Three December Holidays: A Work Sampling Project

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THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

Abstract

The following paper lays out the instructional and assessment plans of a unit entitled “Three December Holidays.” The unit focuses on holidays and how a study of their structure can reveal the perspectives and values of a culture. The assessment plan that accompanies this unit includes two summative assessments: an informational presentation and a compare and contrast essay. The students whose work was sampled for this paper are high-achieving sixth graders. The paper discusses these students’ progress through the unit and analyzes the results of their assessments. The paper concludes with a reflection on what was learned over the course of the unit as well as specific revisions that could be made to the unit and to the assessment plan.
Three December Holidays: A Work Sampling Project

Among personal narratives, poetry, and persuasive speeches, one Standard of Learning for sixth grade reading in Virginia is that students be able to compare and contrast multiple sources of information. Such was the basis out of which the unit “Three December Holidays” was developed. Using this skill as a catalyst toward other communication, research, and thinking skills, I developed the following assessment plan for use with my sixth grade English students at Salem Middle School in Virginia.

**Context of Study**

During the sixth grade school day at Salem, there are two periods that lend themselves to interdisciplinary or enriching work. The first period of the day is called Intervention and Enrichment (IE) and is used mainly for remediation in the various content areas. For these classes, our sixth grade team is divided into four groups, and these groups operate on a four week rotation through the core subject areas—math, English, science, and history. The last period of the day is called Seminar and is a reading-based class in which students further their understanding of the various content areas. Seminar class groupings are a little more flexible depending on how the core teachers direct the format of the course. During the context of this study, my IE class was composed of high-achieving students (most are in the seventh grade math class), and my Seminar class was a group of mixed-ability students.

In order to carry out the specialized unit needed for this study, I selected six students who were in both my IE class and Seminar class. Since my Seminar class was already divided into smaller groups engaging in largely self-directed units, it was convenient to single out six students to complete a separate unit. These high-achieving students—Brynn, Ian, Holly, Henry, Leila,
and Mark—are in my Honors English course, and three of them have the label “gifted.” Each comes from a middle class background in which a high emphasis is placed on education. Because this project would be more labor-intensive than the other Seminar units, I met with the group of students to explain the purpose and layout of this study and to ask them if they would like to participate. All six seemed excited to take part in such a study. The work for this unit will count as their Seminar grade and will accumulate for them some extra credit in English.

The students completed the coursework for this study in the school library or in my English classroom. In the library, they often used the computers for researching or for completing the assignments. For the formative assessments, they had the option of working collaboratively or solo—they nearly always chose to collaborate—but for the summative assessments, they needed to work on their own. I met with them every day to explain the next steps in the process, to field questions about their assignments, or to direct a particular activity. Though six students were chosen to begin the study, not all finished the assessments. Ian participated for a week and then went on vacation with his family and missed the summative assessments. Holly and Henry suffered computer errors and, due to the accelerated pace of the unit, could not finish the summative assessments. Though I have some work samples from all six, only Brynn, Leila, and Mark submitted summative assessments for the unit.

**Instructional Plan**

The unit used for this study was developed for a Middle Years Program (MYP) Language A course and is entitled “Three December Holidays” (see Appendix A for entire unit planner). The unit is organized under the key concept of perspectives, the related concept of structure, and the global context of personal and cultural expression. The statement of inquiry for this unit is as
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

follows: holidays and a study of their structure can reveal the perspectives and values of a culture. In following the MYP unit planner, the unit also follows factual, conceptual, and debatable lines of inquiry. Some factual questions involve the historical background and traditions of the three holidays as well as what it means to compare and contrast. Conceptual questions ask why different holidays have similar ways of celebrating and why three different cultures all have special holidays in December. Finally, a debatable question asks: does cultural perspective determine the value of a tradition or are all traditions valuable? This last question will be used to springboard into a discussion of diversity in keeping with the International Baccalaureate (IB) mission statement that “other people, with their differences, can also be right” (IBO, 2008, p. 3). The assessments and activities incorporated into this unit will be discussed at length under the subheading “Assessment Plan,” but the learning activities include library research; a Holiday Presentation on Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa; a Triple Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the three holidays; and a Compare and Contrast Essay presenting the information from the Venn diagram in written form.

Aside from the lines of inquiry, the unit fulfills specific MYP objectives (IBO, 2013a). With regard to content, students are to produce creative and written responses to the texts that they research in the library. Under the organization objectives, this unit focuses on creating work with a specific organizational structure and organizing one’s own ideas into a logical presentation. The unit also satisfies style and language mechanics objectives: students use written language to analyze information while incorporating proper grammar and sentence structure. This unit takes into account a number of approaches to learning (ATL) that are a specific focus of the MYP curriculum (IBO, 2013b). The collaborative nature of many of the
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

assignments help to develop communication skills, and the self-direction of much of the course fosters the development of organization skills. Information and media literacy skills are built through the library research required for the presentation, and transfer skills are needed to incorporate the information into the presentation and essay. The comparing and contrasting needed for the Triple Venn Diagram and the Compare and Contrast Essay require critical thinking and creative thinking skills.

