Something to celebrate: exploring cultural celebrations through children’s artwork

Jennifer Kirst

Bank Street College of Education

Follow this and additional works at: http://educate.bankstreet.edu/independent-studies

Part of the Child Psychology Commons, and the Children’s and Young Adult Literature Commons

Recommended Citation


This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Educate. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Independent Studies by an authorized administrator of Educate. For more information, please contact kfreda@bankstreet.edu.
SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE
EXPLORING CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS THROUGH CHILDREN'S ARTWORK

By: Jennifer Kirst

Mentor: Dr. Peggy McNamara

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of
Master of Science in Education
Bank Street College of Education
2013
**Something To Celebrate**

*Exploring Cultural Celebrations Through Childrens Artwork*

By Jennifer Kirst

**Abstract**

*Something To Celebrate* is an original book designed for children aged eight to nine. It is a compilation of artwork, created by children around the world, that explores similarities among the world’s many celebrations. *Something To Celebrate* begins by looking at examples of celebrations experienced by most cultures. Depictions of new years day festivities, birthday parties, wedding ceremonies, national holiday events, as well as other common celebrations, demonstrate that there are similarities among the things we celebrate. The book then goes on to highlight some common features that comprise many celebrations. Elements such as music, dancing, food, lights, costumes and parades can be found in a variety of celebrations whether they are experienced by many or unique to certain cultures. An artwork location map as well as artist descriptions can be found at the end of the book.

In addition to *Something To Celebrate*, this thesis includes a description of my rationale for creating the book as well as the developmental appropriateness of the concepts presented within the book. This original book is compared to other picture and photographic books that present similar concepts in a literature review. Finally, through informal interactions with children and educators and a review of relevant research I examine curriculum implications for using *Something To Celebrate*. 
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements..................................................................................................................Page 4

Section I: Rational..................................................................................................................Page 5

Section II: Child Development...............................................................................................Page 14

Section III: Literature For Children Review........................................................................Page 21

Section IV: Original Material...............................................................................................Page 28

Section V: Applications.........................................................................................................Page 62

Section VI: Conclusion........................................................................................................Page 73

Section VII: Bibliography......................................................................................................Page 74

Section VIII: Appendix..........................................................................................................Page 76
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my mentor Dr. Peggy McNamara for her continued support and guidance. Her insights helped to enrich my understanding of the writing process and her feedback, patience and encouragement were invaluable.

An additional thank you to Creative Connections for providing me with access to their artwork archives and for inspiring my appreciation and interest in cultural education.
Section I: Rational

Prior to my time at Bank Street College I had an internship with Creative Connections, a small non-profit organization that facilitates international cultural exchanges. Their mission “is to educate young people by encouraging their awareness, understanding, and appreciation of other cultures, as well as their own” (Creative Connections, n.d.). Creative Connections offers a variety of different educational programs; their main program, ArtLink, is an art exchange between schools in the United States and schools around the world. Participating ArtLink students are given a specific theme to think about and are asked to create a piece of artwork that depicts how their culture relates to that theme. Once students have completed their artwork, the school sends the collection to the Creative Connections office where they are then exchanged with another participating school in the program. The end result is that all participating classes receive a collection of artwork from students in another country that they can then study to learn about the culture and the lives of children in the country where the artwork is from.

Part of Creative Connections’ art exchange program also includes an annual international art exhibit that showcases some of the best and most culturally representative pieces created that year. After the exhibit, the chosen pieces go into a collection housed in the Creative Connections office and are used for “Discovering World Cultures” workshops given throughout the Connecticut and New York area.

My time at Creative Connections was very valuable as I was able to witness first hand how much could be learned through studying art and how important it is to help children accept and value cultures that are different from their own. This idea stuck with me while I began my teaching career and I often talked highly of my Creative
Connections experience with colleagues. As a result of such discussions, a friend introduced me to *One World, One Day* by Barbara Kerley.

*One World, One Day* is a compilation of photographs from the National Geographic collection that uses the framework of a day to uncover similar experiences children throughout the world face in a day. The stunning photographs and the ‘simplicity’ of the supporting text immediately struck me. Barbara Kerley saw the power within each photograph and was able to leave room for it’s message to come through rather than smothering it with a lot of text and description; a process very similar to what Creative Connections tries to employ. It was in reading *One World, One Day* that I decided I wanted to create a similar book and knew where I could get my illustrations.

As I set out thinking about my project, I began thinking about what purpose my book would serve. Knowing that I would be using artwork created by children around the world, I decided that I wanted to concentrate on the idea that despite our differences we all have remarkably similar needs, wants, and experiences. At first I struggled with knowing what age group to write my book for; I went back and forth between wanting to write for the early childhood ages or the elementary. I had many discussions with other educators and looked through multiple sources of professional literature in hopes of figuring out who would best benefit from a book of artwork created by children around the world. Through my time at Bank Street College, I have come to learn about influential child developmentalists and theorists such as John Dewey, Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Caroline Pratt who place importance on the social aspects and meaningful interactions of educational experiences. By focusing on the whole child and using the community as a vital part of education, children learn from everyday experiences and develop into valuable members of society. As Dewey (1938) points out in his book *Experience and
Education, children best learn when their lessons are placed in meaningful contexts and when they can relate to and connect with the learning experience. Lucy Sprague Mitchell (2001) takes Dewey’s theories and relates them to geographic and cultural learning through her book Young Geographers (Scholastic, 2001). She challenges the notion that geography is for the mature grownup who reads maps and understands human relationships. She argues that even young children have the capacity to think in geographic terms if given time to explore, develop, observe and experiment with the relationships around them. Young children must be guided and their experiences related to the here and now. As they develop and their understanding of themselves deepens it can further be expanded to the far away and the long ago.

The crucial point in many educational theories is the notion that learning be connected to the personal experiences of the child. “Studies of foreign cultures, distant geography, or large political entities cannot possibly be illuminating unless there are connection in a child’s mind with his own culture and geographic relationships” (Cohen, 1972, p. 150). Taking all of this and thinking about which students can best relate to my concept of cultural similarities, I decided to write my book with eight and nine year-olds in mind but also wanted to make it accessible to the younger ages by including simple, direct and supportive text. Like Barbara Kerely’s book One World, One Day, I wanted the art to be the powerful voice of the book where children of all ages could enjoy looking and learning from what they could see.

One thing that struck me while working at Creative Connections was the impact of each piece of artwork created through the ArtLink program. On the surface, each piece enables viewers the opportunity to glance into the artist’s world and relive a moment of their life; a moment that, because of the nature of the program, was relevant to
a particular aspect of the artist’s culture. Given time to really examine a piece of artwork, viewers find that much more can be learned as the background details the artist included give further evidence as to what life is like in their culture. Evidence such as their style of dress, type of home, typical foods, and the what the surrounding environment looks like can all be seen within the supporting details of each piece of art. By limiting the amount of text within the book I wanted to allow room for the power of the artwork to come through and be the main source of information.

My decision to gear the book towards a third grade audience was further supported when I looked at the New York City Scope and Sequence (NYCDOE, 2013). While my book could be utilized in kindergarten and first grade, where their units of study are ‘self and others’ and ‘my family and other families’ and they look at how people are unique, important and part of a community, it isn’t until the third grade when the social studies curriculum looks at world communities. The guiding questions and principles of the third grade units are related to community features and the role of culture when shaping communities. It only seemed appropriate to write a book geared to a particular age level where they would be developmentally able to connect with people and concepts of the far away and where their particular curricular studies aligned with the ideas of the book.

I first began the process of writing the book by looking through the Creative Connections database and pulling artwork files based on the strong image that it portrayed. As I came across a piece, I categorized it based on what it was representing and began to see a theme revolving around the concept of celebrations emerge. With a list of artwork that I thought clearly depicted an important celebration in the artist’s life, I narrowed the celebrations down further to ones that appeared common in many cultures.
Within my collection of art I found many examples of birthdays, weddings, new years and national holidays. I knew that the goal of my book was to **highlight similarities despite apparent differences**, so choosing artwork that depicted common events being celebrated in a variety of ways seemed fitting. There were many beautiful examples of religious events or unique and interesting celebrations but these would not help support my message that people around the world choose to celebrate and commemorate similar events and achievements.

