



# Pre-UNIT

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## An Overview of U.S. Holidays

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### Think about the Reading: U.S. Holidays

- What are some things that people around the world celebrate?
- What are some of the holidays that people in your family's native country celebrate?
- What do you think you will learn in this book about American holidays and culture? What are some questions that you have about what Americans celebrate and how they celebrate?

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## Practice New Vocabulary before You Read

### Target Vocabulary

#### A. Learn the Words

Read the definitions. Notice how the words are used in the sentences.

**ancestor** (n.)—a person in your family who died long before you were born.

*I was born in the United States; my **ancestors** came to the United States from Germany in 1850.*

**cemetery** (n.)—land where people who have died are buried.

*My family and I visit the **cemetery** where we buried my grandfather last year. We plant flowers there to keep it beautiful. It helps us to remember him.*

**Congress** (n.)—the group of people who represent the 50 American states. This group makes laws for the United States.

*The two parts of **Congress** are called the Senate and the House of Representatives. People who work in the Senate are called Senators. People who work in the House of Representatives are called Representatives.*

**culture** (n.)—the kind of art, music, food, manners, and values that a society has.

*The United States is a mixture of many different **cultures**.*

The adjective form is **cultural**.

*The **cultural** traditions of Irish-Americans have influenced the United States.*

**custom** (n.)—a specific habit or practice that a group of people share.

*One **custom** in the U.S. is to shake hands with someone the first time you meet.*

The adjective form is **customary**.

*It is **customary** for both men and women to shake hands the first time they meet.*

**federal** (adj.)—national; used to talk about the national government.

***Federal** taxes pay for things like roads, health programs, and the military.*

**honor** (v.)—to show high praise and appreciation for someone or something; to give an award to someone.

*We **honor** people on their birthday. We can tell them how important they are to us.*

The noun form is spelled the same and is common.

*It's an **honor** for me to be the guest speaker today.*

**observe** (v.)—to celebrate a holiday or ritual; to watch carefully.

*My school **observes** several holidays during the year. (This means that no one comes to schools on those days.)*

**parade** (n.)—a procession where people march in an organized way.

*One famous **parade** in the city of Seattle happens in the summer. It is called the Torchlight Parade. It begins in the evening. About 300,000 people go to watch. People march, bands play music, and dancers perform.*

**tradition** (n.)—thoughts, actions, stories, or beliefs, usually coming from older generations. This can be the same as “custom,” or it can mean a much older practice.

*One wedding **tradition** in many countries is for the woman to wear white.*

The adjective form of is **traditional**.

*It is **traditional** for the man and woman to give each other wedding rings when they get married.*

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Complete the paragraph with vocabulary words from the box. Be careful! You might need to change the form of the word. That means that you might need to make it plural or change the form of the verb ending.

ancestor	culture	honor	observe	tradition
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On holidays in the U.S. today, Americans ① \_\_\_\_\_ important people, and remember religious and historical events. Americans ② \_\_\_\_\_ their holidays by doing something special. Different groups of people in the U.S. have different ③ \_\_\_\_\_, which means that their food, music, and even their languages might be different. Sometimes this is because their families or their ④ \_\_\_\_\_ came from other countries. This partly explains why there are so many different ⑤ \_\_\_\_\_ for the same holidays in the U.S.

Look at the sentences. The new words are underlined. Do the sentences make sense? Write yes if the sentence makes sense. Write no if the sentence does not make sense.

Example: My ancestors came to the U.S. from England last month. no

1. A custom is something that nobody does. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Congress makes laws for the U.S. \_\_\_\_\_
3. A federal program is a program that only one or two states have. \_\_\_\_\_
4. People can be buried in a cemetery after they die. \_\_\_\_\_
5. A parade can have just one person. \_\_\_\_\_

Now scan the reading on pages 7–8 for the target vocabulary words. You might find them more than once. Circle the words. Then compare your results with a partner. Did you both circle the same words?

## B. Practice the Words

1. Read the sentences. Circle the number that reflects how much you agree or disagree. This is your opinion. Then compare your answers with a partner or group. Are your answers the same or different? Did you understand the vocabulary?

	agree	disagree
a. Parades are fun to watch.	1	2 3 4 5
b. It's important to pay federal taxes in any country.	1	2 3 4 5
c. In my family's native country, most people are buried in a cemetery when they die.	1	2 3 4 5
d. Congress is more important than the President is.	1	2 3 4 5
e. Everyone should honor his or her ancestors.	1	2 3 4 5
f. I have friends from different cultures.	1	2 3 4 5
g. Holiday customs in the U.S. are the same as in my family's native country.	1	2 3 4 5
h. Old traditions are better than new traditions.	1	2 3 4 5
i. My family's culture is similar to American culture.	1	2 3 4 5
j. I can observe the holidays from my family's country in the U.S.	1	2 3 4 5

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2. Complete the sentences. Then compare them with a partner. Talk about what you wrote.
  - a. People in my family's native country observe the New Year in the month of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. One birthday tradition that my family has is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. In my family's native country, many people have the custom of \_\_\_\_\_ when a baby is born.
  - d. One federal holiday in my family's native country is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - e. One thing that I love from my culture is \_\_\_\_\_.
  
