

Celebrating Culture and Tradition

Beth Vanaman

Introduction and Rationale

Third grade is a developmentally-challenging time for students. They begin to notice and comment on differences amongst one another, and they require guidance in how to cooperate, as well as anti-bullying tactics, and a gamut of other social skills.

Teaching social skills, coupled with Delaware's History Standards as stated on the Delaware Department of Education's website "Students will understand similarities between families now and in the past, including daily life in the past and present, as well as cultural origins of customs in Delaware and around the world," will lead to cultural sensitivity and understanding and appreciation of differences.

In this unit, students will be able to share family, school, and/or community traditions, celebrate and explain the customs to others, and learn tolerance and cultural sensitivity through meaningful conversations and interactions. Students will read picture books to provide additional information about several popular celebrations like Christmas, Eid al-Fitr, and Cinco de Mayo. Video clips will supplement shared personal experiences and texts by transporting children on virtual field trips. A final project will offer students a variety of modalities from which they can display their understanding of the unit.

Demographics

Wilmington Manor Elementary School, of the Colonial School District, has approximately 500 students in grades K-5. Most of the students have little to no exposure to the world beyond their own neighborhood and a small stretch of highway known as Route 13 (fast food joints, schools, and drug stores). In this small school, there is a high population of Low Socio-Economic Status (LES) students and English Language Learners (ELL). 68.4% of students in the building receive free and reduced lunch. With no money for food, the families have limited funds for travel to see other cultures firsthand or to visit museums and other educational alternatives to travel. 37.1% of students at Wilmington Manor Elementary School are classified as ELL. Many students are their family's only English speaker. Aside from limited travel experiences, ELL's face a lack of background knowledge of American traditions and culture which greatly impedes their social studies' understanding and often, general conversations.

With Delaware Standards stating that students must understand similarities between cultures and customs, the available textbooks and provided curriculum will not suffice. The provided textbooks are written several grade levels above my students' reading levels. Thus other means will have to be used. This unit strives to incorporate teacher instruction, whole-class discussion, peer-to-peer interactions, conversations with trusted adults, group work, independent work, and other modalities. Many teaching and learning styles will be entwined throughout this engaging unit.

Islamic Thought and Culture

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States. CNN and the Pew Research Center have projected the number of Muslims worldwide in an awakening projection.

“According to a new report from the Pew Research Center, the number of Muslims in the world will increase to 2.2 billion by 2030, double what it was in 1990. The report projects that in 2030, more than a quarter of the world’s population will be Muslim.”¹

As informed citizens, students need to be educated on the beliefs of the religion, understand the traditions to which they are exposed, and gain an appreciation and acceptance of such a prevalent culture.

Beliefs

Muslims do not believe that the prophet Muhammad is a god. Rather, they hold him in high regard as a perfect man. It is he, they believe, who received a series of messages from God which were recorded into the Koran. Muslims believe that Muhammad purely received the message of God.

“By the grace of your Lord, you are not a madman.
Yours will be an unending reward;
For you are a man of noble character.
Soon, you shall see, and they shall see, who the madman is.”²

Today adhering to the written words of the Koran is very important to all those of the Islamic faith. Muslims believe in the 5 Pillars. Shahadah, one of those pillars, is the profession that “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is God’s Messenger.”³

Traditions

“Religions become institutions when the myths and rituals that once shaped their sacred histories are transformed into authoritative

models of *orthodoxy* (the correct interpretation of myths) and *orthopraxy* (the correct interpretation of rituals)...”⁴

In order to understand the Islamic religion, it is crucial for students to be informed and aware of the traditions of Muslims.

Salat

Salat, or ritual prayer, is an Islamic tradition which many Muslims practice here in America. This tradition is evident to non-Muslims as it often happens in public when getting to a mosque isn't feasible. When Muslims pray, they do so with structure- five times a day- at sunrise, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening in a show of their submission to God. The prayers include a series of movements in which Muslims primarily face towards Mecca.

Hajj

Hajj, the trip to Mecca, is the holy obligation for all capable Muslims. The journey, which should be completed at least once a lifetime, is one which unites all Muslims as one with no distinctions of men and women. Traditional garments are replaced by plain white clothes (symbolizing purity) and hair is cut or trimmed.

