



Addressing the December Dilemma in Your Classroom

What is the *December Dilemma*? And why should educators care?

The *December Dilemma* is that time of year when multiple joyous religious holidays collide, and when people with good intentions can find themselves in the middle of potentially toxic misunderstandings and intolerance. The phenomenon occurs in classrooms and in workplaces across America.

At the Tanenbaum Center, we've developed a list of things to consider to help you create an inclusive classroom this holiday season:

- Look for shared values and similarities between various religious traditions and holidays. Focus on our common ground.
- Search out stories that are inclusive of different faiths and beliefs.
- Don't ignore children's questions. Encourage respectful curiosity!
- Make sure to recognize and represent the range of views and practices within each religious tradition.
- Find community members and guest speakers who can talk about different traditions, so that students aren't forced into being the "experts" on their particular culture.
- Keep an eye on the calendar! Before scheduling field trips, special events or testing, make sure the day is not a holiday. Remember holidays such as Hanukah and Ramadan happen at different times each year.
- Before planning holiday parties and snacks, send a note home to find out about students' dietary needs. Be mindful of the significance of religious dietary restrictions. Parents and caregivers are the best source of information about students' needs.
- Simultaneously conduct several activities in celebration of different seasons or holidays – so that students can rotate or opt out without feeling awkward.
- Normalize different holiday traditions throughout the year; for example, don't wait for December to mention the principles of Kwanzaa.
- Think outside the box. A "Secret Santa" can be replaced by something that doesn't have a particular religious connotation.
- Teach students to practice acts of kindness throughout the year, rather than only in December.