



Festive Seasons

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Suggestions for a wider ranging look at Celebration.

Christmas is almost upon us. Santa Claus is already established in shops, and schools all over the country are gearing up for card-making, decorations, carols, nativity plays and other seasonal activities. A good moment in our multi-faith, multi-cultural country for all schools to draw attention to the festivals of other religions.

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Whatever the faith, festivals have much in common: we celebrate the victory of good over evil, the hope of new beginnings, we give thanks, we commemorate. The patterns of celebrations are also similar: families and friends gather together, food is shared, gifts exchanged. And particular rituals often make the same symbolic use of candles and fire as dispellers of the dark.

To introduce children to those things that all share opens the way to an understanding and tolerance of difference. What better time for schools without an ethnic or cultural mix of pupils to depart from a single-minded pre-occupation with Christmas and explore how others celebrate their festive seasons.

Start here with this brief guide to the major festivals and some useful books for teachers and children.

Hindu Festivals

Diwali (October/November)

A festival of lights which celebrates the return of Rama to his kingdom after rescuing his wife Sita from the evil Ravana. It marks a new year, a new beginning when Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, visits homes which are specially lit with lamps and candles to welcome her and celebrate the triumph of good over evil. It is perhaps the closest Hindu festival to Christmas: houses are cleaned, people gather together, wear new clothes, and enjoy feasting and exchanging presents.

Holi (February/March)

A spring harvest festival marked by visits, feasting, bonfires and fireworks. Much boisterous behaviour occurs, especially throwing coloured powders and water at people, to recall the games of Lord Krishna.

Dussehra (September/October)

Also celebrates the victory of Rama over Ravana. (In north India the story of the Ramayana is told in a series of elaborate plays.) Families get together to exchange gifts and there are processions and dancing.

Janam Ashtami (August)

The celebration of the birth of Lord Krishna. Midnight vigils are kept and sometimes there is an image of Krishna in a cradle. Gifts of sweets are placed in the cradle and also given away.

Sikh Festivals

Sikh festivals are mostly associated with the births and deaths of the ten Sikh gurus. All celebrations are marked by a continuous reading (by men and women) of the Guru Granth Sahib - the Sikh holy book which now stands in place of the guru - a special service and a ceremonial meal of food prepared in the gurdwara (the place of worship) and shared with everyone present. Sikh festivals reflect a strong sense of community.

The Birthday of Guru Nanak (November) The commemoration of the birth, in April 1469, of the first Sikh guru is one of the most important festivals.

Sikhs also celebrate **Diwali** to commemorate the release from captivity of Guru Hargobind, the sixth guru, and his arrival at the golden temple of Amritsar. There are lights, prayers, fireworks and feasting.

Islamic Festivals

Eid-ul-Fitr (May/June)

The great Muslim family festival which marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. It is a day of prayer but also for decorating homes, sending cards, exchanging greetings - 'Eid Mubarak' (Happy Eid) - family reunions, new clothes, presents for children and special meals.

Buddhist Festivals

Wesak (April/May)

To mark the anniversary of the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha. Houses are decorated with lights and flowers, the statue of Buddha is garlanded, candles are lit, there are processions in the streets. People gather at home, presents are exchanged and gifts given to the poor.

Jewish Festivals

Chanukah (December)

The nearest Jewish celebration to Christmas. It marks the date in 165 BC when the temple in Jerusalem was reclaimed and the Jews could once more worship freely. It is also a festival of light - the ritual of lighting candles on the eight-branched menorah over the eight days commemorates the miracle whereby the Temple lamp was kept burning for eight days with oil sufficient for only one.

Decorations, gifts, parties and festive meals make it a very happy time.

Rosh Hashanah (September/October)

The New Year celebration. The ram's horn is blown to bring to mind the story of Abraham and Isaac. Greetings cards are sent and special food is prepared.

Pesach/Passover (March/April) Commemorates the exodus of the children of Israel led by Moses. Families gather to carry out the very special rituals associated with this festival.

Yuan Tan/Chinese New Year Festival (January/February)

The religion of Chinese people can be based on Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Communism or ancestor worship; but every year Chinese people all over the world celebrate this most important festival. Homes are cleaned, lamps and lanterns lighted, families re-united, debts paid and quarrels made up. Presents, parties and special food go along with processions in the streets to welcome the gods with music, noise, dragon dancing and fire-crackers.

The Books

Festivals and Celebrations (1981) Rowland Purton, Basil Blackwell, 0 631 91570 2, £6.60 (214pp, no illustration)

Helpful and simply explained background information about different beliefs, and details of festivals and celebrations grouped thematically - New Starts, Harvest, Family Festivals etc. Also includes pagan customs and folklore. An excellent source book, usefully cross-referenced and indexed.

Festivals and Celebrations (1984) Kathleen Elliott, Young Library, 0 946003 24 6, £4.95 (64pp col. and b&w ills.) Available December.

Information on religious and non-religious festivals in Britain, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Shows how they are celebrated in the country of origin and also by immigrant groups in their adopted countries. Suggestions for activities, things to make and do. Good index and contents. Junior or Secondary. Useful reference for teachers.

Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals compiled and edited by Clive A. Lawton, published by CRE, distributed by Shap Working Party, 7, Alderbrook Road, Solihull, West Midlands, B91 1NH. Apply direct for details of supply.

An annual publication from the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education which has become an invaluable source. Many religious celebrations are moveable feasts, calculated with reference to the movements of the sun and moon. Clive Lawton and his advisers produce an annotated calendar in which the festivals of twelve religions are recorded with their dates calculated (wherever possible) for the 17 months July - December.

A book, **Festivals in World Religions**, is promised from Shap in 1985.

The Living Festivals Series (1982-84) Religious and Moral Education Press (Arnold Wheaton). Net and non-net editions. (30pp approx., full colour limp covers, b&w ills.)

Christmas (1982) Antony Evans, 0 08 027869, 75p (non net); 0 08 027870 1, 90p (net)

Diwali (1983) Howard Marsh, 0 08 027873 6, 75p; 0 08 027874 4, 90p

Guru Nanak's Birthday (1982) Margaret Davidson, 0 08 027877 9, 75p; 0 08 027878 7, 90p

Passover (1982) Lynne Scholefield, 0 08 027867 1, 75p; 0 08 027868 X, 90p

Ramadan and Id-ul-Fitr (1982) Janis Hannaford, 0 08 027875 2, 75p; 0 08 027876 0, 90p

Chanukah (1983) Lynne Scholefield, 0 08 029276 3, 80p; 0 08 029277 1, 95p

Chinese New Year (1984) Anne Bancroft, 0 08 029278 X, 80p; 0 08 029279 8, 95p

Festivals of the Buddha (1984) Anne Bancroft, 0 08 030610 1, 80p; 0 08 030611 X, 95p

Holi (1984) Janis Hannaford, 0 08 029282 8, 80p; 0 08 029283 6, 95p

Short chapters give varied and interesting information about the festivals and their backgrounds. Suggestions for Things to Do, Information about books and other materials for teachers. No index. Intended for 9-16 age range. A good starting point for teachers too.

Families and Faiths series

Religious and Moral Education Press (Arnold/Wheaton). Net and non-net editions. (100p approx. b&w ill. limp covers)

A Jewish Family in Britain (1983) Vida Barnett, 0 08 027888 4, £1.90 (non-net); 0 08 027889 2, £2.50 (net)

A Muslim Family in Britain (1980) Stephen W. Harrison & David Shepherd, 0 08 022884 4, £1.90; 0 08 022885 2, £2.50

Story-style account of the life-style, customs, beliefs of non-Christian families living in Britain. Very accessible and packed with fascinating information. Suggestions for further study, recipes, glossary, further sources of information.

Scheduled for next year titles featuring **A Sikh Family** (Spring) and **A Hindu Family** (Autumn). **A Christian Family in Britain** (Autumn) sets the Christian faith in a multi-cultural setting.

Beliefs and Believers series (1982)

Wayland, £3.95. (64pp, hardcover, b&w ill.)

Buddhists and Buddhism Martha Patrick, 0 85340 906 4

Hindus and Hinduism Partha and Swasti Mitter, 0 85340 908 0

Sikhs and Sikhism S. S. Kapoor, 0 85340 907 2

Spacious layout and lots of illustration make these accounts of world religions especially accessible for a wide age-range. Glossary. Index.

Religions of the World series

Macdonald, £4.95 (45pp, lots of full colour ill.)

The Buddhist World (1984) Anne Bancroft, 0 356 07524 9

Fifth in a useful series which sets out to explain religions and how they are practised. Also available **The Muslim World**, **The Hindu World**, **The Jewish World**, **The Christian World**

Gifts and Almonds (1980) Joan Solomon, 0 241 10422 X, £3.50

Sweet-Tooth Sunil (1984) Joan Solomon, 0 241 11201 X, £3.95

Matza and Bitter Herbs (1984) Clive Lawton, 0 241 11377 6, 3.95

Three in the very good Hamish Hamilton series which uses photographs and simple text to reflect life in multi-racial Britain. These three titles deal specifically with the festivals of Eid, Diwali and the Jewish Passover.

Arjuna's Family series

Bell and Hyman, £3.50. (26pp, col [ills. by](#) [3] Lisa Kopper)

The Festival Peter Bonnici, 0 7135 1458 2

Simply told stories of events in the life of a small boy in India. This one tells of a Hindu local festival of the temple which Arjuna takes part in when he visits his grandmother's village.

Festivals series

Wayland, £4.95 (48pp, colour photographs and ills.)

Christmas (1984) 0 05078 450 6

The first four books in this new series deal with Christian festivals.

Christmas links traditional customs with pagan festivals and shows how the festival is celebrated round the world. Intended for 9-13's but useable with younger children. Titles dealing with other religions scheduled for next year.

A new series **At Home and Abroad With**

Steve Hamilton, Macmillan Education. (49pp full colour and line ills.) due to be published in Spring 1985 will show British Muslim, Sikh and Hindu children. It also goes back one or two generations to show how and why their families migrated. Looks interesting. (Provisional price £3.50).

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