Ramadan

Ramadan- the holiday during which Muslims fast from food, drink, and sexual encounters from sunup to sundown for a month- is a well-known tradition to many outside the Islamic faith. In keeping with Muslim tradition, the holiday includes fajr, or praying five times a day. During a typical day of Ramadan, Muslims eat a predawn breakfast before continuing with their day. Maghrib, the evening prayer, occurs at sundown and is followed by iftar, the evening meal. Visiting mosques is also commonplace during the holy month.

While some students may see Ramadan as a punishment because of the strict eating regiment, “Ramadan is actually a time for both spiritual introspection and festive celebrations.”⁵ The fasting is a show of self-control and self-constraint. Jewish students may compare Ramadan to Yom Kippur or Catholics to Lent.

To see the celebrations in texts, videos, and illustrations and compare them to festivities that are familiar to students will allow them to appreciate the positive, peaceful feeling of the spiritual month. With a mindset in which students are open and accepting, students will be in the position to know better than to believe any rumors that they may hear about the Islamic faith. To understand the Islamic traditions is to know that the religion is one of peace.

Id al-Fitr and Id ul-Adha

Id al-Fitr is a celebration ending Ramadan. Called “The Feast of Fast-Breaking,” it and Id ul-Ahar, which marks the end of Hajj, are two great festivals in the Islamic culture. During the celebrations, Muslims ask Allah to forgive their sins, visit the deceased in cemeteries, and partake in parties and festivals.

Celebrations commonly include delicious foods like biryani- a rice and lamb meal- and halwa- a treat of wheat, sugar, and almonds. Like Zakah, the collection for the needy, during Id al-Fitr and Id ul-Ahar food is collected and donated to those less fortunate at these special times. Besides great feasts, children may receive gifts and all enjoy spending times outdoors, dancing, and shopping.

Objectives

Students will be able to communicate to others details about their community’s, school’s, family’s traditions, and customs.

Students will be able to compare and contrast traditions of different groups of people.

Students will be able to make connections between cultures around the world and and their lives.

Essential Questions

What are similarities between cultures around the world?

What are some differences that make cultures unique?

How can people share their cultures and traditions with others?

Strategies

I will utilize a variety of modalities to actively engage students in the unit. Students will rely on background knowledge, meaningful conversations, appropriate picture books and literature excerpts, as well as video clips and teacher instruction to learn the content. The use of literature allows for this unit to be implemented primarily in social studies but during the reading block as well. I hope that by making the difficult content comprehensible that students will be able to take away a sensitivity that will endure the years.

Interviewing

Students will rely on personal experiences of their own family traditions and celebrations in order to build background knowledge when the unit is introduced. By interviewing their family members, other adults, and their peers, students will share

their own experiences and learn about the customs of those closest to them. This approach allows students to build their knowledge base without teacher interruption. It will also allow me to gauge how much they already know about different customs, other religions, and the meanings/origins of holidays that they and other celebrates. I will then be able to adjust my plans as necessary- eliminate what students already know and beef up ideas on which they need more instruction.

Children's Literature

Children's literature and picture books make tough content comprehensible. Students will first listen to *The Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss. In this book, students will hear the fictional tale of Plain-Belly Sneetches trying to fit in with Star-Belly Sneetches. After much distress and alienation, the Sneetches realize by the end that their differences can be put aside. "The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches."⁶ The rhyming, engaging story will introduce the idea of celebrating differences and acceptance.

When students have free time in class, there will be several books available for them to read related to the topic of cultural diversity. Students will be able to explore the geography of the Middle East with non-fiction text *The Middle East* by Philip Steele which features several detailed maps, photographs of the regions, and a few facts related to each region. *Id-Ul-Adha A Muslim Festival* is a similar non-fiction text that uses candid photographs and brief captions to expose the reader to the holiday. Other realistic fiction books will help explain cultural celebrations and festivities with the use of cartoon characters and likeable illustrations. *My First Ramadan* by Karen Katz is an entertaining tale about a young boy's holy month experience with basic Islamic vocabulary. In another book, *An Eid Story The Lost Ring* by Fawzia Gilani-Williams, students can read a quick story which is set against the backdrop of Eid-ul-Adha. Two other stories, *Listen to the Wind* by Greg Mortenson and Susan Roth and *The Librarian of Basra* by Jeanette Winter, the children can easily read interesting stories which have hints of Islamic culture entwined in them. The books will expose students to different types of dress, the challenges of those trying to fit in with modern society, and how strict the Islamic religion can be. Other books related to Islam will also be available. Some printable stories are available on the Saudi Aramco website under the Young Reader's World tab.

