Activities
Winter Holidays
Teach tolerance with these fun, collaborative projects that bring families together.
By Jacqueline Clarke

Grades: PreK–K, 1–2, 3–5, 6–8

Overview:
Children and their families dream up ways to cook turkeys, make greeting cards, donate to a food drive, and make a quilt pattern of family traditions...

Family Art
Families will enjoy this cooperative art project that lets them imagine themselves as a family of turkeys or gingerbread people. Send each student home with one turkey or gingerbread person cutout for each member of the family. Using found materials, have family members decorate the cutouts to express their unique styles. Paste these together on a large sheet of paper and label with family members' names. Display all the projects to convey the idea that like students' art, each family is unique! — Rita Galloway, Bonham Elementary, Harlingen, TX
Talking Turkey
Serve up holiday humor with this collaborative "cookbook." Begin by sending each child home with a turkey cutout. Then have a family member use the cutout to record the directions for "how to cook a turkey" as dictated by the child. Compile all student recipes into one book, and make a copy for each family. You might also send children home with a cookie cutout, and ask them instead to dictate "how to bake a gingerbread man." —Rita Galloway, Bonham Elementary, Harlingen, TX; and Betsy Cochran, West Springfield Elementary School, Springfield, VA

Dinner Plate Graph
Create a bar graph to determine which Thanksgiving foods family members like best. Send students home with enough small white paper plates to equal the number of people in their families. Then ask family members to draw their favorite Thanksgiving foods on the plates that they've been given. When the plates are returned, sort them by food type, then create a bar graph on one wall with the actual plates. Gather children around the graph and ask questions such as, "Which food do most family members like best?" "Which food do they like the least?" "How many people like turkey? Pumpkin pie?" Continue with other foods. Let students share the results with their families by compiling the findings into a top-10 list that ranks the foods in order of popularity. —Judy Meagher, Bozeman Schools, Bozeman, MT

Handmade Greeting Cards
Exposure children to different holiday traditions by inviting families to each create a homemade card that illustrates their own holiday symbols, traditions, or memories. Invite each child to share his or her card with the class, explaining how the idea for the card originated, and how it was constructed. Then hang all the cards on a bulletin board or around your door frame under the heading "Season's Greetings." Later, let students vote for their favorite card and reward the winner with a gift certificate to a local print shop, where he or she can make extra copies to send out to friends and family. —Judy Wetzel, Woodburn School, Falls Church, VA
Wishes for the World
As an alternative to the holiday wish list, encourage students and their families to think of others’ needs as they make wishes for the world. Begin by sending each student home with several star-shaped cutouts, and have them ask family members to think of ways that they could make the world a better place. Students can record each of these "global wishes" on a star, then decorate with craft materials such as sequins, glitter, ribbon, or stickers. Invite students to share each of their families' wishes with the class by first reciting, "Star Light, Star Bright," then reading the wishes aloud. For a dazzling holiday display, punch a small hole through the top of each star and thread with bright colored ribbon, then dangle from the ceiling of your classroom. —Natalie Vaughan, Littleton, CO

Helping Hands
Sometimes the best gifts are those of service, where one person lends a helping hand to another. Encourage students and their families to help others during the holiday season with this thoughtful activity. First, show each child how to trace and cut out several hands from green construction paper. Then send the hands home along with a note asking family members to complete acts of service and record each good deed on a "helping hand." These might include running errands for an elderly person, donating to a food drive, or volunteering at a local community center or nursing home. As students bring in completed hands, arrange them into a fanciful holiday garland by stringing a clothesline across your classroom and attaching the hands with clothespins.

Family Tradition Quilt
A festive classroom wall hanging is a great way to highlight the holiday traditions of every class member. To begin, send each student home with a different-colored felt square. Have families work together to create a scene or symbol on their square that tells about a family holiday tradition. Encourage students to use cloth scraps, ribbons, buttons, glitter, and other materials to uniquely decorate their squares. Ask students also to write accompanying paragraphs about their designs to share with their classmates. After each student has presented his or her square to the class, stitch the squares together into a quilt, and hang in a prominent place in your classroom. —Michelle Serpenti; Natalie Vaughan, Littleton, CO; and Janet Worthington-Samo, St. Clement School, Johnstown, PA
Peace Wreath
Associated with many winter holidays are symbols such as trees, stars, and candles. Celebrate the diversity within your classroom community by inviting students to create a wreath of these symbols. To begin, ask each student to work together with his or her family to create a wreath ornament symbolizing a holiday they celebrate. They can use craft materials or supplies from around the home such as cardboard, aluminum foil, Popsicle sticks, or pipe cleaners. After each child has presented his or her ornament to the class, attach the symbols to an evergreen wreath using wire. Hang the wreath on your classroom door as a sign of respect and tolerance for individual differences.

A Gift for the Class
As an alternative to student gift exchanges, ask families to make or purchase gifts for the classroom. Send a letter home with ideas such as homemade play dough, board games, or take-home activity packs. Store-bought gifts might include books, art supplies, or playground equipment such as jump ropes and balls. Open all the gifts together, inviting each student to unwrap one present. Then, have students write thank-you notes on behalf of the class for the gift they unwrapped.

Invent a Holiday
After sharing and learning about what other families celebrate during the winter season, invite your class to research some different holidays celebrated around the world, and then create its own special day. Have students brainstorm their favorite symbols, dress, colors, foods, and traditions that they might want to include in their special day. Then ask students to decide what they would like to call their invented winter holiday, and what traditions they will observe. Set a date and hold a celebration, with the decorations, food, dress, and merrymaking all chosen by the class. —Denise Frasca, Grades 6–8, Katonah, NY

Subjects:
Arts and Crafts, Cooking, Winter, Holidays, Winter