Though the students selected for this work sampling form a homogenous group with reference to academic ability, this unit could be adapted to suit the academic needs of all learners. Dunn, Craig, Favre, Markus, Pedota, Sookdeo, Stock, and Terry (2010) divide learners into two main categories of thinkers—global learners and analytic learners. Global learners tend to see relationships between events and information and are drawn to analogies, choices, and overall concepts, whereas analytic learners tend to learn content in a step-by-step fashion and prefer facts to metaphoric examples. For students who tend to see the “big picture,” the triple Venn diagram will provide an overview of the similarities and differences among the three holidays. These students will also benefit from a brief overview of each holiday before jumping into the specifics of the holiday. For students who prefer a more step-by-step method of learning, the library research worksheet will help them to organize the information they are gleaning from the various sources of information.

Learning preferences account for great diversity within a classroom, and while students may prefer certain methods of teaching or styles of learning, it is important that they engage in multiple methods in order to develop the skills needed to succeed in higher education and their professional careers. One division of learners based on preference is interpersonal and
intrapersonal; interpersonal learners thrive a group setting, and intrapersonal learners work best on their own. Since a Language A class requires solo work and collaboration, it is important that both scenarios are offered in order to address the needs of all the students. Students have the opportunity to work collaboratively on the triple Venn diagram and in viewing and responding to their peers’ presentations. Students have the opportunity to work on their own through their individually conducted research and in their Compare and Contrast Essay.

Another category of learning style relates to a student’s preference for audio, visual, or kinesthetic learning (Milner & Milner, 2008). Audio learners prefer to receive information through hearing, visual learners prefer sight, and kinesthetic learners learn best when they can engage tactiley in whatever they are learning. Though much of the information provided for the students’ research will be conducive to visual learning, students who prefer auditory information may acquire this during individual research by reading aloud or finding audio sources. The flexibility of the presentation also allows students to present information in a way that is more visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. Students may also have learning preferences for either verbal or numeric information (Milner & Milner, 2008). As part of a Language A course, this unit caters more to verbal learners; however, numeric learners will benefit from the step-by-step sequence of gathering and presenting information.

Students also vary in their learning ability. This unit was developed with academically gifted learners in mind. Academically gifted learners often make insightful connections among various content areas and, in many cases, prefer to demonstrate their learning in creative ways (Tomlinson, 2005). The freedom given in conducting research and compiling the presentations allows students to pursue their learning at their accelerated pace, as well as in a creative fashion.
This unit could be adapted, however, for students with specific disabilities or learning needs. English Language Learners (ELL) sometime lack the vocabulary or writing skills needed to demonstrate their knowledge. In the provided sources for research, ELL students could be given sources that define difficult words and are not biased in their assumption of cultural norms. Peer editing of the essay could also help students who are just learning the intricacies of English spelling and grammar. For students with specific learning disabilities, such as dyslexia or processing problems, the worksheet for organizing research and prewriting for the essay may be scaffolded to assist students with their specialized needs. These students may also require more direction in their solo research.

**Assessment Plan**

The summative assessments for this unit are the Holiday Presentation and the Compare and Contrast Essay. For the Holiday Presentation, students are to conduct research on a December holiday (Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa) and create a visual presentation for the purpose of informing their classmates about the holiday. This assessment may take the form of a PowerPoint, a poster, or another method of presentation suggested by the student. In keeping with the concepts of perspectives and structure, students will examine the structure (history, traditions, etc.) of the holiday through their research, and they will view the information through multiple perspectives through their peers’ presentations. After having collaboratively discussed the similarities and differences among the three holidays, the students are to summarize this information in the Compare and Contrast Essay. This assessment presents a structured recording of the knowledge constructed during this unit. After having viewed information from multiple perspectives, students have the opportunity to present the information from their personal
This unit also includes formative assessments that prepare for the summative assessments and monitor student learning. The unit includes a pre- and post-test in the form of a Cloze reading passage, as well as a written reflection at the end of the unit expressing what has been learned through the course of the unit. Other formative assessments include a worksheet to record library research, student/teacher conferences to check progress of assignments, and a Triple Venn Diagram to record the commonalities and distinctions among the three holidays.

In the course of completing this unit, students spent the first IE class taking a pre-test on the three holidays that would be the main content of the unit (see Appendix B for Cloze Pre-Test). The pre-test consisted of a Cloze reading passage adapted from the online article “Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa” (2009). This passage was chosen for its reading level and its brief treatment of each holiday, but since the source itself had no reliable references, I fact-checked the article using the Encyclopedia Americana (Ickis, 2013; Kwanzaa, 2013; Miller, 2013). The students’ results on the pre-test showed strong background knowledge in one holiday—either Christmas or Hanukkah—but very little background knowledge in the other two holidays. None of the students exhibited much background knowledge in Kwanzaa.

