Lesson 6

Family Celebrations

Resources
• Globe
• Calendar
• Props depicting celebrations: birthday cake; tangerines; rice cakes; lucky money pocket; candy; flowers; carp kite; kimono; tobe; mideastern foods; traditional Thanksgiving foods; hanukkiya (Jewish candleholder also known as menorah); latkes (Jewish pancakes); green, black, red candles-holder for Kwanzaa
• Photo of local mosque

Children's Literature

General Comments
The emphasis of this lesson is on family celebrations around the world. Families share languages, customs, traditions, and values, and it’s often the sharing at special times that binds family members together. In this lesson, students will examine a select set of examples that illustrate family celebrations around the world. You might substitute other celebrations based on the composition of the class. The use of family and other local resources for this lesson is encouraged.

Point out that not all families of a given culture adhere to the same traditions and customs. Also, family circumstances sometimes prevent participation in celebrations.

General Purposes and Goals
To help students: (1) understand and appreciate that families share languages, customs, traditions, and values and that often these are made very visible through planned parties or celebrations; (2) understand that celebrations often bind family members together; (3) understand and appreciate their individual family customs, traditions, and values; and (4) develop respect for the diverse customs, traditions, and values of their classmates and other people who live in their community.
Main Ideas to Develop

- Families share languages, customs, traditions, and values. Often these are made visible through planned activities on special days.
- Families across the globe participate in celebrations. Some are similar to our celebrations while others are very different.
- Celebrations tend to bind families—provide a sense of connectedness/wholeness/specialness.
- Respecting diversity results from learning about it and experiencing it.

Teaching Tips from Barbara

I found that creating a table comparing the different family celebrations helped to keep the information organized. I used a question to head each column: “What celebration?” “When?” “Who celebrates?” and “What do they do?” The resource book Celebrations was a particular favorite of my students. They often picked it to read and review on their own.

Starting the Lesson

Discuss the results of the home assignment. Begin the lesson by explaining that one celebration that many children throughout the world have in common is their birthday. Children in different cultures celebrate in different ways. Show photographs of your (teacher’s) birthday celebrations growing up. (Optional: Bring in your favorite cake—the kind that your family always provided because it was your favorite. After the lesson, provide samples.) Sing “Happy Birthday” and tell stories about your parties, opening gifts, and other traditions. Elicit input from the students about their birthdays—how they celebrate, what they eat, and so on.

Suggested Lesson Discussion

Even in the United States, birthday celebrations are not all alike (e.g., different types of cakes, different activities or games). Some children have sleepovers; some go skating; some go swimming; some may not be able to have a party because of other family responsibilities, and so on. There are places in the world, however, where people are not educated about time in the same way we are. In these places, children may not know the specific day they were born, so birthdays are not celebrated.

Some children who live in the United States celebrate the way their families did when they lived in other places. For example, Juan’s parents are from Mexico. [Locate on the globe.] At his party, children break a piñata. Candy and toys fall out of the piñata and the children at the party receive them as treats. People in Denmark hang flags outside their homes on their birthdays. In Russia, people celebrate with a birthday pie. In Japan, the third, fifth, and seventh birthdays are the most important. On those birthdays children often wear their native kimonos as a part of the
celebration. [Show photographs from Celebrations: Children Just Like Me (pp. 4–5) of how children all over the world celebrate birthdays.] They may wear their native costumes for the special day, and most eat snacks, play games, and sing to celebrate the day.

[Continue showing pictures from Celebrations: Children Just Like Me.] For one year the photographer and writer team Barnabas and Anabel Kindersley traveled around the world meeting children and talking to them about family celebrations and festivals that they enjoy. [See pp. 60–64, “Meet the Authors.”] They share these in four sections of the book categorized by the seasons of the year. We are going to look at one or two from each season. [Based on the composition of your class, you may want to add or delete accordingly.]