With a long list of potential artwork, I moved on to another aspect of this project and began examining children’s literature that had a similar approach to what I was trying to achieve. I searched for children’s literature that used photographs and artwork of children around the world as well as literature that examined aspects of culture through the eyes of a child. As I did this, I began to realize that just pointing out ‘how’ cultures are similar would not be enough. After reading some of the children’s books, I often asked myself ‘why’ questions; why did the snapshots in *Family Pictures* by Carmen Lomas Garza remind me of some of my childhood memories? It was questions like this, the ‘why’ questions, that helped me narrow my ideas and develop a framework for my book.

Children are continuously making connections as they read. Even from the young ages of preschool and kindergarten, children will relate to the emotions of a character, remember a time when they too had a similar experience as one depicted in the story (text to self), and find similarities and differences within the books they read (text to text). Connections such as these are part of the background knowledge that is required to help readers understand and internalize information within a text. When presented with unfamiliar concepts, readers rely on information they already know about the subject or related subjects to make sense of the new information (Ross & Fisher, 2009). If my book
was to be an educational tool I realized that I would need to provide support for the ‘why’ questions that might emerge.

With my goal of highlighting similarities despite apparent differences in mind, I took the context of celebrations and went a bit deeper into thinking about the components of celebrations and began to focus on pulling out the basic elements of what constitutes a celebration. My thinking behind this was to support potential ‘why’ questions that might arise as readers wondered why a particular piece of artwork reminded them of a celebration from their own experience. To do this, I needed to take a look at the celebrations I participate in and find the commonalities among them. Very quickly I recognized that most of my celebrations include some combination of music, food, dancing, costumes, lights and parades. My next step then required me to go back to the artwork I had pulled from the Creative Connections collection and organize them based on what celebration they were depicting and what element of the celebratory atmosphere they best highlighted.

Once I had the artwork organized I began playing around with the formatting of my book and developed the progression, or storyline, I wanted to follow. The most natural sequence for me was to first showcase a few celebrations that most children can relate too (ie birthdays, weddings, new years day, and national holidays) as a way of showing that we have similarities among the things we celebrate and then progress on to highlighting the elements and practices found within these celebrations. By highlighting these elements I am helping to support the understanding that while they might look, sound, taste and feel different, all celebrations have basic commonalities that help make them special; it is only the cultural influences within these elements that set them apart from other celebrations to make them different and unique.
Figuring out how to format my book also required me to consider the examples of children's literature I had gathered and decide what was it about these books that worked, or didn’t work, for me. I went back and forth with the idea of including the country of origin marked below each piece of art but ultimately decided that doing so took away from the simplistic feel I was trying to achieve as well as the message portrayed by the art itself. I loved the blurbs/captions that some of the other children’s literature supplied and felt that I wouldn’t be honoring the work of the Creative Connections students if I didn’t include their artist descriptions and so I decided to have a section in the back of my book dedicated to identifying where the artwork was from and what it was about. Being that I was also writing this book with eight to nine year-olds in mind but wanted to have it accessible for the younger ages as well, I didn’t want to overcrowd the pages with information or text. The Artwork Identification section at the end of the book allows for a more in depth discussion of what is being portrayed in each piece of art by giving readers further information.

Throughout this entire process, I was conscious of representing a wide variety of countries and constantly checked my artwork selection for potential stereotyping influences. Limited by those counties that Creative Connections has worked with, I wanted to make sure my book included artwork from as many diverse geographical locations as possible. As I decided on which artwork I was going to use, I kept note of the artist’s country to make sure I had a wide and fair representation of countries. Supplying a map to further highlights each country depicted throughout the book was another idea I gathered from various examples of children’s literature and was one idea that I feel helps as a visual reference both in knowing geographically where each piece of artwork is from, but also in demonstrating how diverse yet similar the world’s cultures
are.

One of the last things I decided on while creating my book were the images for the front and back covers. I strongly felt that the front cover needed to include an exemplary piece of art that not only related to celebrations but also depicted diversity. Because the artwork within the book originates from around the world, I wanted readers to have an open mind from the start and accept that there will be diversity found within the art but when looking at the book as a whole, it is the similarities, not the apparent differences that truly matter. I selected the image on the back cover because I loved the artists’ description and feel that it speaks to the message I am hoping to convey.

The process of writing a children’s book has been a wonderful learning experience. As a teacher I use books in my classroom everyday and for a variety of learning purposes. Some books offer great stories that can be enjoyed during a read aloud, some help teach important concepts and highlight key facts, while others can be used to guide students with their reading and writing skills. When I choose books for my classroom, I approach them from the viewpoint of how they can enhance my teaching; I look for literary components and messages that support the lessons I am teaching and decide which books fit my plan. Writing my own children’s book required me to almost reverse this process. I had a concept I wanted to teach but now had the opportunity to set out and create a resource that would package all my ideas together. Rather than looking at a final product someone else had created, I got to develop my own ideas and figure out how to best portray them based on what made sense to me in terms of organization, visual presentation and what I knew about the developmental needs of my target audience. The research I conducted- consulting fellow educators, professional literature, other children’s books, and gaining insights from current students- helped
guide my decisions and the result is a book entitled *Something To Celebrate: Exploring Cultural Celebrations Through Children’s Artwork.*
Section II: Child Development

Before I could begin writing my book, I had to decide on my target audience so that the content of my book would speak to children of that age. Based on my findings while researching the works of professional educators and after consulting the New York City Scope and Sequence curriculum, I decided to gear my book towards the third grade. In order to align my ideas with the developmental capacities and interests of eight and nine year old children, I turned to professional literature to examine the social, cognitive, academic, physical and emotional developments of typical third graders. What follows is a brief recount of my findings.

SOCIAL:

With a “thrust…[of] increasing freedom from adult authority and direction” (Cohen, 1972, p. 217) eight and nine year-olds begin to strengthen their sense of individuality. They gravitate toward peers of their own gender and form groups or cliques around like interests and common traits. Rules for fitting in and maintaining group membership are set up and group alignment is regarded with a high level of importance. Solidarity and cooperation is viewed as crucial, allowing one to turn to his/her peers as natural allies for support.

“Peer relationships, unlike adult-child relationships, involve partners who negotiate, compromise, share and defend themselves as equals” (Berger, 2011, p. 364). It is through the formations of these groups that eight and nine year-olds begin to expand their understanding of how the social world works. Individuals play different roles within the group, often resulting in competition for leadership or coveted positions. The ability to compromise and to see unique qualities within other individuals becomes essential in settling disputes and maintaining a functional group (Cohen, 1972). The group will often
times develop norms of their own as a way of distinguishing themselves from others. These norms may include common lingo or a secret language, inside jokes, and rituals like a special handshake.

All this is not to say that every group formed by eight and nine year-olds are long lasting. Friendships fluctuate but there is an increasing stability in relationships built on loyalty and it is through these friendships where social values are learned. “The conflicts of belonging and the dilemmas of relating occur in an expanding web of moral and ethical considerations, as developmental readiness and family and societal values now meet” (Cohen, 1972, p. 223). Once a self-interested individual, the eight and nine year-old is ready to take on social responsibilities such as loyalty, fairness, and duty.

As social relationships with others change, so too does the eight and nine year-old’s sense of self. Their roles, expectations, and privileges were predefined and predetermined during infancy and early childhood when they spent most of their time among family members. Now that they are expanding their social web, “the sense of self they acquired in their families no longer suffices, and they must form new identities appropriate to the new contexts they inhabit” (Cole, Lightfoot & Lightfoot, 2009, p. 460). Egocentrism once buffered them from peer acceptance or rejection but as eight and nine year-olds begin to become more aware of their peer’s opinions, judgements and accomplishments, their sense of self is now viewed in the context of their social relationships.

**COGNITIVE:**

During middle childhood, the brain continues to mature and develop. These patterns of changes within the brain’s structure and function play an important role in the cognitive development of eight and nine year-olds. With these changes, children are now
able to better control their attention, solve complex problems, develop plans, and self-reflect (Cole et al., 2009).

