

SOCIAL STUDIES

CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD

GRADES: 3-6

MATERIALS:

- world map
- imitation passport
- information on various cultures' Christmas customs
- various materials depending on the country

METHOD:

1. Each student is assigned a team work research project. They must research an American Christmas custom, tell what it is, where it originated, any special significance and draw or copy a picture of it. They find many of their answers as we learn about the customs in other countries.
2. We brainstorm all the American Christmas customs we can think of to begin this assignment. I put them on slips of paper and let each team draw out a custom or some years I have them write the ones that interest them and match them by interest.
3. Here are some common American Customs to Research:
 - Christmas trees
 - Christmas cards
 - gift giving
 - Santa Claus
 - Christmas dinner/feast
 - candles
 - Yule log
 - nativity

- mistletoe, holly and evergreen
 - wreaths
 - Caroling
4. I choose a number of countries to study for this unit. Here is a list of the ones I choose this year:
- England – Happy Christmas
 - Mexico – Feliz Navidad
 - Germany – Froehliche Weihnachten
 - Sweden – Gud Jul
 - Denmark and Norway – Glaedelig Jul, Norway = God Jul og Godt
 - Netherlands – Hartlijke Kerstroeten
 - Russia – Hristos Razdajetsja
 - Italy – Guon Natale
5. I begin by telling the kids what countries we will be studying. We discuss them and they locate them on a world map worksheet I give out. (It is part of a packet that also includes the above greetings in a list and a word search, a place for the kids to list American customs with enough room to tell where they started later. It also has a couple of color sheets that show flags and an International Christmas tree. I don't particularly care for color sheets, but some of my kids just love them. Each student starts a folder for Christmas carols of the World and a Multicultural Recipe book).
6. I will start with France because Dec. 4th, St. Barbara's Day, is the starting of the Christmas holidays. We learn a lot about France's customs. We also learn about their flag and their location on the map. Basic Information on France's customs:
- Soucope – water soaked wheat grains placed in dishes and set to germinate. fast growing = good crops for next year. The soucope is placed next to the creche as a symbol of an the offering of a living thing. **ACTIVITY:** In fifth grade coincides with our plant chapter in science.

- We plant grains in saucers, some with dirt, some on a sponge, some just water, some crowded, some not. When they sprout we set next to a miniature creche I bring in.
- Strong religious accent – French display miniature nativity scene, the creche, lit by the glow of candles and incense while bells are rung. Creches are carefully set up with a back drop of greens. A lighted star is suspended over the creche. The family gathers around and sings as petite Jesus is placed in the manger. The three Kings are not placed there until Jan. 6th. ACTIVITY: students may make dipped candles, set in a pie tin with plaster and decorate with plastic greens.
- Reveillon – a luxurious meal of oysters and special wines and sausages following midnight mass.
- Caroling – has a very early beginning in France. Called Noels in France. Poor often sing in the streets during the season and money is tossed out windows to them. We will go caroling, but usually, the last day before Christmas break. Many other countries have caroling also. I will give them a French carol to put in their song book (we add to the song book as we go).
- Lots of decorations with meaning – mistletoe = good luck, holiday candles= hope.
- Yule log – French custom that is hundreds of years old. It is a huge piece of an old tree trunk that is lit on Christmas Eve. Each holiday, an unburned piece of wood is saved to light the next year's Yule log. As heating systems replaced the fireplaces, Yule logs were no longer burned, but the French could not part with this age-old tradition. The traditional Yule log has been replaced by a Christmas cake shaped like a Yule log, served at the end of the holiday feast.

ACTIVITY: Purchase sponge cakes, 1 for each student, canned frosting, plastic knives and small Christmas candies. Students frost and decorate their own Yule Log.