Other books for students to peruse will include books on diversity like *Tacky the Penguin* and *Three Cheers for Tacky* by Helen Lester, *Jack and Jim* by Kitty Crowther, *Black, White, Just Right!* by Marguerite W. Davol, and *Stinky the Bulldog* by Jackie Valent. Students will also be able to read books about celebrations in their culture like *Cinco de Mouse-o* by Judy Cox, *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus* by L. Frank Baum, *Shante Keys and the New Year's Peas* by Gail Piernas-Davenport, and more. The fictional tales feature an array of fun characters who have different

family customs, are from different areas of the world, and who all enjoy their unique holiday traditions.

Video

The Colonial School District purchased Discovery Education videos for each teacher. Several videos and video clips on the site will be used to show students an Islamic school here in America. An addition video will allow students to hear a young Muslim girl -Farrah- explain the challenges she faces when adhering to the Muslim religion in the U.S.

Websites

With limited funds and resources available, traveling is not an option for many of my students. Luckily they can take virtual field trips via the internet. There are websites available where students can view 360 degree views of the Dome of the Rock, Al-Aqsa Mosque, and Suleymaniye Mosque. Guiding questions and graphic organizers will allow them to record what they find on their 'trip.'

Aside from virtual tours, students can utilize the web to read blogs written by Muslim children in America. The blogs often read like those of any child- school, friends, activities, etc. However, in some writings students will be able to hear firsthand the accounts of children who find being a Muslim in a public school very challenging. "I knew I was not allowed to dance as a Muslim. But how was I going to explain this to the teacher."⁷

Teacher Instruction

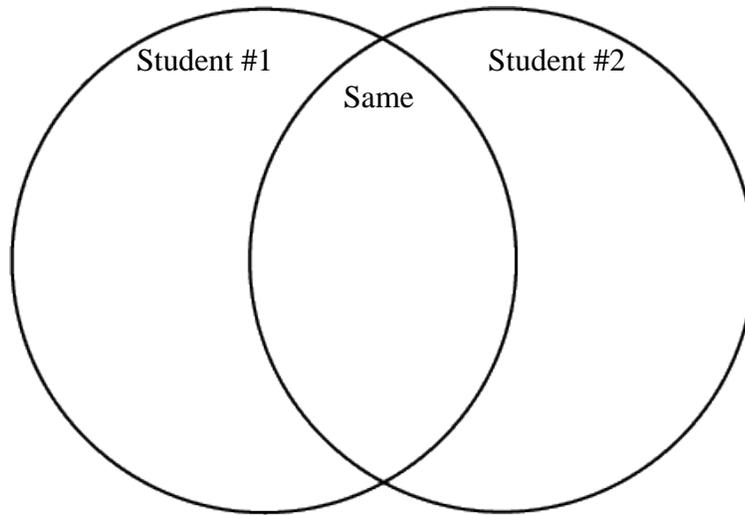
With such unfamiliar content, third graders will rely on guidance from the teacher to make connections and make meaning of the presented lessons. Teacher instruction can provide necessary background knowledge. They can also pose guiding questions to challenge students to make content-to-self connections and provide graphic organizers such as KWL charts, venn diagrams, as well as webs, while facilitating discussion.

Classroom Activities

Lesson One

Students will begin by reviewing strategies previously used to compare and contrast in the reading curriculum. In the opening assignment, students will be asked to pick a partner and complete a venn diagram comparing themselves to a peer. They will record unique facts about themselves, their partner, and find similarities that they

share. Little guidance will be given. Students may come up with basic information like boy/girl, hair color, age, etc., but others may delve deeper finding similarities and differences that aren't just skin deep i.e. likes, pet peeves, fears.



After completing the venn diagrams with at least 4-5 details in each section, students will have an opportunity to share their learned information with the class. As an extension activity/exit ticket, students will answer the following questions to reflect on the graphic organizer and partner assignment- Did you learn any information that surprised you? Is there any information about yourself that you wish you could have shared? These reflection questions will allow students to begin to think about the similarities and differences within our classroom community.

