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KEEP 'EM READING

INVESTIGATING TRADITIONS

The traditions we practice in our families transport the voices of our ancestors into the present. These traditions keep memories of loved ones alive and transfer wisdom and values from generation to generation. Traditions give us a sense of belonging and identity by awakening community spirit and social mores and by transmitting knowledge and beliefs. The special memories created by these repeated rituals create bonds that last a lifetime and beyond.

Every culture has unique traditions. Whether religious, ethnic, social, or political, these traditions are a part of society. And though some traditions are ages old, others are adapted or created anew. In the present-day United States, many of the traditions celebrated in our families have been adapted from other countries or have blended together to form unique family customs. The following activities identify the components of traditions, examine cultural similarities and differences in traditions around the world, and help students understand the importance of tradition in their own lives.

Components of Tradition (Grades K–5)

Whether originating in the past or established more recently, traditions strive to perpetuate the continuity of a culture. Use the Kwanzaa festival to identify the elements of traditions.

For younger students, read *Kwanzaa* by Lisa Herrington to explain the basic elements of this celebration. Older students can visit the History Channel website (<http://tinyurl.com/po8usr4>) to watch a video and read additional information on the symbolism of the objects used during the daily family gathering and the ideals featured on each of the seven days of celebration. Discussion should highlight the three



components of tradition (see sidebar). Older students can write a paragraph citing examples from Kwanzaa for each of the three components. The components of tradition also can be used for reference as students explore traditions in other cultures.

Food and Tradition (Grades 3–5)

Many cultural traditions include foods, including types of food, food preparation, and mealtime customs. Exploring these diverse traditions is a delicious way to introduce students to various cultural groups.

Model the following exercise to review the technical skills needed for the activity, and offer assistance in the

Components of Tradition

- Cultural purpose or meaning
- Cyclical practice
- Community or family activities

GRADES
K–5

decision-making process as students evaluate relevant websites.

Choose a culture to research. Open an Internet browser and type the question "What foods do people in [country name] eat on their birthday?" in the search field. Instead of clicking on the first website for information, highlight and copy all of the choices on the first page, and paste them into a new document. With the class, read and discuss the information found under each website title to establish criteria for determining relevance. Choose three sites that may contribute the best information. Delete the others.

Number the websites. Predict which website will give the best information and write the reason in the space provided on the Evaluating Websites worksheet (www.librarysparks.com). Go to one of the three sites. Read through the information to find what people eat on their birthday; if found, write the answer on the worksheet in the space provided. Continue with the other two websites, adding additional information.

Divide the class into groups of three, and let each group choose a cultural group from a list you create. Instruct students to follow the directions modeled earlier and write answers on their worksheets. After searching through each of their chosen websites, they should decide which one provided the best information and determine what information from the website list gave the best clues in choosing the site. Guide the class in a discussion about how to ascertain website relevance.

Create a class chart where students can post information about birthday foods and traditions from their assigned countries. Use the chart to lead a discussion on the similarities and differences found among the traditions.

The book *Food Culture: Celebrating Diverse Traditions* by Kristin Petrie discusses the idea that the food we eat in the United States often originated in other cultures. Read the pages about "borrowed meals" and the "New World" aloud to the class. Ask students to reflect on their own traditional birthday foods and traditions. Are their family birthday traditions borrowed from any of the countries that they investigated? Are there any traditions that students might like to borrow to add to their next birthday celebration?



New Year Traditions Around the World (Grades 3–5)

New Year celebrations occur around the world at many different times throughout the year. Because the time frame stretches from January through September (on the Gregorian calendar), student posters can decorate your bulletin boards and hallways for a long time and stay relevant. A brief review of many world New Year celebrations can be found on the Australian Media Family Network website (www.fathertimes.net/traditions.htm), which will give students a beginning reference point.

