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## Unique and United

### Holiday Displays: Sharing Traditions and Building Community

#### Why Unique and United?

Students Rebuild: Unique and United helps students explore what makes them special while celebrating how everyone is different in wonderful ways. Through art and sharing around cultural and holiday traditions, students will learn that being unique is something to be proud of and that differences make communities stronger and more interesting. This lesson was created by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding for the Students Rebuild Unique & United project.

#### About the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding

Tanenbaum promotes justice and builds respect for religious difference by transforming individuals and institutions to reduce prejudice, hatred, and violence.

As a secular and non-sectarian non-profit, Tanenbaum works to promote religious peacebuilders who help counter extremism and violence in armed conflicts, and to reduce religious bullying of students, harassment in workplaces, and disparate health treatment for people based on their beliefs.

Tanenbaum's Education program works to teach students skills of respectful curiosity and positive communication, setting them up for lifelong success. We develop curricular and professional development resources and work with educational institutions to build environments where students of all religious and non-religious backgrounds feel safe, heard, and respected.

#### Activity Overview

This project-based learning opportunity is designed to be an extracurricular or extra credit project, which students will opt into through a supervised application and planning process. This project can be offered as an extension for a single class, student group, grade team, or expanded into a school-wide initiative.

Students working in groups will submit proposals to decorate a public space within the school (a designated bulletin board, wall, or door) to represent and teach the community about a meaningful holiday tradition OR the theme of holidays and inclusion.

# Project-Based Learning Guide | Grades 6–12

## Grade Level: 6-12

This project is most appropriate for middle and high school students, but could be adapted for an elementary school classroom with more support and hands-on supervision.

### Teachers will play a key supervisory role to ensure that:

1. The public art representations of holidays are well-researched and respectful.
2. A wide range of holidays or interpretations of the theme are represented in the approved projects.
3. Administrative approval and support have been secured before launching the initiative.<sup>1</sup>

## Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Investigate diverse holiday traditions through research and artistic expression.
- Collaborate with peers to plan and create a public creative expression.
- Identify similarities and differences among different holiday traditions.
- Practice empathy, inclusion, and understanding through public creative expression.

## Required Materials

In this lesson, any medium or material can be used for decoration, giving teachers and students full creative freedom. However, teachers should provide explicit guidance on protecting surfaces, such as using painter's tape, avoiding permanent adhesives, and ensuring decorations won't damage walls, floors, or doors.

## Duration

Independent, project-based learning, approximately 3 weeks.

This multi-week project-based learning exercise includes a proposal stage and implementation timeline that will vary from school to school.

Include at least one 50-minute class session for final project execution.

*For a complete list of standards and competency alignment, see the final page of this guide.*

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### Part 1: Discover and Connect by Activating Prior Knowledge