The first activity to be completed as a part of the course was library research on the holidays. Students chose one holiday to research—two students were assigned to each holiday—and were provided with a worksheet on which to lay out their researched information (see Appendix C for Library Research Worksheet). In the library, students were directed toward specific encyclopedia articles accessed through the library database but were given the freedom to use other sources in the library or online. Some of them chose to partner up to complete their
research since two students were assigned to each holiday. The purpose of the research was to prepare for a presentation on their selected holiday. Students spent approximately seventy minutes conducting library research and filling out their worksheet. I met with them before each class period that was spent in research to show them the parts of their worksheets that could be more developed.

Once students had finished their library research, they were ready to complete the first summative assessment, the Holiday Presentation. The instructions for the assessment were to create a visual presentation on their holiday using the information recorded on the library research worksheet (see Appendix D for Holiday Presentation Handout). Students were given a choice as to how they wanted to present their information, but each of them chose to create a PowerPoint presentation. The purpose of the assignment was to share information about the history and traditions of the holiday—including the reasons the holiday is celebrated in the first place—to someone who has no background knowledge of the holiday. The scoring rubric for this assignment operated on a spectrum of one through three and focused on three key areas: organization of information, depth of information, and clarity of information. Because of student absences and computer malfunctions, only three of the six students submitted a completed presentation.

Once the presentations had been completed, students shared their information with each other through work on the Triple Venn Diagram. This formative assessment served two purposes. First, it provided a platform whereby students could share information that they had researched in order to supply background knowledge of each holiday. Second, it served as the prewriting for the Compare and Contrast essay. Students drew the diagram on a large sheet of
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

paper and worked together to express the similarities and differences that all three holidays share, as well as those shared by only two (see Appendix E for Triple Venn Diagram Student Work Sample). The students drew insightful connections among these holidays and did not need much direct intervention, but I supervised the activity and asked guiding questions when they needed assistance.

Finally, students were ready to complete the Compare and Contrast Essay. Provided with instructions and a scoring rubric (see Appendix F for Compare and Contrast Essay Handout), students wrote the essays and submitted them to me at the slightly revised rough draft level: this meant that the paper was largely a first draft, but the draft was checked for usage and mechanics. Because the sixth grade English curriculum had not yet covered comparing and contrasting, the students needed some organizational instruction before they began their writing. The essay was scored using a rubric similar to the Holiday Presentation rubric, focusing on organization of information, depth of information, and clarity of information. Due to student absences, only two students submitted a completed Compare and Contrast Essay.

At the end of the unit, students were given a second chance to complete the Cloze reading passage given at the start of the unit; the purpose of this post-test was to assess whether or not the students gained any new insights and information about the three holidays through the course of the unit. Students also completed a written reflection expressing what they learned through the unit, how they think this learning will help them in future learning, and whether or not they believe a study of multiple perspectives is important when conducting cultural research.

Analysis of Student Learning Results

When analyzing the results of this work sampling, it is important to discuss student
participation in the various formative assessments undertaken during the course of the unit. Overall, the students were enthusiastic about the study. They expressed a feeling of importance at having been selected to participate and eagerly completed activities to the best of their abilities. All students took the pre-test and post-test and completed the library research worksheet. Five of the students also collaborated on the Triple Venn Diagram. Though not all students completed the summative assessments for this unit, all began work on them and submitted the unfinished products.

In the end, only three students—Brynn, Leila, and Mark—submitted completed summative assessments. These three students performed highly on the Holiday Presentation, with the class average score at 2.7 out of 3 (see Appendix G for Holiday Presentation Scoring Results and Student Work Samples). Mark scored the highest with a 3 and was followed by Leila with a 2.7 and Brynn with a 2.3. These high scores are not surprising, considering the students’ educational background and their placement in Honors English. The useful information, however, comes from looking at the breakdown of the parts of their scores.

All three students scored a 3 for Organization of Information: they exhibited consistent organizational structure throughout their presentations and their slide headings made it easy for an audience to follow. Leila and Mark both received a 3 in Clarity of Information, displaying a firm grasp of English language conventions; Brynn, on the other hand, scored a 2 in that category. Since other work that Brynn completes in English class shows that she is capable of proper usage and mechanics in writing, this score is most likely because she did not proofread her work before submitting. Both Leila and Brynn only received a 2 for depth of information: their descriptions of Christmas and Kwanzaa focused mainly on how the holiday is celebrated
today and did not include vital information on the historical background of the holidays. This suggests to me that either they did not find library sources that shared this information, that they did not pay close attention to the rubric, or that they did not fully understand the directions for the assignment. While the depth of information may have been lacking in some presentations, all three students went to great lengths to make the presentation visually appealing (using pictures, background graphics, etc.). This suggests to me that should I assign this project in the future, I should stress that the information in the presentation is more important than how the project looks.

