

Christmas and Holiday Traditions Around the World



November 22, 2011 – January 8, 2012

Teacher Packet

Exhibition Theme:

The theme for our 17th annual *Christmas and Holiday Traditions Around the World* exhibition is the celebration of light. The exhibition showcases some of the many cultures and holidays that feature light or enlightenment. These celebrations include India's Hindu Festival of Light known as Diwali, the Chinese New Year Lantern Festival, the Jewish Festival of Lights, Hanukkah, and Saint Lucia Day honoring Sweden's patron saint of sight and light.

Main Concepts

- Countries around the world pause during late fall and early winter to celebrate. This is the time of Kwanzaa (a celebration honoring traditions of African-Americans), Hanukkah (the Jewish Festival of Lights), Christmas (the Christian commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ), Diwali (the Indian holiday that symbolizes the victory of good over evil) and the Chinese New Year, among others. A complete list of the countries/cultures represented in the exhibition is included elsewhere in this packet..
- Families from all cultures enjoy unique traditions, stories, songs, dances and spending time together.
- Many cultures celebrate with the sharing of gifts, and feature a figure such as Santa Claus as the much anticipated gift-giver.
- Celebrations often include special foods.
- Evergreen trees and special plants often play an important role in decorations for the holiday.

Curriculum Standards

State of Michigan Strand – Social Studies

- Describe places, cultures and communities in the United States and compare them with other regions and countries.
- Explain how culture and experience shape the position a person takes on an issue.

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW AND HIGHLIGHTS

This year's holiday display offers many opportunities for making classroom connections for students of all ages. Beyond those interested in cultural and religious comparisons, foreign language students, history buffs, native Grand Rapidsians and train enthusiasts have extra reason to be glad this season. Our *Christmas and Holiday Traditions Around the World* exhibition will hold a special appeal for them.

Cultural connoisseurs will delight in thirty trees and eleven pedestal displays from all around the world. They will have an opportunity to learn not only about seasonal holiday celebrations, but also ethnically diverse festivals and customs. Students will see authentic decorative objects from various countries from Africa to Vietnam. They may visit the Discovery Cart to get a closer look at (and feel of!) selected ornaments and to play a guessing game matching the ornament with the country of origin.

Students of religion will be able to compare holiday rituals from five major faiths: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. They will see actual objects of worship and learn basic information about Tet Nguyen Dan, Diwali, Eid ul-fitr and Hanukkah as well as Christmas, and Russia's non-religious Festival of Winter.

French students will be charmed by a special nativity display featuring *santons*. *Santons* are a classic 19th century tradition begun in the Provence region of southern France. These creche scenes depict figures of local villagers, known as "little saints" as they make their way to the manger, bearing not gold, frankincense and myrrh, but bread, wine, cheese and other products from their trade. These exquisite, hand-crafted scenes represent a frozen moment in time. Let us help your students bring the scene to life with an explanation in French of the *santons*, followed by a discussion of the culture of the French-speaking areas of Africa, Canada, Switzerland, Vietnam and India. After the tour, the class may enjoy the rest of exhibition. Tours are by reservation only.

History buffs will go back in time to Victorian England. A thousand ornaments tell the story of the 60 years (1840-1900) of Queen Victoria's reign. The Victorian Christmas tree is a miniature encyclopedia, a window to the past. Victorian trees recorded not only a family's personal history (a stork told of the birth of a child), but served as a witness to past events (dirigible, comet) and reinforced religious beliefs through symbols (a butterfly symbolizes resurrection). The keen observer will find these and many more historical reminders.

Not only do other cultures and countries come to life, but so does an area closer to home—Grand Rapids. In our *Railway Garden*, a 20-foot-long, model train journeys through a miniature landscape of historical Grand Rapids. All structures are carefully crafted from natural materials. Magically, an acorn cap becomes a street lamp; shelf fungus becomes a stair. Be amazed at the life-like detailing on five historic buildings shown side-by-side with their antique photos. Learn the secret of creating these miniature worlds with a demonstration model of the Lena Meijer farmhouse from our Michigan's Farm Garden. *[A complete list of the buildings is included elsewhere in this Teacher Packet.]*

Other complements to the exhibition include hands-on activities in the Lena Meijer Children's Garden as well as an assortment of live Christmas trees in the Cook Entryway which note interesting aspects of this important Michigan industry.

The *Christmas and Holiday Traditions Around the World* exhibition opens November 22, 2011 and continues through January 8, 2012. Call Suzie Doten today to schedule your field trip: (616) 974-5239.

WAYS TO EXPERIENCE THE EXHIBITION

There are several ways for classes to enjoy this year's holiday exhibition.

Self-guided Tour

With this option, the group will be welcomed by a greeter who will orient them to the facility, distribute *Holiday Looking Guides*, answer questions, and generally, help them get started. The "tour" is self-directed. There will be docents (tour guides) stationed throughout the building who will be happy to assist with questions. Near each tree or display a text panel will detail the cultural celebrations and traditions represented.

Cost: Free with admission. (Group rate: \$3 per student; chaperone rates vary.)

