

Inclusive holidays: A toolkit

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Definitions

Juneteenth: The holiday marks the day enslaved people in Texas were freed in 1865. Even though the Emancipation Proclamation was made effective in 1863, it could not be implemented in places still under Confederate control. As a result, in the westernmost Confederate state of Texas, enslaved people would not be free until much later. Freedom finally came on June 19, 1865, when some 2,000 Union troops arrived in Galveston Bay, Texas. The army announced that the more than 250,000 enslaved black people in the state were free by executive decree.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: The day that celebrates civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. who was [assassinated](#) in 1968. The designation of this day was fraught. It didn't become a federal holiday until 1986, nearly 20 years after it was introduced in Congress. Even then, not all states recognized the holiday, until 2000.

Indigenous Peoples Day: Typically celebrated on the second Monday of October, the day celebrates Indigenous peoples' culture, traditions and histories. The proposals for the day originate back to the 1970s, and in particular, a 1977 United Nations conference in Geneva,

where Indigenous leaders proposed to observe a day of solidarity with Indigenous people instead of Columbus Day.

Source: [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#); [Britannica](#); [The Conversation](#)

Did You Know

“As of October 2021, fourteen U.S. states celebrate Indigenous Peoples’ Day and not Columbus Day, as well as the District of Columbia. More than 130 cities including Arlington, Amherst, Cambridge, Brookline, Marblehead, Great Barrington, Northampton, Provincetown, Somerville, and Salem also celebrate Indigenous Peoples’ Day.”

Source: [National Today](#)

How to talk about inclusive events

See holidays and other cultural events as learning opportunities. Celebrations across different social locations offer a critical chance to conduct informal research. Shift beyond what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls the “danger of a single story” — thinking about a cultural practice in stereotypical, flattened ways. Take the opportunity to do a simple search on a holiday unfamiliar to you. Study its origins and aims. Collect articles and new perspectives as bookmarks or screenshots. Then, create a chart. On one side of the chart, write: “*What I used to know...*” On the other side of the chart note, “*What I now know...*” This chart is a simple exercise to brainstorm what your prior ideas about this holiday or practice might have been. It also allows you to summarize or note some of the new information that you’ve gathered. Finally, reflect on this process: What new knowledge opened up for you? What sources did you draw upon? How will this shape your notion of what counts as an event to be celebrated?