Piaget referred to the school-aged child as being within the concrete operational frame of thought. No longer limited by egocentrism, eight and nine year-olds can look beyond themselves, reason and perform logical operations within the context of concrete situations. One such logical operation is the concept of classifying or organizing things into groups based on characteristics they share. By age eight, most children can organize things using categories and subcategories. They can also grasp connections that are implied by inferring relationships and understanding unspoken links (Berger, 2011).

Eight and nine year-olds are very industrious and curious. They are full of ideas, which can lead them to be impatient, work too quickly, and take on more than they can handle. Because of their curiosity and amazement, they jump quickly between interests but are able to manage and hold on to more than one concept at a time (Wood, 2007). While the transfer of knowledge from one context or interest to another is not always automatic, eight and nine year-olds are avid learners who, with a little support, are able to actively build on the knowledge they already have.

**ACADEMIC:**

“The job of the second or third grade teacher is to harness that eight-year-old energy and give it some direction and focus. Throughout the year, teachers need to help children cut work down to bite-sized pieces… Children at this age need to experience ‘increasing success’ in their school work- success in gradually increasing quantities and levels of complexity- so that they will continue feeling motivated and excited” (Wood, 2007, p. 97). Eight and nine year-olds seek out explanations and facts, enjoy figuring out
how things work and learning about why things happen as they do. It is the perfect age for scientific exploration.

They enjoy working with a partner or in small groups and they tend to work best in such groupings as long as these are frequently changed throughout the year. In general, class projects are met with enthusiasm and students will display a great deal of interest in details and care about the final product.

As set out by the New York City Scope and Sequence (NYCDOE, 2013), third grade social studies curriculum looks at world communities with the guiding questions and principles studied during this time relating to community features and the role of culture when shaping communities. With their developing sense of moral responsibility, eight and nine year-olds show an interest in issues such as fairness and justice. It is perhaps because of these interests that they enjoy hearing stories about other cultures and can begin to gain an appreciation for others that differ from themselves.

**PHYSICAL:**

There are no dramatic physical changes facing eight and nine year-olds. It is an age marked with lots of energy and a need for physical release. Roughhousing, tumbling and wrestling are common activities, especially among boys. Growth spurts are common and may result in restless behavior or complaints about physical aches and pains. Children will play hard, push their physical limits and tire quickly (Wood, 2007).

Both gross and fine motor skills are still developing during this stage. Children are becoming stronger, more agile, faster and efficient at physical tasks such as riding a bike, skating and climbing (Cole et al., 2009). Coordination is improving yet they are seemingly unaware of physical obstacles. Eight and nine year-olds are gaining better hand and eye control. Typically their writing appears sloppy however, their increased
attention to detail enables them to focus and produce beautiful final copies when needed.

EMOTIONAL:

Erikson noted that middle childhood is a time of industry versus inferiority. Watching an eight or nine year-old it is clear that they are industrious, actively trying to master whatever skills their culture values. But the eight and nine year-old is now much more concerned with the opinions of peers and thus social comparison arrises. Children begin to “judge themselves as industrious or inferior - that is, competent or incompetent, productive or failing, winners or losers” (Berger, 2011, p. 351).

Eight and nine year-olds have an increasing level of confidence as they begin to become aware of their own rights and responsibilities. They are willing to meet challenges yet are sensitive towards perceived criticism and aware of personal failures (Ames and Harber, 1989). Their expanding awareness of the broader world can leave them with feelings of inferiority and the notion that nothing is fair.

Children of this age will begin to develop preferences, interests, values, likes and dislikes that are not shared with their parents or other adults in their lives. Adult rules once gladly accepted are now internalized and need to be made their own for individuality and responsibility to be achieved. This will often show as gaps between moral understanding and moral action. The ability to interpret right and wrong might still be in terms of physical consequences yet they are beginning a “developmental shift in the capacity to think in objective, rather than subjective, terms about matters that impinge upon them [and] makes it possible for children to perceive the expectations and rules of the family, group, or nation as making sense in their own right” (Cohen, 1972, p. 225).

PUTTING MY FINDINGS INTO CONTEXT:

Taking what I learned about the developmental positions of eight and nine
year-olds, I began to think about my book idea within this context. From a social standpoint, children of this age are able to understand what it means to be a part of a community and are able to identify with their own culture. The formation of groups based around similar interests and common traits speaks to the meaning of community. Often times these groups create their own rites and rituals as a way of distinguishing themselves from others. Social organization becomes a big part of an eight or nine year-old’s life as they juggle their position within the group and learn how to compromise their personal wants with the wants and needs of others in the group.

No longer constrained by the egocentric view characteristic of the younger ages, eight and nine year-olds are able to look beyond themselves and consider the views, opinions and values of others. This ability, perhaps, sparks their interest in learning about cultures and other countries. Now that their social world has expanded, eight and nine year-olds find themselves interacting with others outside the immediate world created by home and school. They learn about different values and traditions through these expanding interactions and begin to see and classify the world around them into different communities and cultures. Additionally, children in this age begin to internalize their own needs for individuality and responsibility. It is an age where they try to interpret right and wrong, fairness and equality.

The aim of my book is to harness the eight and nine year-old interest in cultures and help them to think about what things that appear to be different in such a way that they begin to understand underlying commonalities. Something To Celebrate is divided into two parts with the first part depicting common celebrations around the world and the second part outlining elements of different celebrations that are similar. The second part of the book helps students reconnect some of the distinctions they probably made while
reading the first part. At this age children are able to classify information and will most likely pick up on the cultural differences found within the common celebrations and organize these differences into categories and subcategories based on the factors they pick up on. After reading the second part of the book, these distinctions can be thought of in a new way and the notion that cultures share similar elements can be restored.

While I do highlight cultural celebrations that will be unknown and foreign to readers, I wanted to take what I considered the basic and core celebrations most eight and nine year-olds can identify with. “Studies of foreign cultures, distant geography, or large political entities cannot possibly be illuminating unless there are connection in a child’s mind with his own culture and geographic relationships” (Cohen, 1972, p. 150). The first part of my book includes celebrations of birthdays, new years, national holidays, and weddings. I have, to the best of my ability, included artwork examples from as many cultures as possible so as to provide something for every reader to relate too.

My choice of proving limited text is another attempt at getting readers to dive into the artwork and pull out as much information as they need and to make connections. Knowing that eight and nine year-olds are able to read with more fluency, they no longer rely on the illustrations within a book to help guide their reading. I wanted to provide space for the images to speak. The amount of information found within the images outweighs that found in the text and I wanted to make sure readers payed attention to this. As you turn to each page, you sense that the artwork is more prominent than the text and thus your attention is turned toward what can be learned from the art.
Section III: Literature For Children Review

My book, *Something To Celebrate: Exploring Cultural Celebrations Through Children’s Artwork*, was written for children in the middle years aged eight and nine. The themes explored throughout the book are similar to those explored in other cultural non-fiction books written for the age group. The main themes include using pictures and photography to tell a story, highlighting similarities despite apparent differences, common experiences around the world, and exploring cultural traditions and celebrations.

The first theme, using pictures and photography to tell a story, is a common one used in non-fiction books. Images help children better understand concepts and in most situations are used to further support the information being presented within the text. In my review of children’s literature I came across a few examples of books that use pictures or photography to help tell a story. Carmen Lomas Garza’s book *Family Pictures* is a memoir of her childhood told through a series of pictorial vignettes with short text accompanying the paintings. We can read about the time she went to a fair in Mexico or about picking oranges in her grandparent’s backyard, but it is in studying the paintings that we truly get a sense of what her childhood was like; the painting provides a vivid and complex image of the environment, the style of dress, the sense of community, and the importance of family relations in her culture all by looking at the paintings she has provided. Barbara Kerley’s book *One World, One Day* also uses images, but in this instance they are used to tell the story of how children all around the world partake in similar activities throughout the day. The photographs alone give us an idea of how the children’s days are progressing but the text helps put the images into context and gives us a bit more background information as to what is happening.

In a similar way to Kerley and Garza’s books, *Something To Celebrate* uses
pictures as a way of drawing parallels between various cultural celebrations. Each page contains images of artwork created by children around the world that are depicting celebrations they partake in. I have organized the book by grouping the artwork based on commonalities. The first section contains celebrations that most children can relate to as they are events observed in many different cultures. The second section of the book takes these celebrations and highlights key elements, or components, that help create the festive atmosphere. Supporting text helps readers contextualize what is being portrayed by the artwork but it is the details within the artwork that contains the information and reveals the basic commonalities of the world’s cultural celebrations.