Worksheet/Scavenger Hunt

As a discussion starter, groups may consider using our *Discovery Tour* which is available from the greeter. This year's tour continues the exhibition theme of the celebration of light and enlightenment. The *Discovery Tour*, which is included elsewhere in this packet, contains sixteen questions appropriate for use by chaperones, or older students. The tour may be used individually, in pairs, or as a group. Clipboards and pencils are available upon request.

Cost: Free with admission.

Guided Nativity Tours

Enhance your visit with a 30-minute Nativity Tour. These docent-guided tours compare the six major nativity scenes featured in the holiday exhibition. Each crèche is made from different materials and reflects something unique about the culture that produced it. Cultures represented include France, Italy, Mexico, the Middle East, Poland and the USA.

Cost: Free with admission.

While there is no additional cost for this tour, reservations are required.

Tour and Classroom Activity

Students can try their hand at the art of rangoli. After either a guided Nativity Tour or a self-guided tour of the exhibition, students will learn more about the Hindu Festival of Light, Diwali, the culture of India, and the tradition of creating rangoli. In a 45-minute session, students will help create a group rangoli using lentils, beans and rice. Then, they will create their own geometric designs to take home. Appropriate for all ages.

Cost: \$5 per student (includes admission charge); chaperone rates vary.

Value Package

To get the most bang for your buck, combine a Nativity Tour followed by the cultural exploration activity in the classroom, and conclude with either our *Discovery Tour* or self-guided viewing. All for \$5 per student (includes admission!). Minimum: 2 hours.

For more information, or to schedule your visit, please call Suzie Doten at 616-974-5239 or send an email to sdoten@meijergardens.org. An online registration form can be found on our web site (www.meijergardens.org).

Countries/Cultures Represented

Africa	Japan
Australia	Korea
Austria	Kwanzaa
Belize	Lithuania
Bird Tree	Mexico
Brazil	Middle East
Canada	Netherlands
China	Peru
Denmark	Philippines
Eid ul-Fitr	Poland
England	Poinsettias
Finland	Russia
France	Slovak Republic
Germany	Spain
Greece	Sweden
Hanukkah	Switzerland
Hungary	Ukraine
Iceland	United States
India	Victorian
American Indian	Vietnam
Ireland	
Italy	

Railway Garden

All buildings included in the Railway Garden were created by Paul Busse and his staff at Applied Imagination. The structures are artistic renditions of Grand Rapids landmarks and are decorated entirely with natural materials. Askerik (*) indicates this year's highlighted structures.

Landmark Buildings

St. Mark's Episcopal Church	Lena Meijer Tropical Conservatory
Fountain Street Church	Civic Theatre*
Choo Choo Grill	Temple Emanuel*
Herkner Jewelers	Joseph Kinnebrew's <i>Grand Rapids Sculpture and Fishladder</i> *
Ledyard Building	
Ryerson Library	Covered Bridges in Ada and Fallasburg*
Peninsular Club	Van Andel Institute
Fulton Street Power Station	Helen DeVos Children's Hospital
McKay Tower	Maya Lin's <i>Ecliptic</i> at Rosa Parks Circle
Trust Building	Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum
Pantlind Hotel	Alexander Calder's <i>La Grande Vitesse</i>
Flanagan's Pub	(with city and county buildings)
St. James Church	Fred and Lena Meijer's home
St. Cecilia Music Center	
Holland Harbor Lighthouse ("Big Red")	

Demonstration Model: See how these amazing buildings are made.

- Farmhouse, partially constructed to show steps in the creation process
- Natural materials used – find where they appear on the Farmhouse

Other Structures

- Arch Bridge
- Cedar Mountain Pass
- Water Feature
- Generic House
- Generic Buildings (3)

Train and Trolleys

Train travel comes alive in our Railway Garden. The train's roadbed, bridges, trellis work and general layout were also designed by Paul Busse. A multi-car, garden-scale (1:22) train runs over 600 feet of track, and makes a round trip of the display every four minutes. The train features a Hudson steam locomotive, a coal tender and several passenger cars. In addition, there are two trolleys that travel through a miniature cityscape. The trolleys are replicas of the famous trolleys found in cities such as New York, San Francisco and New York—and now Grand Rapids.

SIGNIFICANT PLANTS IN THE EXHIBITION

Tropical Conservatory

- Poinsettias
- Orchids
- Amaryllis

Victorian Garden Parlor

- Poinsettias
- Orchids
- Amaryllis

Arid Garden

- Kalanchoe
- Succulent wreath
- Christmas Cactus

Railway Garden

- Weeping Alaskan Cedar
- Lemon cypress (smells lemony)
- Dwarf Alberta spruce
- Blue spruce
- White pine
- Dwarf euonymus trained to resemble small trees
- A variety of flowering plants including gardenias, kalanchoes, cyclamen, African violets and anthuriums.

Hallways

- Red and white poinsettias

Cook Entryway

Michigan grown Christmas trees:

- Colorado blue spruce
- Black Hills spruce
- Scotch pine
- White pine
- Douglas fir
- Fraser fir
- Balsam fir

Christmas and Holiday Traditions around the World: Discovery Tour

This year's holiday exhibition celebrates light and illumination around the globe. Join us on this *Discovery Tour* and learn how cultures as diverse as China, India and Sweden use light as a symbol of spiritual power, inner being and hope. See also how light can commemorate an historical event, guide sailors safely ashore, unite cultures and memorialize a loved one. Come and be enlightened.