- Christmas tree custom borrowed from Germany in the late 1800's. Usually the tree is planted in a tub before bringing it into the house.
 - Pere Noel – the French gift giver, looks a lot like Santa. Red suited and bearded, however, he is tall and thin, wears wooden shoes and often brings a donkey with him to help carry gift bag.
7. Instead of “Ho, Ho, Ho”, he calls out “Tra la la, tra la la, bouli, bouli, boulah!” Shoes are left by the fire to be filled by Pere Noel. Birch sticks are sometimes left as a reminder to be good.
 8. I give students a picture of him in their French packet.
 9. At the end of each country study, I give each student a sticker flag of that country to put in their imitation passport.
 10. Next I do Christmas in Holland (Netherlands). Dec. 6th is Sinterkllass Day there. I will send info on that country as soon as I can. I do basically the same stuff for each country. I have a packet with written information, pictures and puzzles that contains the following information for each country:
 - gifts
 - who is the gift bearer
 - how does he deliver the gifts
 - nativity
 - Christmas trees
 - vocabulary word search and cross word puzzles
 - color sheets that show gift giver, etc.
 - special foods
 - any other special customs I can find. Every country has different activities, including writing poetry, letters and stories.
 11. At the end of all the countries, the research teams

present their information on the American customs. We go caroling and return to the classroom to have hot “wassail”, without any alcohol, and sugar cookies. I usually give each student a small Christmas gift bag.

This information has come from many sources, including people I’ve talked to. I don’t know if any of it’s copyrighted or not. But, I’m happy to share!

Submitted by,

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THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS IN (YOUR STATE)

GRADES: 3-12

Every year I have my student rewrite the Night Before Christmas in the style of our state (Louisiana). I generally start out by reading the story. I use the “Cajun Night Before Christmas” to set the mood. I then have the rewrite it using as many of the state symbols as possible in the story.

MATERIALS:

- the book “Night Before Christmas”
- a ditto printout of the story “Night Before Christmas”
- a ditto list all the state symbols: bird, flower, song, stone, drink, colors, etc.
- blank ditto paper

METHOD:

1. Read the story of the Night Before Christmas.
2. After reading, hand out the ditto of the story and tell the students that they are going to rewrite the story but set in your state. (They will complain sure, but once they hear the next details they generally like the idea.)
3. Hand out a list of all the state's symbols. You can find this list in a state almanac, state website, or state history textbook. Be sure to get the most complete list you can.
4. Tell them that they must use all the symbols in the story. They can substitute any of the characters or scenes with one from the list or your state. (In Louisiana the setting generally becomes the bayou or swamp due to lots of our symbols being water related – crawfish, alligators, bald cypress trees, etc.)
5. Have them write a rough draft. Highlight or underline all the symbols. Check to see if they have them all. Now write a final draft neatly in ink.
6. Hand out blank ditto paper and have them illustrate a cover for their story.
7. Type stories if possible. Copy some of the best and create covers then send to elementary classrooms or hospitals for other children to read.
8. Another idea is to copy all stories and have them bound or stapled and give each student a complete set. They love to see their work in print.
9. If you have a school newspaper see if they will print a few.
10. Have the student choose their favorite and submit to the local newspaper for possible publication.

Submitted by,

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GETTING TO KNOW YOU

GRADES: 5-9

MATERIALS:

- large sheets of colored butcher paper

METHOD:

1. Divide students into groups of five or six. Provide each group a large sheet of colored butcher paper.
2. Instruct students to draw a large flower with a center and an equal number of petals to the number of students in their groups.
3. Through discussion with their group members they are to find their similarities and differences. They should fill in the center of the flower with something they all have in common.
4. Each member fills in his/her petal with something about them that is unique—unlike any other member in their group. Students should be instructed that they cannot use physical attributes such as hair color, weight etc. (to encourage more meaningful discussion with their group members). Students should be encouraged to be creative in their ideas and drawings.
5. Students share with the large group, teacher leads discussion about similarities and differences, and the flowers can be displayed.

submitted by

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AN OPENING TIME-LINE PROJECT

GRADES: 3-8

To help students understand time lines, I try to associate as much of my teaching as I can to real life situations.