Lesson Two

Opening the second lesson, students will be reminded of the venn diagrams. The question, "Did you learn anything that made you dislike your partner?" will be posed. Expected responses are "Of course not!" and an emphatic "No!" Discussion will be shifted away from those that may respond inappropriately. I will then pose a second question. "If I said that my favorite color was orange, would that make you not like me as a teacher?" When students answer no, I will share with them our enduring understanding for the unit- People and cultures around the world are very different; yet commonalities exist. We must celebrate our similarities and accept our differences.

Next, the children's book *The Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss will be read aloud to students. In the book, two groups of fictional characters are at odds

because of their different looking bellies. While they alienate one another in the beginning of the story, by the end the Sneetches learn that despite their differences, they are all the same fun-loving creatures underneath. The message of this book will be transferred to lessons one and two. Students will be challenged with connecting how that book relates to the graphic organizer in lesson one and our enduring understanding.

Lesson Three

Students will be asked to brainstorm traditions and celebrations that take place in their schools and homes. They will write their answers before sharing out to the class. A class list will be recorded on the Smartboard for all to see. Possible suggestions include chicken patties on the first day of school, Student of the Month assemblies on the last Friday of each month, birthday parties, 4th of July barbeques, Christmas stockings, etc.

Students will then choose their favorite celebration and illustrate it with a few sentences explaining why that custom is a favorite, who they share the holiday, festivity, or celebration with, and how their community or family is unique in its' celebration. Their illustrations and captions will be posted around the classroom as they complete them. The students can then participate in a gallery walk, walking around the classroom, to view other student's illustrations and read the information. Classical music can play as students walk for effect.

After the gallery walk, the teacher will read a story which highlights a tradition not featured in the students' work. A book about Hannakuh, Kwanzaa, the Chinese New Year, or a birthday party can be used. A think-aloud where the teacher poses questions to the class as s/he reads will feature stems like "This reminds me of ..." and "Wow, that seems different because..." At the end of the book, students will be asked the hypothetical question of what the main character could draw for their illustration in the gallery walk and how they might describe their picture. This activity is designed to get students to start thinking of their own traditions, to activate background knowledge, and to have them transfer their knowledge of personal celebrations to another person's different customs and traditions while comparing and contrasting them.

A suggested homework assignment following Lesson Three is for students to interview their parents or another adult about family traditions and customs. Questions can be suggested, or students can write their own questions. A form will be provided so that students can record their answers.

Lesson Four

In a hook activity, students will watch the Gary Marshall video “Merry Christams Space Case.” In this short video, the main character (a spaceship) visits his friend on Earth, but he is startled to see the streets full of vicious lions, cowboys, soldiers, astronauts, etc. Space Case had arrived on Halloween and didn’t realize that he was in the midst of trick-or-treating. Once a young boy explains the holiday to him, Space Case is no longer scared and is excited to learn more about Halloween and to participate in trick-or-treating. Following the video, students will be asked to think back to yesterday’s lesson. Can you think of any holidays or activities that your family or school participates in that may look silly to outsiders? We will discuss their ideas, which may include cupid, birthday party hats, Easter egg hunts, etc.

Since students are already familiar with many of their own traditions, the main activity of Lesson Four has students interviewing one another. Teacher selected pairs will take turns interviewing one another about their community, school, or family’s customs, traditions, religion or lack of religion, celebrated holidays, and heritage. Students will be matched so that students are with a peer that is not a close friend. Whenever possible, ELL students will be partnered with native Delawareans. Students can again share their illustrations with captions, share personal stories, and share the information that they learned in their parent interviews. Discussion will be teacher-directed so that it stays on topic. The words celebration, traditions, and customs will be posted in the room as a reminder for students.

Prior to engaging in the activity, the class will work collaboratively to define the term tradition. The ideal definition would be that a tradition is a story or practice passed down from generation to generation.

Each pair will be provided a list of suggested questions so that they are not lacking for conversation. Suggested questions include: What are some holidays that your family celebrates? How do you celebrate those holidays? What are customs that your family has (i.e. attending church, eating dinner together, special trips, and family reunions)? Are others involved in your family’s traditions (real or not real people such as church members, cousins, friends, neighbors, God, Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, etc.). Are there any traditions in school that you are especially fond of? What celebrations have you participated in here at Wilmington Manor? Responses and important information can be recorded on lined paper. Upon completion, students will have a chance to share out their information with other groups. I will wrap-up the lesson with a discussion in which I will share my realization that while many of the students celebrate the same traditions, the way that their families celebrate or their customs are very unique.

