



Seasonal Round Lesson Plan

THE SEASONAL ROUND

For New Year, we would cook cabbage. Some people would cook black-eyed peas. That way, you would always have money for the year. And we had to have our egg nog. That was one tradition waiting for the New Year to come in. And when the New Year would come in, Daddy would take his gun and let us shoot a few rounds to bring in the New Year.

—Grace Populas, St. John Parish, Louisiana

Introduction and Background for Educators

Asked to picture the year, you might think of a wall calendar. Envision instead the months of a year as a wheel, a seasonal round that the folklorist Jack Santino illustrates in his book *All Around the Year* (University of Illinois Press, 1994). What customs fall where? How do the weather and landscape change? What relationship do holidays have to the seasonal round? How do seasonal changes affect the daily life, culture, art, history, and economy of a community? What can students learn about themselves, their families, their region, and the world by examining the seasonal round?



Click [here](#) to print out a blank Seasonal Round Worksheet.

French and Spanish versions are also available in [Unit IX Part 1 of Louisiana Voices](#).

Consider holidays. Many have ancient roots; others are quite contemporary; some are religious, others are secular; and some combine elements of the sacred and the secular. For example, Mardi Gras has an old, complex history and traditions sacred and secular that span continents. President Woodrow Wilson made Mother's Day official in 1914, and Maulana Karenga created Kwanzaa in 1966. Presidents' Day and Martin Luther King Day honor national heroes. Labor Day was founded in 1882 to heal rifts between labor unions and the federal government.

Some holidays, “movable feasts” on liturgical calendars, change annually according to lunar phases or because different religious groups follow different calendars. Examples include Easter, Passover, and Ramadan. Other holidays fall on the same date each year: December 25 or July 4. Still others fall on particular days, for example, Memorial Day is the last Monday in May. Personal holidays such as birthdays or anniversaries fall randomly on the seasonal round.

In addition to holidays and special events, seasonal changes affect our work, recreation, foodways, beliefs, customs, even our worldviews. Students see how seasons change the

landscape, but they may not have considered how other aspects of their lives and the life of their community change according to the season. Working individually or in teams, students may investigate many aspects of seasonal change. Some students may be interested in science and geography, while others are curious about seasonal customs.

As your class moves through the school year, you will also be moving through a seasonal round. Integrate this concept into your curriculum, noting the often overlooked changes that affect our lives in many ways at work, at play, in everyday life, in celebrations and rituals-and in school. You might start the school year with this unit to get to know your students. Even for many adults, a new school year announces a sense of purpose, a chance to start anew. The smell of freshly sharpened pencils and the anticipation of seeing friends after summer break are deeply embedded in many adults' memories.

Purpose of the Unit

The seasonal round provides a point of inquiry for students to examine in any subject area and can culminate in many projects, from developing weather graphs to choreographing a round dance. Students are introduced to the concept of the seasonal round, how traditions vary from season to season, and how the seasonal round contributes to the uniqueness of a place and a community. They first chart birthdays and dates of personal interest on seasonal round calendars and research birthday traditions. Then students identify important seasonal traditions in the life of their families. Finally, students research community celebrations and how seasonal changes affect their own lives and the culture of their community.

Time Required

Variable, at least 2-5 class periods

Materials

Seasonal Round Worksheets: crayons, colored pencils, or markers

Seasonal Round Collages: cardboard pizza rounds or paper plates, string, scissors, glue or glue sticks, and items to glue such as old greeting cards, junk drawer odds and ends, feathers, magazines, tourism brochures, fabric scraps, photos of local events, etc. Cut string into 12-inch lengths.

If your students will be doing interviews, they may need digital cameras, recorders, or notepads and pencils. Practice interviews in class and use the Local Learning Tools [2 Js, link to LL Tools] Interview Basics and Release Form.

Assessment

1. Seasonal Round Worksheets
2. Birthday Calendars and Birthday Traditions book or exhibit
3. Personal Seasonal Round Calendars
4. Seasonal Round Collages
5. Community Seasonal Round Calendar
6. Interview notes, photos, recordings
7. Poetry, essays, graphs, etc.

To Prepare

Send a letter home letting families and caregivers know the class will be studying the seasonal round, including celebrations and holidays as well as weather, recreation, customs, foodways, occupations, and so on. Some people do not celebrate certain holidays, so be prepared to offer students alternative activities such as researching, writing about, and documenting landscape and weather changes or work and business cycles throughout the seasonal round. Their work can illustrate a large class calendar and other projects. Talk with students' parents to determine a suitable alternative assignment.