The Compare and Contrast Essay elicited slightly higher scores from Leila and Brynn than the presentation did (see Appendix H for Compare and Contrast Essay Scoring Results and Student Work Samples. Brynn achieved a 2.7 overall, and Leila achieved a perfect score of 3. Both girls scored a 3 in depth of information—a score increase from the Holiday Presentation. Even though Mark did not complete this assessment, the portion of the essay that he did submit maintained the level of detail that would attain a 3 in depth of information. I attribute this overall score increase to the time spent on the Triple Venn Diagram. Through their prior research, students became “experts” on their holidays and were able to share this information in a collaborative activity. Because each one had specialized knowledge that his or her peers did not have, they were able to draw insightful conclusions about the commonalities and distinctions among the three holidays.

The pre-test and post-test provided data on how the students’ knowledge of the three holidays increased over the course of the unit. First, it must be acknowledged that a Cloze reading passage is not the most accurate assessment of student knowledge: there is much
subjectivity involved in determining the “correctness” of an answer. What a Cloze activity does reveal is how familiar students are with terms and content surrounding the subject in question, or in this case, Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa. To determine the results of the pre- and post-tests, I calculated how many of the blanks were filled on the tests and, of these filled items, how many answers were “correct,” or within a range of possible answers (see Appendix I for Pre-Test/Post-Test Data). I observed two trends in this data: first, the number of items attempted increased from the pre-test to the post-test, and second, the percentage of items answered correctly increased from the pre-test to the post-test. For some students, this increase was subtle—only three more items answered or only one percentage point higher—but for others it was dramatic. Mark went from attempting 26 items to attempting all 50, and Holly leaped from 27% of answers correct to 76% of answers correct. Overall, students demonstrated an increase in their knowledge base of the three holidays.

In interpreting the results of this study, it is important to consider various factors that may have influenced the study. One crippling factor was student absences. As was stated previously, Ian participated in the study for a week, but then his family went on vacation and he missed the summative assessments. Holly was also absent for two of the class periods and was unable to complete her summative assessments. Another influencing factor was the chaotic school schedule for the two weeks during which this study took place. Students missed two days of school for Election Day and Veteran’s Day, and two IE classes were taken for a special Veteran’s Day assembly and a performance of the school play. Because of these scheduling conflicts, students were forced to work at an accelerated pace, leaving some assignments unfinished. One factor that worked in the students’ favor was that each of them is a high-
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

achieving student: they are all in Honors English and maintain A’s and B’s in all their classes. If anyone was predisposed to succeed in a schedule-conflicted unit, it would be this group of six students.

**Reflection and Implications for Revision**

In revising this unit and assessment plan for regular classroom use, the biggest change that I would make is the amount of time allotted for the completion of the unit. Two weeks was not enough time to adequately treat this topic. Even though my focus group consisted of high-achieving students, the pace of the unit was such that even they had difficulty in keeping up.

There was also insufficient time to revise and edit the summative assessments. Students had the time to create their Holiday Presentations and to discuss them with the small group, but it would be more beneficial for them to partner up with another person and share their presentations prior to submission. Peer editing gives students the opportunity to help their fellow classmates, and it also helps students to troubleshoot problem spots in their own work. The Compare and Contrast Essay would have especially benefitted from multiple drafts, and a longer timeframe in which to work would ensure that every student had the opportunity to finish the assessment. More time spent on the unit would also allow for class readings to coincide with the research, such as short stories about Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa.

Setting aside the accelerated pace, I believe that the assessments of this unit were well-developed and useful in aiding student learning. I do believe, however, that the directions for the Holiday Presentation could be made clearer. Students tended to provide details about traditions that are celebrated during their holiday, but they failed to express much about the purpose of or reasons for the holiday. Though this distinction is stated in the grading rubric, I would outline it
more clearly in the directions and in the instruction before the students begin the project. It would also be helpful to provide students with an example of a well-done presentation.

As a final assessment, students wrote reflections on their learning over the course of the unit (see Appendix J for Reflection Student Work Samples). Most students wrote about specific pieces of information they uncovered or how this information would aid them in conversation with someone who celebrates a holiday that they do not. When reflecting on the importance of assimilating information from multiple perspectives, most students treated these perspectives as informational sources and described how multiple sources would provide access to more facts. Two students described multiple perspectives in terms of hearing stories and traditions from other cultures. The ambiguity of the word “perspectives” may be a subject for class discussion in a future teaching of this unit.

**Concluding Remarks**

This study was as much a learning experience for me as it was for the students. In analyzing every piece of the unit and multiple aspects of the assessments, I was forced examine every bit of planning, teaching, and assessing that I performed in and for the sake of the classroom. The reflection and revision that occurred over the course of the unit has shaped this plan into one that I would gladly put into practice in the future.
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

References


THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

Appendix A
Unit Planner

MYP unit planner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher(s)</th>
<th>Natalie Beals</th>
<th>Subject group and discipline</th>
<th>Language A - English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit title</td>
<td>Three December Holidays</td>
<td>MYP year</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unit duration (hrs)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**INQUIRY: establishing purpose of the unit**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key concept</th>
<th>Related concept(s)</th>
<th>Global context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Personal and Cultural Expression</td>
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</table>

**Statement of inquiry**

Holidays and a study of their structure can reveal the perspectives and values of a culture.