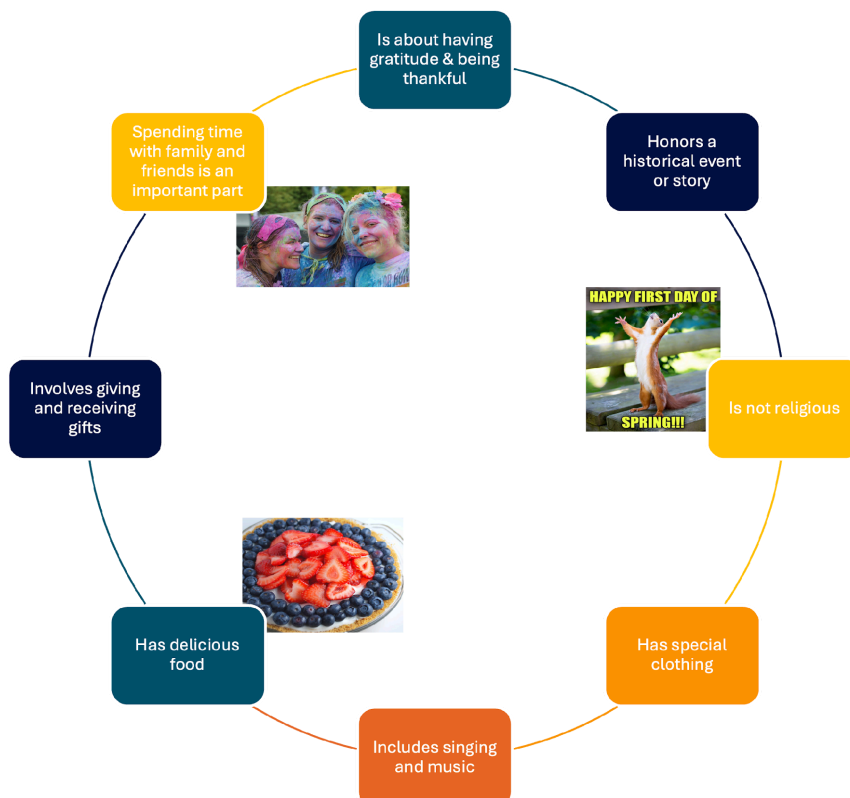
#### General Discussion

- Do you have a favorite holiday?
- What holidays do you celebrate?
- How many different kinds of holidays can you name? (national, public/bank, religious, days of personal/family significance [birthdays, weddings], cultural [Valentine's Day]). What are some similarities and differences that you notice between these types of holidays?

#### Step into the Circle

Begin by reminding students that celebrations vary across countries, communities, and families, and that even shared holidays can be observed in different ways.

- Gather students in a circle with room to move. Explain that you will read a series of categories, and students should step into the circle -- and then step back out -- when a category applies to them.
- After each category, invite (but do not require) students who stepped into the circle to share the holiday or practice they were thinking of. If several students mention the same holiday, ask them to try to identify some similarities and differences in how they celebrate.
- You may also invite students who remained outside the circle to share holidays they know about, but do not personally celebrate, that fit the category.



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### Think/Pair/Share with Active Listening

Divide students into pairs. Explain that during this activity, they will:

1. Describe a personally meaningful holiday to their partner.
2. Listen as their partner describes a holiday that holds meaning for them.
3. Report back to the class with the information they learned about the holiday celebrated by their partner.

Before starting, remind students to listen carefully, and, if age-appropriate, encourage note-taking. Begin by asking:

- "What is a holiday or celebration that is important to you?"
- "How does your holiday look, feel, sound, taste, and smell?"

Teachers should keep track of time and cue students when it is time to switch speaking and listening roles. When it is time to come back to the large group discussion, ask:

- "What did you learn about your partner's holiday?"

### Setting Expectations for Respectful Dialogue in the Classroom

Full-class discussion:

- Explain that many holidays and the things we do to celebrate reflect important parts of who we are. They can reveal our deeply held beliefs, the practices that shape our lives, and the communities to which we belong. Ask: How can we discuss our differences with respectful curiosity?
- Encourage students to share "I" statements that describe respectful dialogue. Write responses on the board or smartboard.
- Note: The goal of this exercise is for students to set their own standards for respectful and curious communication. If students are having trouble coming up with answers, you can suggest some of the following:
  - "Just because I celebrate a holiday one way, doesn't mean that that is right for other people."
  - "Recognize that people celebrate different holidays for different reasons, or have different motivations for celebrating the same holidays."
  - "Everyone's traditions matter."
  - "Always ask questions respectfully, don't make assumptions."
  - Use I statements -- "I am representing my experiences and community."
- After the lesson, write the standards out on a piece of chart paper and post them on a wall in the classroom where everyone can see them.

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### Part 2: Creating Research-Driven Holiday Displays

#### Introduce the Project

- Introduce the project to the eligible student community. Clarify that participation is optional, and that projects will be collaborative and research-driven.
- Discuss examples of public art that celebrate culture and identity -- murals, installations, and school displays. (Possible examples include [The Great Wall of Los Angeles](#) or Eduardo Kobra's [Etnias mural](#) in Rio de Janeiro; if there are examples of public art in your community, include them as well.)
- Model how artists use symbolism, color, and imagery to communicate cultural meaning.