- **Activity 1** Birthday Calendars and Traditions Print and copy a Seasonal Round Worksheet for each student and yourself. If you are going to create a class chart of birthdays, print out and label an extra copy. You may enlarge it on a copier or design and decorate a large wheel to hang in the classroom. Inventory what you know about birthday traditions. Many children in the U.S. have similar parties, which vary more by age group than other factors, but students may have unique family customs that differ. Even recent immigrant students figure out birthday party protocol quickly, employing popular culture character themes, cake, candles, wishes, ice cream, treat bags, and the "Happy Birthday" song.
- **Activity 2** Personal Seasonal Round Calendars Print and copy a Seasonal Round Worksheet for each student and yourself. Gather information to help students research important school and community dates. Think of dates important to your own seasonal round. How do you mark seasonal changes in large and subtle ways? If making Seasonal Round Collages, students will need collage supplies (see Materials). If making a Class Seasonal Round Calendar, enlarge it on a copier or design and decorate a large wheel to hang in the classroom.
- **Activity 3** Community Seasonal Round Calendar Gather books, brochures, almanacs, and other resources to help students research regional seasons and customs. Determine how thoroughly you want students to investigate. Decide whether students should work on all phases of research or divide into teams to identify important dates for the school, community, state, and nation. Students could conduct interviews among workers in outdoor occupations, hunters and fishermen, cooks, craftspeople, celebration organizers, friends, and family members. They could limit work to collecting sayings and beliefs, or they could conduct more extensive research in books, on the Internet, and through fieldwork and interviews. This activity lends itself well to collaborative group work.

Activity 1: Birthday Calendars and Traditions

Give students copies of the Seasonal Round Worksheet. Ask them to indicate the current month by marking a large "X" inside the circle. Then ask them to mark a small "x" on the circumference of the circle to indicate where they think the day of the month would fall. Students should compare results and as a class reach consensus on where to put the "x." Then ask students to write their full birth dates in the correct month, for example, 7/23/04.

Create a large class chart and mark all the students' and the teacher's birthdays, using initials and a small drawing or sticker. As a class, analyze the data. *In which quadrant do most birthdays fall? Which month? Do more boys or girls have birthdays in certain months? What conclusions*

can they draw from the data they have collected? For example, “Because 6 boys and 2 girls have birthdays in March, I can tell that more boys have birthdays in March.” Students can create different categories to calculate, noting how many students have party themes, for example.

Technology Option

Students may use software to create charts or graphs of birthdays broken down by months, days, gender.

Use this as an opportunity to study birthday traditions among students and their families. First, ask students to describe a birthday party, in a class discussion. Appoint a scribe to take notes. Then assign students to interview adults about childhood birthday traditions, perhaps choosing a specific birthday such as their 10th. Students can compile results in a classroom “Birthday Traditions” exhibit or book including interviews, drawings, photos, artifacts, foods, and games.

Extensions

Ask students to take their calendars home to add birthdays for family members, pets, and friends. Students may compare results in small groups or as a class and add the data to their charts.

Invite an older adult to class to teach a birthday party game from childhood such as Drop the Handkerchief or Button, Button.

Use Venn diagrams to compare and contrast birthday celebrations of different ages or cultural groups.

Research the “Happy Birthday” song and how it became traditional.

Activity 2: Personal Seasonal Round Calendars

Have a class discussion about seasons and holidays to introduce an assignment for students to create personal seasonal round calendars. *How do seasons influence students’ lives? Which holidays are related to religious beliefs, which honor the state or nation, and which are unique to a community? What holidays combine religious and secular customs? How does commerce enter into holidays? How do popular culture media such as TV, radio, or the Internet portray holidays? How do these portrayals compare with how students actually celebrate holidays?*

Have students use blank Seasonal Round Worksheets to draft Personal Seasonal Round Calendars with dates of personal significance, including interests such as sports, hobbies, family customs, and school and community events. Students should take home their drafts to use in interviews with family members and share their findings in class. *Are any holidays specific to a family or community? How does each family celebrate holidays uniquely?* After adding data from family interviews to their draft calendar worksheets, students may decorate a fresh copy of the worksheet using colored pencils, markers, and crayons to illustrate their Personal Seasonal Round Calendar. They may also make Seasonal Round Collages on cardboard pizza rounds or paper plates.

Hang decorated Seasonal Round Calendars or Collages in a classroom exhibit and ask students to tell the story of their seasonal rounds to the class.