**Inquiry questions**

Factual – What is the historical background of the three holidays? What traditions surround the three holidays? What does it mean to compare and contrast?

Conceptual – Why do different holidays have similar ways of celebrating? Why do different cultures have special holidays in December?

Debatable – Does cultural perspective determine the value of a tradition or are all traditions valuable?

**Objectives**

A Content (receptive and productive)
- express an informed and independent response to literary and non-literary texts.

B Organization
- create work that employs organizational structures and language-specific conventions throughout a variety of text types
- organize ideas and arguments in a sustained, coherent and logical manner

**Summative assessment**

Outline of summative assessment task(s) including assessment criteria:

**Holiday Presentation** – Students will conduct research on a December holiday (Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa) and will create a visual presentation for the purpose of informing their classmates about the holiday. This presentation may take the form of a PowerPoint, a poster, or another method of presentation suggested by the student.

**Compare and Contrast Essay** – After having researched the

Relationship between summative assessment task(s) and statement of inquiry:

This assessment researches and presents information about the three holidays. Through research, the students examine the structure (history, traditions, etc.) of the holiday, and through the presentations, students will view the information through multiple perspectives.

This assessment presents a structured recording of the
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

C Style and language mechanics
- use language to narrate, describe, analyse, explain, argue, persuade, inform, entertain and express feelings
- use correct grammar and syntax
- use appropriate and varied sentence structure
- use correct spelling (alphabetic languages) or writing (character languages).

similarities and differences among the three holidays collaboratively, the students will separately summarize this information in a written essay.

knowledge gained in this unit. After having viewed information from multiple perspectives, students have the opportunity to present the information from their personal cultural perspective.

Approaches to learning (ATL)

I. Communication skills
Exchanging thoughts, messages and information effectively through interaction
- Use a variety of media to communicate with a range of audiences
Reading, writing and using language to gather and communicate information
- Read critically and for comprehension
- Read a variety of sources for information and for pleasure
- Write for different purposes
- Paraphrase accurately and concisely
- Organize and depict information logically
- Structure information in summaries, essays and reports

III. Organization skills
Managing time and tasks effectively
- Use appropriate strategies for organizing complex information

VI. Information literacy skills
Finding, interpreting, judging and creating information
- Access information to be informed and inform others
- Make connections between various sources of information
- Present information in a variety of formats and platforms
- Process data and report results
- Evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on their appropriateness to specific tasks

VII. Media literacy skills
Interacting with media to use and create ideas and information
- Communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats
- Compare, contrast and draw connections among (multi)media resources

VIII. Critical thinking skills
Analysing and evaluating issues and ideas
- Interpret data
- Draw reasonable conclusions and generalizations
- Consider ideas from multiple perspectives

IX. Creative thinking skills
Generating novel ideas and considering new perspectives
### THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

- Make unexpected or unusual connections between objects and/or ideas

**X. Transfer skills**
Utilizing skills and knowledge in multiple contexts
- Combine knowledge, understanding and skills to create products or solutions
- Change the context of an inquiry to gain different perspectives

### ACTION: teaching and learning through inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Learning process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Learning experiences and teaching strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 The student will participate in and contribute to small-group activities. c) Summarize and evaluate group activities.</td>
<td>Students will read information about their selected holiday from multiple sources. Students will visit the library to perform their own research on their selected holiday. Students will make inferences about the perspectives of the various sources. Students will peer edit each other’s papers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.2 The student will present, listen critically, and express opinions in oral presentations. b) Compare and contrast viewpoints. d) Paraphrase and summarize what is heard.</td>
<td><strong>Formative assessment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of a variety of nonfiction texts. i) Compare and contrast information about one topic, which may be contained in different selections.</td>
<td>Students will take a pre-test in the form of a Cloze reading activity. This pre-test will assess their cultural knowledge of Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa. Students will organize research by the means of a worksheet that categorizes information. Students will present their individual research to their peers so that cumulatively they will have enough information on all three holidays to complete the triple Venn diagram. <strong>Triple Venn Diagram</strong> – After listening to and viewing each other’s presentations on the three holidays, the students will collaborate on a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts the three holidays. Students will complete this Venn diagram on a large sheet of bulletin board paper. Students will complete a post-test using the Cloze reading activity from the pre-test. Students will reflect on what they have learned throughout the unit, implementing data from their pre- and post-tests. This reflection will take the form of a brief written paragraph.</td>
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<td>6.7 The student will write narration, description, exposition, and persuasion. a) Identify audience and purpose. b) Use a variety of prewriting strategies including graphic organizers to generate and organize ideas. c) Organize writing structure to fit mode or topic.</td>
<td><strong>Differentiation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9 The student will find, evaluate, and select appropriate resources for a research product. a) Collect information from</td>
<td><strong>Global/Analytic Learners</strong> – For students who tend to see the “big picture,” the triple Venn diagram will provide an overview of the similarities and differences among the three holidays. These students will also benefit from a brief overview of each holiday before jumping into the specifics of the holiday. For students who prefer a more step-by-step method of learning, the worksheet will help them to organize the information they</td>
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THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

are gleaning from the various sources of information.

