



A Multicultural Christmas

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CONTENTS

	Page
Program Overview	4
Student Objectives	6
Suggested Lesson Plan	7
Introduction	7
Pre-Viewing Activities	7
Post-Viewing Activities	7
Transcript of the Video	8

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Holiday Facts and Fun: A Multicultural Christmas

Time: 22:44

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

A Multicultural Christmas, aimed at primary and intermediate students, profiles five families of different ethnicity, and shows how they celebrate the holiday. The families prepare Christmas foods, decorate their homes, sing songs, and participate in special activities — all within their particular cultural tradition.

The Rydlands and their four children celebrate Christmas within the Scandinavian tradition. They begin the holiday season with Advent, during which they light Advent candles, bake gingerbread cookies, and make a Swedish candy called *kaknack*. They decorate their house only after Advent is over. The Rydlands prepare a traditional Scandinavian Christmas dinner with Norwegian *lutefisk* and Swedish meatballs. The youngest child, as is customary in Sweden, passes out the presents.



The Valentino family, members of the Oneida Indian tribe, believes in retaining its tribal customs, and has integrated some of those customs into their Christmas celebration. Four members of the family are seen participating in the “talking stick” ceremony, and the children are shown hanging special Native American

ornaments on the Valentino's Christmas tree. In keeping with the Oneida tradition of giving away personal possessions, the presents under their tree are to be given to friends and neighbors. Nine-year-old Cassie helps her father make Indian fry bread for Christmas dinner.



The Kim family, many of whom are first and second-generation Americans, finds its roots in South Korea. Christmas for the Kims is family reunion time. This year, thirty-five uncles, aunts, and cousins have come bearing not only presents, but traditional Korean foods. A huge buffet is set up, and the family digs in. After dinner, the Kims settle down to *yut* and *wotto* — two games they always play at Christmas time. Afterwards, the Kims sing and play musical instruments in order to receive their Christmas presents.



The Martinez family, which traces its roots to Mexico, decorates its Christmas tree with forsythia flowers, straw candy canes and straw Christmas wreaths. Instead of presents, a crèche is found at the foot of their tree. Mr. Martinez and Mrs. Martinez and their two children also spend the holiday with relatives who have come to their home. The Martinez family has a *pasada*, a re-enactment of the story of Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, every Christmas. In addition, the children have fun trying to break a Mexican *piñata*.



The final family profiled, the Tekleabs, are recent immigrants from

Ethiopia. It is their first Christmas in America. The Tekleab children grew up in a refugee camp, and their Christmas presents are the first store-bought toys they've ever had. Mrs. Tekleab is seen cooking a traditional Ethiopian meal, including *d'oro-wott*, *kej-wott*, and *indjera*, a sour-dough bread that serves as plate, eating utensils and food. Two guests arrive and, as is customary, are treated to spicy Ethiopian coffee. One of the guests, an elderly woman, is honored by sitting at the head of the table and being given a separate meal on *indjera*.



STUDENT OBJECTIVES

After viewing the program, and participating in the suggested activities, students should be able to do the following:

1. Compare and contrast the Christmas traditions of the five families profiled.
2. Describe how each family has celebrated its Christmas.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the validity of each family's traditions.
4. Discuss their own family's Christmas traditions.
5. Compare and contrast their family's Christmas activities and traditions with those in the program.

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Introduction

Explore how your students celebrate Christmas. (If you have any Jewish students, also discuss Hanukkah and the background of that holiday). After the discussion, explore any similarities and differences. Ask the class why those similarities and differences may exist.

Pre-Viewing Activities

Help your class understand that family traditions are often rooted in national origins. Explain that, with the exception of Native Americans, our families have come from countries other than the United States. Then help your students to accept the validity and acceptability of all ethnic traditions.

Explain that you will now show a video which shows how five different families celebrate their Christmas holiday.

Present the video.

Post-Viewing Activities

Ask your students which family was most like theirs. In what ways? What do they think were the most interesting traditions? What looked like it would be the most fun? Then discuss the Tekleab family. Explain that in their area of Ethiopia, there has been constant warfare, and many families have been forced (as were the Tekleabs) to escape to refugee camps. Can your class imagine what it would be like to never have any toys, and to never attend school? Now they can understand why Christmas in the United States was so special to the Tekleab family.

Younger students may enjoy drawing their favorite scenes from the

program — perhaps breaking the *piñata*, making gingerbread cookies, smudging during the “talking stick” ceremony, or playing *yut* or *wotto*.

Are there any ethnic museums in your area? Many have special Christmas programs that your class may enjoy.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

The Christmas season — a wonderful, magical time of the year.

The Christmas season is a time to be happy, a time to be joyful, a time to have fun!

And for Christians, it’s a time to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus.

For many people, it’s also a time for family and friends to gather together to observe the holiday according to their traditions.

For the Rydland family, those traditions come from Scandinavia, in northern Europe. Mr. Rydland comes from Norway, and his wife, from Sweden.