**Chinese New Year** (pp. 8–9) Man Po is nine years old and lives in Hong Kong [locate on the globe]. One of the world’s most colorful celebrations starts on the first day of the Chinese New Year, usually in February, and lasts for fifteen days. One of the traditions is that Chinese families clean their houses thoroughly to rid them of last year’s bad luck. A spectacular parade takes place, and usually there’s lots of feasting and visiting of family and friends. Celebrations are based on bringing luck, happiness, health, and wealth during the upcoming year.

[Show students some tangerines.] Tangerines are considered the lucky fruits of the Chinese New Year because of their bright color. Odd numbers are unlucky, so the tangerines are always given in pairs. [Show them sticky rice cakes.] Sticky rice cakes called *lin gu* are a special treat that families usually share during this holiday celebration. [Show a replica of the lucky money pockets (red envelopes with good luck messages written in gold).] On New Year’s morning, Man Po is given lucky money by her parents and grandparents. All Chinese children and people who are not married receive money in special red envelopes.

**Mother’s Day** (pp. 20–21) [Show a picture of seven-year-old Matthew from England and locate on globe.] Often English children make special cards and buy their mothers flowers to celebrate the day. They give their mothers boxes of chocolates. In some parts of the world, this is called Mothering Sunday. In the past it was a time to relax the rigid rules of Lent and for working people to go home and visit their mothers. Mother’s Day is a special day set aside for children to show appreciation for all the things their mothers do for them—provide love, cook food, wash/iron clothing, and so on. [Show items that are traditionally a part of Mother’s Day celebrations (e.g., candy, flowers, cards.)]

**Kodomono-hi** (pp. 30–31) On the fifth day of May, Kazu and other Japanese boys celebrate Children’s Day. [Locate Osaka, Japan, on the
globe.] On this day, young boys fly streamers and enormous kites in the shape of a large fish (carp—known for determination and energy) from a large pole in the garden. Inside their homes, families display traditional warrior dolls and bathe their children in iris leaves. The main purpose of the festival is to demonstrate the qualities of strength and determination. On this day, boys wear kimonos—the traditional dress for both females and males. At birth, Japanese boys are given a set of samurai dolls [show picture]. The samurai were courageous Japanese warriors. The dolls represent strength and fearlessness. On Kodomo-no-hi, families display the warrior dolls.

Optional The girls also have a special day. Girl’s Day occurs on March 3 and is known as Hine Matsuri. It is a day dedicated to dolls—either dolls brought especially for the girl or dolls that have been in the family for many years. They are considered too valuable to play with, so they are displayed in the best room of the house [see doll display, p. 17]. The dolls represent Japanese values such as calmness and dignity and are set as examples for young girls to follow. Some Japanese believe that a person’s illness or bad luck can be transferred to a doll. They therefore hold a special ceremony each year on this Doll Day. Families that are worried about their children’s health donate dolls to the shrine. Shinto priests offer special prayers and then throw the dolls onboard wooden ships that they destroy at sea [show pictures, pp. 16–17]. During Doll Day, stores and stalls sell small models of these dolls. Some contain delicious snacks such as tiny cakes [show sample]. Girls dress up in the traditional costume (kimono) as part of the celebration [show kimono/shoes].

[You should be aware of cultural diversity in your classroom and draw on parental resources and other community resources when available.] Not all people of a given cultural heritage (e.g., Japanese) participate in these celebrations or even hold the same beliefs and values. These traditions have long been a part of Japanese culture and learning about them helps us understand the behavior of men and women in Japan—the gender roles they play, and so on.

Ramadan (pp. 36–37) A celebration that occurs in the summer for Muslim families is Ramadan. Dalia lives in Jordan [locate on the globe and show pictures of her in her prayer clothes (p. 36) and in western clothes.] Most people around the world dress much as we do most of the time. However, they wear their native costumes on special days. For example, white robes are worn by Muslims to show that all are equal before their god. Muslims in America, maybe even some in your school, celebrate Ramadan; however, they might not wear their native costumes.