Another theme *Something To Celebrate* explores is the idea of highlighting similarities despite apparent differences. In Susan Kuklin’s book *Families*, children from different families share what being a part of their family means to them. From the outside one might look at each family and initially see differences in appearance and composition, but when one reads what the children have to say about their families it becomes clear that there are some key similarities. This message is also apparent in Beatrice Hollyer’s *Wake Up World!* where children from eight different countries share what a day in their life is like. Each page portrays a different part of the day and includes photographs of each child doing similar activities. All the photographs look different and one can pull out variations amongst the activities, however, the message of the book highlights the children doing similar activities despite them being conducted in a different way or taking place in a different environment.

When looking at the artwork in *Something To Celebrate*, one might notice differences such as the style of dresses each bride is wearing at their wedding or the various musical instruments that are being played. It is true that differences like these do
exist, but when you stop to think about what the celebrations are for or what helps create the festive atmospheres, similarities begin to emerge. Citizens showing pride for their country mark national holidays and local food and drinks are brought out to share with those partaking in the celebrations. No matter what culture one identifies with, celebrations play an important role and help to bring the community together. Culture influences how the celebration is carried out but at the heart of every celebration is the important role it plays in different cultures.

A third theme apparent throughout Something To Celebrate is the idea of common experiences. In the first section I highlight events most children are familiar with and present readers with artwork depicting how these events are celebrated in different cultures. While it is true that every culture may have holidays, traditions or events that are unique to that particular culture, there are numerous events celebrated in many countries and across many cultures. A celebration signifies that those partaking in the festivities value and honor what is being commemorated. To understand and appreciate that those who may be different from us celebrate common experiences as ourselves helps in establishing appreciation and understanding of different cultures.

Both To Be A Kid and The Milestone Project point out common experiences of children throughout the world. In Maya Ajmera and John D. Ivanko’s To Be A Kid, readers learn that no matter what language you speak or what climate you live in kids all over the world learn new things, spend time with family and friends, and share stories. Additionally, as pointed out in Richard and Michele Steckel's The Milestone Project, kids also share common achievements. Every child loses their baby teeth, makes new friends and turns one year older each year. Many children around the world share some common experiences- it is what marks being a kid.
The last theme *Something To Celebrate* explores is that of cultural traditions and celebrations. Each culture has events they find worthy of celebrating. Celebrations are a way of showing pride and joy in things accomplished or valued. Recognizing that everyone has values and celebrates important events in their lives is an important step in accepting values that may be different from your own. Children from all parts of the world share with readers their favorite holidays and celebrations in Anabel and Barnabas Kindersley’s book *Celebrations!* Through each child’s description readers learn just how important and special celebrations are for cultural identity. *Let’s Eat!* by Beatice Hollyer also takes a look at celebrations but through the lens of food. No matter what the celebration is, food seems to be an important component of many celebrations.

Based on the content of *Something To Celebrate*, my book fits within the genre of cultural non-fiction. The themes it explores are similar to those of other books within this genre, thus making it a potential resource for a curriculum unit that explores culture. The following is a compilation of the children’s literature examples I explored that relate to the themes and content of *Something To Celebrate*.


Throughout this book, readers travel around the world to new countries, one for each letter in the alphabet. Each page introduces readers to a new country first by providing a brief history and then talking about the people and children that live in that country. Photographs taken in each country help depict the daily lives of children around the world. Differences in each country affect the lives of the children but despite these differences, similarities can be found.


Kids will be kids, no matter where they live. So what exactly does it mean to be a kid?
Photographs of children taken in a variety of countries help convey the message that kids around the world enjoy doing similar things. To be a kid means...being carried by those that love you, sharing a story with a friend, playing outside, and having fun while goofing off. The photographs illustrate children painting beautiful pictures in Poland, South Africa, and India, marching in parades in Ecuador, The United States, and Botswana, and dancing their hearts out in Ireland, the Philippines, and The United Kingdom. No matter where they grow up, kids enjoy similar activities and will love seeing photographs of others doing the same activities they do.


This book uses illustrates and text to help depict what it is like to be a baby being carried through the rain forest, across the desert, down a river and along a mountain. Some babies are carried on mother’s back, some on grandfather’s hip, and others hang in front of someone. No matter how or where they are being carried, “all around the world babies love to be held close. And parents everywhere need their hands free to work and play.”


Pictures tell a story, artist Carmen Lomas Garza certainly knows this. Told as a series of vignettes and coupled with paintings that depict memories of her childhood, readers get a taste of the life of a Mexican American girl growing up in Texas. Whether it is celebrating a birthday, going to a fair, coming together with family to make tamales, traveling to the beach on vacation, or joining the community for a neighborhood gathering, Carmen Lomas Garza shares what it means to be a family in her culture. The story tells of a single family’s experiences, yet readers from outside the family and even outside the culture can still find similarities and perhaps even see their family within the paintings.


Mushrooms in France, tortillas in Mexico, weetabix in South Africa, flat bread in India, and eggs in Thailand; these are the favorite foods identified by five children living in different countries around the world. Their favorite foods may not be the same, by the role of food in each of these children’s lives is similar. Each child helps their family gather or shop for food, they help cook the food, and they love mealtimes with their family. In addition to describing favorite foods, readers are introduced to a special event in each child’s life and learn about the important foods that are eaten during the event. The end of the book contains favorite recipes that each of the five children have shared for readers to try.

“The moment we open our eyes to a new day is something we all share. But what we see, feel, and hear around us is different depending on where we live.” *Wake Up, World!* follows eight children from around the world as they go about their day. Some of the things these children do are very different from one another, yet there are common activities that happen each day in all eight of their lives. Through the use of photographs and short descriptions, readers travel around the world to the United States, Brazil, Ghana, Russia, Vietnam, Australia, India and the United Kingdom and learn how children in these countries wake up, get ready for the day, go to school, do their chores, have a meal, and go to bed.


At first, living with a family in a small village in Nepal, Barbara Kerley was drawn to the things that were fairly different from what she knew in America. As time went on, she began to recognize aspects of the day that was very familiar to her; every morning the kids she lived with got up, went to school, helped with chores around the house, and relaxed as a family after mealtime. A compilation of photographs from the National Geographic collection helps to uncover these similarities and shows that kids from all around the world spend their days in astonishingly similar ways as one another. “This book represents one day, from sunrise to sunset, around the world- a day that we share together.”


This book explores the cultural traditions children around the world celebrate. Readers are introduced to twenty-six children who explain and talk about the important celebrations in their lives. Organized by season, readers travel around the world and learn about various festivals, holidays, and celebrations that occur throughout the year in different counties. As each child describes their favorite celebration, photographs from the event and key artifacts that relate to the event help readers understand and experience the celebration.


Through a series of interviews, children from a variety of different family compositions talk about who they are within the context of their family. They talk about their life in families with mixed-race parents, adopted parents, single parents, divorced parents and gay and lesbian parents; they talk about their relationships with their twin, their older sister, their younger brother, their special needs sibling and what it is like to be the only
child. While we are introduced to a myriad of different families, each family being unique, it is clear that there is a common sense of feeling loved and cared for regardless of how one’s family is put together. This book celebrates what it means to be a family in America’s ever diversifying population.


Birthdays, lost teeth, haircuts, and the first day of school…these are all experiences common to children everywhere. Through a compilation of photographs and quotes by children as well as children’s book authors and illustrators, this book sets out to document milestone events familiar to every child. To best understand someone who is different from us, someone from another continent, a different race, a different culture, it is important to recognize that behind the noticeable differences, there are similarities. The photographs and quotes within this book remind us of these similarities, these childhood milestones, which are common throughout the world.


