

As Stankiewicz points out “We use the arts to make holidays and festivals special, but modern art educators have sometimes regarded holiday art as a stereotyped, frivolous incursion on the real work of learning” (p.67). Where do you stand on this issue? Should holidays and the seasons be celebrated through the art curriculum or not? Support your position.

Holidays and seasons provide a rhythm to the school year, and the calendar becomes intimately known by students, teachers, and all members of the world of education. I remember when I graduated college and was working fulltime, not as a teacher; it felt so strange that my life was not being dictated by days off of school and holidays. It would be time for summer vacation, but I still had to go to work...The school calendar was so ingrained in how I functioned, that I wanted back in. Being a teacher feels natural to me in part because my first job was being a student, and I got pretty used to that after seventeen years. The nature of education is that it is structured by the calendar, and the rhythm of the holidays and seasons is how most of us in education, give context do our daily life. I do not see anything wrong with acknowledging holidays, seasons, annual festivals and events within the art classroom. I do have a major issue with cookie cutter projects that have no meaning or content, or are not relevant or respectful to the diversity of the student body. Let's take hand-turkeys for example. They are bad; do not ever do them in your art classroom. Ever. With that said, I am glad I know how to make them, and I am not a cultural anomaly ;). I didn't learn how to make them in art class though, that's not what art class is for. Now, when I taught elementary school, I did a unit for Thanksgiving. Let's not be blind here, Thanksgiving happens every November, every student is aware of it, learns about it, and should understand and respect the holiday, whether they are an American born citizen or not. I would also like to add here that I am Native American and I prefer to say that I celebrate Neo-Thanksgiving ;). So, I happen to love the idea of being thankful and taking time to give thanks and reflect on the meaning of being/giving thanks. So, when it came time for Thanksgiving, we made “Fill Me Up With Thanks Bowls.” I had my students make papier-mâché bowls that we painted and made our own unique style. We then took restaurant placemats that I bought at a restaurant supply store and we wrote all sorts of words that we were thankful for and decorated our placemats. These were the items that we wanted to fill our bowls up with. It got the students thinking about the meaning of the holiday, which let's face it, is everywhere and also a major defining component of how we understand/ interpret the school calendar. No pilgrims, Indians, hand-turkeys, misguidance, culturally insensitive material, religion, consumerism, etc. It was holiday art though...the project would function perfectly fine during any other time of the year, but doing the project around the holiday actually created more meaning. So, holiday art and seasonal art does not have to be vilified here. It also should never be as it once was though back in the early 1900s; as a way to take a break from monotony, offer a fun activity, aid in beautification of the school, and in creating a sense of aesthetic taste for the future consumer. As Stankiewicz points out, “holiday art contributed to the marginalization of art as a school subject and to the displacement of art from work to entertainment” (p. 74). Please do not contribute to this method of production anymore, and educate your homeroom teachers to do crafts that are more meaningful, diverse, and (god-forbid) messy/ allow for individuality. Just say “No” to cookie-cutter-homogenous-hegemonous craft projects; they cause more harm than good. Let's be honest with ourselves, fellow teachers, the calendar, holidays, and seasons are a major part of school culture. They do not have to be excluded in your curriculum, nor do you have to include them in your curriculum, but you also cannot ignore them; that is delusional. Recognize the holidays that have meaning to your students, and if you don't understand the meaning, find out. It is possible to teach and relate a lot of holidays, festivals and seasonal activities/ symbolism in a meaningful way that can be effective, respectful, and appreciated by every student in the classroom, no matter what cultural or religious background the students may have. My students are mostly Buddhist. I still teach them about American Holidays though, and they teach me about their holidays too. We celebrate cultural diversity, we do not ignore it...