Interpersonal/Intrapersonal Learners – Since a Language A class requires solo work and collaboration, it is important that both scenarios are offered in order to address the needs of all the students. Students have the opportunity to work collaboratively on the triple Venn diagram and in viewing and responding to their peers’ presentations. Students have the opportunity to work on their own through their individually conducted research and in their compare/contrast essay.

Audio/Visual/Kinesthetic Learners – Though much of the information provided for the students’ research will be conducive to visual learning, students who prefer auditory information may acquire this during individual research. The flexibility of the presentation also allows students to present information in a way that is more visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.

Verbal/Numeric Learners – As part of a Language A course, this unit caters more to verbal learners; however, numeric learners will benefit from the step-by-step sequence of gathering and presenting information.

Academically Gifted Learners – This unit is geared toward an academically gifted class. The freedom given in conducting research and compiling the presentations allows students to pursue their learning at their accelerated pace, as well as in a creative fashion.

English Language Learners – In the provided sources for research, ELL students will be given sources that define difficult words and are not biased in their assumption of cultural norms. The peer editing of the essay will also help students who are just learning the intricacies of English spelling and grammar.

Learners with other Disabilities – The worksheet for organizing research and prewriting for the essay may be scaffolded to assist students with other learning needs. These students may also require more direction in their solo research.

Resources

Encyclopedia articles and other database sources on Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa
Library research materials

REFLECTION: considering the planning, process and impact of the inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior to teaching the unit</th>
<th>During teaching</th>
<th>After teaching the unit</th>
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<tr>
<td>By the end of this unit, students should have a clearer picture of the structure of the three December holidays. They should also be able to define similarities among the holidays that will connect their own</td>
<td>Students do not yet have the research skills to go to the library on their own and research a holiday. Though they had some resources provided for them, I had to provide extra research in order</td>
<td>The biggest change that I would make in this unit is the amount of time allotted for it. Two weeks was not enough time to adequately treat this topic, nor was there time to revise and edit the summative</td>
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</table>
personal culture to one or more of those that celebrate the Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa. The planning of the inquiry has focused on incorporating the research skill of selecting relevant information and the reading skill of compare and contrast into a multicultural context. I anticipate two activities that will be most difficult for the students: sifting through the informational sources to select relevant information for their presentations and drawing insightful comparisons among the holidays. 

| for them to complete the assignments within the designated time frame. If I teach this unit to an entire class, I will either save it for after we have practiced library research or allow for extra time to learn library research. I had originally placed the Triple Venn Diagram as one of the summative assessments. Once the unit began, however, I realized that it really should be more of a formative assessment since the students are still learning the material. In the practice of the unit, we used the Venn diagram as a means of preparing for the Compare and Contrast Essay. Since students only studied one of the holidays, the Venn diagram class activity served as a way for the students to teach each other about the other holidays. I supervised this activity and helped guide toward details the students had not thought of. | assessments. There would certainly be no opportunity for an entire class to give their presentations. |
Cloze Reading Passage

Kwanzaa is new; Christmas and Hanukkah are old. All three are December celebrations, variations on the Judeo-Christian spiritual tradition and three different ways to __________ with one’s family and ___________.

**Christmas** has its ___________ in the birth of ____________, as recorded in the ____________. After Emperor Constantine made ___________ the official religion of ____________, the faith began to ___________ across Europe. These continental ___________ took local winter-solstice ___________ and changed them to ___________ their faith in Christ. ___________ of celebrating the arrival ___________ the sun after the ___________ night of the year, ___________ Christians used such Solstice-___________ elements as trees, holly ___________, and Yule logs to ___________ the arrival of God’s ___________ to a world in ___________ darkness.

**Hanukkah** origins date back ___________ about 167 B.C. A ___________ army, led by Judah _____________, recaptured Jerusalem from the ___________. Judah’s men tried to _____________ the Jewish temple by _____________ its menorah. But, as _____________ legend tells it, there _____________ only enough of the _____________ ritual oil on the _____________ to keep the menorah _____________ for one day. Interestingly, _____________ they lit the lamp, _____________ stayed lit for eight _____________. Over the years, the _____________ of the oil became _____________ central focus of Hanukkah ___________.

**Kwanzaa** (the name means "___________ fruits" in Swahili) was _____________ by Dr. Maulana Ron _____________ in 1966. Karenga wanted _____________ holiday specifically for African-___________; a celebration that would ___________ supplant or replace any _____________ practices, but would rather _____________ on the heritage and _____________ of black families. Each _____________ during the week between _____________ and New Year’s, families _____________ candles on in-home shrines.