For Ramadan, Muslims fast (avoid food) between sunrise and sunset for one month. On the first day of the celebration, the family attends spe-
cial prayers at the mosque. [Show a picture of the mosque in your community if one exists.] Females usually pray at home, but on this day women and girls go to the mosque. However, they use a different entrance than the men and boys.

At the end of the fasting period, Muslims have big family meals with lots of special foods. [Have children sample special foods enjoyed at the feast (e.g., labaneh—dried yogurt, or ma’moul—cookies).] During this celebration Muslims give food to the poor, visit relatives, and exchange cards and gifts.

**Thanksgiving** (pp. 46–47) This celebration began in North America [locate on the globe]. It’s one of our most important festivals. It marks the early settlers’ first harvest—a time when they gave thanks for surviving in the new land for a year. [Show pictures of Thanksgiving in the Bronx, New York. Elicit input from students about their Thanksgiving celebrations, noting that not all people are able to celebrate because of family circumstances. Show examples of some of the traditional Thanksgiving foods (e.g., pumpkins, potatoes, squash, cranberries, apples, and turkey), explaining that these were the ones available to the early settlers. Have a sample of one of the traditional foods available for tasting.]

Many winter holidays and celebrations include gifts and candles. [Show picture of children around the world who take part in festivals that occur during the winter months (e.g., p. 48). Underscore the range of dress for the celebrations.] For the purposes of this lesson, we will focus on St. Nicholas Day, Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa. [Note: You may want to emphasize other celebrations, based on the make-up of your class. Involve parents and other local resources, always underscoring the major understandings to be emphasized: (1) families share traditions, customs, and values; (2) families learn how to celebrate from each other; and (3) families across the globe celebrate the same things but celebrate in various ways.]

**Hanukkah** (pp. 52–53) For many Jewish people, this is their favorite holiday because it represents religious freedom (2,100 years ago). [Show Israel on the globe.] As the story goes, when the Jews returned to their temple to put things back in order after the Syrians (their enemies) had destroyed many holy things inside, they found the Eternal Light no longer lit. It was supposed to burn all the time. The Jews looked for pure oil so they could light it again, but their enemies had also found the oil and spoiled it. Finally, after lots of searching, they found a little jug of unspoiled oil. They thought it was only enough to keep the lamp burning for a day. However, a wonderful thing happened: there was enough oil to burn for eight days, until more pure oil could be found. [Show the class the elaborate candlestick that is used to remind them of this miracle.] During this holiday, when
families get together they light candles and recite special blessings before
the evening meals. This elaborate candlestick is called the hanukkiya, or
menorah. It holds nine candles, eight of which represent each night of
Hannukkah. The ninth candle in the middle is used for lighting the others.

In some Jewish families children receive a small gift on each night of
the festival. Other families give only one big gift on the first night of Ha-
nukkah. Many people wrap their presents in blue and white paper, which
are the colors of the Israeli flag. [Optional: Share latkes—potato cakes
that Jewish people make for this celebration. These are made of grated po-
tatoes, onions, flour, and eggs, and fried in sizzling olive oil. The oil repre-
sents the oil that burned in the temple lamp for eight days. Show picture
of children celebrating Hanukkah.]

**St. Nicholas Day** (p. 54) This occurs on December 5 and is cel-
ebrated by families across eastern Europe [locate this area on the globe
and show a picture of Matis, who lives in Slovakia (p. 54)]. Slovakian
children including Matis believe that during the night St. Nicholas will
come and fill children’s boots with treats. Slovakian children carefully
polish their boots and place them on the windowsill. They leave the win-
dow partly open so St. Nicholas can get in and leave chocolate treats.
Coal, potatoes, onions, and devils are sometimes also left in the boot be-
cause the children have been naughty. Children use boots instead of
shoes so there’s more room for treats.

