

## **Black-Eyed Peas, Dumplings, and Grapes: Exploring the Diverse New Year's Traditions of Families in Our Classroom**

*Key Lesson Strategy:*  
Critical Literacy

*Lesson Overview:*

This lesson begins with students reading the text Shanté Keys and the New Year's Peas by Gail Piernas-Davenport. Students discuss and critically analyze this text, thinking about the multi-cultural neighborhood that Shanté lives in and the different New Year's holidays that they celebrate. Next students draw pictures of their own New Year's holiday food traditions and experiences. Students then interview an older family member about how they celebrated the holiday as a child to determine if and how family holiday traditions have changed over time. Finally, the class works together to share what they have learned on a class blog or website.

*Grade Level:*  
Elementary

*Objectives:*

- Students will be able to critically analyze the text.
- Students will reflect and share their own family New Year's traditions
- Students will prepare interview questions.
- Students will interview an older family member about family traditions and cultural heritage.
- Students will develop and share their findings on a class website. \

*Materials:*

- Shanté Keys and the New Year's Peas by Gail Piernas-Davenport
- Copies of Interview handout (attached)
- Computers with internet access

*Lesson Plan:*

1. Introduce students to the text Shanté Keys and the New Year's Peas by Gail Piernas-Davenport. In this text, a young girl attempts to borrow black eyed peas to complete her New Year's meal. Along the way she learns about the diverse New Year's celebrations and food traditions of her neighbors, who she invites to come enjoy the peas and her family. Read the text aloud to students, stopping frequently to check for comprehension and ask questions.
2. After reading the text, discuss the book with students. Possible questions include:
  - What did you find most interesting or surprising about this book?
  - None of Shanté's neighbors were able to give her black-eyed peas. Why not?
  - Not all of Shanté's neighbors celebrated the New Year in the same way. Some of them didn't even celebrate it on the same day. Yet they were all able to come together for a party at the end of the book. Do you think this is realistic?

- Shanté lives in a very diverse neighborhood. Think about your own neighborhood. If you visited your neighbors, would you find so many different traditions and customs? Why or why not? Would you like to live in Shanté's neighborhood?

3. Have students draw a picture of their New Year's holiday. Encourage students to include what they eat, how they spend their time, and who is included in the celebrations. In the text, Shanté shares her meal with diverse neighbors. Who do students share the holiday with? What special foods or customs are enjoyed? What clothing is worn?

4. Place students in small groups to share their pictures. Encourage students to ask questions about each other's traditions and customs.

5. As a class, discuss the multiple perspectives that were shared in the student-created images. What similarities and differences did students notice in the ways that we celebrate the New Year's holiday?

6. Traditions are passed down through families from one generation to the next. But sometimes these traditions evolve or disappear over time as families move apart, new technologies develop, and daily life changes. To learn more about how your parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles celebrated the New Year's holiday growing up, each student will be conducting an interview with an older member of their family. This will offer an intergenerational perspective and provide students insight into their own cultural heritage and family history. Using the Interview handout (see Attached) students will determine who they will interview, write interview questions, and prepare to conduct their interview.

7. For homework, have students go home and interview an older family member, using the interview questions they prepared in class.

8. Upon completion of the interviews, have students share their interviews with partners or small groups of students. Reflect on the experiences as a class. Possible questions include:

- What did students learn about their own family's traditions?
- What was most surprising or interesting?
- How have their family traditions changed or evolved over time, if at all?
- What has caused these family traditions to change over time?
- What traditions from the past might students seek to incorporate into their future celebrations of the New Year?
- What diversity do we notice in our class in terms of how our families celebrate the holiday?

8. How can the information students collected be analyzed and shared to help other people understand the multiple ways that a diverse community right here in the United States celebrates the New Year? Share what students have learned about their family traditions through the intergenerational interviews and student drawings on a class website. Take it a step further and have students study why and how these traditions came to be. For instance, why do you eat apples and honey on Rosh Hashanah? By developing a website, you can celebrate the cultural

diversity of your students and their families in a format that they can easily share with other family and community members. Try creating a free and easy website at [www.weebly.com](http://www.weebly.com).

*Additional Resources:*

- Try the Shanté Keys and the New Year's Peas Reader's Theater to encourage oral reading and fluency:  
[http://www.gpdavenport.com/images/Readers\\_Theater\\_Script\\_for\\_Shante\\_Keys.pdf](http://www.gpdavenport.com/images/Readers_Theater_Script_for_Shante_Keys.pdf)
- Resources on New Year's Food traditions and Lucky Foods:
  - <http://www.epicurious.com/articlesguides/holidays/newyearsday/luckyfoods>
  - <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/Lucky-Foods-for-the-New-Year.html>

**Uncovering Family New Year's Traditions**  
**—Interview with a Family Member—**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Questions: Write at least five questions you have for this family member about their New Year's holiday traditions. Use the space beneath each question to record their responses during the interview.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.