On the outside, it appears as if children all over the world lead very different lives from one another. They speak different languages, eat different food, have different skin and hair colors, and partake in different activities. Despite these differences, however, the basic needs and hopes of all children are the same. This book lays out the similarities of children based on their needs for survival, development, protection and participation. Every child has the right to water, food, shelter, and education.
Section IV: Original Material

The following is the book, *Something To Celebrate*, that I have created.
Something To Celebrate

Exploring Cultural Celebrations Through Children's Artwork

By: Jennifer Kirst
A special thank you to *Creative Connections* for providing me with access to their artwork archives and for inspiring my appreciation and interest in cultural education.
As you read this book, take the time to become a ‘cultural detective’. Study the artwork, read the artist descriptions and make connections to your own experiences.

What can you learn about the cultures of these artists?

Are they similar to your own?
As one year ends and another one begins, people all around the world kick start the New Year with a grand celebration!
Throughout the year as the weather shifts, more celebrations welcome the **CHANGING SEASONS**.
Everyday is someone’s **BIRTHDAY**. Children -near and far- celebrate as they turn one year older!
Families and friends gather to celebrate...
a new couple on their WEDDING DAY.
Citizens show pride for their country during **NATIONAL HOLIDAYS**.
Students honor their TEACHERS.
The year is filled with many wonderful **CELEBRATIONS**... What is your favorite?
No matter what the celebration is for, people all around the world celebrate in remarkably similar ways.
FOOD plays a big role in many celebrations.
When people gather together to celebrate,
MUSIC can be heard...
and people will be **DANCING**.
Fancy **LIGHTS** help create a celebratory atmosphere.
Some may come to the celebration dressed in **COSTUMES**...
Or take part in a big **PARADE**.
However you choose to **CELEBRATE**, it is sure to be a wonderful time!
ARTWORK IDENTIFICATION

The artwork contained within this book was gathered from the collections of the Creative Connections ArtLink Program - an international exchange program that works to connect US classrooms with classrooms around the world as a way of opening up discussions about culture. The following is what the artists had to say about their work.

Fireworks in the Winter
Artist: Beth  Age: 12  
Country: USA  Page: 4
“The tradition is party poppers for New Year’s. My mom’s best friend ever year comes and gives them to us, and we pop them together at ten. (It is so early because I have younger siblings.)”

Beating to Break Pot
Artist: Sarn  Age: 15  
Country: Cambodia  Page: 4
“This is a gathering in a village for playing a popular game. Since ancient times this is a kind of game the Khmer people have always played in the Khmer New Year.”

Summer Solstice In My Home
Artist: Renate  Age: 12  
Country: Latvia  Page: 6
“My drawing is depicting a Latvian tradition, Midsummer Night. I am in the portrait and behind me are some of my family members around the campfire and the table with food. We usually jump over the fire and eat cheese and drink beer.”

Birthday Celebration
Artist: Mutuku  Age: 12  
Country: Kenya  Page: 7
“It is a celebration, people are skinning a goat. Other people are coming to join the celebration. I chose this, because I like celebrating my birthday, and we usually slaughter a goat.”

Fireworks
Artist: Kendall  Age: 10  
Country: New Zealand  Page: 4
“The tradition I have chosen is New Year. People are watching fireworks and a bonfire. I choose this scene because it is my favorite time of the year and I like fireworks.”

New Year Festival
Artist: Himshari  Age: 10  
Country: Sri Lanka  Page: 4
“In this scene children are playing. Three women are playing “RABANA” it is a kind of drum. In this season we can find many kinds of fruits, especially cashew nuts. The New Years Festival is the most important festival in Sri Lanka.”

Traditional Winter Games
Artist: Elena  Age: 13  
Country: Russia  Page: 6
“In winter, we have many traditional activities. People go skating, playing with snow. I like winter games very much.”

The Birthday Party
Artist: Julia  Age: 11  
Country: USA  Page: 7
“In my scene a girl is having a birthday party. They are sitting in her house, just about to have cake while her friends are gathering around the table to celebrate.”

Best Day Ever
Artist: Samm  Age: 10  
Country: New Zealand  Page: 7
“Awesome colorful and yummy cake. I like it when I make a wish on my birthday.”

Harvest Time
Artist: Liang  Age: 13  
Country: China  Page: 6
“Some farmers are harvesting. They are very excited and happy. I chose this scene because it tells us about harvest time. We Chinese people are very happy at this time.”

Family
Artist: Sophie  Age: 12  
Country: Ireland  Page: 7
“I am looking at my family at my cousin’s 18th birthday party! I picked this scene because my family is important to me.”
Kazakh Wedding
Artist: Uliyana Age: 9
Country: Kazakhstan Page: 8
“They sit in a yurta. A yurta is a Kazakh house of nomads before. There is a wedding by Kazakh custom. A man is playing the dombyra which is a traditional musical instrument. An old woman is treating with tea of men and a bride and a groom with decorations. It’s a gathering for all relatives and friends.”

Nepali Marriage
Artist: Shanti Age: 12
Country: Nepal Page: 9
“My picture describes a Nepali marriage. It shows a man “dulha” and woman “dulhai” in the ceremony in Nepali dress. It is a Hindu way of marrying.”

The Pledge of Allegiance
Artist: David Age: 13
Country: USA Page: 10
“I chose this because it is an American tradition, and it is done in all schools in America. In this scene, a boy is putting his hand on his heart. This is the position for the pledge.”

Independence Day
Artist: M. B. Age: 13
Country: India Page: 11
“On Independence day, 15th August, the president is hoisting the flag of our country India and the Commander is saluting the flag. I chose this scene because I like to see the flag of Independent India to keep flying high.”

Teachers’ Day
Artist: Han Age: 16
Country: China Page: 12
“September 10th is Teachers’ Day in China. Our class is having a party to celebrate Teachers’ Day. All of the students love our teachers very much. Some are singing and dancing. Some are giving gifts to our teachers. We all say, ‘Happy Teachers’ Day!’”

A Popular Wedding
Artist: Sayed Age: 14
Country: Egypt Page: 8
“It’s a popular wedding that’s composed of a group

Jordanian Wedding
Artist: Joud Age: 13
Country: Jordan Page: 9
“I have drawn a Jordanian wedding because it is so special and different from any other wedding. In our wedding, the bride wears a special white dress. The traditions in Jordan are to make a celebration with song and dances in front of the bride’s house, before they go to the hotel. The value is family bonding and celebrating togetherness.”

Enjoying The Fireworks
Artist: Martha Age: 15
Country: Mexico Page: 10
“I drew a show of lights that is on the 15th of September. It is with cause of the independence and we enjoy with my family at my grandparent’s house. I chose this because it is important day for all Mexicans.”

18th November
Artist: Indrikis Age: 15
Country: Latvia Page: 11
“In my artwork you can see the celebration of 18th November, the day of Latvia’s proclamation. The boy and girl look to fireworks. I chose it because that is an important and beautiful tradition to look at fireworks, sing together, warming up at the fireplaces and remembering history.”

15th August
Artist: Indrikis Age: 15
Country: Latvia Page: 11
“Independence Day is a great Russian holiday when we think of people who liberates our motherland.”

Victory Day Parade
Artist: Denis Age: 10
Country: Russia Page: 10
“This is a parade on the Victory Day. People are watching the show. They are happy. I chose this tradition because Victory Day is a great Russian holiday when we think of people who liberates our motherland.”

Happy Teacher’s Day
Artist: Meera Age: 14
Country: Nepal Page: 12
“In my piece we are celebrating teacher’s day by the students giving flowers, gifts and balloons to show their respect for the teacher.”
Pancake Week (Maslenitsa)
**Artist:** Kolbasenkova  **Age:** 10  **Country:** Russia  **Page:** 15
“I have chosen Pancake Week. People bake pancakes. They burn a straw man. They swing. In my scene, I’m tell about Maslenitsa. There is a woman carrying pancakes. The girl is swinging. They are burning the straw man.”

Wedding
**Artist:** Punthip  **Age:** 13  **Country:** Thailand  **Page:** 15
“I painted a wedding. In Thai, “wedding” is “Kgin-Khaek”, the words for “eat” and “guests” Thai society is based on food culture, and so the word means the guests are invited to eat at the social gathering of a newly married couple. Also, at the wedding ceremony, favorite foods of the ancestors are ceremonially offered. Another important part of the wedding ceremony is the “Pook Mue” or sacred cord, which guests tie around the wrists of the bride and groom.”

