

TANENBAUM

Religions in My Neighborhood

Teaching Curiosity
and Respect about
Religious Differences

Including: The Seven Principles for Inclusive Education



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For more information, contact Tanenbaum's *Education Program*:
212.967.7707 · education@tanenbaum.org · www.tanenbaum.org



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Chapter IV (Unit 5): Rituals and Traditions about Harvest: Collecting Resources

BIG IDEAS FOR IV (5)

- There are many different rituals and traditions about harvest. Some are religious and some are secular.
- Most rituals and traditions about harvest coincide with the autumn season depending on the geographical region.
- Some harvest rituals and traditions include collecting food and other resources before the onset of winter, when food is no longer growing.
- Rituals and traditions about harvest stem from taking care of people's need for food and reassurance that they will be cared for during the winter.
- Some rituals and traditions from different religious groups share some common traits.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR IV (5)

- What harvest traditions emphasize collecting just enough resources and leaving some for others?
- What do harvest traditions teach us about sharing resources throughout the year, and in times of crisis?
- Does harvest season occur at the same time of year in all regions of the U.S. or all geographical regions of the world?
- Why do we still have harvest rituals and traditions in industrialized nations, even though the availability of food in grocery stores has changed our relationship to the harvest and to winter?

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR IV (5)

- English Language Arts: 1, 3, 6, 9, 12
- Social Studies: 1, 2, 3, 5

LESSON IV (5) LEARNING ABOUT HARVEST

The information and activities in Chapter IV (5) have been adapted from Patty Bode's book *Cultural Connections through Art*, Amherst, Massachusetts: Amherst Educational Publishing (1993). (Out of print.)

Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

Studying the work of the harvest and displaying the fruits of the labor may seem to be an antiquated theme to U.S. youth of today, who are accustomed to most food coming from supermarkets in a variety of cartoon-decorated packages. Yet, as the environmental movement reveals the need to reconsider the origins of our food and the essential role of community sustained agriculture, this topic emerges as a contemporary social justice issue.

Factors about how food is grown, harvested and transported, as well as the implications about who has access to fresh, nutritious produce, meats and grains are central concerns in environmental justice efforts and human rights campaigns, as well as in community organizing in both urban and rural settings. Furthermore, when a classroom recognizes the ways in which the harvest is celebrated across cultural traditions and religious beliefs, students can understand the common human need for sustenance through adequate food sources. They can also understand how some religious stories have been shaped by the importance of having reliable access to food when food is no longer growing. Moreover, understanding harvest celebrations across a broad spectrum of world regions highlights some profound similarities among diverse groups.

A world map will also help students understand that the winter months in the northern hemisphere match summer months in the southern hemisphere, and vice versa. They will also understand that winter does not take place at the Equator and that summer is very short at the Arctic and Antarctic poles. This provides an opportunity for science lessons for older students.

Think ahead:

Students will bring a wide range of experiences and levels of awareness about the harvest and the sources of the food we eat everyday. Some students will bring a great deal to the discussion in Setting the Lesson below. They will each learn from one another's perspectives and see value in their peers' different points of view.

Teachers may be surprised to learn the diversity of perspectives around how students experience family mealtime. Some students will report that they have regular dinner time gatherings with their families that follow rituals of helping to prepare food from scratch – or from microwaveable packages – setting the table, having family prayer, family discussions and cleaning up dishes. Other students' experiences with meals may be self-directed and involve grabbing a to-go meal and eating in front of the TV. Many other variations on mealtime and the harvest of food will be revealed.

Keep in mind that sensitive issues around students not eating, malnutrition, homelessness or not eating regularly may come up. If such a situation is revealed in the discussion, make sure you follow your school's protocol for reporting such matters.

Objectives for this lesson – Students will:

- Heighten awareness of the source of the food they eat everyday.
- Express gratitude for adequate food and empathy for those in need.
- Learn about the variety of ways in which the harvest is celebrated in some religious traditions and some secular festivities.
- Think about their favorite fruits and vegetables, and differences among their peers.
- Make a fruit or vegetable out of papier mâché for a collective harvest display.