#### Guided Discussion

- What holidays or traditions are meaningful to you or your community?
- What do you notice about how artists represent who they are and the communities they come from?
- How can we use art to help others understand holidays respectfully and accurately?
- What responsibilities do you think artists have when representing a culture they are not part of?

#### Imagine and Plan

##### Early Brainstorming

Ask groups to discuss the project and agree on their project topic:

- What holidays are important to you and your group members?
- Do you want to work on a single holiday, or a display on the theme of holidays and inclusion?
- Is there a holiday you want to learn more about?

Use the following prompts to continue:

- What foods, colors, objects, customs, or activities are associated with your holiday?
- Is this holiday connected to your identity? What about your family or the communities you are a part of?
- What emotions do you associate with it?
- If your project is about holidays and inclusion rather than a single holiday, what do you want to include?

Identify the available materials and where to find them.

##### Communicate Project Requirements

- Share the project application form (Worksheet 1), the application deadline, and the requirements of the project. Answer any questions about the scope of work and the available materials.
- Set clear milestones, including:
- Deadline for complete application forms with design sketches.

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- Timeline for teacher feedback and revisions.
- Final submission deadline.
- Timeline for construction/decoration.

### Develop, Refine, and Submit Final Proposals

- Provide consistent feedback emphasizing clarity, cultural respect, and feasibility.
- Select proposals that are well thought out, inclusive, and achievable for actual construction. Ideally, all students who want to participate will be able to revise their projects until they can be approved, but it is important to make sure the supervising teacher enforces standards based on the following selection criteria:
  - Students should have a feasible plan for construction and execution that uses available materials safely and appropriately.
  - Students should have done sufficient research on unfamiliar traditions or have a robust, age-appropriate research plan.
  - Representations of holidays, cultures, traditions, and practices must be respectful.
  - Students should have a clear sense of artistic purpose. They have thought about what they want to communicate and how they can use color, texture, and materials to express themselves.
  - The final range of projects should include a diverse range of traditions and holiday types.

## Create and Express

### Research and Final Planning

- Students should complete any research on their chosen holiday (as outlined in their proposal).
- Students should work collaboratively -- engaging in constructive dialogue and consensus building -- to agree on the final details of their installation in the designated school space.
- Students should submit drafts of short artists' statements that explain the holiday's significance to them and the choices they made. These statements will be displayed alongside their work. These should include:
  - Important facts about the holiday they are representing and their sources (including citations, if age appropriate).
  - The importance of the holiday to communities that celebrate and/or the students who created the piece.
  - Commentary on creative choices. Why did they use particular materials, colors, symbols, or shapes to represent their concept? What feelings did they hope to convey?
  - Reflections on expressing cultural diversity through public art. What were the challenges of this project? What was rewarding? Did your creative process change the way you think about the role of public art in promoting or representing diversity?

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### Share and Impact

Approved projects are built and displayed, accompanied by artists' statements, to engage the school community.

Community Engagement Options:

- Coordinate a "Holiday Art Walk" or exhibit to share completed works.
- Encourage asynchronous reflection from viewers through posted comment boards and/or emoji/sticker reaction boards. (Asynchronous responses will need to be monitored and moderated by teachers and/or administration)
- Lead a follow-up group discussion:
  - Did you learn about a new holiday or something new about a holiday you celebrate? What was it? Who celebrates it?
  - What surprised you most about the different holiday celebrations you learned about today?
  - Did viewing the displays around the school reveal anything new about the diversity of cultural traditions represented in our community?
  - How can public art strengthen empathy and inclusion?
  - How does it feel to see student voices and work shaping our shared space?