The Rydlands and their four children — Jonas, Camilla, Christina and Magdelina — begin their celebration four weeks before Christmas, during a holiday period known as Advent.

Each Sunday during the Advent season, the family lights special candles while they sing a traditional prayer.

This four-week period is also a time to make gingerbread cookies in the Rydland household.

It’s also a time to make a delicious Swedish candy called *kaknack*. Christina helps by setting out the small paper cups into which the hot *kaknack* will be poured.

As the *kaknack* bubbles merrily in the pot, Christina eagerly anticipates eating the crunchy, nutty candy after it’s had a chance to cool.

The family puts up their Christmas decorations only when Advent is over.

Christmas morning finds Mrs. Rydland and Camilla preparing the family's big holiday dinner.

Among the first of many foods to be cooked is a traditional cabbage dish.

Next comes a specially prepared Norwegian fish called *luttfisk*.

And then the Swedish meat balls are made.

In early afternoon, the Rydlands start their Christmas dinner with prayers sung in Norwegian and Swedish.

Next, Camilla reads a portion of the Christmas story from a Norwegian Bible.

And then, at long last, dinner is served.

As delicious as the food is, it's what comes after dinner that Christina enjoys most.

That's when she gets to hand out the gifts! Swedish tradition holds that the youngest child passes out the Christmas presents, and for Christina, it's a perfect way to end the holiday.

Christmas at the Valentino household is somewhat different from that of the Rydland's.

The Valentinos are Native Americans, members of the Oneida Indian tribe, one of several dozen tribal groups in the northeastern part of the United States and southeastern Canada.

The Valentinos believe that it's important to practice Indian traditions during the Christmas holiday season, and at other times of the year, too.

One of those traditions is the "talking stick" ceremony. Four Valentinos are taking part — Francine, Cassandra, Karen, and Mrs. Valentino.

The two other family members, Mrs. Valentino's husband and her 4-year-old daughter, Felicia, are out doing some last-minute shopping.

During the first part of the ceremony, called "smudging," small pieces of a sage plant are burned and passed around.

After everyone has been smudged, each Valentino discusses her feelings. And since it's Christmas, they talk about the holiday.

From a distance, the Valentino's Christmas tree looks like most others, but there are some interesting differences. First, most of the presents beneath it are to be given to neighbors, friends and relatives.

Giving generously to others — not receiving -- is an important Oneida tradition.

And if you look carefully, you'll see some special ornaments the Valentino children have placed on the tree.

A "medicine wheel," for example, shows that each person -- whether white, yellow, black or red — is part of the same family of all people.

A "dream catcher" is another interesting ornament. It's said that bad dreams are caught in it, while good dreams are able to pass through.

Later, when Mr. Valentino returns, he and Cassandra start making Indian fry bread, a family favorite always served at Christmas dinner.

After the dough has been mixed, it will be set aside for several hours to rise.

Mrs. Valentino has made the rest of the meal, including wild rice, an important Oneida food, and an Indian soup made of beans, hominy and pieces of pork. Ham will also be served.

The dough has risen by dinner time, so the bread is ready to be fried right on schedule.

The bread tastes great by itself, but it's even better with Mrs. Valentino's soup.

The Valentinos combine their family's ancient Indian customs with the traditions of Christmas — and for them, that's the best possible way to celebrate the holiday.

For the Kim family, Christmas Day is family reunion time. This year, 35 uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, aunts and other relatives have traveled up to several hundred miles to celebrate the holiday together.

The Kim family comes from South Korea, a country that lies at the far eastern edge of Asia.

Most have been here for many years, but they still practice many Korean

customs. For example, visitors leave their shoes in the Kim's front hallway.

And the family's Christmas tree is decorated with many traditional Korean ornaments.

Miniature shoes like these, for example, were once pinned on the dresses of Korean women.

A tiny ceremonial drum, another example, is a reminder of an important instrument played at Korean harvest festivals.

All the Kims bring food to the celebration. Their Korean delicacies make for an especially tasty buffet.

In fact, everybody seems to appear from nowhere as soon as all the food is placed on the table.

Before the delicacies are eaten, however, a prayer is recited.

After dinner, the family plays games. The first is called *wotto*. It's a pastime the men of the Kim family have enjoyed every Christmas for many years.

Then some of the women start a game of *yut*.

To play, sticks are thrown into the air. Depending on how they land, the player gets to move the wooden markers to certain locations on the game board.

In addition to games, music plays a big role in the Kim's Christmas celebration -- and it's a good thing, too, because nobody gets a Christmas present until she or he plays a musical instrument or sings a song.

The nice thing about singing for your present at the Kim's Christmas reunion is that nobody is expected to perform perfectly. Getting up in front of all those people is the thing that counts.

The Christmas tree in the Martinez household has been decorated in a very traditional style — with forsythia flowers, straw Christmas wreaths, and straw candy canes.