Celebrating In Roma Family
**Artist:** Roman  **Age:** 13  **Country:** Slovak Republic  **Page:** 16
“My scene shows a celebration in the family. The violinist plays a song. The other people are dancing and singing.”

Hanami
**Artist:** Kokoro  **Age:** 16  **Country:** Japan  **Page:** 15
“My family and friends are celebrating Hanami. This is a traditional Japanese culture. We celebrate the bloom of cherry trees and have a picnic under the trees. It is a celebration.”

An Islamic Victory Day
**Artist:** Nathania  **Age:** 11  **Country:** Indonesia  **Page:** 16
“Islamic Victory Day is a great day for Muslims. Usually they celebrate it after they have been fasting for thirty days. One of them has to hit the large drum in front of the mosque to summon to prayer.”

Song & Dance Festival
**Artist:** Daiga  **Age:** 12  **Country:** Latvia  **Page:** 17
“Every four years song- and-dance festivals take place in my country. People from all over Latvia come to sing together on a big open-air stage. In my scene one of the conductors is conducting the huge choir. It is a great feeling to sing together with hundreds of singers.”

Smash The Pinata
**Artist:** Miranda  **Age:** 12  **Country:** Mexico  **Page:** 14
“Observing a girl breaking the pinata during a celebration. I chose this tradition because I like the celebrations that we do in my house in December where we eat tamales and drink punch.”

Cultural Heritage of Nepal
**Artist:** Nita  **Age:** 13  **Country:** Nepal  **Page:** 16
“The people are celebrating their festival and they are singing and dancing and using their own traditional instrument. Since we have a multi-religious committee and everyone has their own traditions, therefore, everyone celebrates festivals in their own way. We respect every religion and its tradition.”

Engagement Agreement
**Artist:** Ali  **Age:** 15  **Country:** Kuwait  **Page:** 15
“One of the typical traditions in our country is an engagement. You can see in the scene a young man who came with his father to our house to ask to marry my sister Mounifa. When my brother Faris offered them a traditional coffee they put their cups (we call them “finjan”) on the ground, refusing to drink the coffee until they get the approval from my father for the young man to marry my sister. My father agreed to their request.”

Tinikling
**Artist:** King Laurence C.  **Age:** 11  **Country:** Philippines  **Page:** 18
“This shows the traditional dance called Tinikling. I am dancing it with my classmates in school. We dance through bamboos.”
Dancing Girl
Artist: Ife Age: 14
Country: Nigeria Page: 19
“In my scene I decided to draw a scene I saw which some people and a girl were dancing beautifully.”

Explosions
Artist: James Age: 11
Country: England Page: 21
“I chose Guy Fawkes Day as my tradition because I like the heat of the bonfires and the colors of the fireworks. In the 1600s, Guy Fawkes tried to blow up the House of Parliament. We celebrate Guy Fawkes Day on November 5th every year by lighting bonfires and burning a Oguy. We also set off fireworks.”

The Festival Party
Artist: Sayo Age: 12
Country: Japan Page: 20
“I am on top of the mountain. I enjoy the festival with my friends. I chose this scene because Yukata and Chochiv are part of Japanese culture.”

Folk 2003
Artist: Adi Age: 15
Country: Albania Page: 18
“This shows the old traditional dancing of the south of Albania. The men are dancing. I chose this because the dancers express the strong character of my people.”

Dhainthyra
Artist: Amirtha
Country: India Page: 19
“Two dancers are expressing their love and joy by dancing during the Dassara festival. The value I am depicting is the importance of love and loving one another.”

Loy Krathong
Artist: Sumana Age: 18
Country: Thailand Page: 21
“This is probably the most romantic festival in my country and occurs on the full-moon of the 12th lunar month (November). In the evening, people gather at the waterside and float krathong, lotus-shaped vessels decorated beautifully with flowers and lit candles and worship the Goddess of water. Whole families and often boyfriends and girlfriends make wishes as they put their krathong in the water together.”

Spooktacular
Artist: Aatessa Age: 12
Country: USA Page: 22
“It's a dark and spooky night with all the houses decorated with spooky and scary decorations. There are kids of different ages that are wearing different types of cool and fun costumes. You may notice a bag in their hands. They have candy from trick or treating.”

Jumping Over Fire
Artist: Alexandra Age: 12
Country: Hungary Page: 20
“On Saint Ivan’s night our ancestors jumped over the fire. In the picture I have managed to jump over and another woman is jumping.”

Candle Lamp Parade
Artist: Astrid Age: 11
Country: Guatemala Page: 21
“I am showing the celebration of Guatemalan Independence Day on September 15. We parade with candle lamps through different streets in our town. My picture shows the value of being good citizens and the lights that illuminate us to begin a new year of independence.”

Spring Festival
Artist: He Age: 12
Country: China Page: 22
“Spring festival is a Chinese traditional festival. People hold different kinds of activities to celebrate it.”

The Culture of Jordan
Artist: Nada Age: 13
Country: Jordan Page: 19
“It is the culture of Jordan. This is a traditional dance which is called Dabkeh. It is often done on special occasions like a wedding.”

The value I am depicting is the importance of joy by dancing during the Dassara festival.

Dhanhiya
Artist: Amirtha
Country: India Page: 19
“Two dancers are expressing their love and joy by dancing during the Dassara festival. The value I am depicting is the importance of love and loving one another.”

The culture of Jordan. This is a traditional dance which is called Dabkeh. It is often done on special occasions like a wedding.”

Jumping Over Fire
Artist: Alexandra Age: 12
Country: Hungary Page: 20
“On Saint Ivan’s night our ancestors jumped over the fire. In the picture I have managed to jump over and another woman is jumping.”

Candle Lamp Parade
Artist: Astrid Age: 11
Country: Guatemala Page: 21
“I am showing the celebration of Guatemalan Independence Day on September 15. We parade with candle lamps through different streets in our town. My picture shows the value of being good citizens and the lights that illuminate us to begin a new year of independence.”

Spring Festival
Artist: He Age: 12
Country: China Page: 22
“Spring festival is a Chinese traditional festival. People hold different kinds of activities to celebrate it.”
In this scene I am depicting the annual parade we have to honor the teaching of Buddha. We take Tipitaka (three baskets of teaching) books to give to the monks. Different temples have drum circles and performers that lead the parade.

**Army For Peace**
*Artist: Renos Age: 10*
*Country: Cyprus Page: 24*
“The army is parading for the anniversary of the ending of the Second World War.”

**Papa Djab**
*Artist: Shernike Age: 13*
*Country: St. Lucia Page: 24*
“Papa Djab is one of the cultural scenes which can be seen parading through the streets on Christmas and Boxing Day. Papa Djab dances and chants to which the onlooker responds.”

**Peacock Dancing**
*Artist: Surani Age: 14*
*Country: Sri Lanka Page: 23*
The Pavo dancers are wearing peacock dresses. They are doing a traditional ceremony that we hold in July. This is our important traditional act. Peacocks are the most valuable bird.

**Bonn Katona Din**
*Artist: Chun Age: 18*
*Country: Cambodia Page: 24*
“In this scene I am depicting the annual parade we have to honor the teaching of Buddha. We take Tipitaka (three baskets of teaching) books to give to the monks. Different temples have drum circles and performers that lead the parade.”

**Carnival**
*Artist: Dayane Age: 14*
*Country: Brazil Page: 24*
The colors of the carnival are beautiful and the carnival represents the culture of Brazil.

**Spring Voices**
*Artist: Yergolieva Age: 13*
*Country: Kazakhstan Page: 23*
“A girl is playing a musical instrument. It seems like you can hear wonderful sounds. I chose this scene because I like because I like the Kazakh national clothes. It is very pleasant to hear the sounds of any musical instrument too.”

**Dancing In The Streets**
*Artist: Alexandra Age: 13*
*Country: USA Page: 24*
“In this picture there is a Mardi Gras Parade going on. I have dancers and majorettes in the street dancing. A girl is throwing beads.”

**Family Fridays**
*Artist: Farah Age: 12*
*Country: Jordan Page: 25*
“My family and I are eating Mansaf on Friday at the farm. Mansaf is the national dish in Jordan. It is a traditional meal made of lamb, cooked in a sauce of fermented dried yogurt and served with rice or bulgur wheat. The value I am depicting is love of family. Family is always beside you and support you.”

