homeland. When it came time to light the *menorah*, however, the high priest found that there was only enough pure oil to light one of the lamps. No other oil could be found and what was there was only enough for one day.

Judah immediately sent his best rider to the closest town to get more oil, but this was an eight-day trip. Amazingly, though, the one lamp stayed lit day after day on just that little bit of oil. It was a miracle!

Now during Hanukkah, one candle is lit each night for eight nights on a special nine-branch menorah (candle holder) called a *chanukiah* to represent the eight days the lamp stayed lit. (The center candle is used to light the other candles.) In some homes there is feasting and gift exchanging as well as religious services on these eight days.

During the week of Hanukkah, work continues as usual, but evenings are filled with songs, puzzles, riddles and games. One of the most popular games is *dreydl*, which is played with a spinning top. Favorite foods served during Hanukkah include *latkes* or potato pancakes and other foods that use oil.

Christmas

Christmas is a Christian holiday celebrated throughout the world to commemorate the birth of Jesus. In the U.S.A. it always falls on December 25. Other countries have their celebrations on various other days in December and some even celebrate in January.

The story of Jesus' birth is a humble one. Mary, Jesus' mother and Joseph, her husband, were required by law to return to Bethlehem for a census being conducted by King Herod just before Mary was to give birth. When she and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, they searched everywhere for a place to stay but there were no rooms available. One innkeeper offered them the only space he had - his barn. Mary and Joseph stayed for the night and Mary gave birth to Jesus in the Manger. The animals' breath kept the baby warm and he lay on bed of straw. Angels announced Jesus' birth to shepherds out in the fields who then came to pay him homage. Three wise men, or *magi* from the East also came to see the baby Jesus, by following a star that shone brightly over the manger. They brought him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Christians throughout the world re-enact this story and decorate their homes and churches with *nativity* scenes (small statues of Mary, Joseph, Jesus and the others in the manger). Presents are exchanged among friends and family as a show of love and good will and according to some, to commemorate the gifts brought by the magi.

Other Christmas cultural traditions abound. Each culture has special foods, decorations, games and holiday symbols. The most famous in this country are: the Christmas tree, a family Christmas dinner, and, of course, Santa Claus. Other countries have similar gift-givers, including China (Dun Che Lao Run), France (Pere Noel), Switzerland (St. Nicholas), Sweden (Jul Tomten) and Russia (Dyed Maroz).

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is an African American holiday, begun in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga. It is based on African harvest celebrations that honor the fruits of the earth and the wisdom of ancestors. In this way, it reminds African Americans of their heritage. The word Kwanza is *Swahili*, meaning "first fruit of the harvest". The second "a" was added to create a seven letter word to represent the seven nights the holiday is celebrated.

Kwanzaa begins December 26 and lasts through January 1. Each night, a candle is lit in the kinara (a seven branch candle holder) to honor one of seven principles or "*Nguzo Saba*" that the people vow to follow. The seven principles are:

1. *Umoja* - Unity; devotion to family;
2. *Kujichagulia* - Self-determination. Having the ability to think for oneself;
3. *Ujima* - Responsibility and hard work;
4. *Ujamaa* - Cooperative economics. Working together for the good of a community;
5. *Nia* - Finding purpose in your life and working to achieve the goals you set to fulfill that purpose;
6. *Kuumba* - Creativity. Finding a way to express yourself uniquely and bring a bit of beauty to the world; and
7. *Imani* - Faith in yourself and the ability to remain a strong individual.

Children receive simple gifts as a reward for honoring their commitments to the seven principles.

Men wear *Dashikis*, African shirts and women wear special African dresses called *lappas*. In addition to the *kinara*, which holds 3 red, 1 black and 3 green candles, many people decorate their homes with a *mkeka* (a mat), *mazawah* (crops of the harvest) and *vibunzi* (an ear of corn for each child in the home). Special foods are served, including collard greens and sweet meats for prosperity and black-eyed peas for good luck. A unity cup is also passed at mealtime and children enjoy playing simple, homemade games such as *Mankala*.

HOLIDAY COMPARISONS

	<u>Hanukkah</u>	<u>Kwanzaa</u>	<u>Christmas</u>
<u>Celebration</u>	Miracle of Lights	Seven Principles	Birth of Jesus
<u>Candle holders</u>	Menorah (8 candles)	Kinara (7 candles)	Candles in Windows Advent Wreaths
<u>Candle Lighting</u>	One each night to represent 8 days the oil burned	One each night for 7 Principles	One for each of the 4 weeks before Christmas
<u>Foods</u>	Latkes, Other foods with oil	Collard Greens Black-eyed peas	Ham or Turkey Fruitcake, Cookies
<u>Gifts</u>	1 gift for each night	Given as rewards for meeting commitments	Brought by Santa Claus & exchanged with family & friends
<u>Decorations</u>	Menorah	Mkeka, Vibunzi Kinara, Mazawah	Tree, Stockings, Nativity Scenes
<u>Games& Songs</u>	Dreydl, Hanukkah Songs	Mankala Homemade games and songs	Carols, Pinatas

MULTI-CULTURALISM

Goal: To instill a respect, appreciation and understanding of various cultures and their holiday celebrations and to teach students the differences and similarities of people throughout the world.

Discussion/Essay Topics:

1. Which holiday(s) do you celebrate? What are some of the traditions in your family during the holiday season? How did those traditions start?
2. Have you ever been invited to a friend's home to celebrate a different holiday or the same holiday in a different way? What was that like?
3. In what ways are Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Christmas alike? In what ways are they different? (Use the attached chart for ideas)
4. Have you ever given or received a homemade gift? What makes a homemade gift special? Can you name some simple gifts you can make to give to someone? We've all heard the expression "It's the thought that counts." What does that mean? Is it true? Why or why not?

Activities:

1. Review the information about each holiday with the students.
2. In Beth and Scott's song, "World Christmas Rap", Beth and Scott sing about traditions in the following countries: Columbia, Italy, Holland, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Australia, Mexico and Sweden. Have students locate these countries on a map.
3. Have students research customs from countries other than those listed above or have them research the origin of various American customs (i.e. Christmas tree originally from Germany, candles in the window - Ireland).
4. In Italy, children compose a poem to give to their parents. Have students write a poem of gratitude. As it's often done in Italy, the children can then take their poems home and hide them on the dinner table for their parents to find.
5. Make or purchase Mankala games or Dreydls and teach the students how to play.
6. Pot Luck Lunch (or Dinner) - Have a Pot Luck meal with the class. (Include parents as well.) Encourage each family to bring a dish from a different culture, preferably from their own ancestry. Have everyone share these tastes from around the world.
7. Invite someone from another culture to speak to the students about his or her homeland holiday traditions. Or, have a student interview such a person and present their findings to the class.