MATERIALS:

- 8 X 11 poster boards
- photos of various years of each student's life

METHOD:

1. I ask students to make a time line of their life starting at birth and each year after that up to their current age.
2. I supply them with 8 x 11 poster boards that they tape together by the end to make the time line.
3. They put the year of their birth to 1996.
4. They are asked to write one important thing for each year. I suggest that they ask their parents for pictures to put on their time lines.
5. I also, as a teacher made a time line ahead of time and showed them it as an example.
6. I put these outside of my room on a bulletin board before Open House or Back-to-School Night. Parents are excited to look at everyone's pictures. This is also a great way to get to know your students!

submitted by

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KEEPING HISTORY ALIVE FOR YOUR STUDENTS

GRADES 3-12

History texts are woefully inadequate. Most of today's History texts, across the United States, have been so watered down in an effort to placate various special interest groups and be politically correct that there's little content left.

It's up to the teacher to draw the information together and present it in a meaningful way. However, the surest way to kill students' interest in History is to teach "names and dates".

I've always found that it's the little things that make History come alive for classes. We don't all have to dress up like George Washington or stage a mock pirate battle in front of our students to hold their interest.

Students love stories, and, after all, History is the grandest story of all. Therefore, it should be presented that way. Bring out the personal side of History's characters and the trivial tidbits of the past's great events. You will find that this will provide the matrix for a greater interest and a better understanding on the part of the student!

Yes, as the text tells us, Hannibal was the first to take an

army across the Alps, but it cost him three-quarters of his army before he had even fought his first Roman. Was it worth it? Was he a hero, a patriot, an egomaniac, or simply a vengeful son? What went through his mind when the Romans tossed his brother's head in his camp?....The possibilities are endless.

The texts don't supply the answers; they don't even supply the questions! The teacher has to research the subject and know the background behind the event. He or she has to come to class prepared to awe, inspire, and titillate; loaded to the gills with information and the enthusiasm to transmit his or her love of History to the students.

[Editor's note; see the History section on the EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES page for excellent History links to materials.]

This is a tall order for today's harried teachers. Loaded down with meaningless bureaucratic meetings, buried in paperwork, less and less time to cover the required curriculum, coping with broken families, kids that have been abused, one social problem after another...but it works...and it's all worth it when that kid in the back (the one who's usually up at the office) exclaims, "Cool!" right in the middle of today's lesson.

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PUTTING TOGETHER THE PUZZLE PIECES OF HISTORY

GRADES: 5-9

MATERIALS:

- 60 or more piece child puzzle

METHOD:

1. On the first day of school, I give each student 2-3 pieces of a 60 piece child's puzzle.
2. I then ask the students to, two at a time, to approach the table at the front of the room, and try to put the puzzle pieces where they belong.
3. After all the students have tried, I ask them why they thought I asked them to do such a difficult task. The correct response should be something like this: History is like a puzzle. There are often missing pieces. There are many ways that the pieces can turn to look right. We don't always have all the answers. But, we can make some educated guesses (straight pieces go on the borders, colors are kept together, etc.) and put together what we think happened.
4. After the puzzle is complete, we can still see the lines of the pieces. In other words, we don't see a perfectly clear picture of what happened. We see most of what happened, and that is what History is all about...putting puzzle pieces together!!

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BASIC DIRECTIONS

GRADES: K-1

This lesson is geared mainly for the social studies lesson, but could be used for every subject.

