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SCII Agenda Newsletter

December 2023 Issue

As we close out the Fall 2023 term, the members of the Schoolcraft College International Institute (SCII) want to wish everyone a peaceful and relaxing break.

In keeping with our *SCII goal to develop an appreciation of the diversities and commonalities among world cultures*, we asked some of our Schoolcraft students, staff, and faculty to share their own holidays, stories, and celebrations. We hope you enjoy and we look forward to seeing everyone in January 2024!

Hanukkah

By Ellen Hochberg



Hanukkah, the Hebrew word is transliterated into English with many variants, is actually a minor festival compared to other major Jewish holy days, although others outside of Judaism incorrectly believe it to be a significant holiday due to its proximity to major holidays of other regions and cultures during this season. Dating back to 198 BCE (Before the Common Era), people in Judea known as the Maccabees led a revolt against a ruler that was preventing them from practicing their religion. In winning back the right to live and freely practice the Jewish religion, their Temple was rededicated for worship. The name “Hanukkah” means “rededication”. The Temple’s lamp, the “Ner Tamid” or Eternal Light, lit the holy ark where the Torah scrolls were kept. It was discovered that the Eternal Light only had enough oil to stay lit for one day. The miracle we celebrate was that the Eternal Light stayed lit for eight days, while

more oil was found to keep the Eternal Light burning.

My family celebrates Hanukkah, which runs for eight days, the same duration as the miracle of light. Each night, we gather around our “menorah”, and light one additional candle for each of the nights until all eight candles are lit and glowing on the final evening. We sing blessings over the candles, as well as some Hanukkah songs. We eat traditional Hanukkah recipes made with oil, like “latkes” (fried potato pancakes). We also spin a toy called a “dreidel”. Each of the four sides of the dreidel has a different Hebrew letter, representing the phrase, “A Great Miracle Happened There”. When our children were little, they got gifts each night after the Hannukah candles were lit. We celebrate the miracle of light and what it means to our freedom to practice our Jewish faith.

[Ellen Hochberg](#) is a Graphic Designer at Schoolcraft College.

Eid Al-Fitr

By Hassan Faraj



One of the major holiday's celebrated in Islam is *Eid Al-Fitr*. One of the five pillars of Islam is fasting during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Muslims around the globe fast from sunrise to sunset, refraining from eating and drinking for 30 days. At the end of Ramadan, a celebration takes place called Eid Al-Fitr. This holiday marks the first day Muslims are no longer required to fast and is usually

spent with family and friends at a local Mosque. To put things in perspective, Ramadan was the month in which the Prophet Muhammad received the Holy Quran on the night of “Qadr”. Eid Al-Fitr is translated into “the holiday of feast” or “breaking fast”.

As a child, I would wake up really early on Eid, put on my nicest suit and go to the Mosque with my older brother. It was a day I truly looked forward to because, let’s face it, who doesn’t love gifts! After service, we would visit our family members and end the night with a wide spread of some of my favorite foods. The photo shows my niece and nephews visiting *Grandpa’s House* for the Eid!

[Hassan Faraj](#) is a student pursuing nursing at Schoolcraft College.

Kwanzaa Celebrations

By TaQuilla Kusero



My grandmother has always made it a point to make sure that her children and grandchildren (and nieces and nephews), were informed about our legacy and history as Black Americans. Whether that was in the books or toys she bought us, the museums, and events she took us to, or the empowering children's programs she enrolled us in during our summer breaks from school. The holidays were no different in that respect.

Though we celebrated the Christmas season, she also included the tradition of Kwanzaa in our celebrations. Kwanzaa is an African-American cultural holiday that is celebrated from December 26th to January 1st each year. The holiday was created by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor and cultural activist. The name Kwanzaa comes from the Swahili phrase "matunda ya kwanza," which means "first fruits." The holiday is centered around seven principles called the Nguzo Saba, which are meant to guide individuals and communities in living a purposeful and meaningful life. These principles are: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility),

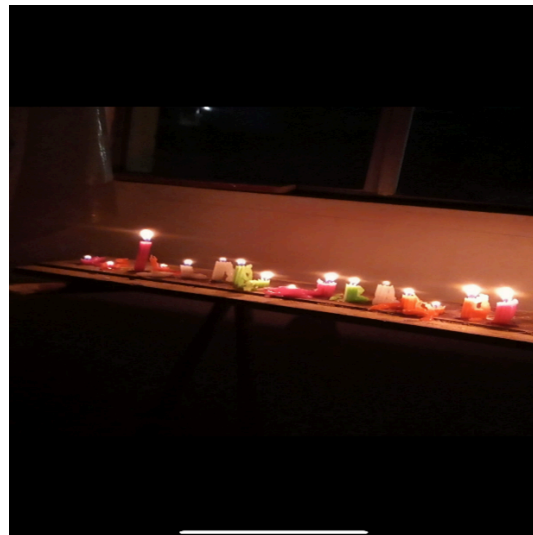
Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith).

