



## Kindergarten Holidays and Traditions Inquiry

# What Makes Holidays Special?



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### Supporting Questions

1. What are holidays and traditions?
2. How are holidays celebrated with traditions?
3. What symbols make us think of certain holidays?



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### What Makes Holidays Special?

<b>New York State Social Studies Framework Key Ideas &amp; Practices</b>	<p><b>K.2:</b> Children, families, and communities exhibit similarities and differences.</p> <p><b>K.3:</b> Symbols and traditions help develop a shared culture and identity within the United States.</p> <p><b>K.8:</b> The past, present and future describe points in time and help us examine and understand events.</p> <p>✓ <b>Gathering, Using, and Interpreting Evidence</b> ✓ <b>Chronological Reasoning and Causation</b></p> <p>✓ <b>Comparison and Contextualization</b> ✓ <b>Civic Participation</b></p>
<b>Staging the Compelling Question</b>	<p>Identify and describe favorite family celebrations.</p>

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
Understand	Understand	Understand
<p>What are holidays and traditions?</p>	<p>How are holidays celebrated with traditions?</p>	<p>What symbols make us think of certain holidays?</p>
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
<p>Brainstorm a list of holidays and traditions.</p>	<p>Construct a group T-chart that identifies various holidays and associated traditions.</p>	<p>Choose three holidays and draw symbolic representations for them on a calendar.</p>
Featured Source	Featured Sources	Featured Source
<p><b>Source A:</b> Image bank—Holidays and traditions</p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> Teacher and student-located books on holidays and traditions</p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> <i>US Symbols</i></p>

<b>Summative Performance Task</b>	<p><b>ARGUMENT</b> What makes holidays special? Construct an argument that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and evidence.</p>
	<p><b>EXTENSION</b> Interview family members and report back to classmates about why particular holidays or traditions are special.</p>
<b>Taking Informed Action</b>	<p><b>ASSESS</b> Decide on a tradition that students would like to begin as a class.</p> <p><b>ACT</b> Establish this new tradition with a representative symbol and invite other kindergarten classes to join in the celebration.</p>



## Overview

### Inquiry Description

This inquiry encourages kindergartners to expand their study of self and others by deepening their understanding of the role of traditions, holidays, and symbols in establishing cultural identity and unity. The compelling question “What makes holidays special?” reflects an enduring conversation about how and why people engage in ritual and tradition. It is respectful of kindergartners’ intellectual efforts as they are likely to be interested in knowing more about traditions and holidays and are likely to have a meaningful entry point into the discussion based upon personal experiences.

In unpacking the compelling question, teachers may wish to gather information about students’ current level of understanding of specific words and phrases related to chronology, including days, months, and years. Kindergarten students likely come to school knowing about certain holidays and understanding that not every day is considered a “holiday.” The goal of this inquiry is to introduce students to holidays and traditions that they may not celebrate personally, to help them make connections between holidays as a part of the calendar year (and the broader concept of chronology), and to expand their understanding of the significance of traditions, holidays, symbols, and cultural identity.

NOTE: Teachers should recognize that some cultural groups do not celebrate holidays and that the identity of these groups may be rooted in non-holiday-related customs, beliefs, or traditions.

This inquiry embeds a portion of the Taking Informed Action sequence through the formative performance tasks. The *understand* element is developed through Supporting Questions 1, 2, and 3. The *assess* and *action* pieces can be done in addition to, or as a substitute for, the Summative Performance Task.

In addition to the Key Ideas listed above, this inquiry highlights the following Conceptual Understandings:

- (K.2b) Unique family activities and traditions are important parts of an individual’s culture and sense of self.
- (K.3b) The study of American symbols, holidays, and celebrations helps to develop a shared sense of history, community, and culture.
- (K.8a) Specific words and phrases related to chronology and time should be used when recounting events and experiences.

NOTE: This inquiry is expected to take four to six 30-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame might expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiries to meet the requirements and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.



## Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question “What makes holidays special?” students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument with evidence from a variety of sources.

### Staging the Compelling Question

To launch this inquiry, teachers could ask students to identify and describe their favorite family celebrations. A wide range of responses can be expected—for example, holiday dinners, traditional celebrations, and birthdays. As a staging activity, all responses should be embraced and recorded; determining the difference between holidays and traditions can occur later.