MATERIALS:

- posters of directions (such as arrows pointing left, right, up, down and a person seeming to walk backwards, forward, and sideways),
- signs of stop, one way, stoplight, etc.,
- signs of places that you would need to look or follow to get there (I found pictures of all different kinds of signs like school crossing, pizza place, handicapped, woman, man, etc. and showed the students each one and asked them to identify them),
- books on maps and directions (such as a “getting lost” book)

METHOD:

FIRST DAY:

1. Start out with a statement like “Stop! Look out the window.”
2. Discuss what word made them look out the window.
3. Tell them that stop is a kind of direction which you must obey or you could get hurt.
4. Ask them if they know why they could get hurt.
5. Now show the students the posters of directions and have them identify what they are.
6. Read the book on directions about getting lost, and then talk about ways that they can get help if they ever do

get lost.

7. Play a game such as "Simon Says" and say everything in directions, such as "take a step backwards" or "take a step to the right".
8. Eventually lead up to saying two directions like take a step forward and then take a step to the left.

SECOND DAY:

1. Review with the students ways to get help if they get lost, and read the book on getting lost again.
2. Ask them what are some other ways that they can use to find their way around. The answers could be maps and signs.
3. Finally use the signs that you have about handicap, woman, man, school crossing, pizza place, etc. and ask them to identify them and tell where they would find each one.

submitted by

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HOW HISTORY IS RECORDED

GRADES: 4-12

METHOD:

1. I begin by talking about the way we record our history, and discuss the fact that our history is mainly written

down in history books, but it is also inherent in all written material in our culture.

2. Point out that newspapers and magazines are the most obvious examples of that. But, since there are other ways of recording history, I usually begin a discussion of how the Native American tribes usually had a tribe historian who had histories of every family in the tribe memorized for up to six or seven generations back. And all of that history was handed down orally; they had no way of writing.
3. I then ask the students to go home and bring back a story from their parents about something the parents can remember when they were kids. I also include some questions about where their parents were born, and where their grandparents were born. (Out of a group of eleven students this year, and this is in the Seattle area, only four of the students were born in the Seattle area. One student was born in Cambodia; her parents were born in Cambodia, and another set of parents was born in Taiwan; six sets of grandparents were born outside the US, and when you go back that far, the grandparents are from all over the country). This leads to some interesting comparisons and a very easy discussion of diversity. We all have our own histories.
4. The stories that the kids share about their parents are always interesting and diverse. The stories also trigger many other stories that the kids already knew but couldn't think of when prompted. This whole sharing experience takes at least an hour, since the kids really get wound up in comparing "the old days" to today, and comparing their family histories. Inevitably, they find out that not all history is written down in history books.

As a side-note, one of my Instructional Assistants (about 50-ish) went home and called her sister long distance and talked for two hours. She thanked me for making this assignment, and

she told me that she learned more about her family than she had ever known in her whole life. This exercise also gets kids to sit their parents down at the table and TALK!

Within the next couple of weeks, I am going to have the students repeat this exercise with another twist. Bring in a story about how your family celebrates the holidays, and another story from a parent about their most memorable holiday celebration. I know that we're going to learn about the Chinese new-year from this, and we'll definitely see some more diversity. I can't wait. This is not a discussion on religion, but a discussion on family traditions.

submitted by

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HISTORY'S RELATIONSHIP TO ONE'S LIFE

GRADES: 5-12

Many students think "history" is political and military events that happened long ago and has little relationship to their own lives. This activity shows that everyone has a personal history that is affected by the times in which they live.

MATERIALS:

- paper

METHOD:

1. Have students draw a horizontal line on a piece of paper starting with their birth year and ending with the present year.
2. Have them write or draw five important events that have happened in their lives next to the year it happened.
3. The teacher draws a horizontal line on the board starting with the year of birth of the oldest student to the present. Ask students to identify important events that have occurred within their lifetimes, be sure to include social and cultural events as well as political, economical and military .
4. In groups or a classroom discussion consider the ways in which they are affected by the times they live in.
5. For homework have students ask their parents or any older person to list some historical events that have happened in their lifetime. The next day list the responses along a timeline on the board.
6. Conclude the lesson by repeating the message that everyone has a personal history that affects or is affected by the times in which they live.