Lesson Five

Case Studies

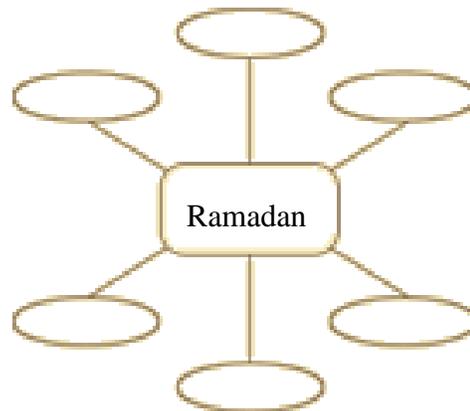
Students will be exposed to a series of case studies featuring typical American, Muslim, and Mexican culture and traditions. While some of the content will be information with which students are familiar, other parts will be new knowledge.

The class will revisit the list generated in Lesson Three- Traditions and Celebrations in their homes. We will identify those which students associate with American culture. Our case study will focus on the celebration of Christmas, the birth of Jesus, the commercial aspects, and the fictional figures associated with the holiday. We will have a group discussion and read a book about celebrating Christmas in America. Following that, students will work in small groups to research and create posters on other winter celebrations such as Hannukah, Kwanzaa, and New Years. Each group's poster will list who celebrates the holiday, traditional celebrations, and any other facts that they learn. The groups will share out to the class once all posters are complete.

I will begin incorporating other cultures in the next class session with a review of how students said New Years is commonly celebrated. A story on the Chinese New Year will be read. As the story is read aloud, students will listen for similarities and differences from how the holiday is commonly celebrated in America. They will use sticks with an S on one side (Same) and a D on the other (Different) to identify information that they hear in relation to the celebrations. Examples of such discussion points are a D for the date of the celebrations (December 31, 2011/January 1, 2012 for the American celebration and January 23, 2012 for the Chinese) and an S for fireworks.

In the next lesson, students will be introduced to the terms Islam and Muslim. To begin, I will ask students "What is an American?" and "Who are the Chinese?" Following student responses, I will then challenge students to define "What is Islam?" and "Who are Muslims?" I anticipate that they will have very few, if any, responses. It is then that students will watch a video of a Muslim school in America. After the video, students will again be asked the questions. I will give them some information to supplement their answers. We will again examine our brainstormed list from Lesson Three to identify any traditions listed that are Islamic.

Students will next learn about the traditions of the Islamic faith with the introduction of Ramadan. I will share with students what Muslims do during the holy month and why they feel it is important (their beliefs). *My First Ramadan* by Karen Katz will tell the story of Ramadan from a child's point of view. While reading the story, students will complete a web with what they learn about the custom.



While students complete the web, I will additionally complete a “think aloud.” I will pose questions to students as they listen. Questions include “Why did the main character eat so much in the beginning of the story?” *He was about to fast for Ramadan,* and “What does the phrase Eid Mubarak! (or Have a happy and blessed Eid!) remind you of in your culture? *Saying Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays!*”

After the story, trade books regarding Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr will be dispersed to collaborative student groups. In addition, photographs of Eid al-Fitr celebrations found online will be shown in a slideshow. Following a few minutes of time to examine the books and pictures, students will participate in a “Think-Pair-Share.” In this activity, students will be asked to think about one similarity between the celebration of Eid al-Fitr and a celebration that they participate in. After that, they will turn and share that similarity with their neighbor. Finally, five groups will be called on to share their best similarity.

In the next lesson, students will begin by reading a blog excerpt from a Muslim student who has trouble fitting in her American school. Her problem is that she can’t dance in music class, and other students do not understand why. As a class, we will brainstorm ideas for making that student feel more comfortable in music. Next, I will share with students one of the five pillars- Salat, or ritual prayer. A basic explanation and photographs/video clips of Muslims praying will be shown to students. We will discuss why we think it might be hard for Muslims to pray at the given times and how Muslims must feel when others stare at them. Again, we will brainstorm ways that Muslims might be made to feel more comfortable and accepted.

