Christmas and Holiday Traditions Around the World


Teacher Packet
Exhibition Theme:

This year, the *Christmas and Holiday Traditions Around the World* exhibit jump starts the twentieth anniversary celebration at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park. The exhibition spotlight shines on Asian cultures that celebrate the New Year. Honoring the past is central to their traditions, as families gather to show respect and affection for their ancestors. In both Korea and Vietnam, ancestral respect is illustrated through altars adorned with symbolic objects. For the Vietnamese New Year, *Tet Nguyen Dan*, altars include incense burned in memory of the departed. During *Seollal*, the Korean New Year, families prepare ritual food offerings in traditional dress, like Korean *hanbok*. Japan and China celebrate with auspicious rituals for good luck and fortune. *Shogatsu*, the Japanese New Year, is marked with the decorative *kadomatsu*, or gate pine, to welcome ancestral spirits and guard against evil spirits. The Chinese New Year includes lighting fireworks to ward off evil spirits and gifting money in red envelopes for good luck. See these and many horticultural highlights as you enjoy the 42 cultural displays that comprise the exhibition.

Main Concepts

- Cultures 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 which celebrates light over darkness) and the Chinese New Year, among others. A complete list of the countries/cultures represented in the exhibition is on pg. 6.
- 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 or Christkind 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.
- 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 Rapidians 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 decorations such as fabric from Africa and decorative objects from 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 on their own. Tours are by reservation only.

History buffs will go back in time to Victorian England. In the Victorian Garden Parlor guests will see a tree similar to that which Queen Victoria and Prince Albert enjoyed at Windsor Castle in 1841. This early, open, version permits easy viewing and display. Our tree is not only true to form, but is also decorated with authentic period ornaments, many of which have symbolic significance.

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 Grand Rapids. All structures are carefully crafted from natural materials. Magically, an acorn cap becomes a street lamp; shelf fungus becomes a staircase. Visitors will be amazed at the life-like detailing on many of these structures.

The secret of creating these miniature worlds is revealed with a demonstration model of the Lena Meijer farmhouse from our Michigan’s Farm Garden. [A complete list of the buildings is included on pg. 7.]

Christmas trees in the Cook Entryway which note interesting aspects of this important Michigan industry act as a complement to the exhibition.

The Christmas and Holiday Traditions Around the World exhibition opens November 25, 2014 and continues through January 4, 2015. Schedule your field trip online by completing the Registration Request form and submitting it to Rebecca Stanislaw at rstanislaw@meijergardens.org or call: (616) 977-7683.
WAYS TO EXPERIENCE THE 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: $3.50 per student; chaperone rates vary.)

Holiday Hunt
For our preschool visitors, we have Holiday Hunt cards highlighting individual decorations for them to find. On the back of each card is a fun fact for families to share. After finding their ornament, kids may exchange their card for another, or keep it as a souvenir of their visit.

Cost: Free with admission.

Worksheet/Discovery Tour
As a discussion starter, groups may consider using our Discovery Tour which is available from the greeter. This year’s tour encourages the student to view the whole display. The Discovery Tour contains fifteen questions appropriate for use by chaperones, or upper elementary students or older. The tour may be used individually, in pairs, or as a group. Clipboards are available upon request.

Cost: Free with admission.

Guided Nativity Tours
Enhance your visit with a 30-minute Nativity Tour. These docent-led 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. Countries 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
Extend the learning with a special 45 minute classroom activity where the students discover the fascinating history of the Polish szopka. Dating back to medieval times, szopki are brightly-colored, gleaming architectural displays combined with a traditional nativity scene. These magnificent creations were originally designed as puppet theaters and used as educational tools during the Christmas season. Using recycled materials, the class will create a group szopka which may be displayed at school.

OR
Students can try their hand at the art of rangoli, the custom of decorating the threshold of the home with colorful designs of natural materials. These geometric patterns create a special welcome for guests visiting during the holidays. Students will learn more about the Hindu Festival of Light, Diwali, the culture of India, and the tradition of rangoli. In a 45-minute session, students will create individual rangoli using lentils and beans or other natural materials 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 with a 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 visit our website (www.meijergardens.org), complete a Registration Request Form and email it to Rebecca Stanislaw, Education Assistant at rstanislaw@meijergardens.org or call 616-977-7683.