3. Discuss these questions with a partner. Listen to each other and try to learn something new. There is no right or wrong answer.
  - a. How can people honor their parents?
  - b. Why do you think our ancestors are so important to us?
  - c. Are there parades in your family's native country? When?
  - d. How often do you go to the cemetery? Why do you go?
  - e. What is one law that you think Congress should make for the United States?

## Read about It

### Where Did Holidays Come From?

Throughout history, people have had a natural desire to celebrate. People want to honor the events that remind them of who they are. Native Americans were the first people who lived in North America. They arrived more than 10,000 years ago. They celebrated many things. They showed respect to the sun, the moon, and many gods. They remembered important battles. They honored their ancestors. They danced, sang, and prayed. They played instruments. They gave gifts. They shared traditional food.

In the 1600s, immigrants\* began to come from Europe. They wanted a new life in a new land. They brought their traditions with them. Like the Native American's, they wanted to celebrate their cultures. They wanted to remember their histories. Today, America's holidays are a reflection of its people. These holidays tell a special story about important events or people in American history. They tell about the people who live in North America and who came from all over the world. Their histories are unique. Their ideas and customs are, too.

#### *How Do Americans Celebrate Holidays Today in the U.S.?*

There are about 30 holidays every year in the U.S. Ten of these are federal holidays. The U.S. Congress chooses which days will be federal holidays. Congress also decides when they will be observed. If a holiday is on a Sunday, it may be observed on a Monday. On federal holidays, most public offices are closed. Post offices are closed. Banks, government offices, and some schools are also closed. Most federal employees do not work on these days.

\* **immigrants**—people who come to live in a new country

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Private companies are different. They can choose whether they will close or stay open on holidays. Most of them observe the six biggest holidays. That means that they usually close on New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Most private companies stay open on the other four holidays. These holidays are Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday, Washington's Birthday, Columbus Day, and Veterans' Day. There are about 20 other holidays that are not federal. They are cultural or religious. On these days, businesses and schools are usually open. Each state can decide which of these holidays to observe.

Each U.S. holiday has its own customs. Many traditions have been passed down from people who lived long ago. There are often fireworks\* and public festivals. People spend time with their friends and family. Sometimes they give presents to one another. Sometimes they go to the cemetery. There is traditional food and music. There are parades. In the warmer months, people go on picnics. Stores have sales, and many people enjoy shopping.

Our holidays are important, no matter where we live. They help us remember the events from history that have shaped us. We can honor the traditions of our ancestors. In the U.S., people can observe holidays in different ways. They learn from the many cultures and have fun with the celebrations.

\***fireworks**—explosions of light and noise, usually set off to celebrate something



## Check Your Comprehension

Read the story again. Write T for true or F for false.

1. Holidays were started in North America. \_\_\_\_\_
2. The Native Americans celebrated their culture. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Immigrants to the U.S. only celebrated the Native Americans' culture. \_\_\_\_\_
4. There are 30 federal holidays in the U.S. today. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Congress decides which holidays will be celebrated as federal holidays. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Everyone works on federal holidays. \_\_\_\_\_
7. No one works on cultural or religious holidays. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Labor Day is one of the biggest federal holidays in the U.S. \_\_\_\_\_
9. All 50 states today celebrate the same cultural or religious holidays. \_\_\_\_\_
10. American holidays have their own customs. \_\_\_\_\_

## Think and Discuss

Work with a partner or group. Think about the reading. Discuss the questions. What do you think? What does your partner think? There is no right or wrong answer.

1. How do people in the U.S. celebrate holidays? Is this similar to or different from the ways people in your family's native country celebrate? Explain.
2. What is the name of one of your ancestors? Does your family have a special day to honor your ancestors?
3. Have you ever seen a parade in any country? Have you ever been in a parade? What was the occasion? Describe your experience.
4. In your family's native country, do you have both federal and cultural / religious holidays? Do schools close for all holidays? Which businesses stay open on these days?
5. Have you celebrated any holidays in the U.S.? How did you celebrate them?

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## Write

Choose one of the topics, and write a paragraph of at least 5–7 sentences on a separate piece of paper.

1. How many holidays are there in your family's native country? Which holidays are the biggest and most important ones? How do people celebrate?
2. What is your favorite holiday? Why is it your favorite? Who do you spend it with?
3. One of the themes of the reading is diversity. How is diversity reflected and celebrated in the U.S. holidays you know about? In your family's native country, are there any holidays that reflect or celebrate diversity?