



No Place for Hate® Newsletter

December 2007



As the December holidays approach, we at the ADL know that many schools are faced with difficult questions about how to appropriately acknowledge the December holidays. In an effort to help you comply with the United States Constitution and create a school environment that celebrates diversity by respecting differing points of view concerning religion, we have compiled a list of suggestions, which appear on page two of this newsletter. If you have questions or need more information, please contact our office at 512-735-8012 or visit the ADL website at www.adl.org/church-state.

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the first ever global assertion that “all human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms.” Since 1950, Human Rights Day has been celebrated annually across the world on December 10th. In honor of this important milestone, ADL features three books this month that will help children to learn about the principles reflected in the UDHR, the primary author and architect of this document, and how it relates to the rights of children globally: **Universal Declaration of Human Rights: An Adaptation for Children; Eleanor Roosevelt: An Inspiring Life; Kids Have Rights Too!**

www.adl.org/bibliography



"Lessons from the World: Including All Children" is the theme for the 7th Annual Inclusive Schools Week from December 3-7, 2007. The week

highlights the accomplishments of families, schools, and communities that have dedicated time, labor, and resources to promoting inclusive education for all of the world's children. This year's theme provides an opportunity to focus on both international accomplishments and ongoing challenges associated with changing global attitudes, practices, and policies toward better educational outcomes for students around the globe. Visit www.inclusiveschools.org for more details and free resources.

A recent wave of noose incidents on school campuses—inspired by the incidents in Jena, LA—has raised alarm among adults and questions from young people. Teaching Tolerance offers its resource **The ABCs of Nooses and Hate Symbols** for help teaching about divisive hate symbols. www.tolerance.org/teach/index.jsp



Cyberbullying is a growing problem that affects almost half of all U.S. teens. Many adults are unaware of the problem and schools are often unsure how to respond to cyberbullying activities. ADL's new interactive program helps schools develop a comprehensive approach to confront against harassment and bullying through electronic media. <http://www.adl.org/education/cyberbullying/>

Please see below for a list of holidays and observances that occur in December. Note: this is not an exhaustive list so if you have anything you'd like to share, let me know.

- 12/1—World AIDS Day
- 12/2—First Sunday in Advent (Christian)
- 12/3—International Day of Disabled Persons
- 12/3—Inclusive Schools Week
- 12/5-12—Chanukah (Jewish)
- 12/8—Feast of the Immaculate Conception (Catholic)
- 12/8—Bodhi Day (Buddhist)
- 12/10—Human Rights Day
- 12/12—Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe
- 12/15—Bill of Rights Day
- 12/20—Eid-UI-Adha (Islam)
- 12/20—International Human Solidarity Day
- 12/22—Winter Solstice (First Day of Winter)
- 12/25—Christmas (Christian)
- 12/26-Jan 2—Kwanzaa
- 12/29—Wounded Knee Day
- 12/31—New Year's Eve

The Spirit of Anne Frank Awards

The Anne Frank Center USA promotes the universal message of tolerance by developing and distributing a variety of educational programs. Based on the power of Anne Frank's diary, the center aims to inspire the next generation to build a world based on compassion, mutual respect and social justice. Each year on or about Anne's birthday of June 12, the center honors Anne's effort to improve the world with awards, stipends and a scholarship to students, educators and citizens who have demonstrated outstanding commitments to take a stand against discrimination of all kinds. **Applications are due January 31st.** www.annefrank.com



Megan Flowers
Megan.Flowers@shalomaustin.org
512-735-8012
www.adl.org/southwest



There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they grow up in peace. -- Kofi Annan

December Holiday Guidelines

General Rule: When a school does choose to acknowledge the December holidays, it is essential that the school must never appear to endorse religion over non-religion or one particular religious faith over another.

Public schools must remain free from activities that could involve religious coercion.

Because of their young age, students are particularly impressionable and susceptible to pressure to conform to the beliefs of the majority. Schools must take care to avoid endorsing the beliefs, practices or traditions of the majority religion.

Schools must be careful not to cross the line between *teaching about* religious holidays (which is permitted) and *celebrating* religious holidays (which is not). Celebrating religious holidays in the form of religious worship or other practices is unconstitutional. Teaching about a holiday will be constitutional if it furthers a genuine secular program of education, is presented objectively, and does not have the effect of endorsing, advancing or inhibiting religion.

Special school events, assemblies, concerts and programs must be designed to further a secular and objective program of education and must not focus on any one religion or religious observance. Thus, religious music or drama may be included in school events, but the reason for including that music must be to advance a secular educational goal. Such events must not promote or denigrate any particular religion, serve as a religious celebration, or become a forum for religious devotion.

Religious symbols are not appropriate seasonal decorations in public schools. The classroom and school premises are the place where children spend the majority of their day. It is important that *all* students feel comfortable and accepted in their school. Symbols of religious holidays may make some students uncomfortable and unwelcome because their holidays and traditions are not represented or because they do not celebrate religious holidays at all.

In an effort to be ecumenical, it is not advisable to rely on information provided by a representative child of a minority religion. Students should not be put on the spot to explain their religious (or cultural) traditions. The student may feel uncomfortable and may not have enough information to be accurate. Moreover, by asking a student to be spokesperson for his/her religion, the teacher is sending a signal that the religion is too "exotic" for the teacher to understand. Finally, in certain cases, the teacher may be opening the door for proselytizing activity by the student, which must be avoided.

Remember: diversity includes religious diversity. In designing holiday programming it is essential to keep in mind that the children entrusted to your care likely have widely divergent religious points of view. The way you approach the December holidays will determine whether those children whose religious views fall outside of the majority's are made to feel welcome and comfortable in their school building or whether they will feel as if they do not belong.

ADL has the following publications that can be of help:

- *The December Dilemma -- December Holiday Guidelines for Public Schools* (online at http://www.adl.org/religious_freedom/resource_kit/december_holiday_guidelines.asp)
- *Religion in the Public Schools*. A comprehensive look at the law of religion in the public schools in an easy to understand and use format (http://www.adl.org/religion_ps_2004).