1. Tropical Conservatory – *Moravian Star*

Look up! This holiday decoration is known as a Moravian Star. This design originated in Germany in the early 19th century and is thought to have begun as a simple geometry lesson for school children.

How is this shape different from those of other stars?

2. India – *Diwali*

The true meaning of Diwali is to rejoice in one's inner light or spirit.

What does "inner light" mean to you? How do you nourish it?

3. Philippines – *Parol*

Compare the Philippine parol with the Moravian star.

How do they differ? Which do you like better?

4. Railway Garden

Locate the Holland Harbor Lighthouse, also known as "Big Red."

What is the function of a lighthouse? Are lighthouses still used today?

5. Railway Garden

Look carefully at the buildings in this cityscape.

Find the ones which seem to be lit from within? What might the light signify?

6. Victorian Garden

In Victorian times during the holidays, homes often had a "fire bucket" filled with sand near the tree.

Why was this practice necessary?

7. Poland – *Szopka*

Describe the materials used to build this structure.

How does the surface of the szopka affect the light?

8. Kwanzaa

The *kinara*, or candleholder, symbolizes common ancestry.

Who is represented by the different colored candles?

9. China

The celebration of Chinese New Year involves fireworks.

What is the function of the fireworks? [Hint: Read the sign.]

10. Vietnam

Many traditions use memorial candles to remember loved ones who have died.

What do the Vietnamese people light to remember their ancestors?

[HINT: Read the sign.]

11. Sculpture Gallery – *Castled Void*

This sculpture is made using “light”.

How is “creating with light” different from working with other materials?

12. Sculpture Gallery – *Forget Me Not*

Look carefully at the parts of this sculpture.

How many recycled objects can you name? How were these blue lights used previously?

13. Sculpture Gallery – *Landscape Reliquary*

This work is lit from inside. Imagine it without the light.

Why is light important in a landscape?

14. Hanukkah

The candles in the Hanukkah menorah recall an ancient miracle.

What do they represent? [HINT: Read the sign.]

15. Germany

German culture was the first to bring trees indoors and to decorate them with lighted candles.

Why did they use candles?

16. Chihuly Chandeliers

Chandeliers typically are lit from within. This is not true for these chandeliers.

Name the two ways they are lit.

Answers

1. It is a large, 3-dimensional, multi-point design with a long terminal ray.
2. Answers may vary.
3. Different colors, materials, size, etc.
4. Safely guide ships. Yes, still used today.
5. Answers may vary.
6. Risk of fire from candles.
7. The shiny papers reflect and augment the light.
8. People with different ethnic heritages.
9. Scare away evil spirits.
10. Incense.
11. Answers may vary.
12. Christmas tree lights.
13. Important to reveal the scene. Can highlight or obscure details. Sets the mood.
14. During the rededication of the Temple, a small cask of oil lasted a full eight days instead of the anticipated one day.
15. Legend has it that Martin Luther decorated a small Christmas tree with candles in the 16th century. While electricity has been known since ancient times, incandescent light bulbs did not come into use until the 1870s.
16. Sunlight shining through the skylights and directed spotlight.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Social Studies: Our Family's Traditions

To examine the unique traditions of families within your classroom, ask each student to bring a favorite ornament or holiday object from home. The object may represent any tradition observed by the student's family. Photograph each student with his/her decoration, and then create a "Traditions Display" in the classroom utilizing the photographs. Discuss the similarities and differences in holiday celebrations.

Social Studies: Classroom Collection of Holiday Traditions

Ask students to interview their oldest family member. Sample questions might include:

- What was [holiday name] like when you were young?
- Do you have a memory of a favorite holiday or a favorite gift?
- Did you ever create a hand-made gift for someone? What was it? How was it made?

Social Studies: Porch Patterns

Instead of a welcome mat, greet your guests with a holiday rangoli. Draw a geometric design on your porch with colored chalks. Use something from the natural world (holly, Christmas tree, dove, reindeer, etc.) as inspiration. Be sure to include diya lamps or votive candles in the design. These lights represent the triumph of good over evil within an individual. Refresh the design throughout the holidays as necessary, and then wash away.

Math: Real vs. Artificial

Create a brief survey for each classroom in your school to count how many families decorate a real tree, and how many prefer an artificial one. Using the information gathered from the survey, create a bar graph. Display classroom names along the horizontal axis, and numbers of tree users along the vertical. Display your findings. If there is a school newspaper, publish the results.

Language Arts: Holiday Journal

Have each student keep a journal describing his or her family holiday preparations. They may wish to include current events as well as their feelings. Encourage them to store the journal in a safe place to read in the distant future.

Art: Creative Decorations

See how many recyclable or natural materials can be used to create holiday ornaments for the classroom.

Holiday-Related Activities: More than Santa?

Research the gift-giver image of various countries. Display images in the classroom and discuss similarities and differences.