

# Joys and Challenges of Holidays

## Gathering Evidence from the Text

Lesson Packet #7 – November 2015

*The Change Agent* <[changeagent.nelrc.org](http://changeagent.nelrc.org)>

**Description:** Use the graphic organizer we provide (p. 36) or create your own to help students analyze four essays about holidays. They will investigate the text to find what the author says are "fun aspects" of the holiday as well as "challenging aspects" of the holiday, and they will write a paragraph based on the essays. The four essays are: "Christmas Changed" (also available in [audio](#) on *The Change Agent* website) by Diana Solorzano, "Taking the Good with the Bad" by Gregory Parker, "Celebrating Eid" by Nuzhat Jahan, and "My Diwali" by Sue Byman. The holidays also represent diverse religious traditions -- Christmas (Christian), Eid (Muslim), and Diwali (Hindu) -- so these texts also lend themselves to social studies explorations, such as geography, world religions, immigration patterns, and more.

**Level:** These texts are levels 7-8 (grade level equivalent). CCR standards addressed are Level D (GLE 6-8.9)

**Purpose:** The aim of this activity is to provide students with engaging, relevant stories that help them practice the important CCR skill of using evidence from the text to be able to explain what the author is saying.

### CCR Standards Addressed:

**Reading Anchor 1:** Read closely to determine what the text says; make logical inferences; cite specific textual evidence.

**Level D:** Quote accurately. Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**Writing Anchor 1:** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

**Level D:** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. Use words and phrases to create cohesion and clarify relationships among claims, reasons, and evidence – eg., furthermore, consequently, specifically, in addition. Provide a concluding statement that follows from and supports the argument presented.

**Writing Anchor 2:** Write informative /explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**Level D:** Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; develop the topic with relevant facts, details, and quotations. Use appropriate transitions.

**Materials:** PDFs of four articles from *The Change Agent* plus the graphic organizer we provide or your own version.

### **Classroom Steps:**

1. Read the four articles.
2. Use *The Change Agent's* (or your own) graphic organizer to detail the joys and challenges that the writers identify in their stories.
3. Ask students to develop a topic sentence based on the information they have collected from the articles. The topic sentence should not be too specific or too general. Students should be able to back it up with evidence from these texts. They should use a minimum of two texts. Some examples of possible thesis statements: "Holidays often include both joys and challenges." "For immigrants, holidays can have special challenges." "Holidays can be great ways for families to connect, but they can also cause tensions because they are expensive."
4. Students should develop an outline that includes details from the text to back up their topic sentence. Then they should develop a paragraph based on the outline. They should make revisions based on feedback.
5. **Possible extensions:**
  - a. Research the holidays and the religions they come from.
  - b. Do the other activities listed on the pages to extend knowledge – for example Eid is tied to the phases of the moon. Take this opportunity to study the phases of the moon
  - c. Build in geography by looking up the "birthplaces" of the religions talked about, the current concentrations of those religions, immigration patterns that helped those religions travel around the world, etc.

**Find more *Change Agent* lesson packets at <[changeagent.nelrc.org](http://changeagent.nelrc.org)>, as well as PDFs of magazines on a wide variety of themes, articles in audio, CCR-aligned activities, and more. All of that is available for the price of an online subscription: \$20 per teacher per year.**

# Christmas Changed

*Diana Solorzano*

My favorite holiday is Christmas. Christmas is very important to me because I get to spend more time with my kids and family. However, over the years the way we celebrate Christmas has changed and not for the better.

Years ago, Christmas was a big celebration where all the family members would get together and make lots of food. We cooked tamales, menu-

**The kids are so focused on electronics, they don't bond with family.**

do, and biscochitos. Family members would not drink alcohol at Christmas. We preferred natural waters like Horchata, Tamarindo, and warm Atole. Mothers made gift bags filled with candy, oranges, peanuts, and small

toys. Before midnight on the 24<sup>th</sup>, we all prayed and welcomed Jesus. Afterwards, everyone stayed together and had fun.