### Reflect and Connect

Students should also have an opportunity to reflect on their artistic process and the experience of displaying their creative expressions to a wider community. This can take the form of a formal reflection paper, a creative journal, or a final group discussion. Students should consider these questions:

- What did you learn about your holiday and its cultural significance?
- How did your group ensure your representation was accurate and respectful?
- How did this project change your understanding of the role of creative expression in community building?
- What challenges did you run into, and what would you do differently next time?
- How did it feel to receive feedback from the community? What impact do you think this project had or could have on our school?

### Share on Students Rebuild to Spark Donations!

Take a photo of what your students created and share it at [Studentsrebuild.org](https://Studentsrebuild.org). Creative Visions will donate \$5, up to \$1 million for each submission or student engaged. The project is open from September 15, 2025 - June 1, 2026.

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### Differentiated Instruction

#### Universal Accommodations

- Use a step-by-step visual guide of the project stages (brainstorm > proposal > plan > construct > share).
- Students should be allowed to base their creative expression on any meaningful holiday, whether it is religious, non-religious, invented (such as Star Wars Day or single-family traditions), or blended.
- Use a timeline checklist and planning sheet to guide time management and include frequent reminders about upcoming deadlines.
- Check in with groups about their internal dynamics and intervene if they need support.

#### For Conceptual Thinkers

- Provide case studies of other conceptual visual art pieces focused on identity and culture.
- Invite students to choose a lens: literal (represent your holiday with traditional imagery), personal (focus on your emotional experiences or memories), or social (explore how your holiday is represented or how other people celebrate it).

#### For English Language Learners or Struggling Writers

- Allow artist statements in multiple formats, including bilingual written statements, video recordings, or audio recordings.
- Use sentence starters to assist with writing artist statements.
- Offer a visual dictionary of visual art and holiday-related terms (e.g., ritual, tradition, palette, collage, symbolism),
- Attempt to balance working groups or pair students with peer editors who can help translate ideas or check grammar in artist statements.

#### For Students with Dexterity or Sensory Issues

- Include extra time for the construction phase of the project.
- Provide some pre-made symbols or materials (e.g. from craft or party supply stores) to reduce fine motor fatigue.
- Allow students to recruit other students or paraprofessionals to assist with construction.

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### Community Decorating Team Proposal

1. What holiday does your group want to share with our school community?
2. Why is this holiday significant for members of your group? How is this holiday connected to your identity, beliefs, family or community traditions, and/or history?
3. What do you want our education community to learn or understand about this holiday?
4. What colors, objects, rituals, customs, foods, sounds, and feelings do you associate with this holiday?
5. How do you want to represent that visually? What materials do you want to use?
6. What information do you think is most important to include on your explanatory placard? What research do you still need to do on this holiday and its history? What sources will you use to find reliable information?

*Please include a sketch of your proposed finished product!*

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## Standards and Competencies

### National Core Arts Standards Alignment

#### 1. Create – Using Art for Self-Expression

- NCAS Anchor Standard VA:Cr1.1 – Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- NCAS Anchor Standard VA:Cr2.1 – Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

#### 2. Present – Sharing and Interpreting Holiday Art

- NCAS Anchor Standard VA:Pr4.1 – Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- NCAS Anchor Standard VA:Pr6.1 – Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

#### 3. Respond – Exploring and Understanding Peer Traditions

- NCAS Anchor Standard VA:Re7.1 – Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- NCAS Anchor Standard VA:Re8.1 – Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

#### 4. Connect – Respecting Diversity and Building Community

- NCAS Anchor Standard VA:Cn10.1 – Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- NCAS Anchor Standard VA:Cn11.1 – Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

### CASEL Core Competencies in Social-Emotional Learning

- Self-Awareness: Expressing one's identity through art.
- Social Awareness: Appreciating others' traditions and perspectives.
- Relationship Skills: Engaging respectfully in dialogue and feedback.

<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this lesson was developed by Cheryl Rizzo in collaboration with the Tanenbaum Foundation. Cheryl is a gifted educator, a member of Tanenbaum's Education Advisory Board, and a Creative Visions Ambassador.