

HOLIDAYS OF THE WORLD

To Help Us Understand Traditions,
Cultures & Religions
of the World Through Education*



Holiday Explanations are listed alphabetically
(*indicates classroom discussions)

**The Use of Cultural, Ethnic, or Religious Themes
in our Educational Program**

We believe that it is our responsibility as educators to foster mutual understanding and respect for the rights of all individuals regarding their beliefs, values, and customs. In pursuing this goal the Board recognizes that we have a diverse community with a variety of cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and we are cognizant of the special significance of seasonal observances and religious holidays.

The Board also recognizes that a genuine and broad secular program of education is furthered by advancement of students' knowledge about our society's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. Inclusion of this area of knowledge helps to achieve our district's educational goals.

Through our instructional programs, we shall seek to broaden our students' understanding of, and respect for, the many beliefs and customs stemming from our diverse multicultural community's religious, racial, ethnic and cultural heritage. While one cannot study the richness of civilization without studying about religion, it is essential that those studies be conducted with sensitivity to the many religious beliefs existing within our student population; they must also remain consistent with law as interpreted by state and federal courts in accordance with the Constitution of the United States. Programs which teach about religion and its role in the social and historical development of civilization and in the social and political context of world events do not violate the religious neutrality of the public schools. Schools may teach about but not promote religion. The inclusion of religious themes in the study of the arts, literature, and history shall be only as extensive as necessary for a balanced and comprehensive study of these areas.

The district supports the inclusion of cultural, ethnic and religious literature, music, drama and the arts in the curriculum and in school activities, so long as such inclusion reinforces our secular educational goal of providing a valuable learning experience. A wide variety of activities shall be included throughout the year.

Staff members are responsible for creating the school atmosphere and for demonstrating interest, sensitivity and support, so that students may see that different customs and beliefs are wonderful and essential elements of a pluralistic society.

Adopted: October 18, 1993
Renumbered: February 27, 2001

ADVENT—November—December

- Christian time of preparation for observing the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas. Begins on the Sunday nearest November 30th and is New Years Day for the Christian worship year. Observed with the lighting of advent candles, wreaths, and ceremonies. Advent also anticipates the coming again to earth of Jesus Christ and continues through December 24th.

ALL SAINT'S DAY—November—*discussion

- Christian day for honoring saints, known and unknown. A Holy Day of Obligation in the Roman Catholic church where saints have special formal status. In general, saints are persons with reputation for unusual lives of holiness and devotion to God.

ALL SOULS' DAY—November

- Christian day of prayers of intercession for the dead. Prayers of the faithful are seen as helping to cleanse the souls for the vision of God in heaven.

ASCENSION OF BAHA'U'LLAH

- Baha'i recollection of the death of Mirza Husayn Ali. Observed by prayers and readings. Work is suspended.

ASCENSION OF JESUS—May-*discussion

- Christian recognition of the departure of Jesus from earth after the resurrection. It is perhaps the earliest observed celebration in Christianity. It is observed with worship including prayers and music.

ASCENSION OF ABDU'L-BAHA—November

- Baha'i celebration of the rising of the spirit of Abdu'l-Baha to the heavenly dwelling.

ASH WEDNESDAY—February—*discussion

- Christian observance to begin the 40 day season of Lent. Ashes are marked on worshippers as a sign of penitence.

ASHURA

- An Islamic optional single day fast recognizing the Creation, Noah's departure from the ark, and the saving of Moses from Pharaoh.

ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY—

August

- Christian holy days of observation honoring the belief that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was taken directly to heaven at her death.

B

BAHA'U'LLAH'S BIRTHDAY—November—*discussion

- Baha'i—birthday of the founder of Baha'i faith.

BAISAKHI (VAISAKHI) - April

- Hindu New Year. Various Hindu communities celebrate this under different names. Observed with prayers and community gatherings. For Sikhs, it commemorates the founding of Khalsa.

BASANT (VASANT) PANCHAM—February

- Hindu celebration of the fifth (Panchami) day of spring (Basant). Yellow is the color of choice for celebration. Prayers are offered to Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge.