### Supporting Question 1

Supporting Question 1—“What are holidays and traditions?”—launches the discussion by engaging students in the familiar concepts of holidays and traditions. Students likely have had some experience engaging in a family tradition or celebrating a holiday, and may have some ideas about traditions and holidays celebrated by other families or by people from other cultures. The formative performance task asks the students to engage in a class brainstorming activity to identify the holidays and traditions with which they are familiar. The featured source is an image bank of three different holiday and traditions symbols—fireworks (July 4<sup>th</sup>), turkey (Thanksgiving), and a dreidel and menorah (Hanukkah) that can be used along with any classroom resources to help students to begin identifying a range of holidays and traditions and understand how they are celebrated and passed down through generations.

### Supporting Question 2

Supporting Question 2—“How are holidays celebrated with traditions?”—extends students’ thinking by emphasizing the connection between traditions and holidays and allowing students to explore some holidays with which they may be unfamiliar. After exploring the featured sources, the formative performance task challenges children to summarize their learning by compiling information on a group-constructed T-chart with a list of holidays on one side and traditions associated with those holidays on the other (e.g., Holiday—Easter; tradition—candy eggs; holiday—Memorial Day; tradition—parades for veterans). The featured source involves a trip to the classroom, school, or local library to locate age-appropriate books on holidays and traditions.



## Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question—“What symbols make us think of certain holidays?”—asks students to make connections between holidays they know and the symbols by which they are represented. The featured source describes the nature and importance of symbols through a video that defines and gives examples of symbols relevant to the United States. Drawing on the video, the formative performance task asks students to use the chart constructed in response to Formative Performance Task 2 to select three holidays and draw symbols to represent each one on the appropriate day on a blank calendar.

## Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry students have learned about several holidays, traditions, and the symbols that can be used to represent them. The compelling question challenges students to consider all of this information and then describe what makes holidays special. Students can engage in a brief one-on-one interview with the teacher in which they present an oral argument to the compelling question, using their symbol illustrations to help demonstrate their understandings.

Student arguments likely will vary, but could include any of the following:

- Holidays are special because people celebrate them by doing something different than what they do on a regular day.
- Holidays are special because we can show that they are different from regular days by putting special symbols on our calendar to remind us of traditions that are part of those days.
- Holidays are special because people get together with family and friends to celebrate.
- Holidays are special because people have certain traditions that only happen on those days.

An extension to this inquiry could involve students sharing with classmates reasons why particular holidays or traditions are special to them. Students could interview family members to find out why they think a holiday is special and report back to their classmates at circle time.

This inquiry embeds the *understand* element of Taking Informed Action in Supporting Questions 1, 2, and 3 as students build their conceptual understandings of the relationship between holidays and traditions and the role of traditions in uniting families and cultural groups. Students then *assess* their understandings as they develop a new weekly or monthly class tradition. In order to take *action*, students create a symbol to represent their new class tradition, display the symbol on the calendar along with the days, weeks, and months, and invite other kindergarten classes to join them in celebration.





## Supporting Question 1

### Featured Source

**Source A:** Image bank: Symbols of holidays and traditions

*NOTE: Although the three images below are associated with the respective holidays (Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Hanukkah), students may have many associations with them. For example, students may connect fireworks with any number of civic celebrations. The key is to encourage students to think about the nature of holidays and the various traditions that can be related to them.*



Image 1: Fireworks

© iStock / © PorFang.



Image 2: Turkey dinner

© iStock / © monkeybusinessimages.





Image 3—Dreidel and menorah

© iStock / © [motimeiri](#).





## Supporting Question 2

### Featured Source

**Source A:** Teacher- and student-located books on holidays and traditions

Teachers and students visit classroom, school, or local libraries to locate age-appropriate books that describe a range of holidays and traditions.

Possible titles:

Carole Marsh, *Christmas Traditions around the World*, Holiday Readers, 2003.

Lucille Penner, *Celebration: The Story of American holidays*, Simon and Schuster, 1993.

Doreen Rappport, *Martin's Big Words*, Hyperion, 2007.

Rebecca Risman, *Independence Day*, Heinemann, 2010.



## Supporting Question 3

### Featured Source

**Source A:** BrainPopJr, website video describing United States symbols and holidays, *US Symbols*, 2015

*NOTE: The screen shot below is the first image of the video on United States symbols expressed through holidays.*



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