Now, Christmas is different. Kids don't expect a toy car or a doll or something simple to play with. They expect something expensive, like a phone, iPod, or computer. The kids are so focused on electronics, they don't bond with family. Instead, they just pay attention to their tablets, iPods, or smart phones. Christmas didn't used to

be about how much money you would waste; it was about having a healthy and fun celebration with family.

Not very many families have a special meal, and if they do, they would rather have someone else cook for them or buy something already made. Money is the main issue when celebrating Christmas. For some people, Christmas is a day to party, get drunk, act childish, and end up arguing with family. They eventually ruin the celebration.

In my family I would rather show my kids the true meaning of Christmas. I want to show how much fun Christmas can be by making ornaments for the tree, cooking, and wrapping meaningful presents for our loved ones. I would love for them to know how important it is to welcome Jesus on Christmas day.



*Diana Solorzano is a student at the Adult Learning Center at the University of New Mexico in Taos, NM. She was born in Chihuahua, Mexico but was raised in the United States. She grew up in a small family that included her parents and one brother and one sister. She now has a handsome five year old son and another one on the way. Diana lives with her fiancé who she is deeply in love with.*



*“Adoration of the Shepherds” Gerard van Honthorst. Public domain.*

## What about You?

**What is your favorite holiday?** How has it changed over time (as in Diana’s story above)? How has your family put its own “spin” on traditional U.S. holidays (as in Guadalupe’s story on p. 26)?

**Research Christmas.** Use several sources to explain the background on Christmas.

# Taking the Good with the Bad

## Christmas with My Family

Gregory Parker

Growing up in East Orange, New Jersey, my family had many memorable Christmas celebrations, both good and bad. We usually had a lot of fun and loved our Christmas rituals. However, since my mom and dad were both alcoholics, there often were disagreements. As the oldest sibling, I often had to be the peacemaker in the family and make sure that Christmas was not ruined. It was not easy.

Days before Christmas, my parents, sisters and brothers and I walked to a Christmas tree lot to choose the perfect tree for our house. We always had a lot of fun because everyone had an opinion. After finally selecting a tree and bringing it home, my Dad put the tree into a stand and put on strings of lights. Then, my brothers, sisters, and I went to work decorating the tree.

Our Mother had popcorn ready for us and we children put a needle with white thread through the popcorn and made long garlands. We then draped them all around the Christmas tree.

We sang Christmas songs as we decorated the tree. We also made our own ornaments.



We cut out figurines from cardboard, colored them with crayons, and hung them on the branches of the tree. We put on colorful candy canes. We all thought our tree was the most beautiful tree in our neighborhood.

Christmas morning was full of excitement. We children hardly slept all night knowing that “Santa Claus” was coming. What would he bring us? In the morning, we went into the room where the Christmas tree was decorated, and it was ablaze with light, or so it seemed to us. And there were many presents under the tree.

After we had opened all the presents, we played with our new toys. There was a feeling of joy and happiness in everybody. Later in the day, we watched a movie called, “A Christmas Story.” It was a story about a little boy who was picked on by his classmates until one day he stood up to the bullies. The story had a happy ending.

Unfortunately, our Christmas did not always have a happy ending. Aunts, uncles, and cousins came over, and this was fun at first, but people started drinking too much. They started having disagreements. As the oldest child in the family, I had a certain responsibility. I helped my Mom prepare the food, pick up the wrapping paper, and clean the house. And when the bickering turned

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**We all thought our tree was the most beautiful tree in our neighborhood.**

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**I often had to be the peacemaker in the family and make sure that Christmas was not ruined.**

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into fighting, I tried to calm people down.

For a time, Christmas in our house included the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. We children learned about Jesus by going to church. Unfortunately, since my mom and dad became alcoholics, we stopped going to church regularly and ultimately we even stopped going on Christmas Day. We lost some of our religious beliefs. Our lives were in turmoil because of drugs and alcohol.

