

## Outcomes:

- You will be able to **identify** and name the most common American holidays and compare them to holidays in your own country and other countries. (Bloom's digital taxonomy lowest level, **(remembering)**).
- You will be able to **classify** the American holidays according to which month they are celebrated in. (**understanding**)
- You will **compare** the holidays and
  - match the American holiday in one column to its definition in (**analyzing**)
  - **determine** which month has the most American holiday celebrations (**analyzing**)
  - Answer some **critical** questions about American holidays (**evaluating**)
  - Create a calendar that includes all of the holidays covered in the course including holidays in your own country. You may choose to make a PowerPoint or blog post to present your work to the class. (**creating**)

Americans celebrate a variety of federal holidays and other national observances throughout the year. American holidays can be secular, religious, international, or uniquely American.



The following are American federal holidays and other common national observances. Federal holidays are indicated as such.

**American Holidays** Official information and services from the U.S. government from: <http://www.usa.gov/citizens/holidays.shtml>

**New Year's Day** is January 1. The celebration of this federal holiday begins the night before, when Americans gather to wish each other a happy and prosperous coming year. Many Americans make [New Year's resolutions](#).

**Martin Luther King Day** is a federal holiday celebrated on the third Monday in January. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was an African-American clergyman who is recognized for his tireless efforts to win civil rights for all people through nonviolent means.

**Groundhog Day** is February 2, and has been celebrated since 1887. On Groundhog Day, crowds gather in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to see if groundhog Punxsutawney Phil sees his shadow after emerging from his burrow, thus predicting six more weeks of winter weather.

**Valentine's Day** is celebrated on February 14. The day was named after an early Christian martyr, and on Valentine's Day, Americans give presents like candy or flowers to the ones they love. The first mass-produced valentine cards were sold in the 1840s.

**Washington's Birthday** is a federal holiday observed the third Monday of February to honor [George Washington](#), the first President of the United States. This date is commonly called Presidents' Day and many groups honor the legacy of [past presidents](#) on this date.

**Easter** falls on a spring Sunday that varies from year to year. Easter is a Christian holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Christians, Easter is a day of religious services and the gathering of family. Many Americans follow old traditions of coloring hard-boiled eggs and giving children baskets of candy.

**Earth Day** is observed on April 22. First celebrated in 1970 in the United States, it inspired national legislation such as the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. Earth Day is designed to promote ecology, encourage respect for life on earth, and highlight concern over pollution of the soil, air, and water.

**National Arbor Day** was proclaimed as the last Friday in April by President Richard Nixon in 1970. A number of state Arbor Days are observed at other times to coincide with the best tree planting weather, from January and February in the south to May in the far north. The observance began in 1872, when Nebraska settlers and homesteaders were urged to plant trees on the largely treeless plains.

**Flag Day**, celebrated June 14, has been a presidentially proclaimed observance since 1916. Although Flag Day is not a federal holiday, Americans are encouraged to display the flag outside their homes and businesses.

**Mother's Day** celebrates mothers every second Sunday of May. President Woodrow Wilson, who issued a proclamation in 1914, asked Americans to give a public expression of reverence to mothers on this day. Carnations have come to represent Mother's Day, following President William McKinley's habit of always wearing a white carnation, his mother's favorite flower.

**Memorial Day** is a federal holiday observed the last Monday of May. It originally honored the people killed in the American Civil War, but has become a day on which the American dead of all wars, and the dead generally, are remembered in special programs held in cemeteries, churches, and other public meeting places. The flying of the American flag is widespread.

**Independence Day** is July 4. This federal holiday honors the nation's birthday - the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. It is a day of picnics and patriotic parades, a night of concerts and fireworks. The flying of the American flag is widespread.

**Labor Day** is the first Monday of September. This federal holiday honors the nation's working people, typically with parades. For most Americans it marks the end of the summer vacation season and the start of the school year.

**Columbus Day** is a federal holiday celebrated on the second Monday in October. The day commemorates October 12, 1492, when Italian navigator Christopher Columbus landed in the New World. The holiday was first proclaimed in 1937 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

**Father's Day** celebrates fathers every third Sunday of June. Father's Day began in 1909 in Spokane, Washington, when a daughter requested a special day to honor her father, a Civil War veteran who raised his children after his wife died. The first presidential proclamation honoring fathers was issued in 1966 by President Lyndon Johnson.

**Halloween** is celebrated on October 31. On Halloween, American children dress up in funny or scary costumes and go "trick or treating" by knocking on doors in their neighborhood. The neighbors are expected to respond by giving them small gifts of candy or money.

**Veterans Day** is celebrated on November 11. Originally called Armistice Day, this federal holiday was established to honor Americans who had served in World War I, but it now honors veterans of all wars in which the U.S. has fought. Veterans' organizations hold parades, and the president places a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

**Thanksgiving Day** is a federal holiday celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. The holiday began in 1621, when Puritans, who had just enjoyed a bountiful harvest, showed their gratitude to the Native Americans for their help by hosting a feast to give thanks. The Thanksgiving feast became a national tradition and almost always includes some of the foods served at the first feast: roast turkey, cranberry sauce, potatoes, and pumpkin pie.

**Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day** is December 7. In 1994, Congress designated this national observance to honor the more than 2,400 military service personnel who died on this date in 1941, during the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by Japanese forces. The attack on Pearl Harbor caused the United States to enter World War II.

