

The Heritage Continues

Lesson #15: THE DAY OF THE THREE KINGS (January 6)

TIME

30 minutes

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED

A cake with small trinkets baked into it (a recipe for *Rosca de Reyes*, Three Kings' Bread, is included in the "Recipes" section of this manual), plates or napkins, and a serving utensil.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Bake a cake, or have one baked, with small trinkets mixed into the batter. For more information on culture and communities, read the historical background section of the lesson "What is Culture?"

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- 1) define community and celebration
- 2) demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between communities and celebrations
- 3) identify celebrations within the communities they belong to

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In many Mexican towns the church is in the center of the main plaza and thus serves as the center of the community. As in Mexico, churches in the Mexican sections of Kansas towns usually were built in the center of the neighborhood. The church served as a haven for the Mexican American people and a place where all needs were met. The church became a place where their religious and cultural heritage could be preserved. In a sense, many customs and traditions of Mexico emanate from the church.

On January 6 the Day of the Three Kings is celebrated. This biblical holiday comes exactly twelve days after the day celebrated as Jesus's birthday. According to the Bible, the three kings traveled twelve days to bring their gifts to the baby Jesus. The celebration of this holiday is part of the Spanish influence on Mexico.

On the night of January 5 children leave their shoes, or an empty shoe box, stuffed with straw outside their houses for the camels that the three kings ride. In the morning the straw is gone and in its place they find candy, fruit, and toys. This tradition reminds the children of the three kings' journey to find the baby Jesus.

Some families bake a festive Hispanic bread to eat on this day. This holiday bread is often shaped like a crown and has cherries, pineapple, or other fruit on it to represent jewels. It

reminds people of the crowns worn by the three kings. The baker adds a special surprise inside the bread such as a small china doll, a charm, a coin, or even a ring. It is said this special surprise will bring good luck to the person who finds it.

From Westridge Young Writers Workshop. *Kids Explore America's Hispanic Heritage*. Santa Fe: John Muir Publications, 1992.

VOCABULARY

- **Celebration** = Ceremonies and other activities that observe or honor a special day or event.
- **Community** = A group of people who share a common interest.
- **Epiphany** = A Christian celebration commemorating the Magi coming to see the infant Jesus.

ACTIVITY

- 1) Begin a discussion with the class about the concept of community. Ask the class what makes a community.

A community is a group of people who share a common interest such as students in a class or school, members of a church, girl scouts, an athletic team, or a family.

Have the class consider the importance of religion in the culture of Mexican Americans and the source of this religious heritage.

This holiday reflects the Spanish influence in Mexico. The church is a strong force in holding together the Mexican American community.

Explain to the class that everybody is part of many communities.

The Catholic Church is one community within the larger Mexican American community.

Explain also that the communities of one person overlap the communities of others. Have the class name communities that they are a part of. List these communities on the board.

Examples: everyone in the class is part of the community formed by the class, yet each student individually is part of other communities that do not necessarily include everyone in the class (individual families, church groups, sports teams, music organizations, etc.).

- 2) Within each community celebrations are held for various reasons. Ask the class to name celebrations for some of the communities they have listed. List these celebrations on the board.

Baptisms, weddings, holiday traditions, girl scout or boy scout recognition ceremonies, athletic awards and banquets, family birthday celebrations.

What makes these celebrations special instead of everyday events?

Special food, clothing, and music; the gathering of friends and family; traditional entertainment or activities; etc.

- 3) Using the list of celebrations compiled by the class, introduce The Day of the Three Kings' and the fact that this is a traditional celebration similar to some celebrations in the class's list. It is a religious holiday celebrated within the church and by the family.

Do any members of the class celebrate January 6 in a similar way? Some members of the class probably do not celebrate the Day of the Three Kings or Epiphany.

Have the class look again at their list of celebrations. They should see from the list that within the class itself are some events that not everyone celebrates.

Different religions may be represented; some students may celebrate athletic triumphs while others celebrate musical recitals; days such as Veterans' Day/Armistice Day may not be celebrated by their generation; and days such as community pioneer or heritage festivals may be part of only one locality.

- 4) Have the class experience part of the Mexican American celebration surrounding the Day of the Three Kings by eating Three Kings' bread or a similar type of cake with items baked into it. (A recipe can be found in the "Recipes" section of this manual.) Explain the significance of this cake to the Day of the Three Kings.

The bread or cake has a surprise(s) baked into it and these are tokens of good luck for those who find them. This surprise(s) is symbolic in the Christian religion of the gifts the three kings gave to Jesus. The decorations on the cake represent the jewels on the crowns of the kings.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

- 1) See the complementary lessons in this manual: "Fiesta," "Quinceañera," "Cinco de Mayo," "Independence Day," and "Navidad."
- 2) Use the book *Three Kings Day* by Beatriz Zapater (Modern Curriculum Press, 1992) to explore the celebration of the Day of the Three Kings by Puerto Rican's living in the United States.
- 3) Ask the students to choose cultures they would like to learn more about. Have them research their holiday traditions and share this information with the class in a project format.