Students can work individually or in small groups to discover the traditions and rituals found in different cultures'

New Year festivals. Provide a list of possible country choices by cross-referencing the countries listed on the Australian Media Family Network website with books and database resources at your school to make sure that students will have more than one reference.

Students should set up two-column notes to record information about when New Year's Day is celebrated, the cultural purpose or message, and traditional activities, foods, and clothing. Not all information will be found for every country, but students should try to locate as much as possible.

After information is collected, give each group a large piece of butcher paper for a poster. Have students write the name of the country and the date on which the New Year is celebrated in large letters at the top. Students should then write "A Time to Think About" followed by a brief explanation of the cultural significance of the New Year in the country (e.g., "A Time to Think About Our Ancestors").

Ask students to draw a child in the center of the poster dressed in traditional clothing. Use the DK book *Children Just Like Me: Celebrations!* by Barnabas and Anabel Kindersley for examples. The students can add illustrations or written explanations to the poster to share other information they found during their research. Groups can present information orally and display the posters in hallways and on bulletin boards.

As a culminating activity, students can list the New Year traditions practiced in their own families. Then, after reflecting on the information collected during the research activity, students can write a letter to their parents to suggest borrowing traditions for their own family practices.

ONLINE

Stages of Traditional Rituals

1. **Preparation:** chimes call the class to sit on the floor in the front of the room
2. **Action:** a chosen student sits on a stool and shares one sentence about a favorite picture book
3. **Integration/celebration:** the book is placed on a special shelf, and the class claps in appreciation

Option: Investigate Harvest traditions around the world (<http://tinyurl.com/ycyngj>).

Native American Traditions (Grades 3–5)

Native Americans have many honored traditions that can be as diverse as the tribes themselves. Because of resettlement and other policies forced on them by the US government, some tribes have moved from their original lands and away from their old traditions. Luckily, a resurgence of interest in maintaining cultural traditions is occurring in many tribes, and much of this information is available online.

If this activity is integrated with a concurrent classroom study, students will expand their store of background knowledge. By connecting the insights about the elements of tradition and the cultural messages conveyed, students will gain a better understanding of the values Native Americans hold dear.

Give students copies of the Native American Traditions Chart (www.librarysparks.com), which includes a list of research categories. Include only tribes for which you have at least two book sources available. Give the class time to locate the books and any school databases.

Groups will

- search for traditions in each of the categories listed in the chart,
- create a bulleted list of the traditions of a specific tribe on a digital slide template, and
- present detailed information orally to the whole class.

Students can divide the work, share the research materials, and combine information for the final project. Plan to use four to five days for the research, slide making, and presentations.

At the end of each presentation cycle, ask groups to compare the information presented to the information they found about their own assigned tribe. In the space provided in the chart's first column, write the names of the tribes whose traditions are similar to the tribe they studied.

Creating New Traditions (Grades 1–5)

Daily traditions, and the rituals within them, keep families personally connected and create an easy structure to affirm each individual. Talk with your class about some family traditions that are unrelated to holidays. Solicit comments about the students' daily or weekly family traditions. Older students can create a written list.

The Book of New Family Traditions: How to Create Great Rituals for Holidays and Every Day by Meg Cox states that the rituals within traditions can be created in three stages: preparation, action, and integration/celebration. Refer to the Stages of Traditional Rituals (see sidebar) and share an example. Give students time to analyze one of their own family rituals.

Ask students to create a simple tradition for reading books at home that uses each of the three ritual steps. Students can work individually or in small groups to discuss possible activities. Have students divide a blank paper into thirds and illustrate each of the three steps. They can add captions and a title, and take the pictures home to share with parents. Student involvement in creating this reading tradition will instill pride and a willingness to continue it. If some students already have a daily reading tradition at home, they can create a book-sharing tradition for the library.

December, a month when many holidays converge, is an excellent time to share about the importance of family traditions. In a short blurb in the school newsletter or online, write to parents explaining the information that students have learned about traditions and encourage families to engage their children in new and old traditions at home.



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