



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Iranian Religion/Ceremony Celebration History Prayer
Gathas Comparative Religion Shahnameh

Age Group (circle one): PreK-K Grades 1-3 Grades 4-5 Grades 6-8 Grades 9-12

Lesson # (if applicable): Yalda (Shab e chelle)

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Description:

Yalda Night (Shab-e-Yalda or Shab-e-Chelle) is an ancient Iranian celebration. It is celebrated on the Winter solstice which usually falls around December 21st. It is the last night of Autumn and the longest night of the year, after which days start getting longer and nights shorter.

Why do we celebrate Yalda:

1. Seasonal

Our ancestors were agriculturalists and pastoralists. Spring meant a time for planting and taking the animals to graze again. After Yalda Night, days start getting longer, and Spring was closer with each passing day. In addition, Spring meant a time when weather would be warmer, communities could gather more frequently, enjoy the outdoors and other resources that were provided to them by mother nature. The increase in daytime and approaching Spring with each passing day made Yalda a time of joy, hope, and celebration.

2. Birth of Light-Mithra (Mehr in Persian)

Yalda means birth. It is the re-birth of light. It is associated with the birth of Mithra, Indo-Iranian god of light and promise. Since days get longer and nights get shorter in Winter, Iranians celebrate the last night of autumn as the renewal of the sun and the victory of light over darkness.

How do Iranians celebrate Yalda?

Sabe-e-Yalda and its traditions are an ancient Iranian heritage and was officially added to Iran's List of National Treasures in 2008. Yalda Night is also celebrated in countries such as Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and in some of the Caucasian states such as Azerbaijan and Armenia whilst they share the same traditions as well.

On Yalda Night, people gather in groups of friends or relatives usually at the home of grandparents or the elderly to pass the longest night of the year happily by eating dried nuts and fruits, reading Hafiz poems, making good wishes, and talking and laughing.



Traditionally, people would sit around the “korsi”. Korsi is a low table underneath which hot coal or a source of heat would be placed. A tablecloth would be placed on the table extending all the way to the floor. Family members would sit around this table (Korsi) and put their feet under the tablecloth to keep warm.

Reading poems from Divan-e-Hafiz (Poetry book by the famous Persian Poet, Hafiz) called Fal-e Hafiz is an entertaining tradition of Yalda Night. Fal-e-Hafiz (fortune telling using Hafiz poetry) is read by following a traditional activity called Chak o douleh. Each member of the family would put a small item such as a ring in a jug with a secret wish. Usually, the eldest family member would randomly open the Divan e Hafiz and read a poem after which the youngest family member would take out one of the items from the jug without looking. The poem would be dedicated to the owner of the item just pulled out from the jug. The eldest family member would go on to interpret the poem. In this way, the last and the longest night of autumn comes to an end happily and the first great day of winter begins.

Eating is the delicious part of Yalda Night. Iranians eat nuts, watermelons, and pomegranates on this special night and share the last remaining fruits from summer together. Fruits of Shab-e-Yalda have symbolic significance as well. Some believe that watermelon symbolizes the sun by its spherical shape while others believe that eating watermelon keeps one safe from winter diseases. Pomegranate is also a symbol of birth and its bright red seeds symbolize the glow of life.

Lesson for students:

- What do you know about Yalda?
- Make a Power Point
 - Include the reasons why we celebrate Yalda
 - How we celebrate Yalda (what we eat and read poetry)
 - Why do Iranian Zoroastrians celebrate Yalda?

Activity for Students:

1) Watch videos about Yalda:

a. How Iranians Celebrate Longest Night of The Year
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VxC5CCMOA8>

b. Yalda Persian Celebration of Light -The Origin of Christmas & Hanukkah
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_YLFlN-Zmc&ab_channel=TG-Far.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_YLFlN-Zmc&ab_channel=TG-Far)



2) Celebrate Yalda

- a. Have Watermelons or dried fruits and nuts for students to enjoy
- b. Write numbers according to the number of students on pieces of paper, fold and place them in a jar.
- c. Have simplified (to make it easy for students to understand) English translation of famous Persian poems each written on a different sheet of paper ready and folded. (You should have enough poems for each student)
- d. Have one of the students pull out one of the poems from the stack of poetry sheets and read it. Have the same or another student pull out a number. The poem will be for the person whose number was pulled.
- e. Discuss with class the meaning of the poem.

EX. Hafiz poetry simplified:

For years I sought what I most wanted from strangers while all along I had it inside myself.

3) Invite the students' families to set up a Yalda table & celebrate.

Sources:

<https://irandoostan.com/yalda-night-iranian-celebration-longest-night-year/>

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