**A Tree of Peace**
*Artist: Zhang Age: 13*
*Country: China End Page*
“A tree deeply rooted in the earth on which all human beings live. Its fruit are the pigeons, symbol of peace. The artist wants to express the common wish of human beings, the common wish of creating a beautiful and peaceful future.”
This picture shows a group of South Africans performing a peaceful tribal dance around the night fire under the vast African sky. These people are proud of their roots and are joyously celebrating their culture. By accepting your own culture, you learn to tolerate other cultures.”
Section V: Application

A major part of the creative process for most authors is thinking about how their book can be utilized. Taking an initial idea and developing it, researching similar examples of children’s literature and thinking about the developmental stages of the intended audience can only go so far, the next stage is thinking of potential ways educators can use the book as a resource in their classroom. To help generate ideas for potential usage, I met with a class of third grade students and fellow educators to hear their thoughts. Once I had their input, I was able to think about *Something To Celebrate* and the role it could play in various different curriculums. The following details my experiences and thoughts.

**STUDENT INPUT:**

After completing *Something To Celebrate*, I met with a class of third graders from an international school. I presented my book to them and asked if they had any feedback, input or further questions for me. Since I was reading my book in a whole class setting, I chose to project a digital form of my book up on the screen in the front of the classroom to insure that the text and images were large enough for all to see. While I read my book the students gathered around, sitting either on the floor or in some nearby seats.

Before I began reading, I introduced myself to the class and gave them a brief explanation about my book. I told them why I chose to write the book, how I came up with the idea, and a little bit about where the artwork came from. I then explained to them that while the version of my book I was going to read them was pretty close to being my final draft, I would love to hear their input and suggestions.
My read aloud of the book went very smoothly. The students were attentive and I could see they were really looking closely at the artwork. After initial comments of praise and compliments for my book, some students began asking what countries certain images were from. We took some time to look in the back of the book at the Artwork Identification section and read some of the artist descriptions.

Their interest in where the artwork originated from was no surprise to me. Being that the students were from an international school setting, I expected that they would want to see artwork from their home countries and even asked them if the celebrations I chose to depict were familiar to them. A few students were able to recognize some of the celebrations and after reading the artist descriptions offered some more information about the celebrations based on their own experiences. It was really fun to see how my book sparked the students’ interests and gave them an opportunity to share a little about their culture.

After a few rounds of sharing, I wanted to re-direct their attention back to the focus of my book and I asked the students for some input. I told them how as I began writing my first draft I couldn’t decide if I wanted to include a small subtext that identified the place of origin of each piece of artwork. The initial response I got was that yes, I should put the name of the country in a small font below each piece of artwork. Amidst everyone voicing their opinion and reasoning for how they wished that I included country names, someone quietly said that she didn’t agree. I asked her to explain a little further and she went on to say that had I included the names of each country, she would have spent her time searching for her home country rather than looking at each image. Slowly other students began changing their views and another discussion emerged.

Those in favor of including the origin of the artwork said that it offered a chance
for readers to compare and contrast different cultures. They also said that it would help them recognize or identify the cultures while reading the story so they wouldn't have to interrupt the flow of the book by constantly flipping to the Artwork Identification section at the end. In contrast, those who thought that I should keep my book the way it was, without the country names, felt that it allowed readers to look more closely at the images and worried that they would be too distracted by more text. They also said that in a way the book could be like a guessing game—could they recognize the celebration? If they could, it might mean that the celebration was from their culture or it might mean that their culture was similar to another culture. After the students took turns giving me their input, we agreed that if I choose to include the country names, it should be in a small font and perhaps even in a lighter grey color so it is more subtle and does not distract the readers attention.

After reflecting upon this experience of reading my book to a class of third graders, I have gone back and reorganized the introductory page of my book. I found that some of the initial comments the students gave me were about specific celebrations and they wanted more “well known” holidays to be included. I responded to this by explaining that my intent was not to teach readers about individual celebrations but rather to see how a lot of the world’s celebrations have similar components to them. I took this to mean that my initial introduction to the class of my book and its intent was not clear enough and that I needed to find a way to more explicitly state the intended purpose of my book for all readers while also being aware that readers will interact with the book in a way they feel fits their intention best.

Some additional thoughts I had after reading my book to a whole class was about the mode of presentation best suited for my book. I enjoyed reading the book aloud and
feel like it opened up chances for discussion. The one thing I noticed, however, was that
by reading it aloud in a whole group setting the Artwork Location Map and Artwork
Identification pages were lost. In order to best utilize all the information presented on
those pages, a small group or individual reading would be best. This would allow readers
more time to interact with the information contained throughout the book as they could
more easily flip between the artwork and the descriptions, compare their initial thoughts
to the intentions of the artists, and find support for their questions.

TEACHER INPUT:

After reading my book aloud to the class of third graders, I met with their teacher
to discuss ideas about how Something To Celebrate could be incorporated into a
classroom. We discussed how it lends itself nicely as a mid unit read-aloud and
reference material for any social studies curriculum that explores the concepts of culture
and community. While probably not the best introductory book, some prior knowledge or
a pre-reading activity would be beneficial.

We discussed how in order for students to best connect with the ideas presented
within Something To Celebrate, they should know what a celebration is and be able to
identify with some examples of celebrations from their own experiences. An activity or
chance for students to share about some of their favorite celebrations is a great
pre-reading opportunity. Through this sharing, students might recognize that they
celebrate similar things as their peers, but the ways in which they celebrate can be
different. It might also come up in this sharing that some celebrations are unique to
certain people, or groups of people, and these celebrations might not occur everywhere.
It is important to note, however, that some children, especially those whose families
emigrated a few generations back, might be removed from their cultural heritage. Being
able to connect with or identify a celebration from their culture may be hard as the way in which they currently celebrate has been altered by influences from others.

Additionally, another thing to note prior to reading *Something To Celebrate* is to include a brief explanation that the book picks up on aspects of culture, in particular aspects of cultural celebrations, that are similar. It should be made clear to the students that rather than thinking in terms of what makes one culture different and unique from another culture, they will need to shift gears and begin thinking about the similarities across cultures. Some students will most likely want to know which cultures are being depicted in the different images and they might focus on picking out details that help them identify particular cultures. A second read-aloud, perhaps this time in smaller groups, can be useful as it will allow students more space to engage with the book and use it as a resource where they can more readily flip between sections to help support their thinking and understanding. After is it clear to the teacher that his/her students are grasping the idea that underneath obvious and apparent differences there exist some aspects of culture that are similar, he/she can make the book available as a resource for further exploration.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM:**

**Social Studies:**

*Something To Celebrate* can be used as a resource for the third grade social studies curriculum when launching into a study about culture. It is a picture book that can be used to spark students curiosity as a new unit is introduced. With it's theme revolving around celebrations, it is a book in which most students will be able to connect with. Prior to reading *Something To Celebrate*, students should have the opportunity to tap into their background knowledge and think about and share some of the special celebrations in their lives. Through this sharing opportunity, students will begin to recognize that the
ways in which they celebrate a particular holiday or occasion is different from their peers and aspects of celebratory traditions will begin to come to the surface. Being able to recognize these differences can be a wonderful opening for a discussion that begins to define culture.

A reading of *Something To Celebrate* can further support this growing concept of culture. The book is broken down into two parts which can be read in either two separate readings or together as one. The first section can be used to expand upon the students’ previous experience of sharing about their special celebrations. Here readers will come to recognize that all around the world groups of people gather together to commemorate special events. The specific events that are highlighted within this section happen to be ones that are common throughout many different cultures- the start of a new year, a birthday, a wedding, a national holiday, etc. If given the time to explore the images, students will begin to pick up on variations within these celebrations. Take for example the pages that depict weddings, six images show events that are part of a typical wedding celebration in various different cultures. At the heart of each celebration is the idea of two people joining together, but depending on the cultural influences of the couple, the wedding ceremony is carried out in different ways.