As you can see, there are no presents beneath the tree. Instead, there's

a nativity scene.

Every year, the crib in the manger beneath the tree remains empty until midnight, December 24th. At the stroke of twelve, when Christmas eve becomes Christmas day, the baby Jesus is placed in His crib.

This, and many other traditions practiced in the Martinez household, come from Mexico, where Mr. Martinez's parents were born.

Mrs. Martinez was also born in Mexico, although she's lived in the United States for about 20 years now.

Many of the dishes prepared for the family's Christmas dinner, including turkey, are made from recipes handed down from generation to generation in Mrs. Martinez's family.

Now, she's passing them on to her children — Crystal and her little sister, Alison.

The recipe for the stuffing is an example.

Pork roasts stuffed with prunes also have been served for many years at Martinez Christmas dinners.

The roasts are dotted with olives and almonds, and then coated with orange juice mixed with chili powder.

As soon as the meal has been put in the oven, aunts, uncles and cousins begin to arrive. Christmas get-togethers are something else that have always been an important part of the Martinez holiday.

And so have *Posadas*. *La Posada* means "the inn" in Spanish, and it's a play sung about Joseph and Mary trying to find a place to stay in Bethlehem.

Mr. and Mrs. Martinez play the innkeepers.

The rest of the family sing for Joseph and Mary. At last, they find a place to stay — the manger and are allowed to enter.

Trying to break the *piñata* is the children's favorite Christmas activity. The small children go first.

The older children are blindfolded. This year, the *piñata* is especially

hard to break.

So everybody needs a lot of encouragement to keep trying.

It seems that Uncle Hector really wants to keep spirits high!

Finally, Crystal is successful, and the mad dash is on for the oranges, peanuts and candies.

Christmas dinner starts with a toast with fruit juice.

Then the feast begins.

It's early Christmas morning, and Mrs. Tekleab works alone in her kitchen.

Her husband is out on errands, and her three sons — Emanuel, on the left, Jonas in the middle, and Solomon — are upstairs looking at a book, practicing some new English words.

The Tekleab boys do not help their mother in the kitchen or with any household chores, which is common in Ethiopia, the country in eastern Africa where the Tekleab family comes from.

In fact, they've been here only a few months — so this is their first Christmas in America.

Like many other people from Ethiopia, Mrs. Tekleab and her family belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox church, whose members celebrate Christmas in early January, not in December.

For Christmas dinner, she's making a real Ethiopian feast — a chopped fresh vegetable salad with lots of onions, which are commonly used in Ethiopian cooking, a chicken dish called *d'oro-wott*, and *kej-wott* — a very hot, spicy beef dish.

Everything will be served on *indjera*, a large, flat sour dough bread that serves as plate, eating utensils — and food, as well!

Somewhat later, Mr. Tekleab returns with a family friend, and her mother who's visiting from Ethiopia.

After Mrs. Tekleab greets them, she returns to the kitchen to make a

special spicy coffee that's almost always served to guests in Ethiopian homes.

While the beans turn deep brown, Mr. Tekleab shows some family pictures to the visitors. He tells them that before coming to the United States, the Tekleabs lived in a refugee camp — a place where people go when forced from their homes.

They moved to the camp after a war broke out near their home, and the family stayed there for many years. In fact, none of his children had ever been outside the camp until they came to America.

When the coffee beans have been cooked, they're passed around so the visitors can enjoy the rich aroma — another Ethiopian tradition.

Then it's back to the kitchen to prepare the coffee service and some incense.

Finally, the coffee is ready to be served.

Christmas dinner is somewhat informal, with one exception. Because their friend's mother is very old, she's been given an honored place at the head of the table, and is given her own servings of food.

Elderly people are honored in Ethiopia.

The rest of the family takes their food from portions placed on the *indjera*.

The young Tekleabs come to the table whenever they get hungry.

The children's Christmas presents are handed out after the company leaves. It's an especially exciting time for Jonas and his brothers — not only because it's their first Christmas in the United States, but also because they're getting toys.

You see, these are among the first store-bought toys the boys have ever received. The only toys they had in their refugee camp were ones they had made for themselves, such as mud marbles.

It's not long before Jonas has figured out how to work his walkie-talkies.

Emanuel seems equally taken with his gift. And so does Solomon.

As he watches his sons, perhaps Mr. Tekleab thinks how wonderful it is

to now be in a country where people understand that differences are wonderful and enriching.

Yet, they also know that despite those differences, we are all brothers and sisters who share a common home, a home made better by the message of Christmas — that we can all live together in peace, love and joy!

CHILDREN'S CHOIR: Why can't it be Christmas all year 'round, with Christmas carols and snow on the ground?

And lots of joy with lots of love, and cries of angels high above?

A simple prayer for all to share, a time of hope, a time to care.

Why can't it be Christmas, why can't it be Christmas, all year 'round?

Remember Christmas, Christmas time.

Remember Christmas, with peace and good will the whole year through.