In a closing activity, students will be asked to think of a time when they felt uncomfortable in school. They will then generate ideas which would have solved their problem, made them feel more comfortable, and predict how they think others would have felt had they know the student felt discomfort. To guide students, I will share with students a personal experience that I once had. My experience was when I felt uncomfortable at the school lunch table talking about Communion when I did not attend church. I will also model possible solutions that would have solved my problem such as speaking up and asking questions, visiting church with a friend, and

reading books to learn more about the topic. I will also share with students, that despite my ignorance on the topic, my friendship was not changed with my lunch peers simply because I did not attend church.

In a follow-up case study, students will look at the Lesson Three list again. With assistance from students of Mexico and Central America, we will identify traditions and celebrations with a Mexican/Spanish influence. If none are listed, students will be asked to think of any which they have heard of or learned about. The class will revisit the celebrations of New Years (American and Chinese). This time a connection will be made between those holidays and the Three Kings holiday. A read aloud will be read to the class. The class will be split into five groups to record information during the read aloud. The groups will record the following information-similarities to the American New Year, differences from the American New Year, similarities to the Chinese New Year, differences from the Chinese New Year, and new information about Three Kings. Following a discussion of their findings, students will complete a similar activity in their groups using articles and books about Cinco de Mayo. Again they will distinguish distinctions from holidays previously mentioned and find commonalities amongst all the holidays covered in earlier lessons.

Lesson Six

In Lesson Six, students will listen to the story *Three Cheers for Tacky* by Helen Lester. The fictional tale features Tacky the Penguin who stands out from the other penguins because of his unique sense of style, behavior, and hilarities. Students will be asked to revisit the Enduring Understanding and on a poster with the Enduring Understanding written, take turns writing why they think the story was selected to wrap-up the unit. They will be responsible for making the connection between the story and the previous five lessons.

Lesson Seven

At the completion of the unit, students will be asked to complete a project to demonstrate their knowledge and mastery of the Delaware State History Standards. Students will be able to select the modality for which they display their mastery. Suggestions will be made, but students can also create their own projects with teacher approval.

Project ideas include writing and performing a play with friends that depicts various traditions and customs of a chose group, creating a poster to display illustrations and facts of a group's customs, writing and illustrating a children's book to explain a celebration to younger students, writing an informative paragraph about a custom or tradition including a cover page and illustrations, or creating a new

tradition for the school or a family and explaining how the group will celebrate. Other ideas will be considered.

Bibliography

Aslan, Reza. *No god but God*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005. This book is great for teachers wanting a deeper look into the traditions and culture of Islam.

CNN. "Muslim World Populations" Accessed on January 5, 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2011/01/world/map.muslim.growth/index.html>. The research provided by the Pew Research Center regarding the number of Muslims currently and future projections is astounding and a great hook for lessons on Muslims.

Cox, Judy. *Cinco de Mouse-o*. Malaysia: Holiday House, 2010. This children's book provides a candid look at the Cinco de Mayo holiday.

Geisel, Theodor Seuss. *The Sneetches and Other Stories*. New York: Random House, 1961. This easy-to-read rhyming tale features two distinct groups of characters who learn that being different is okay, and that we are all similar on the inside.

Gilani- Williams, Fawzia. *An Eid Story- The Lost Ring*. United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, 2007. This story of a family's lost jewelry is set against the backdrop of the Eid celebration.

Green, Alice. *Celebrating Id-UI-Adha*. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2009. A non-fiction text, this book provides photographs of the Islamic celebration along with captions and fast facts.

Gordon, Matthew S. *Islam*. New York: The Oxford Press, 2002. The book provides the teacher with information about the basics of the Islam religion and the practices past and present of Muslims.

Katz, Karen. *My First Ramadan*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007. This realistic fiction story allows students to follow a young boy through the holy month of Ramadan and his family's customs.

Lester, Helen. *Three Cheers for Tacky*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994. The comical book preaches understanding and accepting differences with the use of penguins as characters.

Robinson, Neal. *Islam, A Concise Introduction*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007. The book is a nonfiction text which introduces the reader to the history of Islam, its spread throughout the years, and descriptions of practiced traditions and expectations.

Saudi Aramco World. "A Virtual Walking Tour..." Accessed on November 14, 2011. <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200901/a.virtual.walking.tour.al-haram.al-sharif.htm>. This website has many free resources, including virtual tours of the Dome of the Rock and other mosques.