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COMMUNITY BUILDING IN YOUR

CLASSROOM: STRAW ACTIVITY

GRADES: 3-8

This FUN activity will allow the students to automatically develop the basic attitudes that you would like to be foremost in your class.

MATERIALS:

- 1 bundle of approximately 40 drinking straws per group
- roll of masking tape

METHOD:

1. Divide the class into groups of 4 (3 if necessary, but preferably not 5)
2. Hand out a bundle of 40 straws to each group.
3. Give each group about a meter (yard) of masking tape.
4. Instructions to the class:
 - You are going to construct the tallest, FREESTANDING structure that you can, using only the straws and the tape that you have been given.
 - You will get no more tape, so use it carefully.
 - You may not anchor your structure to a desk, or the floor with the tape.
 - BUT you must work in complete silence during the entire process.
 - If you do talk, a straw will be taken from your group each time you do speak. (Note for you only: Taking a straw from the 40 provided, will not really make a difference, as few use them all, but be extremely strict and have a couple of "sacrificial lambs", and the silence rule will be effective.)
 - Say that there will be absolutely no talking from

this point onwards. (Remove straws quickly if they do speak.)

- Suggest that group keeps an eye on the time. (They may begin to gesture at this point.)
- The “silence” rule will cause some consternation, but just say that there are various ways of communicating, only one of which is speech.
- Assign a space in your room for each group.
- Set a time limit; say 15 mins.
- Walk around the room taking straws if necessary and give a 5 & then a 2-minute warning. Observe how productive groups work & make a mental note of any actions, both positive & negative to comment on later.
- When the time is up, go to the various groups with a couple of metre (yard) sticks and measure each one.
- Congratulate the winners, & commiserate with the rest of the class. Always stress the process rather than the results. I.e. Did you enjoy the task/challenge? If you did, then you won. Students usually enjoy this task; they find it a different type of challenge.
- Now is the time for discussion. Ask if they learned anything by doing this. (You’ll be awed by the answers.) Ask the most successful group, what made them successful and what didn’t work. Ask the other groups what worked for them and what didn’t.
- Ask how they managed to communicate without talking & emphasize that communication of all types, is vital if we are to succeed in anything.
- You should end up being able to elicit the following responses from your students; some will need guided questions, others will come up naturally.
- As you get the required responses, make a chart of

the basic ideas. The bracketed notes are FYI only.

- Communicate: find a way, somehow to let others know what you mean. (Vital in the current climate of learning. Students not only have to know what they are doing, they have to be able to explain it to others.)
- You need a strong foundation on which to build anything. (This applies to learning and practicing basic skills.)
- Respect everyone in your group by including them. (This should come from discussion about people who were made to feel left out; who weren't allowed to contribute, and how they felt.)
- Respect other people's ideas and efforts. (Whose idea helped the group? Maybe an idea wasn't used, but it could spark another idea. Everyone can contribute in one way or another.)
- Respect property, both yours and other people's. (If you got mad & wasted tape or straws, you only hurt your group and therefore yourself.)
- Listen, not only with your ears, but also with your head and your heart. (Sometimes just acknowledging another's ideas makes them feel respected.)
- Try out new ideas; take good risks. (Some students may say that they thought an idea wouldn't work, but they tried it & were successful.)
- Take responsibility for your actions. (If you suggest something that doesn't work, admit it, apologize & move on; if you suggest a successful method, don't laud it over everyone else.)

- Respect other people. (The most important rule; encompasses all the above.)
5. A true story that you can credit to your own child or a nephew etc, and that applies to being left out is something that happened to my son. He was 7 yrs old and came home from school one day looking dejected. I asked him what he had done at school. He replied "I learned how not to make dinosaurs!" I asked what he meant, thinking that he had made a mistake or something. He replied, " My group had to make a dinosaur and I didn't get to help so I guess I learned how NOT to make dinosaurs."!!! I tell my students this story every year & they usually get the point. Any time we have group work, I remind them to make sure that no one learns how NOT to do it!

