



## Are You Ready to Celebrate?

### April is Celebrate Diversity Month

—a perfect time to respectfully acknowledge the diversity surrounding us, take advantage of learning about other cultures and customs, and celebrate our differences as our students think, create, share, and grow in the library. Providing opportunities for our students to learn about cultures other than their own aligns with the AASL shared foundation of Include, which aims to have learners “demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community.” Incorporating the Include standards into your library program not only boosts cultural awareness, but also more importantly, makes all students feel welcomed and valued when they enter the library.

Our students will encounter more and more people whose backgrounds and beliefs differ from their own as our communities become more globalized. School libraries are places where they can read and listen to stories that reflect this diversity and engage in activities and discussions to expand their worldview. This will help students learn to put themselves in others’ shoes and look at things from multiple perspectives. In our culturally responsive library programs, they will come to understand what it’s like for people who don’t share their race, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status. They can learn empathy and make sense of themselves and the world at the same time.

There are cultural celebrations for students to learn about throughout the school year. As I write this, we are fast approaching the winter holiday season and Christmas decorations are everywhere, but there are at least seventeen religious holidays that will take place between now and the end of the calendar year. I want my students who celebrate these other special days to feel seen and

I want the rest of the students to gain a greater appreciation for the diversity that surrounds them, so I will display books about Baha’i, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, and Sikh celebrations. I will invite anyone from the school community who would like to share into the library to describe family traditions centered on these special days.

Along with religious and cultural celebrations, there are notable birthdays and widely recognized awareness months and day(s) throughout the year that honor specific groups, cultures, or causes. I recommend resources such as the Anti-Defamation League’s Calendar of Observances (ADL 2021) as a starting place to learn more about many of these celebrations. It is designed to inform various institutions of observances followed by the many cultures and religions represented in the United States. The information you find there is intended to raise understanding and awareness.

Special observances are not enough, however, if we truly want our students to become culturally competent global citizens. Studies have shown that the key to effectively implementing diversity into the curriculum is to include it daily (Kalev 2020). Students can learn about diverse perspectives, experiences, and contributions of the people who form their community and the wider world every time they visit the library. When we talk about, show examples of, and become involved in celebrating diversity today and every day, rather than just at certain times of the year, we model acceptance for our students. We do this by sharing resources to facilitate learning about other cultures and customs; learning and sharing more about global games, customs, entertainment, and cuisine ourselves; and including biographies and talking about contributions from people of color and other underrepresented groups. By celebrating unique cultures, backgrounds, and traditions with us on an ongoing basis,

our students gain a greater appreciation for the diversity that surrounds them and increase knowledge and positive feelings about their own heritage.

Libraries can be a source of resources and guidance to support the school community in framing understanding and communicating with students who ask questions about lives different than their own. It doesn’t matter if people in your school aren’t aware of every cultural tradition out there, but it does matter that you model acceptance and do not judge any of them as less than worthy. Observances shouldn’t be trivialized or stereotyped, and diversity should be celebrated every day.

### Works Cited

AASL. *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*. ALA, 2017.

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