Materials needed:

- Newspaper
- Masking tape
- Pipe cleaners
- Papier mâché paste
- Tempera or acrylic paints

Time needed:

5 class meetings, 45 minutes each

Setting the lesson:

Collect posters and images of still life paintings that depict a display of fruit, vegetables and the results of a hunt. Fill the classroom with images from a range of artists who represent an array of geographic and cultural origins. Try to have posters and images from different countries and geographic regions, representing cultures that are northern and southern.

Prepare to discuss how displaying the harvest in a decorative way is a common practice in many cultures.

- During the Jewish festival of Sukkot, families build a sukka, (also spelled sukkah) or booth outdoors in a garden or porch, and decorate it with fruits and flowers on the outside and with fruits and wheat stalks inside. The sukka serves as a reminder of the huts that the Jews lived in during their wanderings in the desert.
- In the English tradition of the Harvest Home, churches and homes are decorated with flowers, fruits and vegetables, and sheaves of golden wheat.
- An important part of the African American celebration of Kwanzaa is the display of fruits and vegetables on the Kwanzaa table to symbolize the fruits of the community's work.
- Another display of the harvest occurs in Portugal's colorful Festa Tabuleiros or Festival of the Trays. The central event of this festival is a parade so elaborate that the holiday is celebrated only once every three years. The trays are actually giant headdresses carrying layer upon layer of bread and flowers. They are worn by young women who parade in long lines to create a spectacular sight. The parade ends with a feast of communal thanks and charity.
- The United States tradition of Thanksgiving celebrates family and harvest.

Procedure for the lesson:

Day 1:

Write the word HARVEST on chart paper. Discuss the verb or action of harvesting crops from a farm or garden and also the noun that refers to the crops.

Ask students about the ways in which we see the harvest displayed. Discuss the many ways and reasons for displaying the harvest. Ask students to think of occasions when they have seen fruit, vegetables and flowers displayed and to recall the significance of these events.

For many students, their primary experience with viewing a harvest display will be in a suburban supermarket produce section or in an urban bodega. Others may have visited farmers' markets or have stopped by a rural farm stand to purchase corn on the cob in the summer and early fall. Many will have visited salad bars in fast food restaurants or school cafeterias. Help students brainstorm the many ways they may have seen the bounty from the harvest displayed, including some common experiences such as a buffet of dishes at a potluck supper, for example. It is critically important that you validate all the ways that students have seen the harvest of food displayed.

After the discussion, start to make the collective harvest display. Explain that each student will make his or her favorite fruit or vegetable to create a collective harvest display. (Note: If you don't have a class assistant, this activity is a great opportunity to invite parents or guardians to join you in the activity. Another set of hands can't hurt!)

Step 1: Shape the fruits and vegetables

Each student will get one single page of newspaper and crumble it up and shape it into a selected fruit or vegetable. Very young students may find it easiest to shape it into a ball. Older students may be more skilled at manipulating and twisting the newspaper into elongated shapes for bananas, eggplants, or ovals, or even into tiny balls for grapes. Encourage students to think of a variety of crops harvested around the world and to consider some of their personal favorites, or perhaps think of one they wish they could try to taste in the future. Ask students to work together to make a variety of fruits and vegetables that, taken together, will be a large harvest display for their entire learning community.

Step 2: Masking tape

Students wrap one or two pieces of masking tape around the newspaper shape to hold its form. No more than two pieces should be used; masking tape resists papier mâché paste, so a lot of the newspaper surface should remain exposed and not covered up by masking tape. It is wise to pre-cut pieces of masking tape for your students and to stick a few pieces on each work-table, as it is sometimes difficult for students to hold onto their newspaper shape and simultaneously cut, tape, and stick it. Encourage students to work collaboratively with buddies and come up with shared newspaper forms.

Step 3: Add stems

Pipe cleaners make useful stems. Students should make the stem a little longer than they actually want the stem to appear in order to leave space for attaching the pipe cleaner to the newspaper fruit/vegetable with masking tape. Also, the end of the stem needs enough space to bend in a loop for display.