**Christmas** (pp. 56–57) This family holiday is celebrated around the
world. It is a Christian holiday to mark the birth of Jesus Christ. It is cel-
ebrated by going to church, singing traditional Christmas carols, decorat-
ing trees, family feasting, and gift giving. Cookies, stollen, and fruit cakes
are among the goodies eaten at this holiday family celebration. [Optional:
Give children samples.]

**Kwanzaa** Kwanzaa is a holiday of shared harvest, shared memories,
and shared beliefs. During this season, African American children often
wear brightly colored designs that reflect African art. The holiday period is
December 26 to January 1. It’s a period of family celebration and reflec-
tion. Relatives enjoy time together, eat special foods, exchange gifts, and
so on. The holiday centers around the seven principles of black culture: (1)
unity—we help each other; (2) self-determination—we decide things for
ourselves; (3) collective work and responsibility—we work together to
make life better; (4) cooperative economics—we build and support our
own businesses; (5) purpose—we want to restore our people to their tradi-
tional greatness; (6) creativity—we use our minds and hands to make
things; and (7) faith—we believe in ourselves, our ancestors, our future.
Each day of Kwanzaa is dedicated to one of the seven principles.
Optional  [*Powwow Summer* by Marcie R. Rendon is an interesting book with beautiful photographs. It describes Native Americans celebrating the circle of life with ceremonies of singing and dancing around a drum. Today these ceremonies are called powwows, and one is held somewhere almost every weekend all summer. The book introduces the reader to the Downwind family, who goes on the powwow trail with its children every summer.]

Activity

To summarize the lesson, ask the students to close their eyes and think about one new thing they learned about family celebrations. Have them signal with “thumbs up” when they are ready to share. Encourage students to expand on previous peer responses or provide an idea shared for the first time rather than just repeating earlier statements.

Anticipated responses include families everywhere celebrate; celebrations bring families together; family beliefs determine how they celebrate; not all families of a given culture celebrate the same way; birthday is almost a universal day for celebration (but there are places in the world where people do not think about time in the same way we do and therefore individuals may not know their exact date of birth).

Summarize

- Families celebrate around the world.
- Families decide what and how to celebrate.
- Not all families from the same culture celebrate in the same ways.
- Families share languages, traditions, customs, and values. Often these are made visible to others through celebrations.
- Celebrations tend to bind people together.

Assessment

Provide each student with a sheet of paper numbered 1–10. Ask each student to place a + by the number if the statement is correct and a – if it is incorrect.

- 1. People everywhere celebrate their birthdays in the same way.
- 2. Everybody celebrates his or her birthday.
+ 3. Most children around the world wear clothes much like ours most of the time.
+ 4. Sometimes children—and even adults—wear special clothes for special holiday celebrations.
- 5. Muslim children, even in America, might celebrate Ramadan by praying and feasting from sunrise to sunset.
- 6. All Japanese boys everywhere celebrate Children’s Day.
+ 7. Mother’s Day is celebrated in many cultures. Flowers, candy, gifts, and special treatment of mothers are usually a part of that special day.
8. If you lived in China you would be forced to celebrate Chinese New Year.
+ 9. People in many parts of the world celebrate Christmas.
+ 10. Hanukkah is an eight-day holiday celebrated by Jewish people.

Home Assignment
Ask each family (in advance) to be thinking about a favorite celebration.
Ask each family to identify one tradition or custom it would like the child to share with classmates. Encourage the family to send photos, artifacts, or food to add meaning and interest to the presentation.

Dear Parents,

We have been learning about family celebrations across the globe as a means of providing a sense of connectedness/specialness. Please discuss with your child ways in which your family celebrates. Prepare your child to share one tradition or custom that your family enjoys as a part of celebrating. Photos, artifacts, or a food item will be welcomed. We will use the responses during our next class discussion. Thank you!

Sincerely,

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Figure 10  Model Letter to Parents
Thank you for sampling this resource.

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