

# Holiday Fun

Planning Experiences that are Fun &  
Culturally Responsive



Presented by: Beth Smith, B.S., M.Ed. & Sherry Mayberry, B.A., M.Ed

What holiday do your families celebrate during this time of year?



# They might celebrate...

- ▶ Hanukkah
- ▶ Kwanzaa
- ▶ Christmas (secular)
- ▶ Christmas (religious)
- ▶ No holidays
- ▶ Other holidays



# Why is it important to be culturally aware when planning holiday activities?

“Celebrating a holiday engages children in holiday activities as full-fledged participants, on the assumption that their families believe in the holiday’s purpose and meaning. Learning about a holiday means teaching children about what the holiday means to different people and about the many different ways those families who honor the holiday celebrate it. Teaching about a holiday requires that teachers make very clear that the class can enjoy learning about each other’s holidays while holding to their own family’s beliefs and traditions.”  
(NAEYC, 2019)

Derman-Sparks, Louise, and Julie Edwards. “Anti-Bias Education and Holidays: Making Thoughtful Decisions.” NAEYC, 6 Nov. 2019, [www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/anti-bias-and-holidays](http://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/anti-bias-and-holidays).

# Common Elements





# What about religion?

“Pay attention to the language you use in holiday activities. This is an important element in children learning about, rather than celebrating, a holiday grounded in a specific faith or celebrating a historic event. This is especially necessary in publicly funded programs where religious teaching is not allowed by law. Your language choices also support or undercut the concept of religious diversity and each family’s freedom of choice. The challenge is to choose words that focus on the history of the special day and that also make clear the diversity of beliefs. These are topics that require clarifying conversations.” (NAEYC, 2019)



Derman-Sparks, Louise, and Julie Edwards. "Anti-Bias Education and Holidays: Making Thoughtful Decisions." NAEYC, 6 Nov. 2019, [www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/anti-bias-and-holidays](http://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/anti-bias-and-holidays)

# Hanukkah Resources

Information from National Geographic Kids

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/celebrations/article/hanukkah>

Video by Sesame Street:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hA69GlkAuk>

The Jewish Education Project

<https://educator.jewishedproject.org/content/resources-teaching-hanukkah>



# Kwanzaa Resources

Information from the Smithsonian

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/seven-principles-kwanzaa>

Video by Sesame Street:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kV-6qVp98Q>

Official Kwanzaa Website

<https://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/>





# Christmas Resources

Information from National Geographic Kids

<https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/general-history/facts-about-christmas/>

Video by Hey! Guess What

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pB16cvvgDmw>

Children International

<https://www.children.org/archive/2015/nov/christmas-in-your-childs-corner-of-the-world>



And ... don't forget...  
All families are NOT the same



# Common Element #1: FAMILY

Tell me about your family.

What other family members do you see over the holidays?

Do they come to your house or do you travel to theirs?

What do you enjoy most about spending time with your family?

How are our families the same? How are they different?



**LET'S DISCUSS:** What about families that do not celebrate holidays? How could you celebrate the concept of “family” with them in a different way? What about children in foster care or with limited family member contact?

What activities could you plan during the holidays that focus on the “family” element?



# You Could...

- ▶ **Compare family photos** – Have each family text a photo. Print them out on regular paper and then challenge the children to compare/contrast. Graph, if desired. **THINK ABOUT: Families that do not want their children photographed or are protective of family photos? How could you adapt this experience to include them?**
- ▶ **Talk about family holiday traditions** – Do they cook any special foods? Do they go on any trips? Do they put up special decorations?
- ▶ **Role-play with props** – Add a variety of dress-up clothing and materials to your dramatic play area that the children can use to role-play family holiday celebrations. Be sure that the props you add reflect the cultures of the families in your group.
- ▶ **Play the group game, “Pass the Picture”** – Children sit in a circle. Use the family photos for this game. Turn on music and have the children pass the photo around the circle. When the music stops, the child holding the photo must name whose family is in the photo. More advanced children could count the number of members in the photo as well.
- ▶ **Family Celebration** – Plan a special day when families can join the children for a celebration. This should be related to the holidays! Instead, it should be a celebration when all families are celebrated for their uniqueness.



What activities could you plan during the holidays that focus on the “caring, sharing & giving gifts” element?





# You Could...

- ▶ **Conduct a Food Drive** – The children could work together to decorate a cardboard box. Families could then send in canned or packaged goods to be donated to a local food bank.
- ▶ **Set up a Gift-Making Station** – This station could include all kinds of art materials and recyclables (e.g., empty boxes). Keep it open-ended so children feel free to use their imaginations as they create gifts for family members and/or friends.
- ▶ **Set up a Gift Wrapping Station** – Include boxes, gift wrap (which reflects the holidays celebrated by the families in your program), child-safe scissors, tape, bows/ribbon, gift tags, etc. The children can then use these materials as desired to wrap the gifts they create OR to simply wrap whatever they would like.
- ▶ **Play, “Find the Gift”** – Wrap a small box like a gift. When the children are not looking, hide it. Then, give the children clues using positional concepts to help them find the hidden gift.

What activities could you plan during the holidays that focus on the “special foods” element?



# You Could...

- ▶ **Playdough and Cookie Cutters** – Use peppermint extract or any other flavor to create scented dough and be sure to include toy rolling pins. Be sure the cookie cutters reflect the holiday celebrations of the families in your group. If possible, also include baking sheets.
- ▶ **Favorite Recipes** – Ask each family to send in a favorite recipe from the holiday season. Then, either make these with the children or prepare and serve for lunch/snack.
- ▶ **Prepare Holiday Treats** – For each holiday you plan to celebrate (e.g., Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa), plan to have the children help prepare (and then eat) a special food.
- ▶ **Hide, Find, Count** – Hide items related to each holiday for the children to find and count. For instance, cookie cutters, candles, mats, etc.

# Common Holiday Materials

- ▶ Wrapping paper
- ▶ Bows/Ribbons
- ▶ Gift tags
- ▶ Boxes - clothing + packing/shipping
- ▶ Decorations (child-safe ... of course)
- ▶ Lights/Candles



# What activities could you plan with wrapping paper?



**Infants:** Use tape to secure pieces of wrapping paper to the floor. Invite the infant to crawl on them. Describe the infant's actions and what happens.

**Toddlers/Twos:** Cut strips from wrapping paper. Turn on music and invite these children to shake the strips as they dance.

**Threes:** Use assorted patterns of wrapping paper to make a matching game. Cut rectangles from the paper and tape to index cards. Be sure to talk about colors, patterns, etc. while matching cards.

**Fours:** Have each child cut a small rectangle from a wrapping paper that has a pattern (e.g., polka dots, stripes, plaid, etc.). Then, have each child try to find something in the home that has the same pattern.

**Advanced Preschoolers:** Some wrapping paper has words printed on it. Challenge these children to find the words. Talk about letters, letter sounds and words in the process.

**LET'S DISCUSS:** What if you do not want to use wrapping paper? What could you use instead?



# What activities could you plan with bows?



# What activities could you plan with boxes?



What activities could you plan that use decorations and/or symbolic items?





# Questions?



To learn more about Gee Whiz and how amazing, intentional curriculum, please visit our website

[www.geewhizeducation.com](http://www.geewhizeducation.com)

