



## **Activity #4: Respectfully Celebrating Diversity Months**

**Grade:** Tailored for all grade levels

**Background:** Celebratory Calendar Months (Black History Month, Women’s History Month, Pride, etc.) allow for narratives to be amplified that otherwise aren’t in our society. For those in the communities those celebratory months represent, they are viewed as powerful and meaningful. Additionally, it is important to frame these months as opportunities to learn, celebrate, and share often erased history for all members of society.

However, advocacy and celebration for marginalized people cannot have a start and end date and must continue past a celebratory month. To limit advocacy in that way causes further harm and does not define true allyship.

We should ask ourselves, “Why do we only celebrate these identities one month out of the year?” Between targeted ads, curated events/webinars, Netflix recommendations, and our friends and family sharing “Happy XXXXX Month” posts, where is the line between celebration and commercialization? Are these posts and ads examples of advocacy and activism or are they performative?

When events around celebratory months are poorly planned and implemented, they can leave lasting negative impacts on students and educators alike. Without responsibly curating events that uplift and highlight diversity within an identity group, activities centered on celebratory months can potentially reinforce stereotypes, polarize or tokenize disenfranchised community members, and continue to marginalize some groups and their issues.

While ADL encourages schools to incorporate a lens of diversity throughout the school year as an integral part of the curriculum and school culture, we recognize that special diversity events can be worthy endeavors if the implementation is thoughtful and inclusive, the topics and issues are explored deeply, the discussions are meaningful, and the end goals seek positive change. Indeed, at

their best, events celebrating voices and experiences of historically disadvantaged people adds to the goal of creating and sustaining safe and inclusive schools.

**Action Items:** Review the [calendar of observances](#) and celebratory months. Action plan ways you and your school community can celebrate these identities and contributions (keeping in mind intersectionality) throughout the year and ways that you can appropriately learn and share resources during the month.

**Note: This should be a year-long commitment with conversations following the “celebratory months”.**

- Create yearlong movie, tv show, and book guide that respectfully amplify marginalized voices.
- Research project ideas (Middle School/High School):
  - Examine a particular history month. Why was it founded? Why is it celebrated in that month? Explore leaders from that identity group that may not have been discussed in class. Who are they? What did they invent/do/organize? Why do we tend to focus on some individuals more than others?
  - Review companies that align messaging with celebratory months (see Vox article example below). Do their company values align with their messaging? Do they support the causes outside of marketing materials? Explore how commercialization helps and hurts disenfranchised populations they aim to “celebrate.”

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why do you think these months exist? What messages do they send (intentional or unintentional)?
- What does marginalization mean?
- What does intersectionality mean? How does this play a role in celebratory months, if at all?
- Where else do you see “celebratory messaging” outside of the school community?
- What benefits or potential shortfalls do you see when it comes to celebratory months?
- How can stereotypes impact messaging during these months?
- What identity groups have dedicated months to celebrate? Which do not?

- What is advocacy? When does advocacy feel ungentle? Why?
- How do you define an ally?
- If you do not identify as one of these celebratory groups during the designated month, how can you be an ally?
- What ways can you and your school community foster healthy celebratory months? How does that impact long term implementation goals of creating a more equitable school climate?

### **Elementary Adaption:**

- Prompt your students to select a book that best represents their identity. Ask them to share with the class why they choose this book. Follow up with discussion questions like:
  - How did it feel to pick a book that best represented you?
  - Are you able to find books in the classroom, in the library, and at home that represent their own identity? What about books that represent the other students in the classroom?
  - How would you feel if you did not find a book that represents you?
  - Why is it important to be able to see characters that look like you as the protagonist?
  - Why is it important to read books of protagonists with different experiences and voices?
  - How would you want to celebrate this piece of you and your identity?
  - What experiences/backgrounds do we typically see in books? Why is that?

### **Follow Up:**

- Meet with the appropriate school resource officers to bring these identities into your everyday school curriculum and classroom materials.
  - Example: Meet with your school librarians to acquire resources (reading materials, research topics, videos) that are free and easily accessible to students.
- Encourage your student groups to assist in planning celebrations.
- Show examples of appropriate media representations in class and have a discussion.

### **Resources:**

- [Books Matter & Book of the Month](#)
- [Do's and Don'ts with Special Diversity Events](#)
- [Education Glossary](#)
- [Curriculum Integration: Women's History Month Resources](#)
  - [7 Ideas for Teaching Women's History Month](#)
- [8 Ideas for Teaching National Hispanic Heritage Month](#)
- [Curriculum Integration: Black History Month](#)
  - [10 Ideas for Teaching Black History Month](#)
- [Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Resources](#)
- [Jewish American Heritage Month Resources](#)
- [LGBTQ+ Pride Month and Education Resources](#)
- [Native American Heritage Month](#)
- [A Brief History of the Disability Rights Movement](#)
- Non-ADL Resource: Vox – [How LGBTQ Pride Month became a branded Holiday](#)
- Non-ADL Resource: CNN – [NYU serves Kool-Aid and Watermelon Water for Black History Month](#)
- Non-ADL Resource: Medium – [The Difference Between Performative Activism and Genuine Allyship](#)

### **Virtual Adaptation:**

- Use digital platforms to make this activity interactive.
  - Create a google sheet or other platform-based calendar where students can share their ideas.
  - Create virtual flashcards on key terms.
- Host virtual meetings with appropriate school-based resource officers to best implement diverse curriculum.
- Design and share “movie, tv show, and movie” guide with your community at large.
- Host virtual sessions to facilitate discussions on the guide’s content or invite the community to a movie/show screening!

### **Key Terms:**

- *Ally: Someone who speaks out on behalf of or takes actions that are supportive of someone who is targeted by bias or bullying, either themselves or someone else.*
- *Intersectionality: The examination of overlapping and connected social systems that compound oppression for individuals who belong to multiple marginalized social groups based on their race, gender, class, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.<sup>1</sup>*
- *Marginalization: The treatment of a person, group or concept as secondary, unimportant, inferior or abnormal compared with those who hold more power in society.*
- *Stereotype: An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences.*
- *Tokenization/Tokenism: the symbolic involvement of a person in an organization due only to a specified or salient characteristic (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, disability, age) . . . The presence of people placed in the role of token often leads to a misleading outward appearance of inclusive practices.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>Definition of "intersectionality" derived from Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989(1), Article 8, <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

<sup>2</sup> Definition of "Tokenism" derived from "Tokenism" - iresearchnet. (2016, October 06). Retrieved February 11, 2021, from <http://psychology.iresearchnet.com/counseling-psychology/multicultural-counseling/tokenism/>