BIRTH OF THE BAB—October—*discussion

- Baha'i honoring of founder, Mirza 'Ali-Muhammed, in 1819.

BODHI DAY—December—*discussion

- Buddhist celebration of the time when Prince Gautama took his place under the Bodhi tree, vowing to remain there until he attained supreme enlightenment.

BUDDHA DAY—May

- Buddhists celebrate the birthday of Buddha.

C

CHRISTMAS DAY—December 25—*discussion

- Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Observed by prayers, attendance at service, exchanging gifts and family gatherings.

CHINESE, KOREAN AND VIETNAMESE NEW YEAR—

February -*discussion

- Beginning of the New Year—Each year is has a symbol. The day in which all accounts are settled and grudges are forgotten.

CINCO DE MAYO—May—*discussion

- Mexico. Marks the victory of the Mexican Army over the French at the Battle of Puebla.

D

DAY OF THE COVENANT—November

- Baha'i celebration of the covenant given in the last will and testament of Baha'u'llah.

DECLARATION OF THE BAB—May

- Baha'i recognition of the declaration in 1844 by Ali Mohammed that he is the anticipated “Coming One” of all religions. Work is suspended.

DHARMA DAY—August

- Buddhist. The Celebration of the Buddha's Teaching.

DIWALI—October—*discussion

- Hindu festival of lights. It is observed with worship beginning at dawn, lighting of ceremonial lamps, fireworks, gift exchanges, and special foods. Prayers are offered to Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth.

E

EASTER– Floating—March or April

- The most holy of Christian sacred days. The day commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from his death by crucifixion. Observances include worship services beginning at sunrise, special music, feasting and parades.

EID AL-ADHA—October

- Islamic Feast of Sacrifice. The most important feast of Islam. It concludes the Hajj and is a three-day festival recalling Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah.

EID-MAULAD-UN-NAB—June

- An Islamic commemoration of the birth anniversary of the Holy Prophet on 12 Rabi-ul-Awwal of the Islamic lunar calendar year.

EID UL FITR ('Id al-Fitr) - July (moveable)

- A 3 day Islamic fast marking the close of Ramadan. It is a festival of thanksgiving to Allah for enjoying the month of Ramadan. It involves wearing their finest clothing, saying prayers, and fostering understanding with other religions.

EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION ANNIVERSARY - January—*discussion

- On this date in 1863, President Lincoln formally issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that all people held as slaves within the rebelling Confederate states "are, and henceforth shall be, free."

EPIPHANY -(Festival of Three Kings) - January—*discussion

- Christian commemoration of the manifestations of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. The homage of the magi to the infant Jesus is honored by some. For others, the Baptism of Jesus is the remembered event.

F**FATHER'S DAY—June**

- United States - Day set aside to honor Fathers.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT—November—*discussion

- Christian. Preparation for Christmas—First 4 Sundays.

FLAG DAY—June—*discussion

- The Fourth of July is celebrated as America's birthday, but an annual day specifically celebrating the Flag originated in 1885.

G**GANESH CHATURTHI—August**

- Hindu celebration of the birth of the Elephant headed God Ganesh. Observed with prayers and special parades.

GOOD FRIDAY—Floating—March or April—*discussion

- Christian remembrance of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

H**HAJJ - October**

- Islamic pilgrimage rites at Mecca on 7-12th days of month of Dhu al-Hajja. Concludes with Eid ul Adha when those not traveling to Mecca take part.

HANUKKAH—Moveable—November or December—*discussion

- Jewish Festival of Lights. It commemorates the Maccabean recapture and rededication of the Jerusalem Temple in 165-164 b.c.e. Special readings and praise songs focus on liberty and freedom. The eight candle Menorah is lighted.

HOLI— March—*discussion

- Hindu festival of colors. Exuberant and festive community gatherings include throwing of colors and water balloons. Among the legends associated with this holiday, it is the destruction of the evil Holika by fire.