Passages adapted from:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who? – Who celebrates this holiday?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where? – Where is this holiday celebrated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When? – When is this holiday celebrated?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why? – Why is this holiday celebrated?</td>
<td>Include historical context and religious or cultural reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What? – What is the holiday all about?</td>
<td>Include important people, historical events, religious beliefs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How? – How is this holiday celebrated?</td>
<td>Include traditions are practiced during this holiday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

Figure C1
Library Research Student Work Samples
Holiday Presentation Directions

Using the information from your library research worksheet, create a visual presentation that presents information about your holiday (in the form of a PowerPoint, a poster, etc.). You should present information as if your audience has no background knowledge of the holiday.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization of Information</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation is organized in a logical format. Information in the presentation is specific to the holiday without extra details that detract from the main idea.</td>
<td>Presentation is mostly logical in its organization, but some of the information may seem out of place. The presentation may include one or two details that do not relate to the holiday.</td>
<td>The presentation is difficult to follow due to its organization. Multiple details are included that do not relate to the main idea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depth of Information</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation includes extensive information about the history and traditions of the holiday. The reason(s) for celebrating the holiday are clearly outlined.</td>
<td>Specific information is missing from the presentation that detracts from an overall understanding of the holiday. For example, the presentation may include some information about the history and traditions of the holiday, but it may be unclear as to why the holiday is celebrated; or the reasons for celebrating the holiday are stated, but the information regarding its history and traditions is sparse.</td>
<td>The presentation presents very few details about the holiday. There is no clear picture of why or how the holiday is celebrated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarity of Information</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The presentation includes only one or two errors in language usage and mechanics.</td>
<td>The presentation includes three or four errors in language usage and mechanics.</td>
<td>The presentation includes more than four errors in language usage and mechanics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E
Triple Venn Diagram Student Work Sample
Compare and Contrast Essay Directions

Use the information recorded on the Triple Venn Diagram to complete an essay laying out the similarities and differences among the three December holidays.

Compare and Contrast Essay Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization of</strong></td>
<td>Paper demonstrates clear and well-structured organization of</td>
<td>Paper exhibits some organization of information, but some</td>
<td>Paper is difficult to follow do to its organizational structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong></td>
<td>information. All details in the paper support the main idea of</td>
<td>details seem out of place. Some details in the paper do not</td>
<td>Many details are included that do not relate to the main idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>comparing and contrasting the three holidays.</td>
<td>support the main idea of comparing and contrasting the three</td>
<td>of comparing and contrasting the three holidays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>holidays.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depth of</strong></td>
<td>Paper expresses the distinguishing features of each holiday,</td>
<td>Paper expresses the distinguishing features of each holiday,</td>
<td>Paper is lacking one or more sections of analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong></td>
<td>elements that all three holidays have in common, and elements</td>
<td>elements that all three holidays have in common, and elements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that only two holidays share. Paper expresses three or more</td>
<td>that only two holidays share. Paper expresses only one or two</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>connections between any two holidays.</td>
<td>connections between any two holidays.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity of</strong></td>
<td>The paper exhibits consistent, though not necessarily perfect,</td>
<td>The paper exhibits reasonable, but not consistent, control of</td>
<td>The paper exhibits inconsistent control of sentence structure,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong></td>
<td>control of sentence structure, capitalization, punctuation, and</td>
<td>sentence structure, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.</td>
<td>capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spelling.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) writing rubric*
Appendix G
Holiday Presentation Scoring Results

Figure G1
Holiday Presentation Student Work Samples

Brynn’s Presentation
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

Leila’s Presentation

Mark’s Presentation

What Hanukkah is all About

- Hanukkah is celebrate to commemorate the victory of Judah’s soldiers over the Greek soldiers, who were trying to get the Jewish people to worship Greek gods.

How Hanukkah is Celebrated

- Customs: Latkisah-potato pancakes
  - Dreidel-top with Yiddish letters on each side
  - Menorah-Candle holder. It can hold nine candles, eight for religious reasons, and the shamash for practical reasons, such as lighting.
  - Menorah-Candle holder. It can hold nine candles, eight for religious reasons, and the shamash for practical reasons, such as lighting.

Where, and When

- Hanukkah is celebrated all throughout the world. Hanukkah is celebrated on the 25th of Kisley, a Jewish month, and it continues for seven days.