Steele, Philip. *The Middle East*. New York: Kingfisher, 2006. This nonfiction book is appropriate for young adult readers who are seeking information about the region- The Middle East. Maps, photographs, and descriptions make the book easy to navigate.

Soundvision. "My Beliefs in the Public School." Accessed on November 14, 2011. <http://soundvision.com/Info/education/pubschool/edu.mybeliefs.asp>. This blog was written by a young Muslim girl. Other blog submissions are written by Muslims who wish to share their accounts of the trials and tribulations of practicing Islam here in America and abroad.

Appendix A

Civics Standard Two: Students will understand the principles and ideals underlying the American political system.

K-3a: Students will understand that respect for others, their opinions, and their property is a foundation of civil society in the United States.

Civics Standard Three: Students will understand the responsibilities, rights, and privileges of United States citizens.

K-3a: Students will understand that American citizens have distinct responsibilities (such as voting), rights (such as free speech and freedom of religion), and privileges (such as driving).

History Standard Four: Students will develop historical knowledge of major events and phenomena in world, United States, and Delaware history.

K-3a: Students will develop an understanding of the similarities between families now and in the past, including: Daily life today and in other times, Cultural origins of customs and beliefs around the world

¹ “World Muslim Populations,” CNN, accessed on January 5, 2012,
<http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2011/01/world/map.muslim.growth/index.html>

² Koran, 68:1-5.

³ Koran

⁴ Reza Aslan, *No god but God* (New York: Random House, 2005), 144.

⁵ Koran, 2:183.

⁶ Aslan, *No god but God*, 148.

⁷ Geisel, *The Sneetches and Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1961).

Curriculum Unit Title

Celebrating Culture and Tradition

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KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.

Learning about traditions and customs within the community and around the world allows for appreciation of people and their cultures.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT

How can learning about traditions and culture help to foster appreciation and understanding for others' cultures?

CONCEPT A

Our Culture

CONCEPT B

Islamic Thought and Culture

CONCEPT C

Celebrations Around the World

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A

What roles do customs and traditions play in our daily lives?
What traditions make our families and community unique?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B

How role does tradition play in the Islamic culture?
What celebrations make the Islamic culture unique?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C

What commonalities exist in celebrations around the world?
What makes celebrations unique?

VOCABULARY A

Tradition, Custom

VOCABULARY A

Islam, Muslims, Salat, Mecca, Hajj, Ramadan, Id al-Fitr, Id ul-Adha

VOCABULARY A

Lent, Yom Kippur, Cinco de Mayo, Hannukah, Kwanzaa

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES

Children's Picture Books
Discovery Education
Access to the Internet

Cultural traditions and customs are ingrained in a person. They are practices and beliefs that are learned since birth. Thus, people from another country should not think that what they consider sensible and polite behavior, facial expressions, hand gestures and cultural practices in their country are perceived similarly in another. The cultural traditions of the Netherlands and China are vastly different. But in one thing, they are very similar and that is in the receiving gifts that are pointed and sharp, such as scissors and kitchen knives. Do not forget this – giving pointed and sharp objects to your friends or colleagues in the Netherlands (and in China) is a big no-no. For the Dutch, sharp objects are considered unlucky gifts, while for the Chinese, it means you want to break or cut ties with them. Traditional celebrations are some of the core aspects of any culture. Whether it is a wedding, a harvest festival, a religious holiday, or a national observance, our celebrations are woven tightly into our overall cultural identity. When we move overseas, part of the excitement of living in a new culture is exploring and joining in the celebration of the local holidays and traditions of our adopted country. Some of these experiences will provide memories that will last a lifetime. Celebrating your traditions helps keep you grounded in your own culture while adapting to a new one. This is especially important when going through some of the phases of culture shock that affect many of us in the first months after moving overseas. Christian traditions were combined with pagan ones and therefore strongly connected to the seasons and agricultural cycle. Church holidays were mixed with those introduced during the communist regime. And we do not mind: every holiday deserves celebration. Russian Christmas is rich with beautiful traditions. One of them is called Kolyadki. At Christmas night young people put on fancy dresses, gather in a noisy crowd and go in every house on their way, singing carols and merry songs. Hosts of the houses thank singers with all the kinds of sweet stuff like candies, chocolates and pastry. Among other Christmas traditions are wishes of wealth and happiness for everybody and snowball games.