HOLY THURSDAY—Floating—March or April

- Christian observance of final meal that Jesus observed with disciples.

I

ID-AL-ADHA—August (Also called Festival of Sacrifice)

- Islamic day of animal sacrifice. Meat is given to the poor.

‘ID AL FITR (Eid Ul Fitr) - August—*discussion

- See Eid ul Fitr

ID-MAWLID-AL-NABI—January

- Muslim celebration of the Prophet Mohammed’s birthday

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION—December—*discussion

- Roman Catholic (Christian) day of celebrating the belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was preserved from original sin all of her life. A day of obligation and required church attendance.

INDEPENDENCE DAY—July

- United States—Celebration of declaration of independence.

J

JUNETEETH DAY—June—*discussion

- African-American Holiday, also known as Freedom Day. Celebrated on June 19th too commemorate the ending of slavery.

K

KWANZAA - December—*discussion

- An African-American and Pan-African holiday celebrating family, community and culture, Kwanzaa is observed in many religious communities. Seven life virtues are presented.

L

LAYLAT AL-QADR—July—End of Ramadan

- Islamic Night of Destiny. First revelation of Qur-am to Prophet Mohammed. Observed during the last ten days of Ramadan. Prayers to Allah for a good destiny.

LENT—Moveable—Usually February or March

- A Christian forty day period of preparation for Easter. A time of intense devotion, it is observed by fasting, frequent worship and acts of charity.

M

MAHA SHIVRATRI– February

- Hindu celebration of the marriage of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Observed with fasts and worship services throughout the night.

MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY—January—*classroom discussion

- Honors the memory and life-long work of African-American Martin Luther King, Jr. on behalf of freedom.

MARTYRDOM OF BAB—July

- Baha’i. Commemorates the martyrdom of the Bab. Took place on July 9, 1850 at noon.

MAULID EL-NABI– January—*discussion

- Islamic commemoration of the birthday of Mohammed in 571 c.e. Not universally observed. The prophet’s teachings are read and religious meetings are held.

MEMORIAL DAY—May - *discussion

- United States. Day of observation for all who died in the service of America.

MUHARRAAM—March—*discussion

- Mourns the Karbala tragedy when Imam Husain, grandson of Prophet Muhammed, was martyred in early days of Islamic history.

MOTHER’S DAY—May

- United States . Day set aside to honor mothers.

N

NATIVE AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP DAY—September

- Honors both native-born citizens who have reached voting age and naturalized foreign-born citizens.

NAVRATRI—September—October

- Nine Day Hindu celebration. Observed with fasts and prayers. The arbha dance is special to this holiday. Legends associated with this include the victory of the Goddess Durga over the Demon King Mahishasura.Holi.

NAW RUZ—MARCH—*discussion

- Baha'i observance of the vernal equinox symbolizing spiritual growth and renewal

NIRVANA DAY—February —*discussion

- Buddhist—a regional observance of the death of Buddha.

O

P

PALM SUNDAY— Floating—March or April

- Christian celebration of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The day begins Holy Week. It is observed by worship celebrations and parades using palm branches. Palms are later burned and used for next year's ashes for Ash Wednesday.

PASSOVER (PESACH)—Floating—March or April—*discussion

- Jewish 8 day celebration of the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. The story of the Exodus is recounted, and the ongoing struggle of all peoples for freedom from internal and external tyranny is celebrated.

PENTECOST — 50 days after the Resurrection of Christ—*discussion

- Christian observation of the day when the God the Holy Spirit came to the disciples in the forms of tongues of fire and rushing wind. It is a traditional day for baptism and confirmation.

PURIM—February or March—*discussion

- Jewish celebration of the deliverance of the Jewish minority in Persia from genocide. Charity to the poor, sharing food with friends, and merrymaking mark the observance.

Q

R

RACE UNITY DAY—June

- Baha'i. Race Unity Day was inaugurated in 1957 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States to promote racial harmony and understanding.

