

Family Guide: More Than a Holiday: Honoring Culture All Year

At Bright Horizons, we know that every day is an opportunity to celebrate the diversity in our world. Numerous studies confirm that children develop empathy when they have opportunities to learn about others and talk openly about differences and similarities. These early experiences translate to less unconscious bias, stereotyping, bullying, or even unintended exclusion of others later, and provide children with the language and ability to speak up against hate.

Celebrations and holidays are an important part of any community, including our classrooms. As educators we make intentional decisions about what celebrations are more for adults and what are appropriate for children, ensuring that they do not supplant other valuable learning experiences. We do not say “no” to celebrations, but instead we give careful thought to how they:

- Honor the diversity within our programs.
- Are reflective and respectful of the classroom community.
- Create a sense of belonging.
- Provide a developmentally appropriate and meaningful experience for children.
- Engage families.

We have a responsibility to offer the children in our care powerful and positive images of themselves as well as see the strengths and value of differences. We use the concept of mirrors and windows. This means that we provide opportunities so children can see, understand, and appreciate their own identity and culture (mirrors), as well as that of others (windows).

We recognize that not all cultural groups are represented with a particular heritage month, and that many of our families, teachers, and children identify with groups other than ones celebrated visibly in society, or celebrate their heritage in different ways. While celebrations can be a time to honor and respect families and communities, they aren't the way to build long-term respect for diversity, positive self-identity, inclusion, perspective, and empathy.

Those important aspects of children's growth, part of our Toward a Better World curriculum, are developed through intentional everyday classroom experiences, conversations, and environments. This is why we meet with families upon enrollment and throughout the year to learn about caregiving preferences and practices, and why we invite families to share photos, stories, traditions and celebrations within our classrooms.

Black History Month

In 1976, President Gerald R. Ford asked Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans” with an official holiday each February. The annual tradition has continued ever since. Today Black History Month is a time to celebrate and remember the important role Black Americans have played in our history.

At Bright Horizons, we also see this time as one opportunity to promote kindness, peace, unity, and inclusion. We can work hard to create places of belonging and inclusion for teachers, children, and families. We will continue to grow in our understanding and our ability to really see and value each other through shared experiences and small moments of kindness, understanding, and compassion. We are deeply committed to this goal.

When learning about a culture here are a few key points to keep in mind:

Offer positive, developmentally appropriate representations. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers aren’t ready for history lessons or discussions of past struggles. What they need is to see themselves and others represented in positive and powerful ways.

Use a strengths-based lens to help all children to see themselves as beautiful, strong, empathetic, powerful, and smart. Read books with modern photos and images that positively depict children’s diverse physical characteristics. Discuss differences, e.g., “See this child’s beautiful brown eyes,” or “My skin is darker than yours. The child in this picture has skin that is darker than mine. I’m glad that we’re all unique.”

Historically, people often approach diversity from a deficit model. There is a focus on past challenges, and we sometimes define people by their struggles. These are very important topics, but they’re not the beginning or the end of the story, nor are they appropriate topics for the early childhood years. When children hear only about past victimizations, these stories can become enmeshed in their identities and how they view themselves and others, inadvertently causing negative images. We want children to know that they have agency and choice in their lives. They can make a difference.

Avoid stereotyping or taking a superficial (tourist) approach. Don’t offer a very limited or stereotypical view of a specific culture. Focusing on specific songs, dances, foods or traditions for a limited time as a way of “celebrating” reduces culture to a set of resources and reinforces the idea of some cultures as “other” and less valued.

Some experiences to extend learning at home for preschool age children:

- ▶ Read books featuring modern Black characters, or books written by Black authors and illustrators. See recommendations below.
- ▶ Explore the Smithsonian’s online [exhibit](#) of Black artists.
- ▶ Seek out community celebrations of Black History Month.
- ▶ Learn about the lives and contributions of Black teachers, scientists, musicians, athletes, and artists.

Here are some books we might read in the classroom that you can explore at home:

Brave Ballerina: The Story of Janet Collins by Michelle Meadows and Ebony Glenn. Learn about the inspiring story of dancer Janet Collins.

Brothers and Sisters: Family Poems by Eloise Greenfield and Jan Spivey Gilchrist. Poems that celebrate families and siblings.

Kamala and Maya's Big Idea by Meena Harris and Ana Ramirez Gonzales. The true story of how young sisters Kamala and Maya Harris worked to turn the empty courtyard of their apartment into a playground.

Lali's Feather by Farhana Zia and Stephanie Fizer Coleman. Lali finds a feather in a field and wonders to whom it belongs. It's too small for the rooster, too slow for the crow, and much too plain for peacock. Lali keeps it and discovers how useful it is. The birds discover its value too.

Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Pena and Christian Robinson. A charming depiction of a grandmother and grandchild's Sunday walk through the bustling city. This highly acclaimed book offers a subtle message of hope, imagination, and love.

My Family Plays Music by Judy Cox and Elbright Brown. This family loves to play music, from dad's lovely cello to auntie's spunky jazz sound to the baby clanging on pots and pans. A vibrant celebration of family togetherness and music.

My Hair is Beautiful by Shauntay Grant. Explores the beauty and variety of Black hair.

Noah's Seal by Layne Marlow. Noah makes a seal out of sand as he waits for Nana to fix their sailboat. Then they'll go out to the island to see the real seals. A quiet, lovely story about the power of imagination.

Whose Toes are Those? by Jibari Asim and LeUyen Pham. Babies will love this ode to their adorable toes.

You Matter by Christian Robinson. Simple illustrations and text send the powerful message that we all matter.