Why Hanukkah is Celebrated

- Hanukkah is the celebration of miracles that kept the Jewish people alive through their struggle to retake, and rededicate their temple in Jerusalem. The menorah is lit to remember a miracle where the Jews had no oil to burn for more than one day, and that oil burned for eight days.
Appendix H
Compare and Contrast Essay Scoring Results

Figure H1
Compare and Contrast Essay Student Work Samples
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

COMPARE AND CONTRAST
CHRISTMAS, HANUKKAH, KWANZAA

Leila

Christmas: Christmas, a time of joy and love for all families around the world. Now Christmas may have things in common with other holidays but where going to focus on its unique customs and beliefs. The main purpose of Christmas is to celebrate the "Birth of Christ". No one really knows when Christ was truly born, so multiple religious chose what they believed to be the closest date they could think of. Some of Christmas’s unique customs consist of trees to decorate with family made or factory made ornaments, candy, and of course our good ol’ fashioned “Saint Nicholas”. These are some of Christmas’s different traditions.

Hanukkah: Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday but that can be celebrated by other religions and people. Hanukkah lasts 8 days and has different things you do for this holiday. For example, on this Jewish holiday people will give out gifts. This century they are known as chocolates shaped as coins and latkes (known as potato pancakes). The celebration days for this holiday change every year.

Kwanzaa: Kwanzaa is based on a heritage not an event. This African day can be celebrated all around the world. This event lasts for 7 days. The 7 candles represent the seven principles statement. They sing, speak, dance, and recite traditional African rituals. Kwanzaa is celebrated December 26th through January 1st.

Christmas and Hanukkah: These two holidays share a lot of things in common. For example, they are both religious holidays, they involve a miracle; they are very old dating back to 1256 CE. Christmas and Hanukkah can be a holiday for all and you get presents.

Christmas and Kwanzaa: Kwanzaa may consist of fruits, candy, and plants, but so does Christmas. These are some of the many things they have in common. Christmas has a tree and Kwanzaa has a variety of fruits. Christmas has scripture readings from the Bible and Kwanzaa has reciting of African American legends. These two holidays have many things in common; I have listed some already but the rest are for you to figure out yourself.

Kwanzaa and Hanukkah: One candle is lit each night of the remaining days; these holidays last for multiple days and include a candle holder, and have certain heritages. These two holidays may not have very much in common but that sure doesn’t mean they are completely different.

All holidays: Last but not least we have all the holidays. There is dancing, singing, lights, and they all are in December and are close to the new years. Most important of all there’s...

Love

From my research I have figured out the importance of each holiday and I will never think of them as the same again.
Appendix I
Pre-Test/Post-Test Data

### Items Answered on Pre- and Post-Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Items answered on pre-test</th>
<th>Items answered on post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brynn</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Percentage of Items Answered Correctly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of items answered correctly on pre-test</th>
<th>Percent of items answered correctly on post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brynn</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THREE DECEMBER HOLIDAYS

Appendix J
Reflection Student Work Samples

Brynn

1. Some things I learned are that Hanukkah is celebrated over the Jewish people and picking up when the Greeks were trying to convert them to different religions. Also, I learned that candles are inlampments of lamps that some people burn them for seven days and seven nights. It can be known as the "Season of Lights."

2. I think learning about Hanukkah will help me because I celebrate it, and now I understand fully why I am celebrating this holiday. It will also help me with schoolwork, grades, and homework I needed.

3. I think it would help to have different perspectives when reading about religious holidays. It would help get more information on specific religions.

Holly

1. I learned about many different cultures and Hanukkah, but I don't understand fully why I am celebrating this holiday. It will also help me with schoolwork, grades, and homework I needed.

2. I think learning about Hanukkah will help me because I celebrate it, and now I understand fully why I am celebrating this holiday. It will also help me with schoolwork, grades, and homework I needed.

3. I think it would help to have different perspectives when reading about religious holidays. It would help get more information on specific religions.

Henry

1. I think this unit helped me understand more about Hanukkah, and how it's celebrated by many people around the world.

2. I think the most important thing I learned from this unit is the importance of respect and understanding different cultures and holidays.

3. I think it would be important to have more information about other cultures and holidays, especially those that are not as well-known.

Leila

1. I learned about many different cultures and Hanukkah, but I don't understand fully why I am celebrating this holiday. It will also help me with schoolwork, grades, and homework I needed.

2. I think learning about Hanukkah will help me because I celebrate it, and now I understand fully why I am celebrating this holiday. It will also help me with schoolwork, grades, and homework I needed.

3. I think it would help to have different perspectives when reading about religious holidays. It would help get more information on specific religions.

Mark

1. From this unit, I learned that I didn't know everything about Hanukkah, but I now have a better understanding of its significance.

2. I think the most important thing I learned from this unit is the importance of understanding and respecting different cultures and holidays.

3. I think it would be important to have more information about other cultures and holidays, especially those that are not as well-known.

Ian

1. I learned about many different cultures and Hanukkah, but I don't understand fully why I am celebrating this holiday. It will also help me with schoolwork, grades, and homework I needed.

2. I think learning about Hanukkah will help me because I celebrate it, and now I understand fully why I am celebrating this holiday. It will also help me with schoolwork, grades, and homework I needed.

3. I think it would help to have different perspectives when reading about religious holidays. It would help get more information on specific religions.