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BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

GRADES: K-3

In this lesson the learner elaborates on birthday celebrations of own families and the global family.

MATERIALS:

- plain, multi-colored paper
- chart paper

- crayons
- scissors
- glue
- fabric and paper scraps
- picture of cakes, candles, presents
- printed hand outs
- party food
- party hats
- Optional: Computer, Internet service

METHOD:

1. Select a day when a child in class is celebrating a birthday to introduce the lesson. Background: "Today is Niyats birthday. Families believe that a person's birthday is very important and very special. Families have celebrated birthdays for hundreds of years." Teacher asks Niyat how her birthday is to be celebrated and how it was celebrated in her birth country of Ethiopia.
2. Class then discusses the similarities and differences between the two types of celebrations.
3. Teacher writes the similarities and differences on the chart paper.
4. Select a similarity- cake, candles, birthday cards, presents and discuss. For instance: Birthday Symbols: * Cake- for example the tradition started in Germany * Candles- used to symbolize "Light of Life" * Birthday cards- sent by people who couldn't be present on birthday * Present- given to show that birthdays and the person is special
5. Hand out to each child a calendar on which to mark their birth date (teacher will have to assist as grade one children often do not know the actual date of their birthday)
6. Each child will make a birthday cake out of or on paper. Teacher may provide print-outs of birthday cakes for

children to color.

7. Make candles out of paper to go on birthday cake.
8. Sing "Happy Birthday" to the birthday child.
9. Class to go to computer room where teacher goes into Internet to receive the electronic musical birthday card she has e-mailed to the child.
10. Teacher to store the paper cakes, each time a birthday occurs select one to give to the birthday child.
11. Following day: Continue discussion of symbols, and how people in other countries celebrate birthdays. Teacher's knowledge of children's ethnic backgrounds may be used to determine which countries will be discussed.
12. Children will share a birthday tradition from their families.
13. Send home hand out asking parents to explain the traditions of their families.
14. Make birthday books.
15. Read stories, teach songs, and poems.
16. As a Closing Activity: Have birthday party for class. Arrange to have families provide an ethnic dish. Send party invitations to parents (don't forget the principal). Play games, sing songs, have fun. ***Submitted by,***

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CURRENT EVENTS: PEACE IS PATRIOTIC

George Washington knew war and peace, and he outlined a plan, He said, "Stay out of foreign wars," stay off of others' land.

And if Washington said these words today, would he be
attacked

For criticizing our leaders for getting in Iraq?

And wrong is right and right is wrong and the world is upside
down,

And war is right and war is wrong, 'pends on who attacks who's
town,

And you can love your country while saying stop all
battlegrounds,

For peace is patriotic.

Having peace and prosperity is what our country's for,

No politician has ever said, "I brought us into war."

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, means the punishment
fits the crime.

And angry reactions and thousands of lives are connected every
time.

For wrong is right and right is wrong and the world is upside
down,

And war is right and war is wrong, 'pends on who attacks who's
town,

And you can love your country while saying stop all
battlegrounds,

And peace is patriotic.

And don't forget the victims, they're on both sides of the
fight.

The workers in the towers and the children bombed at night.

For to the mothers crying, does it matter who's really right...

We all love our country, we all love red white and blue.

And protecting our freedoms means you can criticize it too.

For freedom of speech and thought are things America stands
for,

And you can support our soldiers while not supporting a war.

And wrong is right and right is wrong and the world is upside

down,
And war is right and war is wrong, 'pends on who attacks who's
town,
And you can love your country while saying stop all
battlegrounds,
For peace is patriotic.

This poem has been set to music and recorded by the Pacoima Singers Musical Theatre Group from the Pacoima Middle School Television, Theatre and Performing Arts Magnet. If you would like a free copy of the CD, please e-mail your address to Dr. Scott Mandel.
