

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Advancing Equitable Opportunities



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January 2026 Cultural Heritage Highlights

Disclaimer: The Cultural Heritage Highlights is intended as a resource to encourage the recognition, exploration, and celebration of a wide range of cultural observances in schools and communities. Each monthly edition features selected observances that reflect both longstanding and emerging cultural traditions. While every effort is made to include diverse and meaningful content, the list is not exhaustive and should not be viewed as an intentional exclusion of any celebration. Educators and community members are encouraged to use this resource as a starting point for deeper learning, inclusive dialogue, and the continued honoring of all cultural identities throughout the year. Suggestions for upcoming highlights are welcomed and can be sent to ESBOCESdei@esboces.org.



Mental Wellness Month

It seems fitting that January is designated as Mental Wellness Month. This month serves as a valuable reminder that maintaining mental wellness is crucial for overall well-being and can have a profound impact on our daily lives, relationships, and productivity. During this time, individuals are encouraged to reflect on their mental health habits, seek support when needed, and adopt strategies such as mindfulness, regular physical activity, and stress management techniques. By fostering a culture of openness and self-care, Mental Wellness Month aims to promote awareness, reduce stigma, and empower people to take proactive steps toward improving their mental resilience in the year ahead.

Learn more:

[Information about Mental Wellness Month](#)
[21 Ways to Celebrate Mental Wellness Month](#)



National Poverty in America Awareness Month

National Poverty in America Awareness Month is a time to shed light on the ongoing challenge of poverty in the United States. This month is an opportunity for educators, students, and families to learn about the roots of poverty, its impact on communities, and ways we can work together to promote economic opportunity and support those in need. Raising awareness is the first step toward creating a more equitable and caring society.

Learn more:

[Community Action Partnership](#)
[January is National Poverty in America Awareness Month](#)



January 1 – Global Family Day

Observed annually on January 1, Global Family Day celebrates the idea of peace, understanding, and unity among people around the world. This special day encourages individuals, communities, and nations to come together in the spirit of compassion and cooperation as we start the new year. As the world welcomes 2026 with enthusiasm and anticipation, Global Family Day provides an opportunity to reflect on the importance of building bridges across cultures and borders. It inspires us to work toward creating a more harmonious and inclusive global community, fostering respect and kindness in our everyday interactions.

Learn more:

[PBS KIDS Talk About: Celebrating Family](#)



January 1 – New Year's Day

In many countries, January 1 is celebrated as the start of the New Year according to the Gregorian calendar, which is used worldwide today. This date symbolizes new beginnings, goals, and hopes for the year ahead. While the tradition of marking the New Year on January 1 has roots going back to the time of Julius Caesar and the introduction of the Julian calendar, today's Gregorian calendar, introduced in 1582, helps us keep track of the passing year with greater accuracy. Overall, January 1 stands as a hopeful reminder for us all to embrace new opportunities and look forward to what the future holds.

Learn more:

[14 New Year's Traditions from Cultures Around the World](#)

[New Year's Day - All About the Holidays \(PBS Kids\)](#)



January 1-3 – Gantan-sai/Japanese New Year

Gantan-sai is the New Year's Day festival celebrated at Shinto shrines in Japan. Held annually on January 1, it is one of the most important and optimistic events of the year. During Gantan-sai, people visit shrines to pray for good fortune, health, and happiness in the coming year. The festival often features traditional rituals, offerings, and the ringing of bells to purify and welcome the new year with hope and gratitude. It is a meaningful time for families and communities to come together and start the year with positive energy and spiritual reflection.

Learn more:

[Gantan-sai](#)



January 4 – World Braille Day

Every year on January 4, we celebrate World Braille Day in honor of Louis Braille's birthday. Louis Braille is the inventor of the Braille system, a revolutionary writing and reading method for people who are blind or visually impaired. Born in 1809 in France, Louis became blind after a childhood accident, but he quickly adapted and found ways to thrive. When he was just 15 years old, he developed the Braille system—based on Charles Barbier's night writing—making it possible for individuals who are blind to read and write independently. Today, Braille plays a vital role in education, personal freedom, and social inclusion, empowering millions of people worldwide to communicate and participate fully in society.

