



THE NEW JERSEY ITALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION



The Story of La Befana The Italian Christmas Witch

Grade Level: Kindergarten and First Grade

Subjects: Social Studies / Language Arts (Folklore)

Categories: Arts and Sciences / History and Society

Standards

Please see page 4 of the lesson plan for complete New Jersey Student Learning Standards alignment.

Objective:

The students will be able to:

1. identify the traditions of an Italian Christmas.
2. will be able to compare and contrast the celebrations of the Italian Epiphany and The Three Kings celebration of Puerto Rico.

Abstract:

State and national curriculum standards ask that students be exposed to the cultures and celebrations of other countries. Although, Christmas is a very important holiday in both Italy and Puerto Rico, both lands place a special emphasis of the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated twelve days later. Students will investigate the Italian gift-giver, Befana and compare her to the American icon Santa Claus. They will compare the Italian celebration with the American Christmas celebration. This lesson help students better understand the Italian tradition, along with understanding the Puerto Rican tradition of sharing gifts during the Feast of the Three Kings. They will see that the tradition of sharing gifts at Christmas or at Epiphany originated with the story of the astrologers from the East traveling to find the baby Jesus in Judea.

Materials Required:

- A world map or globe
- Poster board or black board
- Access to the internet
- Access to a Library
- Writing paper
- Drawing paper

Background:

State and national curriculum standards ask that students be exposed to the celebrations of other countries. Although, Christmas is a very important holiday in both Italy and Puerto Rico, both lands place a special emphasis of the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated twelve days later. For background of the holiday, go to:

- History on the Epiphany
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05504c.htm>

- History of La Befana
<http://www.italiansrus.com/articles/befana.htm>
http://www.twilightbridge.com/hobbies/festivals/christmas/epiphany/la_befana.htm

- History of Three Kings Day in Puerto Rico
http://www.elboricua.com/pr_christmas.html

Procedures:

- I. Introduce the lesson by identifying Italy and Puerto Rico on a world map or globe.
 - a. Explain to the students that you will be discussing holiday folklore and traditions from these two countries.

- II. Discuss with the class and list on poster board or a black board the features and traditions of the Italian Christmas season.

- III. Explain the history behind the Epiphany.

- IV. Parallel the identities of La Befana and Santa Claus.

- V. Discuss with the class and list on poster board or a black board the features and traditions of the Puerto Rican Christmas season.

- VI. Create a Venn diagram on poster board to compare and contrast the two celebrations.
 - a. A Venn diagram is a chart that has two large interlocking circles that creates three spaces.
 - b. Label the left space Italy.
 - i. Events or identities from only the Italian holiday should be placed here.
 - c. The middle space should contain any similarities between the two celebrations.
 - d. Label the right space Puerto Rico.
 - i. Events or identities from only the Puerto Rican holiday should be placed here.
 - e. Have the students help you to place the features of the two celebrations in their proper places.
 - i. Use the lists you made earlier to draw your information from.

- VII. Have the students complete a writing exercise.
 - a. Your grade level's ability will determine how you may want to go about this.
 - b. Younger students may want to write a simple sentence and draw a picture.
 - i. Older students may be able to write a more detailed paragraph.

- ii. Use the following writing prompt;
 1. The Three Wise Men were on a journey to honor and give special gifts to the Christ Child.
 2. What sort of present would you give to someone who is very important to you? Why?

Assessment:

Assess the writing exercise by using the *New Jersey Registered Holistic Writing Rubric* for scoring.

Extensions:

Obtain and read a copy of Tomie de Paola's, The Legend of Old Befana

Obtain and read a copy of Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith's, Three Kings Day: A Celebration at Christmas Time

Establish pen pals with Italian students

<https://mylanguageexchange.com/Pen-pals/Language/Italian.asp>

Bake some Italian cookies

<https://www.shelovesbiscotti.com/italian-christmas-cookies/>

Resources:

History on the Epiphany

<https://billpetro.com/history-of-epiphany>

History of La Befana

<http://www.italiansrus.com/articles/befana.htm>

http://www.twilightbridge.com/hobbies/festivals/christmas/epiphany/la_befana.htm

History of Three Kings Day in Puerto Rico

http://www.elboricua.com/pr_christmas.html

New Jersey Student Learning Standards

Social Studies

6.1.P.D.4 Learn about and respect other cultures within the classroom and community.

6.1.4.D.19 Explain how experiences and events may be interpreted differently by people with different cultural or individual perspectives.

English Language Arts

RI.1.3 Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

SL.1.2 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

SL.1.3 Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather additional information or clarify something that is not understood.