**Christmas Day** is a federal holiday celebrated on December 25. Christmas is a Christian holiday marking the birth of the Christ Child. Decorating houses and yards with lights, putting up Christmas trees, giving gifts, and sending greeting cards have become **traditions** even for many non-Christian Americans.

### **Other Celebrations**

Various ethnic and religious groups in America celebrate days with special meaning to them even though these are not national holidays. Jews, for example, observe their high holy days in September, Muslims celebrate Ramadan, African Americans celebrate Kwanzaa, Irish Americans celebrate the old country's patron saint, St. Patrick, on March 17, and Mardi Gras is the day before the Christian season of Lent begins and is a big occasion in New Orleans, Louisiana, where huge parades and wild revels take place. There are many other such religious and ethnic celebrations in the United States.

## ACTIVITY

Choose a month and enter all the holidays in that calendar page. If you have time, you may complete several pages or even make a complete calendar for extra credit.

## QUESTIONS Answer three of the following questions

1. How many holidays are federal holidays?
2. Which month has the most holidays?
3. Which season has the most holidays? a. summer b. winter c. spring d. autumn
4. Name a holiday that is just for children.
5. Which holidays are religious holidays?
6. Name a holiday that honors a person.
7. Are there any holidays listed that you have never heard of?
8. Can you name a holiday that is not listed in the glossary?

## MATCHING

Match the holidays to the explanations.

\_\_\_ **New Year's Day**

\_\_\_ **Thanksgiving Day**

\_\_\_ **Memorial Day**

\_\_\_ **Independence Day**

\_\_\_ **Labor Day**

\_\_\_ **Earth Day**

**A.** American dead of all wars, and the dead generally, are remembered.

**B.** This federal holiday honors the nation's working people

**C.** This day is designed to promote ecology, encourage respect for life on earth, and highlight concern over pollution of the soil, air, and water.

**D.** Americans gather to wish each other a happy and prosperous coming year.

**E.** The holiday began in 1621, when Puritans, who had just enjoyed a bountiful harvest, showed their gratitude to the Native Americans for their help by hosting a feast to give thanks.

**F.** This federal holiday honors the nation's birthday - the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

**Project:** Research 2 holidays in any country and compare them to the corresponding American holidays. Post your resulting information as an essay, video, podcast, PowerPoint, or other medium into a blog or wiki. Comment on and evaluate two of your classmates' products and post to the discussion forum.

ANSWER KEY

QUESTIONS

Answer three of the following questions.

1. How many holidays are federal holidays? Ten.

Thursday, January 1	New Year's Day
Monday, January 19	Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.
Monday, February 16*	Washington's Birthday
Monday, May 25	Memorial Day
Friday, July 3**	Independence Day
Monday, September 7	Labor Day
Monday, October 12	Columbus Day
Wednesday, November 11	Veterans Day
Thursday, November 26	Thanksgiving Day
Friday, December 25	Christmas Day

2. Which month has the most holidays? May

Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2	3	0	3	4	2	1	0	1	2	2	2

3. Which season has the most holidays? a. summer b. winter c. spring d. autumn

Winter 7	Spring 7	Summer 3	Autumn 5
Dec, Jan, Feb	Mar, April, May	June, July, Aug	Sept, Oct, Nov

4. Name a holiday that is just for children. Halloween

5. Which holidays are religious holidays? Easter, Christmas

6. Name a holiday that honors a person. Martin Luther King Day, Washington's Birthday, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Columbus Day

7. Are there any holidays listed that you have never heard of? \_\_\_\_

8. Can you name a holiday that is not listed in the glossary? St. Patrick's Day, March 17th; April fool's, April 1st.

9. Why do you think that people celebrate more in some seasons than others? (Accept any answer) Ex. holidays are tied to their religious roots, which in turn bear a relationship to the season changes.

"For winter solstice observances, we can go back even farther in history to the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, times of the great stone builders of northern Europe, roughly 4000 to 1500 BCE. Their rituals are lost to us, but simple or grandly awesome, there are hundreds of these monuments and circles surviving, dotted across the landscape. All investigated have been found to have significant solar and lunar alignments to one or more of the eight old holidays: the solstices, the equinoxes, or the cross-quarter days." (from <http://westbynorthwest.org/winter01/mary.light.shtml> )

#### MATCHING

Match the holidays to the explanations.

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ___ <b>New Year's Day</b>   | <b>A.</b> American dead of all wars, and the dead generally, are remembered.   |
| ___ <b>Thanksgiving Day</b> | <b>B.</b> This federal holiday honors the nation's working people  |
| ___ <b>Memorial Day</b>     | <b>C.</b> This day is designed to promote ecology, encourage respect for life on earth, and highlight concern over pollution of the soil, air, and water.                                      |
| ___ <b>Independence Day</b> | <b>D.</b> Americans gather to wish each other a happy and prosperous coming year.  |
| ___ <b>Labor Day</b>        | <b>E.</b> The holiday began in 1621, when Puritans, who had just enjoyed a bountiful harvest, showed their gratitude to the Native Americans for their help by hosting a feast to give thanks. |
| ___ <b>Earth Day</b>        | <b>F.</b> This federal holiday honors the nation's birthday - the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.  |

## Works cited

Webliography	Location	License	Creator
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