Learn more:

[Information about Braille](#)

[A Day in the Life – Braille Transcriber](#)



January 6 – Three Kings Day

In many countries around the world, the tradition of the Three Wise Men, also known as the Magi or Kings, is celebrated as a special day of gift-giving and reflection. On this day, it is widely believed that the Wise Men bring presents to children, often leaving gifts in or near their shoes or in other symbolic ways. This holiday, known as Epiphany, has roots dating back to the 4th century and commemorates the visit of the Wise Men to honor the newborn Jesus. Traditionally, families gather to share a festive meal and celebrate themes of kindness, hope, and renewal. This celebration highlights the significance of generosity and the universal values of community and love shared across different cultures worldwide.

Learn more:

[Lin-Manuel Miranda explains the magic of Three Kings Day](#)



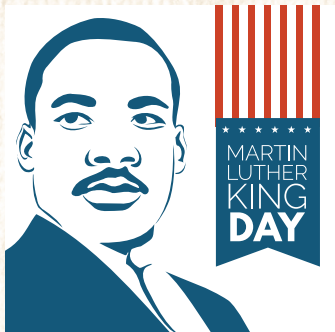
January 7 – Coptic Orthodox Christmas

Orthodox communities in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, which represent over 12% of all Christians, celebrate Christmas several weeks after the majority of the Western world. This difference is due to their use of the Julian calendar, a traditional calendar introduced by Julius Caesar, which varies from the Gregorian calendar used universally today. As a result, Orthodox Christians typically observe Christmas on January 7, rather than December 25. Despite the different dates, the celebrations reflect the same themes. This cultural diversity enriches the global Christian holiday season, highlighting the varied ways communities around the world observe this special time of year.

Learn more:

[Coptic Christmas Around the World](#)

[What is Different About Coptic Christmas?](#)



January 19 – Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a dedicated advocate for racial equality, social justice for working communities, and the rights of the oppressed worldwide. Often called Martin Luther King Jr. Day or MLK Day, the third Monday of January is a national federal holiday that honors his remarkable life and enduring legacy. This day serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for justice and equality. You can participate by volunteering in service projects inspired by Dr. King's ideals, or by visiting historic sites to learn more about his inspiring work and the fight for civil rights in America. The Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park preserves several sites connected to his life and legacy, such as his birth home, the Ebenezer Baptist Church where Dr. King served as a co-pastor, and the Historic Fire Station No. 6 now serving as a museum on desegregation in the Atlanta Fire Department. This day is an opportunity to reflect, serve, and continue his mission for a more just and inclusive society.

Learn more:

[The King Center](#)



NATIONAL
Day of
RACIAL
HEALING

January 20 – National Day of Racial Healing

The National Day of Racial Healing, observed annually on the Tuesday after Martin Luther King Jr. Day, is a special day dedicated to promoting dialogue, understanding, and action toward racial equity and justice. It is a time to reflect on the ongoing impact of race and identity in our communities, and to work together to foster healing and unity. Across the country, individuals and organizations participate in events, conversations, and activities that build bridges, challenge biases, and promote inclusivity. This day serves as a reminder that racial healing is a collective effort, moving us closer to a more just, equitable, and compassionate society for all.

Learn more:

[National Day of Racial Healing](#)



January 24 – International Day of Education

In December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly designated January 24 as the International Day of Education to celebrate the vital role of learning in fostering development, peace, and human potential. While education is often associated with schools and institutions, it is a shared responsibility that extends to all of us. Promoting quality education means advocating for equitable access, supporting lifelong learning, and recognizing the transformative power of knowledge. For many, access to education is a key to breaking poverty cycles, empowering individuals, and creating opportunities for a brighter, more inclusive future. Celebrating this day reminds us of the importance of education as a foundation for sustainable development and social progress, emphasizing that everyone has a role to play in ensuring that learning opportunities are available to all, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Learn more:

[United Nations International Day of Education](#)

[UN Secretary Message - International Day of Education](#)



January 27 – International Holocaust Remembrance Day

On November 1, 2005, the United Nations General Assembly designated January 27, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. On this solemn day, the UN and its member states remember and honor the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust, as well as other genocide victims and millions of innocent people persecuted during that dark period of history. Elie Wiesel, author of *Night* and human rights advocate, famously said, "What is abnormal is that I am normal. That I survived the Holocaust and went on. That is what is abnormal." This day serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of preventing hatred, intolerance, and discrimination in all forms, so that future generations can learn from the past and promote a world rooted in respect and human dignity.

Learn more:

[United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)