Use a permanent marker to put each student's name – or the names of student buddies – on the pieces of masking tape, so you can store their work for the following class meeting. Putting their name(s) on the stem is useful so that the name does not get covered by papier mâché.

Days 2, 3 & 4:

Step 4: Papier Mâché

Papier Mâché Preparation

Work Area: Cover work area with newspaper.

Newspaper Scraps: Use paper cutter to cut newspaper into long strips and/or small squares. The size of your students' objects should help guide the size of the newspaper scraps. Place a box of newspaper cuttings at each work table.

Paste: Many pastes work. Wallpaper paste can be purchased at hardware stores, or flour can be mixed with water until it reaches an adequate paste consistency. However, there are several commercially prepared papier mâché powders that can be purchased to mix with water. These products are exceptionally affordable and clean-up remarkably well. They can be found in most school supply catalogs. Place a small dish of paste, such as a margarine tub or bowl, in each work area.

Layering: This project is best with 2 or 3 layers. It is best to apply one or two layers and allow it to dry over night and then apply one or two more layers the following day. Teach kids to dip paper in paste and then to use two fingers to drip the excess paste into the bowl by sliding the newspaper scrap through the two fingers. If you want to make the very last layer extra smooth, instead of layering newspaper scraps you can apply strips of brown paper towels that are common in most school sink areas.

Step 5: Drying

Place the fruits/vegetables on wax paper or, if possible, on a wire rack or clothesline to allow air to reach the bottom of the objects. The paste will usually dry within 24–48 hours if objects are placed in a reasonably ventilated area and turned to a new side from time to time.

Step 6: Painting

After the final layer is dry, paint the fruits/vegetables with acrylic paint or tempera paint.

Closure for the lesson (during days 3 & 4):

While the papier mâché fruits and vegetables are drying, lead a discussion about why the hunger of some people in a community is a social responsibility for others in the community. Help students investigate resources that exist to help those who are hungry, such as social services, community food banks, community soup kitchens, faith communities' free-lunch programs and community farms, etc. Discover ways in which your learning community can contribute to solutions for solving local community problems of hunger that assist those in need. Guide students in organizing a food drive, volunteering at a local soup kitchen, or providing some other community service.

Bear in mind that some students' families may be recipients of the local service, and so asking students to donate food from home is not always appropriate. Alternatively, baking some bread at school and walking to the nearby soup kitchen to deliver the loaves can be very meaningful, while providing all students a means to participate in the community service.

Display the papier mâché fruits/vegetables. The display may be directly related to the study of a particular culture's tradition of harvest or it may combine allusions to various cultural harvest traditions. The fruits and vegetables may be displayed in bowls, baskets, or pots, or they may be strung on a wire or clothesline-like string in the classroom or hallway.

Assessment for the lesson:

- Do students reveal self-knowledge about the sources of the food they eat everyday?
- Can students apply basic construction skills to a small sculpture of a fruit/vegetable?
- Can students see in perspective the relationships among different traditions of harvest celebrations?
- Do students understand that there are people in a community who are hungry, and display empathy for those who are hungry?

Chapter IV (5) Extensions for teaching about the harvest:

Here are some ideas to take this theme further:

- A study of the artists whose harvest paintings have been placed around the room.
- Painting a harvest landscape.
- A study of apples or other crops of the season.
- Study Thanksgiving from various viewpoints: *Who has enough food? Who does not?* Study the viewpoint of Native Americans on the consequences of colonization on indigenous populations. Some Native Americans consider Thanksgiving to be a National Day of Mourning.⁵²
- Engage in service learning projects involving food banks, soup kitchens, etc.
- Study Sukkot: building a hut and remembering in the Jewish tradition.
- Study Kwanzaa: Mazao – displays of the harvest in African American heritage. (Cultural but not religious).
- Read the book: *Itse Selu: Cherokee Harvest Festival* by Daniel Pennington (1994).
- Read the book: *Whale Snow / Uqsruagnaq* by Debby Dahl Edwardson (2005).

⁵² Pilgrim Hall Museum, <http://www.pilgrimhall.org/daymourn.htm>