Rangoli

Szopka
List of Countries, Cultures, and Displays Represented

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

Landmark Buildings & Structures

- Choo Choo Grill
- Civic Theatre
- Covered Bridges (Ada, Fallasburg)
- Fifth Third Ballpark
- Flanagan’s Pub
- Fountain Street Church
- Fulton Street Power Station
- Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum
- Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital
- Herkner Jewelers
- Holland Harbor Lighthouse (“Big Red”) 
- Jersey Junction
- Joseph Kinnebrew’s Fish Ladder
- La Grande Vitesse & Calder Plaza
- Ledyard Building
- Mangiamo Restaurant (Paddock Place)
- Maya Lin’s Ecliptic @ Rosa Parks Circle
- McKay Tower
- Meijer Gardens – Tropical Conservatory
- Meijer (Fred & Lena) Home
- Meyer May House
- Pantlind Hotel
- Peninsular Club
- Ryerson Library
- St. Cecilia Music Center
- St. James Church
- St. Mark’s Episcopal Church
- Temple Emanuel
- Trust Building
- Van Andel Institute
- Voight House

Demonstration Model

See how these amazing buildings are made.

- Farmhouse (from our Michigan’s Farm Garden), partially constructed to show steps in the creation process
- Natural materials used – find where they appear on the Farmhouse
- Try to identify different materials used throughout the exhibition.

Train and Trolleys

Train travel comes alive in our Railway Garden. The train’s roadbed, bridges, trestle work and general layout were also designed by Paul Busse. A multi-car, garden-scale (approximately 1:25) train runs over 500 feet of track, and makes a round trip of the display every few minutes. The train features a diesel locomotive, tanker car, a box car, a flatbed, several passenger cars and of, course, a caboose.

In addition to the train, there are two trolleys that travel through the miniature cityscape. The trolleys are reminiscent of the famous trolleys that had once been found in cities such as New York, Washington DC and Grand Rapids.
SIGNIFICANT PLANTS IN THE EXHIBITION

Hallways
- Red and white poinsettias

Cook Entryway – Michigan grown Christmas trees
- Colorado blue spruce
- Scotch pine
- White pine
- Douglas fir
- Fraser fir
- Balsam fir
- Concolor fir

Tropical Conservatory
- Poinsettias, red and white
- Orchids, white

Victorian Garden Parlor
- Poinsettias, red and white
- Orchids

Arid Garden
- Poinsettias
- Succulent wreath
- Christmas Cactus

Railway Garden

Evergreens:
- Dwarf Hinoki Cypress
- Blue Princess Holly
- Norway Spruce
- Weeping Alaskan Cedar
- Columnar Blue Spruce
- Canaertii Juniper
- Skyrocket Juniper
- Weeping Blue Spruce
- Japanese Umbrella Pine
- Saybrook Gold Chinese Juniper
- Blue Star Juniper
- Dwarf Euonymus ‘Compactus’
- Busta blue Juniper
- Lemon Cypress
- Japanese Red Pine
- Alcock’s Spruce
- Dwarf Mountain Pine
- Dwarf Alberta Spruce
- Boulevard Cypress
- Rosemary

Tropicales:
- Croton: Mamey and Petra

Rainbow, two trees

- Bromeliads: Cryptanthus, Guzmania and
- Neoregelia Medusa
- Begonia, Rex
- Aglaonema ‘Siam’
- Dracaena ‘Dragon Green Jewel’
- Dracaena ‘Dragon Jade Jewel’
- Echeveria
- Fern, Maidenhair
- Flamingo flower ‘Red Rocket’
- Ivy, Algerian ‘Gloire de Marengo’
- Ivy, ‘Sweetheart’
- Orchids, white
- Palm, Neanthe bella
- Philodendron ‘McColleys Finale’
- Sansaveria ‘Robusta’
- Selaginella
- Zebra plant ‘Dania’
- Variegated Maidenhair Fern
- Kalanchoe, red
- Algerian Ivy ‘Gloire de Marengo’

Echeveria
- Flamingo Flower ‘Red Rocket’

Frost-tender Perennials
(not hardy in Michigan):
- Lemon Cypress
- Cyclamen
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 items 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: Holiday Math
Create a brief survey for each classroom in your school to count how many families decorate a real tree, how many prefer an artificial one, and how many don’t have a tree at all. Using the information gathered from the survey, create a bar graph. Display classroom names along the horizontal axis, and numbers of 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’s 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 decorations 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.