RAKSHA BANDHAN - August

- Hindu celebration of the relationship between sisters and brothers. Raksha means protection, bandham means bond. Girls and women tie a bracelet around their brother's wrists. Brothers in turn vow to honor and protect them.

RAMADAN—varies—*discussion

- Islamic month long commemoration of Muhammed's reception of the divine revelation recorded in the Qur'an. The event begins when authorities in Saudi Arabia sight the new moon of the 9th month. It is the holiest period of the Islamic year. There is strict fasting from sunrise to sunset.

RAMA NAVAMI (Hindu)

- Hindu holiday that commemorates the birth of Lord Rama.

REFORMATION DAY—October - *discussion

- Date commemorating founding of Protestant religion.

RIDVAN—April—*discussion

- Baha'i commemoration of twelve day period in 1863 when Baha'u declared he was God's messenger for this age. Work is to be suspended on days 1,9, and 12 of the festival.

ROSH HASHANAH - September or October

- Jewish New Year. A time of introspection, abstinence, prayer and penitence. The story of Abraham is read, the ram's horn is sounded, and special foods are prepared and shared.

S

SAINT PATRICK'S DAY—March 17—*classroom discussion

- Christian celebration of Patrick who brought Christianity to Ireland in early days of the faith.

SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY—February 14

- Mixed origins. A day set aside to honor love.

SHAVUOT—May or June -*discussion

- Jewish celebration of Moses' descent from Mount Sinai with the ten commandments. Plants and flowers are used in decorations.

SH'MINI ATZERET—September or October—*discussion

- Jewish. Shemini Atzeret literally means "the assembly of the eighth (day)." Rabbinic literature explains this verse to imply that God is asking everyone who actually made the pilgrimage for Sukkot, to remain behind with Him one extra day.

SIMCHAT TORAH—October—*discussion

- Jewish day to celebrate the reading of the Law. Synagogue services involve readings, processions and blessing of the children.

SUKKOT—September or October—*discussion

- Jewish Feast of Tabernacles which celebrates the harvest and the wandering of the people of Israel in the wilderness in dwelling tents.

T

THANKSGIVING—November—*discussion

- Interfaith celebration of the created earth. Celebrated in the USA to commemorate the landing of the Pilgrims in Massachusetts.

TRINITY SUNDAY—May

- Christians honor the belief in one God with a threefold nature; the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

TU B'SVAT—January or February

- Jewish celebration of the coming of spring by preparation of foods native to Israel

U

UNITED NATIONS DAY—October—*discussion

- Founding of the United Nations Organization in 1944.

V

VISAKHA PUJA—May

- Buddhist marking of the birth, enlightenment and death (attainments of Nirvana) of Lord Buddha.

W

WESAK—May -*discussion

- Holiest of Buddhist holy days. It celebrates Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. It is a public holiday in some countries.

WORLD RELIGION DAY—January

- Baha'i sponsored day dedicated to unity of all world religions.

Y

YOM HA SHOAH—April

- Jewish commemoration of the Holocaust.

YOM KIPPUR—September or October — *discussion

- Jewish Day of Atonement. Holiest day of the Jewish year is observed with strict fasting and asking for forgiveness of sins.

This booklet was first prepared by the Policy 6142.2 Policy Committee in June 2003, to help all students, staff and residents understand why certain holidays, celebrations and religious observances are important to some people, cultures and religions throughout the world.

It is our hope that through education, we will learn to respect and understand each other so that we may live in harmony and peace, no matter which holiday we may celebrate or not celebrate.

This booklet will be reviewed and updated as necessary in order to provide our students, staff and residents with the most accurate and up-to-date information available.

All information for this booklet has been taken from approved, Interfaith Calendars of Festivals, Carnivals and Feast Days From Around the World and the Multicultural Resource Calendar, which is used in our Cherry Hill School District Media Centers as a resource tool for education throughout the year.

If you have further questions, please contact Dr. Farrah Mahan, Director of Curriculum at Cherry Hill Public Schools, 856-429-5600, or by email at FMahan@chclc.org.