Christmas taught me a lot about life. It taught me that you can't have the good without the bad, but no matter what, you will always have your

family. All these are wonderful memories that stay with me forever, deep in my heart.

*Gregory Parker was born in East Orange, NJ. He started school at the age of 6 and finished grade school at the age of 12. After that, he worked with his uncle in a cardboard factory. He never returned to school until he became a student at the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK) Adult Education Program, which offers free GED preparation.*



### Practice Reading Closely

**Holidays can be nuanced.** They are not always about pure fun. Sometimes there are challenges. Read closely the stories on the pages indicated below and fill out the chart.

Author	Fun aspect of holiday	Challenging aspect of holiday
 <p>p. 27</p>		
 <p>p. 34</p>		
 <p>p. 36</p>		
 <p>p. 38</p>		

# Celebrating Eid

## A Muslim Family in Connecticut Keeps Traditions Alive

*Nuzhat Jahan*

Life is very busy. We cannot frequently be together with our loved ones. Therefore we have organized celebrations so that we can relax and spend time with each other.

One holiday that my family celebrates is called Eid. Eid is a Muslim holiday that starts at the end of Ramadan, which is a 30-day period of fasting. We celebrate Eid for the first three days of this month.

**I feel very happy and good when my kids see this celebration.**

My country of Pakistan, my community, and my family celebrate the Eid festival. Eid is very important in my life. For Eid, we make new clothes, buy new shoes, and cook a lot of food, especially sweet dishes called sheer-korma. During Eid we exchange gifts with each other.

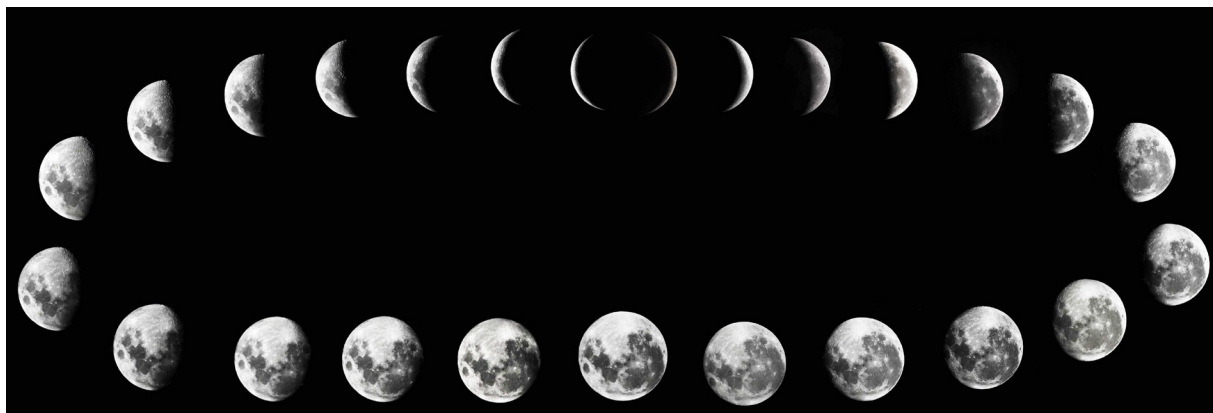
I want to pass all my traditional and religious celebrations to the next generation of my family. Because my kids were born here in the USA, they won't know how to celebrate or how to organize this holiday unless I show them.

Therefore, every year at home I celebrate Eid. My family members and friends come and see each other. I make a lot of food and I give gifts, especially bangles, henna, little amounts of money, and traditional clothing.

I feel very happy and good when my kids see this celebration. We must teach our children to give respect to all holidays, but at the same time we don't want them to give up their own heritage. Therefore, parents must commit to practicing their traditions and celebrating their holidays so that the next generation will learn.