Taking the time to pause and ask students what variations they see and why they think these variations occur will get them thinking about factors that influence culture. The image of the bride cutting a wedding cake is very different from the one of the bride and groom sitting down for tea. What is it about these cultures that influence the food and drink served at a wedding? The influencing factors may or may not be obvious but getting students to think about the features such as geography, education, religion, occupations, and social history may shed some light. Students will most likely have
questions pertaining to certain images. Some of these questions can be answered by reading the descriptions in the Artwork Identification section at the end of the book while other questions will have to be answered through deduction and further research.

The first part of Something To Celebrate concludes by asking readers what their favorite celebration is. The supporting image depicts a naming ceremony in Gambia. While naming ceremonies occur in various different cultures, they are not as common as the celebrations previously depicted. This helps highlight that there can be certain celebrations that are unique to specific cultures or celebrated by only a few. The second part of the book will further identify examples of such specific celebrations.

Within this second part of Something To Celebrate, readers are now introduced to the notion that despite apparent differences there are similarities among the world’s many celebrations. It is here where students will begin to discover and explore what constitutes a celebration. After reading part one, students understand that people celebrate events that are important to them. The students became what Creative Connections calls “cultural detectives” in their task of studying and breaking apart the artwork while looking for clues about the cultural aspects depicted within the images. As typical with the age group, the students most likely began mentally classifying and sub-categorizing (Berger, 2011) what they were seeing about the cultures into distinct groups of people with celebratory aspects specific to their group. In part two, readers will uncover elements that exist within most celebrations despite how unique or specific they are to a particular culture.

Most third grade social studies curriculums that explore the concept of ‘world culture’ narrow this broad topic down and examining just one, or perhaps a few, specific cultures. Something To Celebrate, specifically this second part, would be a great
resource for such a study. Looking at the elements of celebrations as outlined in the book, students can research the traditional food, music, dances, costumes, parades and lights of the Chinese, Ancient Egyptian, Hispanic, or whatever culture their class is studying. By approaching culture from this perspective the implications of cultural influences can be addressed.

Guided questions can lead students to uncover the environmental, historical, social, religious, political, as well as other factors that contribute to what gets celebrated and how it is celebrated. For example, the costumes seen throughout the pages of Something To Celebrate all have specific meaning to the people who wear them. The dancers from Sri Lanka (p. 23) dress like peacocks because to them, the peacock is a valuable bird and they choose to honor the peacock in a traditional ceremony held every July. This information can be gathered in the Artwork Identification section but further information about why the peacock is so valued in Sri Lankan culture will have to be explored. Reading Something To Celebrate and demonstrating how to approach such issues of cultural influences in ways just done with the example from Sri Lanka will help students conduct their research methods is a similar way and they will begin to look not only at reference text for information but also in supporting images to help guide their research and uncover further questions worth examining.

It is not very often that we rely on pictures books as teaching resources for the upper grades, picture books are more readily thought of for use as read aloud opportunities in the early years. Yet, “picture books present memorable social data about people’s actions... and promote a suppleness of mind needed to assimilate content area knowledge” (Farris & Fuhler, 1994, p. 381). Something To Celebrate can be used in a social studies curriculum to introduce a unit on the study of culture and to encourage
further exploration of concepts in the middle of the study. It is a resource that uses
diverse cultural images that can enhance cognitive, aesthetic, and multicultural
understanding (Manifold, 2000).

Language Arts/Writing:

In addition to being used as a tool for a social studies curriculum, *Something To
Celebrate* can also find its way into language arts classes. Before being formally taught
to read, children examine the illustrations and pick up on details that help them tell a
story. As they begin to understand the letter, sound, and word relationships, they still
glance at the pictures to support their emerging reading skills. By third grade, most
students are able to read with fluidity and no longer rely on images in the way they once
did (Hurst, 1999; Feathers & Arya, 2012). The art of studying illustrations and gaining
insight or a story from the images begins to get lost.

“Scholars in the field of children’s literature have long viewed illustrations as an
important part of picture books that contribute as much to the development of a story as
the verbal text” (Feathers & Arya, 2012, p. 36). *Something To Celebrate* can be a great
tool for teachers to help children maintain that prior notion of discovering stories or
information within pictures. With limited text and plenty of detailed images, readers find
the need to slow down and explore the artwork. The storyline itself is very simple and
does not offer as much information as what is contained within the artwork. The artist’s
descriptions offer some new insights, but the majority of the information one can gather
comes from reading the pictures. Recognizing this fact, students can re-discover the skill
of using illustrations to help support reading and understanding for “when text is
integrated with image, a symbolic interaction occurs. Excellent illustrations are an
extension of literal text, and integral to comprehension of the narrative” (Manifold, 2000, p. 30).

While reading the pictures, teachers can then create many writing prompt activities. Students can hypothesize about a particular image and write about what they think is going on. They can read the pictures to gather clues about where the particular celebration is taking place and why. Details such as the style of dress, the food and drinks being served or the features of the environment can guide an observer to a general area of region of the world, a particular country, or even a specific culture. Students can also use the images within *Something To Celebrate* to compare and contrast two celebrations or write about how one of the depicted celebrations is similar or different from a celebration from their own experience.

The versatility of *Something To Celebrate* within a language arts curriculum makes it resource for lessons aimed at developing both reading and writing skills. It can be read to reconstruct the notion that illustrations are powerful supporters of text and it can be used as a branching off point for discussions and/or writing activities within a variety of different genres.

**Art:**

The saying “a picture is worth a thousand words” suggests that images can have expressive power and are capable of conveying meaning. *Something To Celebrate* can be a great resource for an art class where students explore what is being portrayed within the artwork found inside the book. “Visual literacy, the ability to comprehend meaning in images, requires critical viewing skills” (Manifold, 2000, p. 29). A lesson where students take an artwork example from the book and examine it for clues, for
information that help viewers learn more about the culture being depicted, can
demonstrate just how powerful and expressive an image can be. The artwork contained
within *Something To Celebrate* was not chosen because of the artistic skills of the
artists, but rather because each piece illustrates an important aspect of it’s artist’s
culture. Subtle details help to highlight what is valued by the artist and helping students
understand how to ‘read’ the artwork and pick up on such details can help them develop
the visual skills needed to process other pieces of art and uncover the expressive power
of images.

*Something To Celebrate* can also find its way into the art curriculum as an
introduction to a unit focused on creating and sharing about cultural identification. Such a
unit can take on many different activities and projects but enabling students the freedom
to visually represent their traditions and values can help them identify what it is about
their culture they find interesting, exciting, unique, and worthy of being proud about. A
reading or look through of *Something To Celebrate*, coupled with a discussion about the
ways in which the artists share their culture, can inspire students to find their own way to
communicate about their own. Whether it is used as a reference book or as an
introduction to a lesson this book can be useful in the art classroom.
Section VII: Conclusion

This process, creating a children’s book and writing a thesis to support the ideas behind the book, has been a great experience for me both personally and professionally. Searching through the archives of Creative Connections and pulling out pieces that could help support the theme of my book made me think more deeply about my message and my intended audience. Prior to this, my experiences as an educator had been about pulling out resources that were already produced and thinking about them in terms of the curriculum I was looking to enhance. This process had me thinking not only about it’s curricular uses but also the developmental needs I was trying to support. It required me to become creative and consider how to organize the content, display the images and chose the mode of presentation, things that are typically predetermined, or more limited, when selecting books and resources that have already been produced.

As I think back to the beginning, I recall the book that inspired this process-One World, One Day. In addition to this book, Barbara Kerley has written many other children’s books including others that use photographs to create a sense of unity among the experiences of the world’s diverse population. Celebrations, the theme I chose to explore in my book is not the only topic that is addressed within the artwork of the Creative Connection’s archives. Now that I have this experience to learn from I feel inspired to see what other books I can create.
Section VII: Bibliography


Ross, D. & Fisher, D. (2009). The underappreciated role of background knowledge in


**Children’s Literature:**


Section VIII: Appendix

Statement of Permission:
During the process of writing my thesis, I met with a third grade class to get their perspectives and input on my book. I also met with fellow educators to discuss possible curricular implications. The name of the school as well as the names of the participating students and educators have not been disclosed for privacy reasons. Permission from the school’s elementary school director was granted prior to meeting with the students and teachers.