At our holiday parties, the tables would be adorned with Christmas decorations, the Kinara (candle holder), and Mishumaa Saba (7 Candles). The kids would recite special passages or poems, my cousins and I would create dance routines and perform them for the family, and the room would be filled with laughter, music, and love. Celebrating Kwanzaa as a child reinforced my sense of self, my love for my family, and my connection to my community. Even when the world is rocky around me, I'm grounded and settled by the traditions and foundation that my grandmother laid for us.

[TaQuilla Kusero](#) is the Director of Equity and Engagement at Schoolcraft College.

Day of the Little Candles

By David Castaneda



The *Noche de las Velitas*, also known as the *Day of the Little Candles* or *Little Candles Day*, is one of Colombia's most adorable traditions which takes place

on December 7th. Over my 16 years in Colombia, I always found this ritual to be intriguing. I also found it humorous to see all the candle wax strewn all over the sidewalks the next day, which is obvious proof that this is a very common tradition.

The Day of the Little Candles in Colombia has to do with the idea that the Virgin Mary was also a product of the Immaculate Conception. No matter what day of the week it comes on, December 8 is always a holiday in Colombia, which adds to the festive atmosphere of Little Candles Day, and staying late on the day before is not a big deal.

[David Castaneda](#) is originally from Colombia, South American and is a student at Schoolcraft College.

Diwali

By Anna Maheshwari



Diwali is like Christmas for people of Indian background; it is also known as the *Festival of Lights*. The day is filled with delicious food, laughter, lots of gifts for children, and fireworks. We light up our homes with numerous clay lamps and invite Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, into our homes.

I try to recreate the festive atmosphere in our home for Diwali in Michigan. When our children were home, we decorated the home together, lit lamps, I cooked lots of delicacies, and invited friends and family. Now that they are living in different parts of the country, we come together remotely on zoom or Facetime. The picture is of our daughter, son in law and grandson celebrating Diwali in India.

[Anna Maheshwari](#) is a Professor in the English Department and co-coordinator for the SCII.

Greek Orthodox Christmas

By Helen Ditouras



In the Greek Orthodox tradition, Christmas is a very significant holiday as it symbolizes the celebration of the birth of Christ. In Greece, this religious holiday outweighs the commercialization of Christmas and the mythology around Santa Claus and his elves. While in North American Greek Orthodox

homes, Christmas Eve is celebrated at church during an evening service and Christmas day involves family feasts and gift opening, in Greece, the tradition is different. Aside from attending church services, families gather during the entire Christmas season to celebrate, and children do not open gifts until New Year's eve. This is because gift-giving is not associated with the religious holiday of Christmas; instead, the New Year, symbolized by the celebration of St. Vasilios, is a time where children open gifts with their loved ones.

Another Greek Orthodox Christmas tradition involves the singing of the "kalanda" – Greek Christmas carols that are sung the three caroling days in Greece. The morning of Christmas Eve (24th December), the morning of New Year's Eve (31st December) and the morning of the Eve of Epiphany (5th of January). The tradition is that these days children in groups go from house to house to sing the carols. They sing the carols accompanied by [metal triangles](#) and sometimes drums and they are given a small amount of money by the residents of each house. The lyrics of Greek Christmas carols wish prosperity and luck to the family ("My Greek Dish").

As a young child and emerging adolescent, my siblings and I took part in this tradition in Windsor, Canada, where we performed the kalanda for various families in the Greek community. This event was organized by G.O.Y.A – Greek Orthodox Youth of America – and was welcomed by all of the immigrant families who supported this tradition to preserve their own memories of Christmas back home. This picture is from Christmas 1985 with my sister and I and my grandparents visiting from Greece.

[Helen Ditouras](#) is a Professor in the English Department and co-coordinator for the SCII.

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