*Nuzhat Jahan is a student of ESL, computers, and writing at East Shore Region Adult and Continuing Education in Branford, CT. She has lived in the U.S. for 16 years with her husband and two sons. She is from Pakistan where she attended the University of Karachi.*



*The new moon (not visible) is opposite the full moon (bottom center). Eid-al-Fitr begins when the crescent moon (to the right of the new moon) is visible in the sky. During this phase, the moon waxes. After it becomes full, it starts to wane.*

# My Diwali

## A Hindu Festival of Lights

Sue Byman

Diwali is one of the biggest and brightest Hindu holidays. It is also known as the festival of lights. It is celebrated in late October or November, and it is the beginning of the Hindu New Year. Many people in Guyana, where I grew up, celebrate Diwali.

For the festival of Diwali it is important to clean your house and yard, making your home presentable to guests and family. However, this is a ritual whose true purpose is to welcome the

Goddess Lakshmi, who brings spiritual and material prosperity.

Diwali is celebrated by lighting small lamps called diyas.

They are usually arranged in rows, for example, along the driveway and other entranceways to

the house. These patterns are supposed to show Lakshmi the way into your home. The lamps can be made of clay or mud.

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**I remember we would go to the river with my brothers and sisters to dig the mud. When we returned home, we would knead the mud into little bowls that looked like lamps.**

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Small lamps, called diyas, can be made of mud or clay.



People play with sparklers on Diwali, also known as the festival of lights.

Growing up in Guyana, we were poor and could not afford to buy the commercially made diyas. The ones I saw at the market, I remember as being so beautiful, and when we went there I would stay for hours admiring all the different types of diyas. The colors were bright orange, yellow, and red.

Many times I sat with my grandmother in the weeks before Diwali, and we would make our own diyas out of mud. I remember we would go to the river with my brothers and sisters to dig the mud. When we returned home, we would knead the mud into little bowls that looked like lamps. These were our homemade diyas. We put them in the sun to dry. After several days, they were ready to be lit up for Diwali. Even though the mud diyas were not all perfect like the clay ones, the mud ones were all different sizes and shapes. Inside the diyas we would put a wick and some ghee, a type of oil we made out of cows' milk. Then our homemade diyas could be lit up and set down for the celebration.

On the day of Diwali everyone cooks vegetarian. Many sweet foods are prepared and given as presents in goody bags. My mom would cook up

lots of great food even though we did not have a great deal of money to spare. My sisters and brothers made homemade sparklers out of steel wool. The family would also dress up in our best clothes to go and visit our grandmother. She was

**Diwali signifies the renewal of life.**

also a great cook, so this became a highlight of Diwali for me. On the way to my grandmother's, my family and I would stop and

admire all the decorations that we saw honoring the celebration of Diwali.

Diwali signifies the renewal of life. You might say that it is the equivalent of Christmas for Hindus. Although I am actually not Hindu, many of my relatives and some family members do practice the Hindu religion. I have many fond memories of this holiday from my childhood in Guyana.



Sue Byman was born in Guyana, South America, and now lives and works in the U.S. She started out as a home health aide and is presently a rehabilitation technician. Sue attends Mercy Learning Center in Bridgeport, CT, where she plans to enroll in the National External Diploma Program and continue her studies. She would like to thank everyone who has helped her so far.



**Extend Your Knowledge**

**Label the map.** Name the continent and as many of the countries as you can. Look up the names of the countries you can't identify.

**Use the internet** to learn more about the history of Guyana. What European country colonized it? What religion did they bring? What does it mean to "colonize" another country? What is the story of how Hindus came to live there?

**Four major world religions** are discussed in the four articles on pp. 34-39. Each article focuses on one holiday. What are the four religions? What do these holidays have in common?

**Write about a holiday** that matters to you. Compare and contrast your holiday with those of these writers. Use phrases like "similarly" and "in contrast."