Collage Directions (See Materials)

Use cardboard pizza rounds or paper plates as the base. Before decorating, punch two holes about an inch apart in the center of the round. Run a 12-inch piece of string through the holes so the ends exit in the back. Tie the string at the top and tape the string to the back of the round near the edge to keep it from flopping forward. Have students use glue sticks or paste to secure items such as fabric scraps, magazines, old greeting cards, etc., to tell their Seasonal Round stories. They may choose a favorite season or celebration or the whole year.

Extensions

Invite another teacher, a parent, or a community member to class for students to interview about a calendar tradition.

Music is very important to celebrations and is part of the seasonal soundscape. Brainstorm seasonal songs. Then ask students to research and share music important to their seasonal traditions and the holidays of others.

Combine students' seasonal events and traditions to make a big class seasonal round calendar to hang in the classroom.

Activity 3: Community Seasonal Rounds

Brainstorm ways that students think seasonal change affects their lives and the community. *What sounds differ, for example? Do they hear the chimes of an ice cream truck, school bus brakes, fire crackers, or mockingbirds? How does the landscape change? Do foods change?* Add some topics from the list below if they don't raise them. Ask students to choose some of these topics to research and discuss methods they could use: books, the Internet, talking to each other, talking informally to family members and neighbors, conducting an interview project, or inviting someone to class to interview about how seasons influence their work or foodways, for example.

Seasonal Round Topics

Agricultural activities

Play, recreation, hobbies, and sports

Celebrations, festivals, and other seasonal gatherings and events

Seasonal customs

Religious practices and beliefs

Occupations

Landscape and land use

Gardens

Geography, ecology, and environment

Music and soundscapes

Foodways

Clothing

Traditional crafts and decorative arts

Weather sayings and beliefs

If you want students to work in groups, designate group members and let each group choose a topic and decide which research methods to use. Groups can determine how to present their

findings. They might write poetry or essays, produce a skit, make graphs, choreograph a round dance, or create web pages or podcasts.

Construct a large Community Seasonal Round Calendar to hang in the classroom. Students should reach consensus on what to add to the calendar as they conduct their research. When completed, hang the calendar in the school library, cafeteria, or other common space to share with the school community. Students can also share what they have learned in a presentation to explain how the seasonal round influences community life.

Extensions

What changes in the landscape mark seasonal change? Staking out a backyard garden or preparing fields for planting? The appearance of vegetable stands? Home decorations? Repairing boats in dry dock? Students can illustrate community landscapes that reflect the seasonal round for a classroom exhibit.

Invite people whose work changes seasonally for students to interview in class. Students should share their Community Seasonal Round Calendar with guests. Consider business owners, farmers, gardeners, florists, elected officials.

Ask a dance instructor to work with students to choreograph a round dance about the Community Seasonal Round.

Research and design a large seasonal round calendar depicting major holidays of cultures around the world. *Do holidays cluster around particular months or seasons, for example, the solstice or equinox?*

Compare and contrast the seasonal round of places in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres.

Make Community Seasonal Round Calendars in different languages and for different cultural groups.

Ask students for examples of beliefs about the weather: “Red sky at night, sailor’s delight,” or “A ring around the moon means rain will come soon.” Farmers, fishermen, and gardeners still rely on folk beliefs about weather and make predictions based on natural observations. Ask students to collect such beliefs and predictions from older people. They may also conduct research in almanacs. They can make a weather lore chart, booklet, or web page.

If your students will be doing interviews, they may need digital cameras, recorders, or notepads and pencils. Practice interviews in class and use the [Local Learning Tools Interview Basics](#) and [Release Form](#).

Resources

[Louisiana Voices](#) Unit IX The Seasonal Round offers a variety of student activities and worksheets, including blank seasonal round calendars in French and Spanish as well as English.

Santino, Jack. *All Around the Year: Holidays and Celebrations in American Life*. University of Illinois Press, 1994.

_____. *New Old-Fashioned Ways: Holidays and Popular Culture*. University of Tennessee Press, 1996.

[Tending the Commons: Folklife and Landscape in Southern West Virginia](#) is in the digital collections of the American Folklife Center. Click on the Seasonal Round of Activities on Coal River for a chart that links seasonal practices to online interviews and photos.

[Trail Tribes](#) web site provides the seasonal round of several American Indian tribes along the trails that Lewis and Clark traveled, for example see the Blackfeet Camp Life and Seasonal Round.

[Wisconsin Weather Stories](#) marries folklore and meteorology.

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